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## **Our General Mother:’ Eve’s Mythic Power and the Poetry of Aemilia Lanyer, John Milton, Elizabeth Barrett, and Christina Rossetti**

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*University of Tennessee - Knoxville*

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Sarah C. McCollum entitled "Our General Mother: Eve's Mythic Power and the Poetry of Aemilia Lanyer, John Milton, Elizabeth Barrett, and Christina Rossetti." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in .

Robert Stillman, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

Joseph Black, Amy Billone

Accepted for the Council:

Carolyn R. Hodges

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

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Robert Stillman

Major Professor

We have read this thesis  
and recommend its acceptance:

Joseph Black

Amy Billone

Accepted for the Council:

Anne Mayhew

Chancellor and

Dean of Graduate Studies

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

“OUR GENERAL MOTHER:” EVE’S MYTHIC POWER AND THE POETRY OF  
AEMILIA LANYER, JOHN MILTON, ELIZABETH BARRETT, AND CHRISTINA  
ROSSETTI

A Thesis  
Presented for the  
Masters of Arts  
Degree  
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Sarah Catherine McCollum  
May 2004

## Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my mom, Louise Ringler, whose gentle reading voice led me to love language when I was too young to read, my sister, Ann Ringler, who makes Rossetti's proclamation that "there is no friend like a sister" ring true, and to my husband, Mike McCollum, who makes my heart laugh with his stories.

## Acknowledgments

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study is to analyze Ameilia Lanyer, John Milton, Elizabeth Barrett, and Christina Rossetti's versions of Eve. In my first chapter, I pair Lanyer and Milton's work and focus on the demands and expectations they place on the reader. Both authors desire that their readers be intellectually and spiritually astute enough to accept their arguments about Eve, but also be willing to see themselves as Eve. In my second chapter, I discuss Milton's influence on Barrett, and center my treatment of Barrett on the way Barrett's ambivalence toward male authority manifests itself in her depictions of Eve. In my third chapter, I link Lanyer and Rossetti's work for the purpose of examining their emphasis on the body of Eve and Christ. This study explores the way these authors use Eve to evoke societal and theological change and appeal to the power latent within Eve herself as a figure of mythic proportions.

## Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Chapter One Milton and Lanyer as Poet/Teachers: Lessons about Eve for the Reader	5
Chapter Two In the Balance: Milton and Barrett's Efforts to Write and Right Eve	32
Chapter Three Becoming One Flesh: The Poet, Eve, and Christ	56
Conclusion	76
Works Cited	79
Vita	85



## Introduction

Aemilia Lanyer, John Milton, Elizabeth Barrett, and Christina Rossetti interpret, reinterpret, and in some cases rewrite what follows the famous first words of Genesis, “In the beginning.” In so doing, each offers a different vision of what the beginning (specifically as it pertains to Eve) looks like. In *Beginnings*, Edward Said argues, “There is really no such thing as an absolutely primal text, each act of composition involves other texts, and so each writing transmits itself, receives other writing, is an interpretation of other writing, reconstitutes (by displacement) other writing.”<sup>1</sup> Although Lanyer, Milton, Barrett, and Rossetti would disagree with Said’s assertion that no “primal text” exists, and would point to the Bible as an authentic “primal text,” these authors are involved in the sort of Bakhtinian dialogism with other texts that Said describes. Their texts join with others in a literary-theological sonata where texts articulate, recapitulate, revise, resound, and rearticulate ideas and arguments about Eve and the Fall. The purpose of this study is to examine the ways Lanyer, Milton, Barrett, and Rossetti’s ideas balance and contrast with one another to create a rich, textured body of work about Eve. What this study reveals is that the figure of Eve is filled with a mythic power like that of other classical and biblical women (e.g. Helen of Troy and Mary). Eve’s power is strong enough to shape the master narratives of history about human agency, gender differences, and the possibilities for redemption. Lanyer, Milton, Barrett, and Rossetti recognize this power and employ the figure of Eve for the purpose of reshaping old and creating new narratives about women.

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<sup>1</sup> Edward W. Said, *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (New York: Basic Books, 1975) 218.

In Chapter One I discuss the way Lanyer's *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* (1611) and Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667) engage in dialogue with traditional interpretations of Eve's character. Milton and Lanyer both subvert traditional misogynistic interpretations of Eve, ones their reader would have been familiar with, to achieve their poetic purposes.<sup>2</sup> Lanyer specifically sets about the task of "reconstitut[ing]" interpretations of Eve, arguing that her readers should see Eve in a new way. She uses this return to "the beginning" to redefine perceptions about women in her culture, or, as Said says, to "indicate, clarify, or define a *later* time, place, or action."<sup>3</sup> Milton too is in dialogue with conventional interpretations of Eve, and he also looks into the past. He uses Eve as a figure of the first reader in order to "clarify" his views about readership and interpretation. Milton and Lanyer make use of the mythic power of the historical Eve (the one situated in the "past") in order to speak to their present readers about their present moment.

Simply by choosing the "beginning" and Fall narratives as the subject of his epic, Milton reinforces his belief in the Bible as a "primal text." Ironically, by defending God and championing the cultural status of the Bible, Milton's *Paradise Lost* assumes the power of a "primal text." This text is so powerful that it becomes the subject of many

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<sup>2</sup> Pamela Norris provides a succinct description of the traditional view of Eve and its ubiquitous cultural presence: "[In the twelfth century] the flawed nature of Everywoman Eve had become a commonplace persistently reaffirmed in vernacular storytelling, in poetry and legend, in sermons and religious teaching, and in particular through that great educator of popular opinion, the visual imagery of church decoration. But his hostile view of Eve had developed long before the Middle Ages. By the second century after the birth of Christ, Eve had been named by the Christian theologian Tertullian as 'the devil's gateway,' responsible for corrupting the pristine Adam and causing the death of God's Son" (40-41). See *Eve: A Biography* (New York: New York UP, 1999).

<sup>3</sup> Said 5.

attempts to “reconstitute” it “by displacement.” Barrett and other nineteenth-century authors such as Charlotte Brontë and Mary Shelley (as Gilbert and Gubar point out) actively take part in the project of “reconstituting” *Paradise Lost* by displacing it with their own versions of “the beginning” and specifically with their own versions of Eve. Milton, a cultural giant throughout the Romantic and Victorian eras, was not easily confronted. In Chapter Two, I present a study of Barrett’s attempt to rewrite Milton in “A Drama of Exile” (1844). At stake in Barrett’s project is the way she “receives” *Paradise Lost*. Her revisions of Milton suggest that she read *Paradise Lost* as a text that privileged the male voice, and her failed revisions suggest that she was ambivalent about this notion of male privilege. On one hand, she respects the force of Milton’s poetic voice and even respects the power she sees as inherent in the male voice and perspective. On the other hand, she senses a void or absence in depictions of the Fall, and identifies this absence as the lack of a female perspective on Eve’s grief. Despite her wish to honor Milton and her fear of being compared to him, Barrett pushes forward to assert her own perspective on Eve in “Drama.” Barrett’s fear of Milton and her desire to revise him leave her poetic voice hanging in the balance, somewhere between imitator and revisionist. In Chapter Two, I point out areas of Barrett’s revision of Milton, and moreover, I detail her proclivity to echo rather than erase Milton’s ideas about Eve. More significantly, however, I focus on Barrett’s curious situation of dwelling in a region of poetic and ideological indeterminacy and the extremes of stillness and motion, silence and speech that serve as indicators of this indeterminacy.

In Chapter Three, I will discuss the similarities between Lanyer and Rossetti’s treatment of Eve, as well as the significance of their differences. I will argue that Rossetti

and Lanyer's works are evidence of the power of Eve as a transhistorical figure who inspires a similar response to the same basic questions and issues. These fundamental issues include women's status in redemptive history, role in the Fall, and spiritual relationships and obligations to one another and to Christ.

In their own ways, Lanyer, Milton, Barrett, and Rossetti are, like Said, "centrally concerned . . . with what takes place when one consciously sets out to experience or define what a beginning entails, especially with regard to the meaning produced as a result of a given beginning."<sup>4</sup> These authors use Eve to elicit theological change, concerning women's relationship to guilt and redemption, and social change, concerning how women are perceived and treated. The burden placed on the readers, as the ones who are to live out these changes, is a heavy one. Whether implicitly or explicitly, these authors call their readers to action, and at the very least urge them to ready their hearts and minds for new ideas about women.

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<sup>4</sup> Said 6.

## Chapter One

### Milton and Lanyer as Poet/Teachers: Lessons about Eve for the Reader

As seventeenth-century Protestants, both Aemilia Lanyer and John Milton were familiar with the right and responsibility of each individual to read and interpret the Bible in search of eternal truths applicable to their present political, personal, and social circumstances. Lanyer and Milton are unusual in that they stretch this individual Protestant responsibility into an apostolic vocation. They self-proclaimedly occupy an office that obligates them to interpret, but moreover, inspires them to expand biblical narrative.<sup>5</sup> In some ways, then, Milton and Lanyer embark on the same project—that of allowing the muse of the Holy Spirit to illuminate their minds with thoughts of the divine—in setting out to write *Paradise Lost* and *Salve Deus Rex Judæorum*.

As with other seventeenth-century authors who depict Eve (such as Guillaume de Salluste Du Bartas and John Mabb), Milton and Lanyer's Eves are symbolic figures, designed to impart certain lessons to readers. In conventional arguments about Eve, Eve's motives are used to condemn her and commentators figure her as a representation of the dangers of desire and the inferiority of all women.<sup>6</sup> Lanyer uses her brief defense of Eve to transform Eve's traditional significance, making her into a figure symbolic of the plight of all women. To achieve her goal of exonerating women, Lanyer must

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<sup>5</sup> That this process was in keeping with seventeenth-century thought about the Bible can be observed by reading Debra Shuger, *The Renaissance Bible* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1994). The Bible "continued to generate knowledge and narrative" through the seventeenth century; "the biblical narrative retained a certain (if limited) flexibility . . . a sort of extradogmatic surplus of undetermined meaning—or rather meaning capable of being determined in various ways" (5).

<sup>6</sup> For a detailed discussion of conventional Renaissance arguments about women and the figure of Eve, see Ian Maclean, *The Renaissance Notion of Women: A Study in the Fortunes of Scholasticism and Medical Science in European Intellectual Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1980). For a study of the way Adam

Continued on next page.

successfully teach her readers to think about Eve in a new way and teach them to see their connection to Eve. Eve's symbolic significance also interests Milton. Resisting a simple reading of Eve that would somehow either exonerate or condemn her gender, he creates a complex Eve that emerges as a figure representative of the difficulties of reading and interpretation. While Milton and Lanyer's works differ immensely in what they reveal about their authors' personal, political, and even, in Lanyer's case, economic concerns, both authors go further than Du Bartas and Mabb by subverting misogynistic portrayals of Eve to revitalize the figure of Eve with new significance. Not only are these new Eves departures from convention, they are also closely connected to the reader. Lanyer connects her readers to Eve in order to gain sympathy for Eve, and thus also gain support for her argument. Milton, on the other hand, actually turns his Eve into both a picture of the reader and a test of his readers' abilities.

One of Lanyer's chief aims in writing *Salve Deus* is to teach readers: "to make knowne to the world, that all women deserve not to be *blamed*" (italics mine) (48, 11-12).<sup>7</sup> She frames her defense of Eve as a part of this larger project, presenting the story of Eve to make her readers consider "why are poore Women *blam'd* / Or by more faultie Men so much defam'd?" (italics mine) (6, 77-78). Blame, and the project of removing the stain of accusation from women's hands, preoccupies Lanyer. In order to liberate women from the burdens of misinterpretation, Lanyer replaces old representations of Eve

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and Eve were analyzed and interpreted see Philip C. Almond, *Adam and Eve in Seventeenth Century Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999).

<sup>7</sup> Aemilia Lanyer, *The Poems of Aemilia Lanyer: Salve Deus Rex Judæorum*, ed. Susanne Woods (New York: Oxford UP, 1993). All of Lanyer's poetry is quoted from this edition, which I will henceforth cite parenthetically with page number followed by line number.

with new. Lanyer's new Eve is not blameworthy, but is rather an almost innocent figure. Yet, with eleven dedicatory poems, a narrative of Christ's passion, and an account of women's virtues comprising the bulk of *Salve Deus*, "Eves Apologie," which occupies a mere eighty lines, is short. Despite its brevity, Lanyer establishes the centrality of "Eves Apologie" to her poetic project in her first dedicatory poem (written to Queen Anne, the most powerful and influential of Lanyer's readers):

Behold, great Queene, faire *Eves* Apologie,  
Which I have writ in honour of your sexe,  
And doe referre unto your Majestie,  
To judge if it agree not with the Text.

And if it doe, why are poore Women blam'd,

Or by more faultie Men so much defam'd? (6, 72-77)

Traditionally, the story of Eve disgraces woman, but Lanyer writes a defense of Eve "in honour" of the female sex (6, 73). Lanyer uses this defense to do more than honor women. She uses it to invoke comparison between her work, the Bible, and traditional interpretations of the Bible.

Like Milton, Lanyer encumbers her readers with great expectations. She thrusts Queen Anne into a critical role by asking the queen to compare her work to the Bible and "To judge if it agree not with the Text" (6, 75). She constructs a conditional statement that locates "Eves Apologie" as central to her poetic purpose, essentially arguing, "If my defense of Eve agrees with the text, then "poore Women" should not be "blam'd." She uses this argument as a base from which to argue that the guilt of men, who crucified Christ, far outweighs Eve's sin of falling to temptation. (6, 76) By mentioning "Eves

Apologie” at this early point in *Salve Deus*, Lanyer begins preparing her readers to view Eve sympathetically and to see Eve as a figure symbolic of the injustices unfairly heaped on women as a result of traditionally misogynistic readings of the Fall. Furthermore, she wants to prepare them to accept her argument that men’s sin of instigating Christ’s crucifixion more than cancels out women’s sin in the Fall. Lanyer primes her readers to accept “Eves Apologie” by using her dedicatory poems both to construct an identity for her readers and to construct an identity for *Salve Deus* as a text. Her task is two-pronged. She wants her readers to see her work as divinely inspired, as a mirror, and as a feast, and she wants to tell her readers how to think of themselves—as spiritually active readers/gazers and as the Bride of Christ. Furthermore, she surrounds her defense of Eve with evidence of men’s greatest shortcomings, locating her defense of Eve in relation to her discussion of Judas’ treachery, the disciples’ disloyalty, and Pilate’s pride.

In order to validate her own unconventional ways of thinking about Scripture and about women, Lanyer employs binary reversals that are repeatedly used in the Gospels, those of spiritual wealth as superior to worldly wealth, suffering as more heroic than conquering, humility privileged over pride (124, 1706-8; 92, 959-60). In keeping with the Bible, Lanyer espouses the belief that the proud will be laid low and the humble will be raised up. What she adds to the Gospel teachings, however, is the interpretation that the proud are men and the humble, women. The Christ she portrays would not “speake one word, nor once to lift his eyes / Unto proud Pilate” but to “these poore women, by their pitious cries” that “Did moove their Lord,” he turned and spoke (93, 977-82). This contrast between proud, cruel men and humble, faithful women appears again in lines 993-96. In these two passages and elsewhere, Lanyer describes women as “poore.”



Women occupy a lowly station, one insignificant to the world. And yet, Lanyer affirms “the Weaker thou doest seeme to be / In Sexe, or Sence, the more his Glory shines” (63, 289-90). Lanyer’s clear distinction between men and women, which places women with the righteous and particularly with Christ, and men with the wicked, prepares her readers to see Eve as a righteous figure and to lay the blame of the Fall, as well as the guilt of all future male sins, onto Adam.

Since Lanyer does not count men among the righteous, she also counts them out of the church, and therefore, her figuring of the church as the bride of Christ is an auspiciously all-female one. Lanyer asks her readers to see themselves as the Bride of Christ, lovers patiently waiting for him. Lanyer places her readers in this role in order to solidify their connection to Christ and to eventually link them with Eve. Lanyer urges “all vertuous Ladies in generall” to “Put on your wedding garments every one, / The Bridegroome stayes to entertaine you all” (12, 8-9). The request carries an implicit warning, and one to be heeded by “all” and “every one.” Make yourselves ready, for “One sparke of grace sufficient is to fill / Our Lampes with oyle, ready when he doth call” (41, 13-14). Lanyer advises, prepare yourselves for the Bridegroom. Wait and watch for Christ, distinguishing yourselves through your patience and spiritual purity from the disciples who “could not watch one houre for love of thee” (69, 418). To Lanyer, the act of waiting is not one of passivity. It is a mark of spiritual readiness and rigor.<sup>8</sup> Lanyer’s readers, spiritually alert, patiently waiting Brides, would see themselves

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<sup>8</sup> As Achasah Guibbory notes, Lanyer draws the bride/bridegroom motif from the Song of Songs, but this motif also figures prominently in the gospels and the epistles, often in ways that have considerably stronger apocalyptic implications—and thus, imply that the Bride’s waiting is a spiritual work and discipline—than the Song of Songs (202). See “The Gospel According to Aemilia: Women and the Sacred,” *Aemilia* Continued on next page.

in sharp contrast with the spiritually inactive disciples whose “eyes were heavie, and their hearts asleepe” (71, 465). They, the betrothed, would see themselves as the opposite of Judas, the “trothlesse traytor” (72, 485), and heartily agree with Lanyer when she asks “By this Example [that of Judas], what can be expected / From wicked Man, which on the Earth doth live? / But faithlesse dealing” (83, 737-39).

At the same time that Lanyer creates a picture of her reader as patient and faithful and the disciples as impatient and unfaithful, she repeatedly refers to Christ as Patience, and in so doing strengthens the link between her reader and Christ. Of Christ, she writes, “Of those great torments Patience did indure; / And reape those Comforts that belongs to you, / Which his most painfull death did then assure” (38, 44-46). Lanyer also acknowledges Christ as the perfection of all virtues women desire, and patience, of course, is numbered among those (40, 85-96). Lanyer’s portrayal of both Christ and her readers as patient prepares her readers for her sympathetic depiction of Eve in “Eves Apologie.” In a stroke that represents the culmination of Lanyer’s efforts connect her readers to each other, to Christ, and to women of the past, Lanyer calls Eve “Patience,” which paints her as a heroic, enduring figure, one suffering for and with all women (85, 793). Conventionally, Eve represents the sensuality and inferiority of women and the failure of humankind, so in calling Eve “Patience” and depicting her as a representation

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*Lanyer: Gender, Genre, and the Canon*, ed. Marshall Grossman (Lexington, KY: UP of Kentucky, 1998) 191-211. The apocalyptic undertones of this motif are important to note, for according to Kari McBride and John Ulreich, “The Apocalypse, the New Jerusalem, the heavenly city are everywhere and nowhere in Lanyer’s critique, never overtly named, but present throughout in a variety of related metaphors of marriage and feasting that invoke the bridegroom Christ of the eschaton and serve as the hermeneutic by which she reads the social and economic orders” (134). See “Answerable Styles: Biblical Poetics and Biblical Politics in the Poetry of Lanyer and Milton,” *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 100.3 (2001): 333-54.

of injustice toward women, Lanyer gives Eve a new symbolic significance. Showing Adam as “most too blame” in order to stress the injustice of women’s fate, she states, “And then to lay the fault on Patience backe, / That we (poore women) must endure it all” (85, 778). Lanyer emphasizes the shared plight of all women by calling Eve “poore soule” and “poore Eve,” finally using “poore” to describe all women (85, 773, 784, 794).

Pilate’s wife, another biblical character often vilified by readers, speaks “Eves Apologie.” Willing to help Pilate from falling into sin rather than glory in his failure, Pilate’s wife exemplifies the sympathy and generosity of women. Imparting to him the contents of her dream, she urges him to “Let barb’rous crueltie farre depart from thee, / And in true Justice take afflictions part” (84, 773-74). She takes the moral high ground in her attempt to sway him from his decision to condemn Christ. Unlike men who have seemingly rejoiced in women’s fall, Pilate’s wife resolves that women will not take pleasure in the fall of man: “Let not us Women glory in Mens fall, / Who had power given to over-rule us all” (84, 759-60). She is not willing to celebrate men’s sin, even though it is at this moment that women’s guilt and sin (an inheritance passed along from Eve) pales in comparison to men’s willful decision to condemn Christ: “your indiscretion sets us free, / And makes our former faults much lesse appeare” (84, 761-62).

Unlike Milton whose Eve clearly knows of Satan’s threat, Lanyer portrays Eve as the innocent, unsuspecting victim of the serpent’s guile. While it is possible to say that Milton’s Eve should have known better, Lanyer’s Eve is entirely sympathetic. Emphasizing the pitiability of Eve, Pilate’s wife says, “She (poore soule) by cunning was deceav’d / No hurt therein her harmless Heart intended” (772). In telling us that Eve “intended” no wrong, Lanyer wants us to consider a hierarchy of sin. Sin committed

intentionally, like that of Judas and Pilate, is much graver than the unintentional sin committed by the beguiled Eve. Even the sin of the disciples—that of being spiritually asleep—is worse than the sin of being spiritually blind. Guiborry, however, calls Eve’s spiritual blindness “credulity” and argues that “Lanyer turns Eve’s credulity into a *virtue*.”<sup>9</sup> While Eve’s naiveté certainly, in Lanyer’s opinion, clears Eve from much of the guilt traditionally ascribed to her, it is still problematic. Speaking in terms of blindness, Lanyer paints Eve’s spiritual and mental inadequacy as a liability. Lanyer recognizes that Eve falls victim to Satan’s arts because her “undiscerning Ignorance perceav’d / No guile” (84, 769). Here Lanyer embeds a popular Protestant argument (one made by Milton in *Of Education*) about education’s role in keeping one close to God.<sup>10</sup> Ignorance is dangerous, wisdom protective. According to Lanyer, Eve could not withstand temptation because she did not have the knowledge sufficient to refuse Satan. Her emphasis on Eve’s credulity is an emphasis on the importance of education and knowledge. Pilate’s wife explains that Eve “had not powere to see” the consequences of her actions or “to his request she had not condescended” (84, 765, 772). Eve’s sight is not limited in the same way as the disciples’; she is not asleep. She desires spiritual discernment, but lacks the “powere” (84, 765). Even from the beginning, Eve’s

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<sup>9</sup> Guiborry 199.

<sup>10</sup> In *Of Education*, Milton says that the end of knowledge and learning is a right relationship with God. Knowledge is restorative. He says, “The end then of learning is to repair the ruins of our first parents by regaining to know God aright, and out of that knowledge to love him, to imitate him, to be like him” (227). See John Milton, *Of Education*, *John Milton*, ed. Stephen Orgel and Jonathan Goldberg (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1991) 226-236.

ignorance places her at a disadvantage. If Lanyer's Eve is naïve and ignorant, Milton's Eve is wary and intelligent, even before her fall.

Eve, and as Lanyer shows, all women, suffer under the weight of being the living sign of sin. Lanyer works to remove this weight by showing her readers that, despite her limitations, Eve demonstrated great moral strength in her fall. Pilate's wife claims that Eve's act of "Giving to *Adam* what shee held most deare, / Was simply good," asserting that Eve's act is one of selfless rather than selfishness, an act of giving rather than deceit or cunning (84, 764). Eve is not a figure of selfish desire, but selfless virtue. Lanyer's work of drawing attention to the Bible's binary reversals in her dedicatory verses to set up her own reversal that of humble women elevated over proud men prepares the reader to accept a new reversal—Adam as sinful and sensual; Eve as pitiable and self-sacrificing. Reversal is Lanyer's main strategy. Reversing the conventional charge that the Fall proves Eve's sensuality, she asserts, "If *Eve* did erre, it was for knowledge sake, / The fruit beeing faire perswaded him to fall" (86, 797-98). Instead of stemming from base, bodily desires, Eve's motives spring from a desire for intellect, for the higher things of knowledge and learning. The beauty of the fruit itself, on the other hand, motivates Adam,, not by any good the fruit represents. By shifting the charge of sensuality from Eve to Adam, Lanyer associates Adam with the earthly and Eve with the intellectual.

In order to fully exonerate Eve, Lanyer must accuse Adam: "But surely *Adam* can not be excusde, / Her fault though great, yet hee was most to blame" (85, 777-78).

Lanyer, the opposite of ignorant Eve, has several rhetorical tricks up her poetic sleeve, twisting conventional arguments about the nature of women to work in her favor. In keeping with these arguments, she too focuses on the weakness and ignorance of women,

ascribing men with mastery and superiority.<sup>11</sup> She lauds Adam as “Lord of All,” “Lord and King of all the earth,” “The perfect’st man that ever breath’d on earth” (85; 780, 783, 785). He had “powere to rule both Sea and Land” (85, 789). Adam is powerful, regal, even royal. Adam is worthy of directly communicating with God. Lowly Eve is not warned about the dangers of the tree by God, while Adam “from Gods mouth reciev’d that strait command” and still sinned (85, 787). The greater Adam was, “The greater was his shame” (85, 780). Just as Adam’s superiority makes his sin less excusable, Adam’s motives mark him as more liable. As we emerge from “Eves Apologie” we reenter the confrontation between Pilate and his wife, knowing of course, that Pilate—like all men, susceptible to sin, will follow in Adam’s footsteps.

Milton’s transformation of Eve, like Lanyer’s relies on the subversion (although not reversal) of traditional misogynistic arguments about Eve. Like Lanyer, Milton uses Eve as an instructive figure. One of Milton’s most powerful arguments for the justness of God is that God equipped Adam and Eve with reason and with the liberty afforded them by free will, making them “Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall” (3.99).<sup>12</sup> Adam and Eve, endowed with the gifts of reason and free will, are responsible for using these gifts rightly. Their task is that of interpreting the godly bounds of knowledge and liberty, but it is Eve, rather than Adam, who faces the most difficult interpretive task in the epic, that of discerning the validity or error of Satan’s arguments. Milton’s depiction of Eve

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<sup>11</sup> Turner points out that Lanyer makes an “Agrippan argument for the equality or superiority of women” (111). Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa argued that “at most she [Eve] was a deluded accessory to sin, whereas Adam knowingly broke the commandment and brought death upon us all” (109). See James G. Turner, *One Flesh: Paradisal Marriage in the Age of Milton* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1987).

dots the landscape of *Paradise Lost* with many interpretive gray areas. Critic's efforts to navigate this ambiguous terrain frequently result in a recasting of Milton's portrayal of Eve as either feministic or misogynistic.<sup>13</sup> Some critics' interpretive efforts, most notably James Turner's, are sensitive to "the irresolvable doubleness" that characterizes Milton's Eve and Milton's version of marital love.<sup>14</sup> I find myself following in Turner's footsteps in arguing that Milton's Eve is characterized by doubleness. Yet while Turner argues in regard to Eve and Eve's relationship with Adam that the "poem itself presents both ["ecstatic-egalitarian and patriarchal relationships"] as moral systems based on self-knowledge and responsibility, and both appear to have been sanctioned by higher beings," I argue that Milton's doubleness can also be accounted for by seeing Milton's Eve as evidence of both Milton's efforts to frustrate readers' proclivity to read characters symbolically and his desire to create symbolic figures.<sup>15</sup>

Unlike Lanyer, who gives the reader only one satisfactory choice in interpreting Eve by creating a persuasive argument aimed at swaying the reader to see Eve sympathetically, Milton gives the reader a number of choices when interpreting the

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<sup>12</sup> John Milton, *Paradise Lost: An Authoritative Text, Backgrounds and Sources*, ed. Scott Elledge, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Norton, 1993). All quotations from *Paradise Lost* are taken from this edition, and will be cited parenthetically.

<sup>13</sup> For critics who see Milton as a feminist or proto-feminist see the following works. Diane K. McColley, *Milton's Eve* (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1983); Joseph Wittreich, *Feminist Milton* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1987); Philip J. Gallagher, *Milton, the Bible, and Misogyny* (Columbia: U of Missouri P, 1990); and Barbara Lewalski "Milton on Women—Yet Once More," *Milton Studies* 6 (1974): 3-20. For critics who see Milton as a subordinationist or misogynist see the following. Marcia Landy, "Kinship and the Role of Women in *Paradise Lost*," *Milton Studies* 4 (1972): 3-18; Sandra Gilbert, "Patriarchal Poetry and Women Readers: Reflections on Milton's Bogey," *PMLA* 93 (1978): 368-82; Christine Froula "When Eve Reads Milton: Undoing the Canonical Economy," *Critical Inquiry* 10.2 (1983): 321-347; and Margaret Thickstun, *Fictions of the Feminine: Puritan Doctrine and the Representation of Women* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1988).

<sup>14</sup> 286. Turner argues, "Milton has succeed in bringing to life, in the praxis of his art, two quite different models of the politics of love: one is drawn from the experience of being in love with an equal, and the mutual surrender of 'due benevolence,' the other from the hierarchical arrangement of the universe, and the craving for male supremacy" (285).

significance of Eve. Milton's Eve presents the reader with difficult interpretive decisions. His Eve illustrates the difficulties involved in interpretation, for through her, Milton shows us that one figure can signify contradictory ideas about women. Milton's project in depicting Eve is similar to the one Sharon Achinstein sees him embark on in his representation of the Parliament of Hell. As with his depiction of governance in Hell, his portrayal of Eve makes use of a "repeated strategy of provoking allegorical interpretations while refusing to supply unequivocal 'keys' to the allegory."<sup>16</sup> Milton would have us learn that "a single set of signs could bear numerous interpretations" and that "political allegory—and allegory in general—required special skills in reading."<sup>17</sup> Milton tenuously negotiates between portraying Eve either as equal or as inferior in order to imbue Eve with a larger significance. While Lanyer turns traditional interpretations of Eve upside-down, placing Eve as the victor of the blame-game, Milton makes it impossible for the reader to confidently label his reading of Eve either traditional or radical. Rather, Milton uses the figure of Eve (and exploits the duality of meaning that can be ascribed to her) to embody the problematic nature of interpretation, making her both a sign of interpretive difficulty and a representation of the struggling reader.

The scene where Satan and the reader first see Adam and Eve is a persistent problem for readers, and one that characterizes the struggle between hierarchy and egalitarianism identified by Turner. Many (dare I say all?) readers of *Paradise Lost* are

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<sup>15</sup> Turner 281.

<sup>16</sup> Sharon Achinstein, "Milton and the Fit Reader," *Milton and the Revolutionary Reader* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1994), Rpt. in *British Literature 1640-1789: A Critical Reader*, ed. Robert DeMaria (Malden: Blackwell, 1999) 65.

<sup>17</sup> Achinstein 43.



confronted, puzzled, and frustrated by Satan's depiction of Adam and Eve. Satan bases his assessment of Adam and Eve's position in the universe and relationship to each other based on what he can see of their bodies. When he first sees them he describes them as "Two of far nobler shape erect and tall" and "God-like erect" (4.288-89). Their "naked majesty" places them in the position of seeming "lords of all," locating them above animals, plants, and matter in the Great Chain of Being. Soon, however, we learn that Adam and Eve are "Not equal" (296). Adam's "fair large front and eye sublime declared / Absolute rule" (4.300-1). His body actually tells forth his identity and his hierarchical position in relation to Eve. While Adam's body "declared" his identity, Eve's body only "implied" hers:

She as a veil down to the slender waist  
Her unadorned tresses wore  
Disheveled, but in wanton ringlets waved  
As the vine curls her tendrils, which implied  
Subjection. (4.304-8)

Arranged as a "veil" that protects her, almost hiding her body, it is also "disheveled" and "wanton," her hair is only able to imply rather than insist upon her "Subjection." The language of the body, declaring and implying Adam and Eve's status within the gender hierarchy of Eden is interesting enough to note, but Milton, ever willing to complicate the act of reading, also uses the body to assign Adam and Eve political roles.

Adam's body speaks of his right to "Absolute rule;" Eve's of "Subjection" (4.300, 4.308). Milton locates the defining features of absolute monarchy in the body, which identifies Adam as king and Eve as subject. Milton, however, is hasty to temper Adam's

“Absolute rule” and ease Eve’s “Subjection,” by telling us that Eve’s “Subjection” is “required with gentle sway, / And by her yielded, by him best received” (4.308-9). Here Milton creates an interesting paradox between “required” and “gentle” that echoes in the reader’s ear when Eve tells of her creation and first encounter with Adam. She declares, “thy gentle hand / Seized mine, I yielded” (4.488-89). Milton again uses “Gentle” in conjunction with a forceful word, “seized.” In diction alone, Eve’s inferior status is one that Milton depicts with a certain amount of ambivalence. His hesitancy about hierarchy is embodied (pun intended) in Adam and Eve.

Satan’s description of Adam and Eve, despite its doubleness, seems to tilt toward reinforcing notions of gender hierarchy, but Milton’s depiction of Adam and Eve’s worship service clearly offers proof that though Adam may be Eve’s superior in a monarchical sense, he is clearly her equal in an ecclesiastical context. Adam is not Eve’s priest. Eve worships God with the same liberty as Adam: “Both stood, / Both turned, and under open sky adored / the God that made both sky, air, earth and heav’n” (4.720-23). Their prayer marks the closing of their day, “which we in our appointed work employed / Have just finished happy in our mutual help / And mutual love” (4.726-28). Even in the context of work, their labor is “mutual.” Milton subverts a traditional portrayal of Eve and yet avoids a wholly radical depiction.

For as much as Milton’s depiction of the figure of Eve confronts the reader with difficult interpretive choices, Eve is also confronted with interpretive choices. Strangely, in two of the most complex situations Eve encounters, Milton keeps her from actually making interpretive decisions, wresting that power in the hands of Adam and God. Eve’s creation is her first occasion for interpretation, one that confronts her with the question of

defining herself in relation to the world. In this scene, God and Adam both correct and revise Eve's understanding of herself. The episode calls for Eve's interpretive action, yet the action that we see is not hers, but God and Adam's. Milton's depiction of Eve gazing into the mirror of the pool, as a figure in need of correction, is quite the opposite of Lanyer's invitation for her readers to gaze into the mirror of her text.

The dream Satan whispers in Eve's ear is another occasion of interpretation for Eve. This scene too shows Adam take over the interpretive task that seems to be within Eve's domain. In a state of anxiety, Eve awakens from the dream and imparts its details to Adam. Adam proceeds to interpret the dream for her, telling her that "fancy" which often imitates reason "Wild work produces oft, and most in dreams, / Ill matching words and deeds long past or late" (5.102, 110-12). Eve, although "cheered" by Adam's interpretation of her dream, is not wholly satisfied or comforted: "So cheered his fair spouse, and she was cheered, / But silently a gentle tear let fall/ From either eye, and wiped them with her hair" (5.129-31). The reader must be satisfied with Adam's interpretation of her tears as "the gracious signs of sweet remorse / And pious awe, that feared to have offended" (5.134-35). In a scene that should force Eve to engage in interpretation, Milton lets Adam do all of the intellectual work, keeping Eve oddly silent.

Despite the fact that Milton excludes Eve from interpretive tasks in these instances, that he allows her to actively enter into them later and that he portrays her as an intelligent, capable individual works to subvert traditional depictions of Eve (albeit in a way different than Lanyer's subversion). Lanyer changes traditional images by reversing them, while Milton seems to implode them by layering traditional depictions with radical depictions. Lanyer show Eve as good and innocent and Adam as bad and guilty, whereas

Milton plays guilt and innocence, equality and inferiority off of one another to show Eve as a struggling reader and the sign of interpretive difficulty. In her debate with Adam about the division of labor and her encounter with Satan, we see Eve flex her interpretive muscles and display her readerly strengths and weaknesses.

Eve's fall results from her readerly weakness par excellence: her failure to rightly read God's command against eating the fruit. Though she clearly knows God's warning not to eat the fruit, she fails to interpret this warning as having to do with the bounds of knowledge and the importance of obedience.<sup>18</sup> Twice when the serpent tempts Eve, she acknowledges her awareness of God's warning. She tells the serpent, "But of this tree we may not taste nor touch; / God so commanded" (9.651-52). The second time she repeats God's warning she actually quotes the Bible in a gesture imitative of Christ's response to the temptation in the wilderness, saying, "God hath said, 'Ye shall not eat / Thereof nor shall ye touch it, lest ye die'" (9.662-63). Unlike Christ, Eve falls short of right interpretation. She does not make the connection between God's command and the good, beneficial boundaries God places on knowledge. Unlike Adam, Eve does not realize that "apt the mind or fancy is to rove, / unchecked, and of her roving is no end; / Till warned, or by experience taught, she learn" (8.188-90). She does not know that "What is more" than knowledge of the "daily life" is "emptiness or fond impertinence, / And renders us in things that most concern, / Unpracticed, unprepared, and still to seek" (8.194-97).

While it might be tempting to see Eve's misunderstanding of the nature of knowledge as

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<sup>18</sup> Low comments on the importance of obedience: "Just as nothing could be more important to the Milton who wrote *Paradise Lost* than freedom, so—in what seems to us a puzzling contradiction—nothing could be more important than obedience" (132). See *Aspects of Subjectivity: Society and Individuality from the Middle Ages to Shakespeare and Milton* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne UP, 2003).

God's fault, Milton, true to his poetic goal, builds a defense of God by letting readers know that Eve authors her own fall. God made Adam and Eve "just and right, / Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall" (3.98-99). Adam insists that all of God's creation is complete, with "Nothing imperfect or deficient left / Of all that he created, much less man" (9.345-46).

The temptation Eve faces is a confrontation with the text of Satan's arguments. Eve's task, like the task confronting all believers, is that of reading carefully in order to discern good from evil.<sup>19</sup> In his attempt to confuse Eve, portraying knowledge as an unmitigated good and casting doubt on God's command not to eat the fruit, Satan makes several smooth argumentative twists and turns. He raises the issue of God's justness. He says, "God therefore cannot hurt ye, and be just; / Not just, not God; not feared then, nor obeyed" (9.700-1). He not only raises doubts about God's character, but he questions God's motives for commanding Adam and Eve not to eat the fruit. He causes Eve to question God's command, saying, "Why then was this forbid? Why but to awe, / Why but to keep ye low and ignorant, / His worshipers" (9.703-5). Later in the same speech he says,

And wherein lies

Th' offense, that man should thus attain to know?

What can your knowledge hurt him, or this tree

Impart against his will if all be his?

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<sup>19</sup> According to Haskin, "In *Paradise Lost* then Milton took what seemed a simple story from the best known of books, the better to emphasize that what constitutes the real advantage of 'being a Christian' has to do with interpretation" (258). See *Milton's Burden of Interpretation* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1994).

Or is it envy, and can envy dwell

In heav'nly breasts? (9.725-30)

Satan approaches his own question (why is man's desire to know problematic?) from three angles. First, he focuses on Eve, almost sarcastically questioning what harm her knowledge would be capable of inflicting on God. Second, he introduces the issues of the will of God and the sovereignty of God. He hypothesizes that if God is Lord over everything, then the tree could not produce a result in Eve contrary to his will. He presupposes predestination, and even determinism, implying that things can only turn out as God would like. Third, he suggests the most outrageous possibility, and the one that Eve ponders most. He poses the question in one quick jab, "Or is it envy" (9.729), and hastily follows it up by asking "can envy dwell / In heav'nly breasts?" (9.730). Eve is left to negotiate these possible ways to interpret God's command. Satan's argumentative tactics work, because his arguments "into her heart too easy entrance won" (9.734).

Of all of his arguments, Eve becomes fixated on Satan's speculation about God as envious and oppressive preoccupies Eve. She picks up on Satan's use of the word "forbid" and begins to use it as a kind of interpretive decoder ring, interpreting everything in terms of forbidding versus permitting. As she considers eating the fruit, she questions, "In plain then, what forbids he but to know, / Forbids us good forbids us to be wise?," resolving, "Such prohibitions bind not" (9.758-60). The word "forbid" resounds throughout this section, appearing (in some form) six times in the span of only ten lines (9.750-60). After Eve ate "without restraint," she calls the Father "Our great Forbidder," thus also adopting the vocabulary of Satan, who earlier, calls God the "Threat'ner" (9.791, 815). Satan offers Eve knowledge and freedom from the

“Forbidder,” but Gabriel points out (and Eve will soon know) that Satan is a “sly hypocrite” who “wouldst seem / Patron of liberty,” but who desires power rather than liberty (4.957-58). By refusing to depict Eve traditionally, Milton teaches his readers a lesson about the difficulties of reading and the possibilities for representation. While Milton’s Eve is not a sign either of women’s equality or of women’s inferiority, she may still be read as a sign in so far as she is a representation of Christian readers faced with the task of reading the Word and discerning the difference between the true Word and the perversions of the word that Satan offers.

Milton’s Eve illustrates that interpretation is a task for both the mind and the heart. Compared to Lanyer’s Eve, Milton’s Eve is exceptionally intelligent. Milton emphasizes Eve’s intelligence by portraying Satan as a truly formidable enemy. As Adam says, “Subtle he needs must be, who could seduce / Angels” (9.307-8). Milton’s Eve is clever enough to do several rounds of argumentative battle with Satan, quickly rebuffing his attempts to flatter her and initially resisting his invitations to partake of the fruit. Yet, facing temptation requires more than mental acuity and the ability to reason (abilities Satan displays to some degree). It requires spiritual insight and even faith. While God made reason “right,” according to Adam, and according to Eve, “our reason is our law,” the serpent’s argument, nonetheless, “into her heart too easy entrance won” (9.734). Although in the next few lines we learn that the serpent’s argument “impregned / With reason to her seeming and with truth” resounded in her ears (9.738-39, 37), we are initially told that Satan’s argument gains entrance to her *heart*, not her mind. After Satan’s words enter her heart they, in concert with the fruit itself, become a temptation to her senses. Milton tells us that the sight of the fruit alone might be enough to tempt her,

but that all of Eve's senses are bombarded by the effects of the serpent's "words replete with guile" and by the presence of the fruit (9.735). The "sound" of Satan's words "rung" in her ears, "the smell / So savory of that fruit, which with desire, / Inclinable now grown to touch or taste, / Solicited her longing eye" (9.736-43). This scene can be used as evidence for a feminist reading that would argue that Milton has created a traditionally inferior Eve, one enslaved by her senses, but since Milton does not work to either explicitly condemn or exonerate Eve and works rather to show Eve as a reader, this scene of temptation shows us that the difficult task facing Eve is that of interpreting both sense perceptions and Satan's logical machinations.

Two factors motivate Eve to eat the fruit. It is "Fair to the eye, inviting to the taste" and is "Of virtue to make wise" (9.777-78). It will "feed at once both body and mind" (9.779). Aside from these basic motives, Eve is also motivated to eat on faulty logical and theological grounds. As discussed above, she interprets God's command to eat incorrectly, misinterpreting the very nature of God. She sees God as an oppressor, a figure restraining and limiting her. She eats because God's command not to eat the fruit, "his forbidding," makes the fruit appealing and "infers the good / By thee communicated, and our want" (9.753-55). Logically, however, God's command against eating the fruit should make it look unappealing and should speak of the threat of death that the fruit poses. Although she wants the knowledge the tree offers because of its promise of giving her some great advantage previously kept from her, her most egregious error is in misinterpreting God's command and his nature. Eve's exchange with the serpent shows that God made her sufficient to stand--she was equipped with the faculty of reason and



with the knowledge of God's command--and still fell. Her misinterpretation of God's character, as one who limits rather than provides knowledge and liberty, causes her fall.

Like Milton, Lanyer is also concerned with the dangers of misreading. Lanyer's goal in *Salve Deus* is to present a new reading of the characters of Eve and women in general. Lanyer turns Eve from a sign of woman's sinfulness to a sign of her innocence, figuring her as "Patience" (85, 793) In her attempt to vindicate women, Lanyer bases her arguments around Eve's pure motives and good intentions, practically rendering her faultless. Lanyer's argument throughout *Salve Deus* is a daringly subversive, and thus her reader's acceptance of her argument is a subject of her concern. Lanyer's dedicatory verses and efforts to prepare her readers to receive her argument are evidence of her desire to shape her readers into ones prepared for the challenge of her text. Through her dedicatory verses Lanyer creates an audience for her work. This audience is specifically comprised of a circle of noble and royal women, and is generally comprised of virtuous women readers. The dedicatory verses that establish this audience are the topic more of critical discussion than debate.<sup>20</sup> To add to this to conversation, I would argue that Lanyer uses these verses as a framing device that prepares her readers for the task of interpreting

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<sup>20</sup> Judith Herz makes the most controversial argument about Lanyer's dedications by saying, "there are not many texts with so large an assemblage of potential readers perched at the margins; The Fairie Queene is one, but in Lanyer's text the margins, crowded with noble readers, take up almost as much space as the text itself" (129). See "Aemilia Lanyer and the Pathos of Literary History," *Representing Women in Renaissance England*, ed. Claude J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth. (Columbia: U of Missouri P, 1997.) 121-135. Seelig and Lewalski have similar views about the role of the dedicatory poems. Lewalski contends that Lanyer uses the dedications to establish "a contemporary community of good women" (220) in *Silent but for the Word: Tudor Women as Patrons, Translators, and Writers of Religious Works*, ed. Margaret Patterson Hannay (Kent: Kent State UP, 1985). Sharon Seelig echoes Lewalski in saying "these dedications construct a fictive community that functions as an alternative to patriarchal structure" in their "emphasis—on strength of character, intellect, and accomplishment" (50) in "To All Vertuous Ladies in Generall: Aemilia Lanyer's Community of Strong Women," *Literary Circles and Cultural Communities in* Continued on next page.

the whole of *Salve Deus* and specifically for interpreting “Eves Apologie.” In using these poems as framing devices, Lanyer joins the ranks of early modern authors who use framing devices (introductions, epistles to the reader, dedicatory verses) to issue claims about the truth of their accounts and the reliability of their sources or that establish the purpose or context of their work. Lanyer’s dedicatory verses operate in a similar way, acting as a frame wherein she is free to assign roles to her readers and to assign spiritual importance to her text.

At their most basic, Lanyer’s claims of divine inspiration, like Milton’s claims, serve the practical rhetorical purpose of giving her arguments validity. Lanyer prays for God to “give me Power and Strength to Write” and vows to “no further stray, / Than his most holy Spirit shall give me Light” (64, 297-98). This confident articulation of poetic purpose is counterbalanced with her use of the “*humilitas* topos,” which although conventional in the seventeenth century, is under particular strain in *Salve Deus* because of Lanyer’s focus on and at the same time rebellion against claims of the inferiority of women.<sup>21</sup> Even as she prays for inspiration, she labels her work, that of “writing of divinest things,” “Defective” because of her gender (3, ll. 5, 4). Nevertheless, artistic and spiritual boldness burst through *Salve Deus*. Lanyer audaciously compares herself with Saint Peter and declares that her work supercedes his: “as Saint *Peter* gave health to the body, so I deliver you the health of the soule” (34, 9-10). This assertion forces the reader to look either quizzically or laughingly back at her self-effacing claim that “Not that I Learning to my selfe assume, / Or that I would compare with any man” (9, 147-48).

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*Renaissance England*, ed. Claude J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth (Columbia, U of Missouri P, 2000)  
Continued on next page.

Regardless of her claims to the contrary, Lanyer is quite certain of the spiritual import of *Salve Deus*, and in the end, we are confronted with the claim that she “was appointed to performe this Worke” (139).

Lanyer’s argument about Judas and Pilate’s sin (and therefore all of men’s sin) as greater than Eve’s (and therefore all women’s) is her most radical argument, and, in light of contemporary arguments about the Fall, probably the one most easily rejected.

Lanyer’s insistent claims of divine inspiration, then, force her readers to pause before rejecting her argument. These assertions of divine inspiration implicitly appeal to the reader’s sense of duty to rightly interpret inspired text. Lanyer obligates her audience to read *Salve Deus* in much of the same way that James exhorts Christians to read the Bible:

And be yee doers of the word, and not hearers deceiving your owne selves. For if any heare the word, and doe it not, he is like unto a man, that beholdeth his naturall face in a glasse. For when he hath considered himself, hee goeth his way, and forgetteth immediately what maner of one he was. But who so looketh in the perfect lawe of libertie, and continueth therein, hee not being a forgetfull hearer, but a doer of the worke, shall be blessed in his deed. (James 1:22-26)<sup>22</sup>

Two key aspects of this passage resonate with Lanyer’s project. First, Lanyer holds out the promise that her word is like the “perfect law of libertie” (James 1:25), in declaring the purpose of *Salve Deus* that of freeing women from blame (48, 11-12; 6, 77-78).

Second, that Lanyer would want her readers to read *Salve Deus* in this Jamsean manner is

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44-58.

evidenced in her determination to have her readers see *Salve Deus* as a mirror. By creatively using metaphorical language with clear biblical resonances, Lanyer compels her readers to respect and study her arguments in *Salve Deus* and treat her reversal of traditional misogynistic interpretations of the fall seriously.

In some of the dedicatory poems, Lanyer instructs her patrons, would-be-patrons, and other readers to think of *Salve Deus* as a mirror that reflects their virtues and the virtues of Christ.<sup>23</sup> She summons Queen Anne to “Looke in this Mirroure of a worthy Mind / Where some of your faire Virtues will appeare” (5, 37). Expect not only to see yourself, Lanyer confides, but “Here [in the mirror that is *Salve Deus*] may your sacred Majestie behold / That mightie Monarch both of heav’n and earth” (5, 43-44). The act of gazing in the mirror is obviously multi-valent (resonating for psychoanalytic and feminist critics in particular). For the purpose of this chapter, however, two important things can be said about the act of gazing in the mirror of text: it transforms people and it inspires them to act. As Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians testifies, the act of looking into the mirror is transformative. Paul instructs, “But we all behold as in a mirroure the glorie of the Lord with open face, and are changed into the same image, from glorie to glorie, as by the Spirit of the Lord” (3:18).<sup>24</sup> As Christians study the image of Christ, they transform into the image of Christ, the old things are left behind, and guilt for past sins is

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<sup>21</sup> Lewalski 208.

<sup>22</sup> Geneva version of the Bible, 1599.

<sup>23</sup> In the only study that discusses Lanyer’s use of feast and mirror imagery at length, Lynette McGrath explores the historical and cultural significance of Lanyer’s use of the feast and mirror tropes, connecting it with feminist and Marxist theories. She argues that “Both images are deeply embedded in the sacramental and didactic codes of medieval and Renaissance Christianity, but they serve Lanier particularly well as she feminizes them to make them more congenially readable in her women’s community” (102). See “Metaphoric Subversions: Feasts and Mirrors in Amelia Lanier’s *Salve Deus Rex Judæorum*,” *Literature, Interpretation, Theory* 3.2 (1991): 101-113.

erased. Lanyer's goal of removing "blame" from women's hands can be accomplished by gazing into and being transformed by the mirror of the word (that is to say, *Salve Deus* as divinely inspired text with self-asserted claims to status as the Word). Lanyer evokes the mirror of the word not only as trope of transformation, but also as a call to action. Those who "look intently" into the word, will act: "not being a forgetfull hearer, but a doer of the worke" (James 1:25). Lanyer wants readers to gaze into the mirror of her text, remember her words, and act upon them. She wants their ideas about the traditional interpretation of women's fundamental nature to change. They must look at Eve and all women in a new way. The fixed gaze must be accompanied by willingness to be transformed and readiness to act. Although it may seem that the transformation Lanyer calls for is much tamer and less powerful than the changes James calls for, we must not forget Lanyer's declaration: "As St. *Peter* gave health to the body, so I deliver you the health of the soule" (34,9-10). The act of altering one's opinions about women is a radical act, one affecting even the "health of the soule" (34, 9-10).

Aside from framing her text as a mirror, Lanyer presents *Salve Deus* as a feast, an occasion for celebration and a source of spiritual nourishment for the virtuous. She summons Princess Elizabeth, saying "Even you faire Princesse next our famous Queene, / I doe invite unto this wholesome feast" (11, 8-9). The word "wholesome" here is rich with connotations—pure, healthy, virtuous, filling. "Her Honour," Mary Sidney, is similarly requested to attend "my feast" (31, 206). Lanyer's use of the metaphor of the feast also figures into the way the reader is to interpret Eve. The metaphor of the feast is

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<sup>24</sup> Geneva Bible, 1599.

a redemptive trope, one that counteracts Eve's sinful act of eating. Lanyer would have us know that accepting her argument about women is not akin to accepting the forbidden fruit. Rather, accepting her argument is to partake in a "wholesome feast," an occasion of redeemed and redemptive eating. Her argument in *Salve Deus* is not satanic, but godly.

Throughout *Salve Deus*, Lanyer works to focus our readerly gaze into *Salve Deus*, beckoning us to her "wholesome feast" of godly interpretation and argument. Once we are focused and seated at the feast, Lanyer begins changing our perspective on gender as it relates to spiritual guilt and blame. As a part of this project, she empties Eve of her significance as a sign of the sinfulness of the flesh, only to fill Adam with it. Lanyer then creates a new meaning for the figure of Eve, making her a pitiable representation of the plight of "poore" women, vilified for what she sees as the lesser sin of eating the fruit, while men go unchastized for killing Christ.

A comparison of Milton and Lanyer's works allows us to reflect on the common preoccupation of seventeenth-century authors and readers with interpretation. In creating their own versions of Eve, both authors make use of contemporary arguments for and against Eve and ultimately assign Eve new figurative meanings. They use the biblical Eve as a foundation upon which to layer new ideas, concerns, and arguments. Milton and Lanyer skillfully interpret and even rewrite the Bible to make certain arguments to their readers, and most significantly, both authors call upon their readers to read themselves into the figure of Eve.

While little evidence of the cultural saliency of *Salve Deus* exists, *Paradise Lost* soon became a strong cultural force. His reading of the Fall narrative exerts a biblical authority, almost becoming *the* Fall narrative. After *Paradise Lost*, all authors writing

about the Fall are inevitably in dialogue with Milton. The power of Milton's voice is a topic many subsequent authors will take up, challenge, and either overcome or be subdued by. Chapter two will deal with this very subject, taking up the relationship between Elizabeth Barrett's "A Drama of Exile" and Milton's *Paradise Lost*.

## Chapter Two

### In the Balance: Milton and Barrett's Efforts to Write and Right Eve

"Between the desire & reluctance of writing there is no end to my vibrations."

--From a letter by Elizabeth Barrett to Mary Mitford in January of 1843<sup>25</sup>

In the preface to her *Poems of 1844*, Elizabeth Barrett introduces her reader to "A Drama of Exile," a 2,270 line poem that deals with Adam and Eve's exile from the garden of Eden, by calling it the "longest and most important work" of her career.<sup>26</sup> She declares that the subject of "A Drama of Exile" is

the new and strange experience of the fallen humanity, as it went forth from Paradise into the wilderness; with peculiar reference to Eve's allotted grief, which, considering that self-sacrifice belonged to her womanhood, and the consciousness of originating the Fall to her offence, --appeared to me imperfectly apprehended hitherto, and more expressible by a woman than a man. 143-44

Her words of introduction give us an impression of her view of "Drama" and raise some of the fundamental issues one must address in any consideration of it: the limits of gender, the situation of exile or exclusion, and the experience of grief. By virtue of her gender, Barrett sets herself up as an authority on the subject of the exile and denies male authority over the topic of "Eve's allotted grief" (143). Although she does not identify him by name in this passage, Milton, who she began reading when only eight, is surely

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<sup>25</sup> Merideth Raymond and Mary Rose Sullivan, ed., *The Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning to Mary Russell Mitford 1836-1854*, vol. 2. (Armstrong Browning Library, 1983) 170.



among those who have “imperfectly apprehended” Eve’s grief. By pointing out the flaws of past treatments of Eve and exile, Barrett places herself in the position of revisionist, and implicitly in the position of a revisionist of Milton.

Aside from being qualified to write, Barrett is also compelled to write. She explains, “The subject of the Drama rather fastened on me than was chosen” and claims to have pursued it “rather by force of pleasure than of design.” (143). The “principle” of “adoration” and of “reverence” toward God “hurried” her “into speech” (143). Yet, when confronted with the necessity of presenting “A Drama of Exile” to the public, Barrett balks at the thought of being judged against Milton. She confesses that, to avoid comparison, she worked to carve out a poetic space around the narrative of the Fall, limiting Milton by assigning his proper narrative place as being within Eden, and her proper place as being outside. Despite her attempt to situate herself in a narrative location separate from Milton, Barrett lacks the power necessary to keep him within the gates of Eden. To her dismay, Milton breaks forth in a flood of spiritual and poetic vitality. His emergence from Eden is akin to the movement of the Holy Spirit: “The subject, and his glory covering it, swept through the gates, and I stood full in it” (144). Yet, this powerful spirit is uninvited, and Barrett must stand “full in it, against my will and contrary to my vow—till I shrank back fearing almost desponding; hesitating to venture even a passing association with our great poet before the face of the public” (144). Barrett’s anxieties emerge, not at the prospect of interpreting the Bible, a task she

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<sup>26</sup> Elizabeth Barrett, *The Complete Works of Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, ed. Charlotte Porter and Helen Clark, vol. 2 (New York: Crowell, 1900). I will use this edition for all of Barrett’s works and will henceforth cite them parenthetically.

embraces out of “reverence” and “adoration,” but at the prospect of rewriting Milton’s Eve.

Although Barrett contends with the Gilbert and Gubarian “anxiety of authorship” expressed in her Preface, she seems to overcome doubt by discounting, in Bloomian fashion, her poetic forefathers in order to make room for an artistic creation of her own. Gilbert and Gubar group Barrett’s “Drama” with Charlotte Brontë’s *Shirley* and Christina Rossetti’s “Goblin Market” as a text that attempts to “come to terms with the institutionalized and often metaphorical misogyny Milton’s epic expresses” through the use of “reversionary myths and metaphors.”<sup>27</sup> Gilbert and Gubar’s ideas about “Drama” still persist, and Lewis encapsulates the views of some contemporary critics when she says “‘A Drama of Exile’ is a bold revision of John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*.”<sup>28</sup> In many respects, these critics are right. Barrett not only invites “a passing association with our great poet,” but she goes on to claim to bring something new and important, something neither Milton nor any man could bring, to discourse about the Fall: a woman’s perspective. Barrett transforms Milton’s Eve from the embodiment of the struggling reader and learner (barred from direct educative exchanges with God or angels) into a teacher. Barrett’s revision of Milton opens the doors of the classroom to Eve, giving both Adam and Eve the benefit of Christ’s instruction.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination* (1979; New Haven: Yale UP, 2000) 189.

<sup>28</sup> Linda Lewis, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s Spiritual Progress: Face to Face with God*. (Columbia: U of Missouri P, 1998) 50.

<sup>29</sup> Lewis explains Barrett’s revision, arguing, “In that vision of the future that the Gabriel of *Paradise Lost* gives to Adam, man (but not woman) is given direct access to Gabriel’s prophetic knowledge and divine comfort (which Adam will explain to Eve later), perhaps because Milton believes that Eve’s was the greater sin or the weaker intellect (or both), and perhaps because knowledge is the key to power and Milton wants Eve (and her daughters) to remain as subjective as his own Satan perceives her to be” (57).

Even as we recognize the radicalism of Barrett's revision of Milton's Eve, certain problem areas in both the preface and in "Drama" testify to the fact that Barrett, rather than breaking with Milton, reenacts some of the gender problems that complicate *Paradise Lost*. As Morlier points out, "Scattered throughout Barrett's early poetry are female characters who struggle against tradition to develop self-identity. More often than not, tradition wins."<sup>30</sup> Barrett's Eve, however, is neither wholly radical nor wholly traditional, but instead, she is marked by the same "irresolvable doubleness" Turner assigns to Milton.<sup>31</sup> While Milton's doubleness can be explained as the result of a complex clash of changing seventeenth-century notions about both gender and the Fall, and as I argue in chapter one, evidence of his desire to frustrate people's attempts to read Eve, Barrett's doubleness results from the difficulty of shaking off the specter of Milton, whose presence envelops her in artistic fear and hesitation. According to Deborah Byrd, "the product of this struggle [with Milton] is a poem that contains conflicting views of women's rights and duties."<sup>32</sup> Barrett's artistic troubles mark the Preface and "Drama" with competing views of women (namely herself and Eve), with signs of ambivalence toward male authority and interpretation (Milton, her father, Adam, and God), and with a vacillation between silence and speech. These signs of struggle break out of "Drama" to infect all of the 1844 poems and this struggle is only sufficiently resolved in Barrett's creation of a strong, poetic Eve figure in *Aurora Leigh*.

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<sup>30</sup> Margaret M. Morlier, "She for God in Her: Elizabeth Barrett Browning's New Eve," *Sexuality, the Female Gaze, and the Arts*, ed. Ronald Ditterer and Susan Bowers (Selinsgrove, Susquehanna UP, 1992) 132.

<sup>31</sup> Turner 286.

<sup>32</sup> Deborah Byrd, "Combating an Alien Tyranny: Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Evolution as a Feminist Poet," *Critical Essays on Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, ed. Sandra Donaldson (New York: Hall, 1999) 211.

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Barrett sets up “Drama” as a cross between epic and Greek tragedy, complete with a chorus of angels and “Eden spirits,” the major characters of Christ, Adam, Eve, Gabriel, Lucifer, along with the minor angels, Earth spirits, and phantasms (who discuss the plight of Adam and Eve both amongst themselves and with Adam and Eve).

“Drama” opens with a confrontation between Lucifer and Gabriel, wherein Lucifer stakes his claim as an inhabitant of earth. Meanwhile, Adam and Eve, concerned with their own unhappy state, discuss their guilt. Eve attempts to claim responsibility, but Adam rejects her argument and emphasizes their mutual guilt: “It is that we have sinned, --we” (422). He even goes as far as to claim greater responsibility: “I am deepest in the guilt, / If last in the transgression” (458-59). Adam claims greater responsibility:

If God

Who gave the right and joyance of the world  
Both unto thee and me, ---gave thee to me,  
The best gift last, the last sin was the worst,  
Which sinned against more complement of gifts  
And grace of giving. (459-64)

This exchange is one of the most notable in “Drama” because it illustrates Barrett’s effort to respond to Milton. That Barrett has her Eve take the lion’s share of the blame is imitative of Milton whose Eve does the same: “both have sinned, but thou / Against God only, I against God and thee” (10.930-1). Barrett’s Adam’s acceptance of blame is also a Miltonic echo. Milton’s Adam declares,

If prayers

Could alter high decrees, I to that place  
Would speed before thee, and be louder heard,  
That on my head all might be visited,  
Thy frailty and infirmer sex forgiv'n  
To me committed and by me exposed. (10.953-58)

In this passage Milton subverts the traditional notion that Eve is entirely to blame for the Fall, but maintains the conventional view of Eve as frail and infirm. Presumably working from this passage, Barrett revises rather than recapitulates Milton's doubleness. Both Adams acknowledge that their sin was greater because Eve was entrusted to their care. Barrett's Adam, however, sees Eve as a "gift," whereas Milton's Adam addresses Eve's "frailty and infirmer sex," seeing her as one "to me [Adam] committed" (10.57-58). Barrett's Adam feels shame because it is Eve's excellence (in addition to God) that he has transgressed against. Milton's Adam, on the other hand, feels shame because it is Eve's weakness that he has failed to protect and bolster.<sup>33</sup>

The figure of Eve, however, testifies to Barrett's resistance of her own revisionism. Eve, despite Adam's acceptance of blame, remains grief-stricken until corrected by Adam. In her remorse, she prays that God would withdraw her from society, to "hide me from thy face / And from the face of my beloved" (526-27). She promises that this withdrawal will be complete and marked by her absolute silence,

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<sup>33</sup>Other places in *Paradise Lost* show Adam call Eve his mirror and his better half in passages that certainly work against Adam's stance of superiority in this passage. Yet the similarity between Barrett's exchange and Milton's exchange indicate that Browning was working in direct response to this particular episode in *Paradise Lost*, rather than Adam's overall treatment of Eve.

describing this withdrawal as death itself.<sup>34</sup> She says “I will lie still there, I will make no plaint, / I will not sigh, nor sob, nor speak a word / Nor struggle to come back” (530-32). Eve claims that Death, the ultimate silence, “is good enough / For such as I am” (535-36). Here Eve works against Barrett’s revisionism by not only accepting full blame for the Fall, but also willingly abnegating her own voice. Eve’s emphasis on her silence resonates with Barrett’s struggle to overcome silence as it is recorded in the Preface, enacted in “Drama” and the whole of the *1844 Poems*, and finally, as I will argue, overcome in *Aurora Leigh*.

Adam plays the key role of rejecting Eve’s silence, questioning her, “And was it good for such a prayer to pass / My unkind Eve, betwixt our mutual lives?” (540-41). He emphasizes the mutuality of their plight. Whatever fate Eve sentences herself to, Adam will also be subject. To Adam’s correction, Eve replies, “’T was an ill prayer . . . And God did use it like a foolishness, / Giving no answer” (542-44). Adam’s correction of Eve and Eve’s renunciation of her vow of silence marks a triumph for Barrett in that it signals growth and change in Eve. Reflecting on her prayer and Adam’s reproof, she says, “Now my heart has grown / Too high and strong for such a foolish prayer” (544-45). Overall, however, the passage taken as a whole, with Eve’s declaration of silence, Adam’s correction and Eve’s subsequent strengthening, illustrates the way Barrett reenacts rather than revises Milton’s doubleness. Although Eve rejects her vow of silence and death and seems to reclaim and reassert the power of her own voice in the

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<sup>34</sup> This silence resonates with “Grief,” one of the 1844 sonnets wherein Barrett treats the grieving figure as a monument. She says, “Deep-hearted man, express / Grief for thy Dead is silence like to death” (8-9).

next several hundred lines, Barrett creates tension between the power of Eve's voice and the power of Adam's throughout the remainder of "Drama."

Although Adam and Eve have discussed and come to terms with their guilt, they must still face Satan and the Earth Spirits who both condemn them. When Adam and Eve encounter Satan, he assigns Eve the fullest compliment of blame: "Yet Adam was undone of Eve" (682). Browning cleverly uses Satan in this scene by aligning the traditional misogynistic reading of Eve with a Satanic reading. After their meeting with Satan, Adam and Eve contend with the Earth Spirits who reproach them for the ruin they brought upon the earth. Just as Adam heatedly commands the spirits to depart and exclaims that he and Eve will always do war with them, Eve stops him with the plea, "No Strife, mine Adam" and enjoins him "Let us not stand high / Upon the wrong we did to reach disdain, / Who rather should be humbler evermore / Since self-made sadder" (1176-79). She claims to possess a greater wisdom than Adam: "Shall I speak humbly now who once was proud? / I, schooled by sin to more humility / Than thou hast" (1181-83), and proceeds to handle the Earth Spirits in a gentler manner than Adam, and in so doing Eve asserts her right to speak. This passage is celebrated by Lewis as an indicator of Eve's shift from student/learner to teacher: "exiled Eve . . . learns lessons in humility and Christian service that she presumes to teach to her fellow sufferer, Adam, who has not yet assimilated these lessons."<sup>35</sup> By interrupting Adam and claiming the wisdom of experience, Eve demonstrates that she has learned to cast aside her vow of silence. Just

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<sup>35</sup> Lewis 50

as Adam corrected her despair a few lines earlier, here she takes the initiative to correct his pride.

Adam's pride and Eve's humility are highlighted when, under continued attack by the Earth Spirits, Adam and Eve find it necessary to make appeals to Christ. Their appeals are made on different grounds and in fact, it is Eve's plea to Christ, not Adam's, that is the effectual plea. Adam cries out, "God, there is power in thee! I make appeal to thy kingship" and Eve calls "There is pity in THEE . . . There is hope set on THEE" (1744-48). After Eve's pleas Christ appears before them in a vision to chastise the Earth Spirits as well as to comfort, instruct, and bless Adam and Eve. Adam's proud request calls upon God's power and kingship. Eve's request calls upon God's pity, and for the mercy of her "seed" (that is, Christ). Although Barrett certainly would not have had access to Lanyer's *Salve Deus*, her distinction between humble women and proud men is reminiscent of Lanyer's. Much like the poor, patient women in Lanyer's text who elicit a response from Christ, Barrett's Eve, wise in her humility, receives a response from Christ. While Lanyer's Christ responds to women and Barrett's Christ responds to Eve, Milton's Eve is not so fortunate. His Eve only stands before God or the Son in a scene of correction, as when God leads her away from the reflective pool, or in a scene of judgment, as when the Son judges and pronounces the curse on Adam and Eve. Adam, on the other hand, is quite accustomed to interaction with God and the angels. He is on friendly enough terms with God to ask him for a companion and to stand up to God's initial refusal. Adam, furthermore, becomes the conveyor of God's command not to eat of the fruit. Both Raphael and Michael engage in teaching Adam about the nature of knowledge, about all of history, and even about the nature of Eve. Although Eve is



present during the lunch-time meeting of Adam and Raphael wherein Adam and Raphael discuss the spiritual significance of food, the limits of knowledge, free will, and the war in heaven, she plays the role of observer rather than participant in their discourse. Eve may be present, but she is passive and silent. Eve is noticeably absent from all other scenes of instruction. Eve's knowledge of these divine lessons is mediated through Adam, and therefore, Barrett's chief revisions of Milton are her decision to allow Eve the benefits of Christ's direct instruction and encouragement and decision to give Eve a role in divine discussion.

While Barrett's Christ allows Eve entrance into the divine classroom, Milton's Christ portrays Eve as an inferior being. Milton's Christ cites Adam's submission to Eve as the reason for his fall. He argues that Adam

didst resign thy manhood, and the place  
Wherein God set thee above her made of thee,  
And for thee, whose perfection far excelled  
Hers in all real dignity. (10.148-51)

Christ not only speaks in terms of gender hierarchy, but, despite Milton's well-known anti-monarchical stance, he speaks in the language of political hierarchy. Adam fell because he "resign[ed]" his proper place, significantly, a place of God-ordained elevation, "Wherein God set thee above her." Adam's failure is the failure to exert rule by divine right. Barrett's Christ, on the other hand, seems to treat Adam and Eve as equals. Christ exhorts Adam and Eve as "First sinners and first mourners!" urging them to "Live and love-- / Doing both nobly because lowlily! / Live and work, strongly because patiently!" (1995-96). Yet even as Barrett revises Milton by using her portrayal

of Christ to oppose the type of gender hierarchy and male authority Milton's Christ advocates, she shrinks from and counterbalances her own revisionism. Barrett's Christ, despite his seemingly egalitarian stance, embraces an essentialist view that recognizes male and female as fundamentally different. He distinguishes between them, directing, "Take courage, O thou woman, --man, take hope!" (1987).

Earlier in this passage, Eve confesses her desire for the blessing effect of Christ's words, urging Christ to "Speak on still, Christ! Albeit thou bless me not / In set words, I am blessed in hearkening thee-- / Speak Christ!" (1820-23). This call to speak and emphasis on speech serves as a textual counterpoint to Eve's attempted renunciation of speech and vow of silence. Here we see Eve overcome her desire for silence, even daring to ask Christ to speak. Christ, however, immediately refuses Eve's request and instead of speaking, commands Adam to speak, instructing Adam to bless Eve. Christ exclaims, "Speak, Adam! Bless the woman, man! / It is thine office" (1824-25). Christ uses the word "office," a word indicative of an appointed and even permanent role, to tell Adam that it is his place to speak to and bless Eve. In this appointment of Adam as Eve's mediator, Christ reinforces gender hierarchy. Christ's initial refusal to administer a blessing to Eve and his directive that Adam should perform the blessing serves as a clear indicator that Barrett stops short of a full-scale revision of Milton and instead becomes trapped in the doubleness characteristic of Milton's treatment of Eve. Although Christ eventually blesses both Adam and Eve, his initial blessing to Eve is mediated through Adam. In this scene, Barrett places Adam in the same role that Milton often does—that of mediator.

Adam begins his blessing by calling Eve “mother of the world,” thus assigning her a place, or an office, just as Christ assigns Adam’s office. The first part of Adam’s blessing is actually an extended definition of his Christ-appointed office. Adam sees his role as prophetic and poetic, calling attention to the powers of his voice—his power of speech—declaring,

Lo, my voice,

Which, naming erst the creatures, did express

(God breathing through my breath) the attributes

And instincts of each creature in its name,

Floats to the same afflatus, --floats and heaves

Like a water-weed that opens to a wave,--

A full-leaved prophecy affecting thee; Out fairly and wide. (1827-1832)

Adam highlights his roles as prophet, a figure ordained to speak the words of the divine. In this speech, Adam more clearly defines what it means for him to hold the office of blessing woman. He undercuts Eve’s intelligence and relegates her to animal status when he compares his role of naming the animals and “express[ing] the instincts of each creature in its name” to delivering a “prophecy affecting thee,” a prophecy wherein he will mimic the work he did in naming the animals, the work of assigning Eve an identity in the world, at its most basic, that of “first woman, wife, and mother!” (1836). The picture Adam conjures of “God breathing through my breath” shows God using Adam as his representative and as a mediator between him and Eve (1827).

In the next almost ninety lines, Adam gives Eve his blessing. This blessing, however, takes a curious shape. It confronts the reader with a layering of voices. God’s

voice is spoken through Adam which is ultimately channeled through Barrett. In this way, Barrett creates two layers of male authority that mediate her proclamations about women. The blessing both defines Eve's role in society and it highlights Eve's curse (while interestingly, no mention of Adam's curse is made in all of "Drama"). Adam tells Eve, "Rise, woman, rise / To they peculiar and best altitudes / Of doing good and of enduring ill, / Of comforting for ill, and teaching good" (1842-45). The tension between the active role of "doing good" and "teaching good" and the passive role of "enduring ill" highlights Barrett's doubleness. This doubleness takes the shape of her simultaneous ascription to and resistance of traditional, patriarchal representations of Eve, and represents the dichotomy between Barrett's desire to give Eve's voice authority and to deny the authority of her voice. The tension between the activity of benevolent Eve and the passivity of patient Eve reverberates throughout the remainder of Adam's blessing. Adam first warns Eve of all she is responsible to bear. She must "bear through womanhood" not only childbirth, but "feebleness / Within thy heart, and cruelty without, / And pressures of an alien tyranny / With its dynastic reasons of larger bones / And stronger sinews" (1863-67).<sup>36</sup> She is obligated to endure childbirth, the weaknesses of her own faults, and the oppression of a male "tyranny" enforced by brute strength. Eve must passively endure even, it seems, abuse. Nonetheless, her industry will be her reward. Eve will earn gladness, riches, and strength through her work. Adam confides, "A child's kiss / Set on thy sighing lips shall make thee glad; / A poor man served by thee

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<sup>36</sup> This articulation of the curse is an elaboration of the curse Christ pronounces on Eve in *Paradise Lost*: "Thy sorrow I will greatly multiply / By thy conception; children thou shalt bring / In sorrow forth, and to thy husband's will / Thine shall submit, he over thee shall rule" (10.193-96).

shall make thee rich; / A sick man helped by thee shall make thee strong” (1869-72). After pronouncing Eve’s dual role in society, Adam proceeds to set the crown “of service” on her head, telling her that it symbolizes her goodness and protects her from “all reproach against the sin forgone, / From all the generations which succeed” (1874-77). The crown Adam gives Eve is meant to shelter her from “reproach;” thus, in some ways, this crown symbolizes a redemptive project similar to that of Lanyer’s *Salve Deus*. Barrett wants the crown to protect Eve “from all reproach,” while Lanyer wants her text to do the work of proving that blame has unfairly been assigned to all women because of Eve. Barrett envisions the crown as a devise that would prevent the unjust incrimination of Eve, whereas Lanyer positions her text as a means through which unjust accusations would be erased and Eve would be seen for all of her goodness.

Barrett’s Eve accepts the role of the sufferer. She vows to engage in the “noble work” of instruction and at the same time, resolves to persevere through “permitted pain; / While on my longest patience there shall wait / Death’s speechless angel, smiling in the east, / Whence cometh the cold wind” (1902-5). Barrett’s claims about Eve’s patience again create resonances with Lanyer’s personification of Eve. Although Lanyer’s Eve is also a figure of Patience, Lanyer remonstrates against the male wrongdoers who have forced her into this role. Barrett, on the other hand, casts Eve’s vocation as that of teacher and sufferer. Her Eve must endure the pain of injustice and bear up under trial.

In Adam and Eve’s encounters with Christ, Barrett creates tension between Adam’s role as mediator and superior and Eve’s right as an equal. This tension is writ large in her Dedication and Preface, where in one breath she enjoins her father to act as

her mediator and in the next shrinks at the prospect of Milton's mediating presence.

Dedicating the volume to her father, she writes,

Somewhat more faint-hearted than I used to be, it is my fancy thus to seem to return to a visible personal dependence on you, as if indeed I were a child again; *to conjure your beloved image between myself and the public*, so as to be sure of one smile, --and to satisfy my heart while I sanctify my ambition, by associating with the great pursuit of my life its tenderest and holiest affection. (italics mine) (142-43)

Barrett wants her father to stand between her and the world. In acknowledging her longing for him to take up this mediatorial role, she figures herself as "a child," and thus establishes herself as weaker and somehow inferior to him. She speaks in terms of a nostalgic looking back. It is her "fancy" to "seem to return to a visible dependence on you" (142). She says she wishes to once again rely on his strength, but the sincerity of her desire to assume a stance of inferiority and her true desire for his mediating presence is problematized by her indication that she wants to "*seem* to return" to such a juvenile "dependence" (my italics) (142). She only wants to *appear* to rely on him, to "conjure your beloved image" (142). Ultimately, her goal in conjuring his image is that of "satisfy[ing] my heart while I sanctify my ambition" (143). She uses her father as an authorizing figure, one who will both permit her to enter and protect her from the dangers of the male-dominated spheres of publishing and interpretations of the Fall. This dedication is evidence of Barrett's desire to mingle the domestic and professional realms in order to "sanctify" her work in the professional or public realm.

Just as propriety and Barrett's father's strict rule would prohibit her from socializing with men without a chaperone, so too, Barrett's desire to keep intellectual and professional company with men would necessitate the authority of a protective male presence. Writing about the plight of women writers in the nineteenth century, Cora Kaplan explains,

Patriarchal dominance involved the suppression of women's speech outside the home and a rigorous censorship of what she could read or write. All the major women writers were both vulnerable to and sensitive about charges of 'coarseness;' The Brontë sisters, Sand and Barrett Browning were labeled coarse by their critics, and, occasionally, by other women.<sup>37</sup>

That Barrett should seek her father's protection in the professional realm is as appropriate, if not more urgently so, as her seeking his protection in the private.

Barrett's use of spiritualized language about her father, however, should force us to read her invitation of his mediation as more than a request for an appropriate chaperone into male-dominated realms. As I observed earlier in this chapter, Barrett speaks of Milton's presence in spiritualized terms, but it is important to note that she also speaks of her father in a spiritualized manner. She speaks of her father as her "holiest affection," yet her use of his mediating image borders on the sacrilegious (143). She wishes to "conjure" his image in order to "sanctify" her "ambition" (142). Although

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<sup>37</sup> Cora Kaplan, Introduction, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning: Aurora Leigh and Other Poems*, (London: Women's Press, 1978) 5-36. Rpt. in *Critical Essays on Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, ed. Sandra Donaldson (Hall: New York, 1999) 75.

Barrett conjures her father's presence to stand between her and the public, she shrinks at the prospect of having Milton's presence stand between her and the public. In the Preface Barrett tells of the impossibility of keeping Milton's text from imposing itself on her text and her readers. This ambivalence toward male authority figures—her father on one hand and Milton on the other—carries over into the text itself where, on one hand, Adam and Eve stand before Christ together, and on the other, Christ orders Adam to extend his blessing to Eve.

Lanyer frames her argument about women with professions of humility, but since her work indicates little sense of actual inadequacy, these professions are no more than conventions. Lanyer feels no real qualms about the authority of her claims of divine inspiration and her claims of superiority over male authors (namely, St. Peter). Aware that she is writing within a male dominated culture, she makes use of the rhetorical tools available to her. She twists traditional misogynistic arguments to her feminist purpose. Barrett, conversely, firmly establishes her claim of authority over the text of the Fall and specifically over Eve's grief, but experiences real hesitation at the prospect of actually making good on this claim. Hesitation manifests itself in Barrett's "double" portrayal of Eve—Eve as under the reign of Adam and Eve as Adam's equal before Christ. Barrett, unlike Lanyer finds it impossible to get inside traditional misogynistic discourse to twist it inside out and exploit it. Instead, she tries to claim a space outside of this discourse. Milton, according to Barrett "should be within [Eden] . . . with his Adam and Eve unfallen or falling, --and I, without, with my EXILES,--I also an exile!"(144). She locates herself outside and apart from male discourse, but when Milton comes sweeping through the gates of Eden, she soon finds that even this narrative location is not hers



alone. Even in her place outside of Eden's gates, in the condition of exile that she so emphatically claims as being hers, she cannot hold full authority, and shrinks from Milton's powerful influence. She plays on the dichotomy between inner and outer, and eventually resigns herself to the fact that no separation can exist. She cannot exist outside the realm of masculine discourse and neither can her text, her Eve, her Adam, or her Christ.

Male mediation places Barrett in a position of silence, neither privileged to speak with the authority inherent in male discourse nor able to speak outside of it. Even to speak, she uses her father as an authorizing figure. The struggle between inner and outer, silence and speech, evident through Barrett's prefatory confessions, shows that she was hurried into speech but fearful of it. As I argue above, these conflicts are employed repeatedly in "Drama," but it is worth pointing out that these conflicts are also apparent in the whole of the 1844 poems, and are particularly exaggerated in the two sonnets that immediately proceed "Drama," "The Soul's Expression" and "The Seraph and Poet." In these poems, Barrett enacts the struggle between speech and silence that her Eve experiences. In "The Soul's Expression" Barrett details her struggle to speak, revealing, "With stammering lips and insufficient sound/ I strive and struggle to deliver right / That music of my nature" (1-3). She depicts this "music" as being inward and the speech act--that which makes the inner (the inner song), outer--is what troubles her. It is "This song of soul" that she "struggle[s] to outbear . . . And utter myself into the air" (9-10). Not only is it difficult for Barrett to engage in speech, but it would bring her spiritual and physical ruin. She says, "But if I did it [speak]—as the thunder-roll / Breaks its own cloud, my flesh would perish there, / Before that dread apocalypse of soul" (12-14).

Despite the grim images of death and destruction that come with speech in “The Soul’s Expression,” the next sonnet, “The Seraph and Poet,” validates the act of making the inner song into an outward expression. In this sonnet, Barrett equates poets and angels:

Sing, seraph with the glory! heaven is high

Sing, poet with the sorrow! earth is low.

The universes inward voices cry

‘Amen’ to either song of joy or woe:

Sing, seraph,--poet, --sing on equally. (10-14)

Barrett dwells on the glorious possibilities rather than the stifling inhibitions associated with being a poet in this sonnet. The act of speaking is not an act that brings fleshly death and spiritual damnation to the poet, but brings forth the cry of “Amen” from the “universes inward voices” (13, 12). Looking back at the conflict between silence and speech in “Drama,” and identifying this conflict as a gendered conflict, best explains the tension between silence and speech in these poems.

In “Drama,” Barrett vacillates between an Adam who speaks the words of Christ to and for Eve, assigns Eve’s role, and takes on the role of prophet and poet; and an Eve able to teach Adam, summon Christ, and stand before Christ as Adam’s equal. As her sonnets about George Sand bear witness to, Barrett’s struggle to come to terms with female authorship and the masculinity of the office of the poet extend beyond the borders of “Drama.” Only twelve years later, when Barrett writes her feminist epic *Aurora Leigh*, does she allow a woman to take up the role of the prophet and poet without

somehow problematizing her role.<sup>38</sup> As if to atone for her conflicted depiction of Eve in “Drama,” Barrett casts the poetess Aurora Leigh as an Eve figure. Early in *Aurora Leigh*, Aurora’s cousin Romney attempts to take up the “office” Christ assigns Adam in “Drama,” only to be roundly chastised and rejected by Aurora. Instead of accepting the positions Romney deems appropriate for her, Aurora asserts her commitment to her poetic vocation. Aurora ultimately claims full authority over her voice that “Drama’s” Eve can only partially exert and that the 1844 sonnets are hesitant to assert.

Although “Drama” is Barrett’s self-proclaimed attempt to rewrite Milton’s Eve, *Aurora Leigh* is a deliberate revision of *Paradise Lost* while at the same time a revision of her own Eve figure.<sup>39</sup> In Book One, Aurora reflects on her youth, recalling a time of questioning where she explored the idea of identifying herself as a poet,

Am I such indeed? The name [poet]  
Is royal, and to sign it like a queen,  
Is what I dare not, --though some royal blood  
Would seem to tingle in me now and then,  
With sense of power and ache. (1.934-38)

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<sup>38</sup> Some critics are of this opinion while others are not. Kathleen Hickok notes, “In *Aurora Leigh*, Barrett Browning departed from the feminine traditions of the century with sufficient force to impress many, alarm some, and startle nearly all of her readers” (130). See “‘New Yet Orthodox’—The Female Characters in *Aurora Leigh*,” *Critical Essays on Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, ed. Sandra Donaldson (Hall: New York, 1999) 129-140. On the other hand, Deidre David sees Aurora Leigh as “a coherent expression of Barrett Browning’s conservative sexual politics,” arguing that “female imagery is employed to show the ‘art’ of the woman poet performs a ‘service’ for a patriarchal vision of the apocalypse. In *Aurora Leigh* woman’s art is made the servitor of male ideal. She continues, arguing that, “her novel-poem is an integrated expression of essentialist and ultimately non-feminist views of sex and gender” (146) “‘Art’s A Service’: Social Wound, Sexual Politics, and *Aurora Leigh*,” *Critical Essays on Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, ed. Sandra Donaldson (Hall: New York, 1999) 164-183.

These lines recall the Barrett and Eve of the 1844 poems, hesitant to accede to the authority (figured here as monarchical) of their voices and accept the self-ascribed identity (versus male-ascribed identity) of poet. Poetry becomes Aurora's resistance to the rule of her strict aunt, who would, like Romney and "Drama's" Adam assign Aurora and all women a set role. Aurora's aunt makes her read "a score of books on womanhood . . . books that boldly assert / Their right of comprehending husband's talk / When not too deep, and even of answering / With pretty 'may it please you,' or 'so it is,'" (1.427, 730-33). It is through reading and writing poetry that Aurora resists these teachings and develops as an individual. She describes her poetic activity as singing: "My soul was singing at a work . . . as safe from harm / As sings the lark when sucked up out of sight / In vortices of glory and blue air" (1.1053-56). Unlike Barrett's struggle to make the inner song outer in the 1844 poems, it is "through" Aurora's poetic work that "The inner life informed the outer life" (1.1057-58). References to "inner" and "outer" resound in Barrett's work, from the images in her 1844 Preface that show her outside of Eden and Milton inside, to the 1844 sonnets that figure the speech act as the process of making the inner outer. In speaking of Aurora's poetic development, Barrett still creates a dichotomy between inner and outer, but it is one that the woman poet can easily move between and negotiate.

In Book Two, Aurora both names and crowns herself as poet. Within the first lines, she creates an important pairing in calling herself "woman and artist" (2.4). In her

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<sup>39</sup> For a study on the relationship between *Paradise Lost* and *Aurora Leigh*, see Sarah Annes Brown, "Paradise Lost and *Aurora Leigh*," *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 37:4 (1997) 723-40, Rpt. in *Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, ed. Harold Bloom, (Chelsea: Philadelphia, 2002).

aunt's garden (an Edenic place for Aurora), Aurora crowns herself as poet, rationalizing her seemingly self-aggrandizing act by asserting,

The worthiest poets have remained uncrowned  
Till death has bleached their foreheads to the bone;  
And so with me it must be unless I prove  
Unworthy of the grand adversity,  
And certainly I would not fail so much.  
What, therefore, if I crown myself to-day  
In sport, not pride, to learn the feel of it,  
Before my brows be numb as Dante's own  
To all the tender pricking of such leaves? (2.28-37)

She argues that is better to crown oneself while living than not be able to experience the honor after death. Here she ventures to compare herself with Dante. In so doing, she celebrates Italian epic rather than Milton's English epic. As she turns to face her imagined "public," she encounters her cousin Romney, who promptly rejects her claim as poet. Romney confronts Aurora with a book of her poems, saying that "the thing [Aurora's book] had witchcraft in't," and calling Aurora "the witch" who wrote it (2.77-79). Despite his apparent feelings of contempt and disgust at the idea of Aurora as a poet he says, "I have seen you not too much / Witch, scholar, poet, dreamer, and the rest, / To be a woman also" (2.85-87).

Romney equates the roles of "witch, scholar, poet, dreamer" and declares them to be the opposite of the term "woman" (2.85-87). In words reminiscent of "Drama's" Adam and Christ, Romney distinguishes between men and women, telling Aurora "Men

and women make / The world, as head and heart make human life. / Work man, work woman, since there's work to do . . . and thought can never do the work of love" (2.132-136). Romney takes on Adam's office, attempting to assign a proper role to Aurora.

Romney tells Aurora

Women as you are,  
Mere women, personal and passionate,  
You give us doating mothers, and perfect wives,  
Sublime Madonnas, and enduring saints!  
We get no Christ from you, --and verily  
We shall not get a poet, in my mind. (2.220-25)

The label of "enduring saints" echoes Adam's assignment of "peculiar suffering" to Eve and Eve's acceptance of "worthy endurance of permitted pain." While Eve humbly accepts the role Adam gives her, Aurora rejects Romney's declarations and embraces her own ability to identify her role in the world. She says, "I too have my vocation—work to do," and asserts that this vocation is that of the artist (2.455). In discussing the importance of her work she says, "Unless the artist keep up open roads / Betwixt the seen and unseen,--bursting through / The best of your conventions with his best" (2.468-70). Despite disagreement about the radicalness of Barrett's feminist vision in *Aurora Leigh*, it is possible to see within *Aurora Leigh* a less conflicted articulation of Barrett's views about gender equality and poetic vocation.

Whereas Milton crafts his Eve into a figure of the struggling reader, and in so doing frustrates the attempts of his own readers to "read" Eve either along traditional or radical lines, Barrett's apprehension over Milton's poetic power frustrates her own

attempts to revise Milton along radical lines. She manages to skillfully transform his Eve from reader to teacher, but this transformation is called into question by Christ and Adam's positions of authority over Eve. Perhaps in part because of the influence of Milton, Barrett's depiction of Eve is far more conservative than Lanyer's. Despite whatever paralyzing effects Milton had on nineteenth-century women authors, Christina Rossetti was nonetheless able to create a unique version of Eve whose radical nature compares to and ultimately transcends Lanyer's Eve in its daringness.

## Chapter Three

### Becoming One Flesh: The Poet, Eve, and Christ

Christina Rossetti and her 1862 work, *Goblin Market*, seem unlikely candidates for a comparison with Aemilia Lanyer and *Salve Deus*. Yet, although separated from Lanyer by a gulf of more than two hundred years and without any access to her work, Rossetti takes up many of the same issues preoccupying Lanyer. That she does so is evidence of the mythic power of the Eve figure to invite similar kinds of revision and revisitation of across historical and cultural boundaries. The force of religion and the constraints of gender manifest themselves in similar ways in Rossetti and Lanyer's works, creating obvious and unavoidable links between them. Both authors connect their readers, Christ, and Eve in order to elevate Eve and all women, thus creating sympathy and good will toward Eve, encouraging people to read Eve in new ways, and associating her with the good of Christ rather than with the evil of Satan. By creating these links between women and Christ, both authors feminize Christ. This feminization shows that the most laudable of Christ's virtues are the ones women exemplify. To fuel their arguments about Eve, both authors emphasize the link between the spiritual and material and focus on the breakdown of gender divisions through their treatment of Christ's literal and eucharistic body. For both authors, the focus on Christ's body accompanies a general focus on the body and on eating (and, for Rossetti, on abstaining).



From medieval to modern times stories of women's eating and abstaining deal with the embrace or abnegation of the self's power, authority, and autonomy.<sup>40</sup> In light of these stories, all treatments of Eve are in some ways discussions of eating and the link between the material and physical symbolized by the forbidden fruit. Lanyer, Rossetti, Milton, and Barrett all make important distinctions between good and bad eating. Milton's Adam and Eve are told that the way to become more angelic is through modifying their appetites; Lanyer's readers are to feed on her text to gain spiritual refreshment; Barrett's Adam closes Eve's hand to food and her mouth to speech, only allowing her to participate in service that will somehow redeem her; Rossetti's Laura and Lizzie learn when and when not to eat, and ultimately both become and participate in a redemptive feast. However, Rossetti and Lanyer's projects are particularly similar in their use of feast imagery and images of Christ's body to emphasize the redemptive powers of eating. Rossetti's work is ultimately more experimental and bold than Lanyer's. *Salve Deus* presents an Eve who can be Christ-like, while *Goblin Market* presents an Eve who can become Christ.

Rossetti's sympathetic feelings toward Eve closely echo Lanyer's. According to Diane D'Amico, Rossetti "stresses that Eve was deceived by Satan and that her very innocence, her lack of guile, made her vulnerable. . . . When Satan offered her the fruit,

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<sup>40</sup> See Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast : The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*, (Berkeley: U of California P, 1987). Bynum observes, "Eating in late medieval Europe was . . . an occasion for union with one's fellows and one's God, a commensality given particular intensity by the prototypical meal, the eucharist, which seemed to hover in the background of any banquet. Because Jesus had fed the faithful not merely as servant and waiter, preparer and multiplier of loaves and fishes, but as the very bread and wine itself, *to eat* was a powerful verb" (3).

she was innocent, and when she offered the forbidden fruit to Adam, her motives were innocent still” (125). In a prose piece entitled *Letter and Spirit* Rossetti asserts,

Eve made a mistake, "being *deceived*" she was in transgression: Adam made no mistake: his was an error of will, hers partly of judgment; nevertheless both proved fatal. . . Her very virtues may have opened the door to temptation. . . she never suspects even the serpent. . . . Eve . . . offered Adam a share of her own good fortune, and having hold of her husband's heart, turned it in her hand as the rivers of water (Gen. iii). (315-16)<sup>41</sup>

Lanyer's *Salve Deus* makes all of the same points about Eve. Both authors see Eve as an innocent figure who exhibits virtue in her fall and who shares the fruit with Adam selflessly. Aside from creating an inversion of the common nineteenth-century belief that the woman represents the heart and the man represents the mind, when she says, "Eve diverted her "mind" and Adam his 'heart' from God Almighty," Rossetti creates a distinction between Eve's 'mind' and Adam's 'heart' similar to Lanyer's distinction between Eve's quest for intelligence and Adam's desire for sensual things.<sup>42</sup>

Lanyer and Rossetti make use of mirroring (i.e. one character as a reflection or double of another) and the trope of the mirror (i.e. the text or the reader as a mirror) to situate women in an intimate relationship with Christ. Lanyer presents *Salve Deus* as a mirror that reflects the virtues of the reader and Christ, thus creating a connection

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<sup>41</sup> Christina Rossetti, *Letter and Spirit: Notes on the Commandments, Selected prose of Christina Rossetti*, ed. David A. Kent and P.G. Stanwood (New York: St. Martin's, 1998).

<sup>42</sup> See Diane D'Amico, *Christina Rossetti: Faith, Gender, and Time* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1999).D' Amico considers Rossetti's view of Eve and of women at length in Chapters 5-6.

between them. The text is the metaphysical mirror that allows Christ and the reader (that is, the female reader) to become reflections or mirror images of each other. Rossetti establishes a similar relationship between her readers and Christ in “Advent Sunday.” In this poem Rossetti, like Lanyer, places the reader in the position of the Bride of Christ. In the first lines, Rossetti commands readers, “Behold, the Bridegroom cometh: go yet out / With lighted lamps and garlands round about / To meet Him” (1-3). Towards the end of the poem she postulates, “His Eyes are as a Dove’s, and she’s Dove-eyed; / He knows His lovely mirror, sister, Bride” (14-15). In these lines Rossetti speaks of a relationship where the reader is not only the Bride; she is also a reflection of Christ

What differs in Lanyer and Rossetti’s approach to their construct of the relationship between Christ and the reader is the object of the mirror itself. In “Advent Sunday” the mirror *is* the Bride (the reader), whereas in *Salve Deus* the mirror is the text. The text acts as the facilitator of the Christ/ Bride relationship. Although the poem itself plays a positive role, one that enables reflection to occur, nonetheless, it stands between Christ and the reader, preventing their full union. Lanyer gives her poem a mediatorial role not entirely dissimilar to the mediatorial role filled by male authority in Barrett’s “Drama.” Rossetti does not give her text such an intrusive (and privileged) role. Instead of elevating her poem, Rossetti elevates the Bride by emphasizing that the Bride is the mirror and allowing for an unmediated connection between the Bride (the reader) and Christ. In *Goblin Market*, Rossetti stays true to her emphasis on the unity between the Bride and Christ. She uses mirroring to show Laura and Lizzie as doubles of each other and as two types of Eve. I will argue that by the end of the poem, however, the relationship between these two figures of Eve transforms into a direct, intimate

relationship between Christ and the Church. The transformation from Eve to Christ and Eve to the Church in *Goblin Market* shows that Lanyer's Eve is much further removed from Christ than Rossetti's Eve. Lanyer's Eve is only linked to Christ through a web of associations with women's patience and virtue, while Rossetti's Eve becomes Christ.

The difference between the directness of the body and the separateness of the text, already touched on above, merits further discussion because it marks an important distinction between Rossetti and Lanyer's work. The text and the existence of the body-as-text pervades Lanyer's treatment of the connection between women and Christ. Even her treatment of Eve is cordoned off as a text within the larger work of *Salve Deus*. "Eves Apologie" is itself a story, one told not by Lanyer herself, but told by Pilate's wife and only recounted by Lanyer. ("Eves Apologie" is further removed from Lanyer herself when we recall the fact that *Salve Deus* was delivered to Lanyer in a dream.) Part of Lanyer's efforts to connect Christ with her reader and with Eve is her own effort to link her work with that of Christ. Lanyer pursues this connection through the text and the body, treating Christ's body as a book and also, paradoxically, as a generator of text. Ironically, Lanyer's emphasis on text as a means through which to connect Christ and women, actually creates a layer of distance between women and Christ (one which Rossetti entirely eliminates in favor of a direct, bodily connection).

As John Rogers argues, Lanyer makes "use of the atonement narrative as the means to authorize her verse."<sup>43</sup> She does so, not by co-opting Christ's life and story, enacting his death and forcing him into a role of passivity so that her poetry might be

filled with vitality and she might join the realm of activity (as Rogers would argue), but rather, she uses Christ's saving work and Christ's role as generator of text as a model for her own work in much the same way that she holds Christ's virtues forth as a model and perfection of all virtue.<sup>44</sup> While she places Christ in a feminized role, which, according to Freud or Lacan, would be a role of inherent passivity, she by no means makes him passive. Lanyer carefully avoids equating femininity with passivity throughout *Salve Deus*. Although she recognizes her readers' plight to suffer patiently and in some respects, passively, like Christ, she also charges her readers to lead active lives, to ready themselves for the coming of the Bridegroom and to actively read both *Salve Deus* and Christ's works of salvation. Just as Lanyer avoids characterizing women as entirely passive, she makes no attempt to portray Christ as simply passive. Indeed, any Christian would find it difficult to ignore Christ's embodiment of the contraries of activity and passivity. Through his death (the crucifixion being perhaps the ultimate moment of Christ's passivity), Christ returns to life and brings life to the whole world (the resurrection being perhaps the ultimate moment of Christ's activity). Lanyer authorizes her work by relating it to Christ's work by depicting a Christ who is at once passive (as an object, namely a book) and active (as a subject who erases the record of wrongs and writes the book of life).

Both in her prayers for and claims of divine inspiration, Lanyer reinforces the power of God to inspire stories, and even of his power, through the person of Jesus

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<sup>43</sup> John Rogers, "The Passion of a Female Literary Tradition: Aemilia Lanyer's *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*," *Forging Connections: Women's Poetry from the Renaissance to Romanticism*, ed. Anne Mellor, Felicity Nussbaum, and Jonathan Post. (San Marino: Huntington Library, 2002) 17.

<sup>44</sup> Rogers 14.

Christ, to undo, write, and rewrite stories that confuse people's understanding of concepts such as power, wealth, and culpability and provide the hope and promise of salvation. Lanyer speaks of Christ as a text and of Christ as a destroyer and generator of texts. Christ's body is a book wherein the faithful can read of salvation. Lanyer tells the Countess that Christ "desires that he may be the Booke, / Whereon thine eyes continually may looke" (109, 1351-52). In relating a vision of Christ to Lucy, Countess of Bedford Lanyer says, "Loe here he coms all stucke with pale deaths arrows: / In whose most pretious wounds your soule may reade / Salvation, while he (dying Lord) doth bleed" (32, 12-14). Although Lanyer figures Christ himself as a passive object, to be read by her active female readership, she also sees him as active, depicting him as the divine undoer of the record of wrongs. She claims, "He onely worthy to undoe the Booke / Of our charg'd soules, full of iniquitie" (122, 1657-58). Yet Christ does not stop at erasing condemning words, but he becomes the writer of a new book, one that renews people's lives. Just as Lanyer depicted Christ's body as text, in her portrayals of his authorship, she again emphasizes his body.

As an author, Christ uses his own body to generate text. To Lady Katherine, Lanyer depicts Christ, "Writing the Covenant with his pretious blood" (38, 47). Later, in "Salve Deus," she says, "For by his glorious death he us inroules / In deepe Characters, writ with blood and teares, / Upon those blessed Everlasting scroules" (124, 1724-26). Christ then is not only text, but is one who effaces old text and replaces it with new, redemptive text. Christ's palimpsest is perfect, for no signs of the old record of wrongs exists. The effacement is complete and the new text is immutable. Lanyer in taking on the task of undoing old text—old charges against women—and replacing it with new text,

takes on a Christ-like role. Her text, like Christ's new text, is one of exoneration and liberty. So although Mary Sidney is certainly a "model for Lanyer's conception of herself as learned lady and poet," Christ too is a significant model for Lanyer's poetic activity.<sup>45</sup> Lanyer uses Christ as a figure whose work of undoing and rewriting authorizes her work. Engaging in the Christ-like work of undoing old, condemning text and writing new, redemptive text, Lanyer sets out to erase old notions about women and supplant them with new. Lanyer not only wants to erase old notions about Eve, she wants her palimpsest, like Christ's to be perfect. She wants no trace of old ideas to remain.

Lanyer's emphasis on corporeality raises some interesting questions. The paradoxical passivity and activity of Christ is a state well understood by Lanyer. Like Christ's body, the female body can be read as a text. In traditional depictions of Eve, her sin is gendered, and the female body thus becomes a text whereon women's guilt and subordination is writ large.<sup>46</sup> In this figuration, the body is inescapably passive. Yet, despite its status as a passive sign, the female body is also an active sign-maker, first and most obviously in the act of giving birth. Like Christ's body, the female body operates as a sign and a generator of signs, an active force, and the locus of creative power. In her depiction of the body, Lanyer prefigures Hélène Cixous' discussion of "l'écriture

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<sup>45</sup> Barbara K Lewalski, "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 Hannay. (Kent: Kent State UP, 1985) 210.

<sup>46</sup> Eve's body and sexuality has long been discussed by commentators. Pamela Norris observes, "It is not surprising that the encounter between a naked girl and her clever persuader, the most sinuously phallic of all the beasts, should have come to be read as a seduction scene. The erotic implications of the temptation of Eve were finally spelt out in a narrative known as the *Apocalypse of Moses*, which probably dates to the first century AD" (84). See *Eve: A Biography* (New York: New York UP, 1999) Norris also notes the impact of Galen's opinions on women's bodies. Based on the anatomy of the female body, Galen considered women inferior: Galen "cited the female lack of an external penis and facial hair as further proof of woman's inferiority" (140).

feminine.” Lanyer’s Christ writes in blood by using the fluids of his body--his salvific blood. Lanyer also conjures maternal images of mother’s milk when talking about Christ’s blood. It is more than a writing implement, but it is also “Sweet milke, wherewith we weaklings are restored” (125, 1738). Lanyer’s treatment of Christ allows women to shake off the old, male-imposed views of women, views which were written in ink, rather than in salvific, edifying blood, and presents herself as a Christ figure, one capable of erasing old text and writing new.

Lanyer’s ability to mirror Christ resides in her ability to imitate his work as a writer. As the use of blood and milk imagery suggests, this authorial work is associated with the body, but it by no means allows Lanyer to actually take on Christ’s corporeality and become Christ. She can write a text that reflects his presence and virtue, but she cannot take on his body. Rossetti, on the other hand, goes beyond associating women with Christ through mirroring by actually making Lizzie (an Eve figure) Christ by turning her body into a site of redemption.<sup>47</sup> Rossetti does not just use Christ’s body (and its significance as a sign and generator of signs); she allows Lizzie to actually be transfigured into Christ. For Rossetti, the book is not the eucharistic feast like it is for Lanyer. Rather Eve and all women are the feast. The potential for redemption lies in the incarnation.

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<sup>47</sup> In “‘Transfigured to His Likeness’: Sensible Transcendentalism in ‘Goblin Market’” Linda Marshall observes that “religio-moralistic interpretations of the poem have more recently recognized the disruptive feminist potential in the redemptive Lizzie, who appears to fulfil the prediction of Rossetti’s co-religionist, Florence Nightingale: ‘The next Christ will perhaps be a female Christ’” (432). See *University of Toronto Quarterly* 63.3 (1994): 429-450.



*Goblin Market* is both a return to the garden of Eden and a reenactment of the Passion. Rossetti sets up a battle between the freedom of desire and the restriction of denial that is resolved in Lizzie's Christ-like sacrifice and Laura's penitent participation in the Eucharist. I argue that at the poem's outset, Laura and Lizzie, two sisters, represent two Eves who are tempted by the harmful fruits of the satanic goblin men. Laura's choice to purchase the fruit casts her in the role of the fallen woman. Rossetti's portrayal of Laura, who focuses entirely on the body and its desires, is in keeping with conventional misogynistic depictions of Eve. Although it would seem that Lizzie makes the "right" choice and remains sinless in her confrontation with the goblin men, nonetheless, Lizzie makes this choice at the cost of abandoning her sister and entirely renouncing her senses. Although Laura clearly falls while Lizzie does not, Lizzie nonetheless handles temptation incorrectly. Laura is enticed by the appearance of the fruit, which Rossetti also makes appealing to the reader through her sing-song descriptions. The goblin men tempt Lizzie, Laura, and the reader, cajoling,

Taste them and try:  
Currants and gooseberries,  
Bright-fire-like barberries,  
Figs to fill your mouth,  
Citrons from the South,  
Sweet to tongue and sound to eye;  
Come buy, come buy. (25-31)

The stylistic simplicity of the feminine rhymes in these short, trochaic lines creates their sing-song, fairy-tale quality. Rossetti focuses on the senses—"taste them," for they are

“sweet to tongue and sound to eye.” Here and throughout this section of the poem, Rossetti compiles a veritable grocer’s list of fruits. So desirable are these fruits that the reader is not surprised to see that “Curious Laura chose to linger / Wondering at each merchant man.”

Laura willingly pays for the fruit with a “precious golden lock” of hair. This act immediately commodifies Laura by reducing her body to currency. Yet, Rossetti’s choice of hair as a means of exchange is resonant in other ways. Hair is typically a symbol of a woman’s sexuality and independence. In Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*, only in the safe confines of the forest will Hester Prynne let her hair down from under her tight cap. While hair may be seen as a symbol of feminine sexuality and independence, it may also be seen as a sign of strength, blessing, and vitality as in the biblical narrative of Samson. Laura mourns as she sells her hair: “She dropped a tear more rare than pearl” (127). The narrator’s diction alludes to the symbolic power of Laura’s decision while at the same time providing a foreshadowing of the destruction that this decision will bring. Indeed, Laura’s sexuality, strength, and spiritual favor have been symbolically lost to the goblin men in the form of her golden lock of hair.

In contrast to Laura, the fallen Eve, Lizzie, as the quintessential nineteenth-century pure woman and new Eve, flees from sin. She urges Laura, “We must not look at goblin men, / We must not buy their fruits” (42-43). As the goblin men grow closer, Laura “thrust a dimpled finger / In each ear, shut her eyes and ran” (67-68).<sup>48</sup> For

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<sup>48</sup> Rossetti’s view of the body is in keeping with this argument that Lizzie also errs in her approach to the temptation. In her study of Rossetti’s works, D’Amico notes that “though she was always suspicious of the senses and believed that bodily desires needed to be disciplined, she did not reject the body” (79).

obvious reasons, Laura's response to temptation is sinful and incorrect, but while Lizzie's response is not sinful, it is not spiritually appropriate. During the temptation scene, Lizzie and Laura play equal roles in the breaking of their sisterly bond. At the same time that Lizzie "covered up her eyes / Covered close lest they should look," Laura "reared her glossy head" to look at the goblin men (50-1, 52). While "Laura bowed her head to hear, / Lizzie veiled her blushes" (35). After hiding her eyes from the goblin men, unaware of their appearance or the appearance of their wares, Lizzie still proclaims, "their evil gifts would harm us" (66). Yet rather than experience the trial of temptation, Lizzie pushes her fingers into her ears, squeezes her eyes shut, and runs away. She "thrust a dimpled finger / In each ear, shut her eyes and ran" (77-8). Lizzie willfully cuts herself off from contact not only with her senses but also with her sister, finding it easier to run from her senses rather than master them. Conversely, Laura, opens her senses to the goblin men without discretion. In their mutual breaking of the moral bond, Laura and Lizzie retreat to the extremes of renunciation and desire.

Although Rossetti shows Laura and Lizzie's different reactions to the same temptation, she also portrays Laura and Lizzie as halves of the same whole, or as mirror images of each other. Even after Laura succumbs to the temptation that Lizzie resists, they are still mirror images: "Golden head by golden head, / Like two pigeons in one nest / Folded in each other's wings" (184-86). They lay down in one bed, "like two blossoms on one stem, / Like two flakes of new fall'n snow, / Like two wands of ivory" (188-90). Even their frustratingly similar names remind us that Laura and Lizzie reflect each other. By depicting the sisters as mirror images, Rossetti warns her readers that contrary impulses exist within each person, and these contraries give birth to a range of

possibilities for women. Each woman faces the difficulty of falling into sin, yet each woman is at the same time capable of sacrificing herself in a Christ-like manner. Laura and Lizzie, identical to one another, are equally susceptible to sin and equally capable of salvation. Importantly, in order for the saving sacrifice and the redeeming transformation to occur, both Laura and Lizzie must confront the error of their responses to temptation.

Rossetti finds fault with Laura and Lizzies's reaction to temptation. When faced with the goblin men's fruit, Lizzie and Laura both fail to thoughtfully analyze and exercise discernment. Lizzie reads spiritual significance onto the fruit by questioning its origin: "Who knows upon what soil they fed / Their hungry thirsty roots?"(44-45). She also asserts that "Their offers should not charm us, / Their evil gifts would harm us" (65-66). Ultimately, however, she proclaims, "We must not look at goblin men," and "you should not peep at goblin men," making the decision to close her eyes, cover her ears, and run away. Lizzie clearly flees from temptation rather than faces it. This action seems unremarkable, but because of Rossetti's tenacious study of the Bible, we can read Lizzie's act of retreat in light of James' warning that believers "Resist the devil and *he will flee from you*" (italics mine) (James 4:7), Christ sets the example of facing rather than fleeing temptation, and Ephesians instructs Christians to stand and fight against evil forces.<sup>49</sup> Far from being obscure passages of Scripture, these passages would be familiar to most nineteenth-century Christians. While these passages by no means invite Christians to pursue temptations, they do urge believers to stand firm when faced with temptation.

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<sup>49</sup> Authorized Version of the Bible, 1831.

Unlike Lizzie, Laura fails to consider the important connection between the material and the metaphysical. This connection is one in which Rossetti, with her Tractarian leanings, would have been interested. One of the doctrinal points characterizing Tractarianism is its emphasis on the importance of the Eucharist. Indeed, “Goblin Market” is a lesson about the Eucharist, which at its most basic is the mystical union of the spiritual and physical worlds. The reality that these two realms can and do mingle is one that Rossetti treated with seriousness in her religion and in her art. In his biblical letter to the church at Corinth, St. Paul exhorts all who seek to partake in the Lord’s Supper to “But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of *that* bread, and drink of that cup,” suggesting that the material is vested with a spiritual significance (I Corinthians 11:28).<sup>50</sup> The presentation of fruit by the goblin men represents a sinful, spiritually harmful feast. Tempted by the physical allure of the fruit, Lizzie fails to give thought to its spiritual significance. After eating the fruit, Laura suffers in a physical and spiritual way. Like Barrett’s Eve, Lizzie’s sin results in silence: “She said not one word in her heart’s sore ache,”(261) and “Laura kept watch in vain / In sullen silence of exceeding pain” (270-71). She refuses to eat and sleep. Afflicted by desire for the fruit, she “sat up in a passionate yearning / And gnashed her teeth for baulked desire, and wept / As if her heart would break” (266-68). Laura continually worsened, “when the moon waxed bright / Her hair grew thin and gray; / She dwindled” (276-78). Laura grew silent and old, drawing towards death, not because of any physical malady, but because of a decidedly spiritual cause: “Her tree of life drooped from the root” (260).

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<sup>50</sup> Authorized Version, 1831.

Before their second encounter with the fruit and goblin men, both examine and reconsider their response to the goblin fruit. As Laura continues to sicken and waste away, Lizzie weighs the advantages and disadvantages of confronting the goblin men. She knows that “twilight is not good for maidens” (144). She considers the fate of “Jeanie in her grave, / Who should have been a bride / But who for joys brides hope to have / Fell sick and died,” and she “feared to pay too dear” (311). Lizzie seemingly waits as long as she can before going to the glen. She watches Laura’s decline for an unknown amount of time, fearful of her own health should she try to help. Only when “Laura dwindling / Seemed knocking at Death’s door: / Then Lizzie weighed no more / Better and worse” (320-23). Lizzie, at this point, fully understands the harm the goblin fruit can bring. She enters into a realm of knowledge that she has not previously ventured into. This knowledge allows her to put aside her restrictive denial of the senses. She no longer hides her eyes and closes her ears, but walks boldly to face the goblin men: “At twilight, [she] halted by the brook: / And for the first time in her life / Began to listen and look” (326-28). Lizzie’s motivation for confronting the goblin men is different from Laura’s initial motivation: Lizzie “begins ‘to listen and look’ for the sake of someone she loves, not to satisfy her curiosity.”<sup>51</sup> Just as Laura is imprisoned by her choice to succumb to her desires, so too Lizzie is imprisoned by her rejection of the sensory. Lizzie is able to help Laura only after she embraces her senses with discretion and faces the temptation that she previously fled from. Lizzie’s wise handling of her senses during her encounter with the goblin men reveal her to be not only a figure of Eve facing temptation in the

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<sup>51</sup> D’Amico 73.

garden, but show her to be a figure of Christ, willing to sacrifice herself for her sister's sake.

Laura receives freedom through Lizzie perhaps because she, too, examines herself, adopting a discretion she formerly lacked. When Lizzie returns from the glen, Laura indicates her sharp awareness of the fruit's powers. Her attitude of dismay toward the fruit directly counters her attitude of curiosity toward it at the beginning of the poem. Laura has reached a place of knowledge about the fruit's significance, thus moving beyond a place of desire. When Lizzie returns from the glen, Laura frantically questions,

have you tasted

For my sake the fruit forbidden?

Must your light like mine be hidden,

Your young life like mine be wasted? (478-81)

Both sisters examine their hearts and partake in the fruit out of knowledge rather than desire or denial, and in so doing become both redeemer and redeemed. Indeed, Laura and Lizzie are both reflections of Eve in that they both confront temptation and respond incorrectly to it. By the end of the poem both sisters learn to make a different choice. This new choice sets them up in a relationship of Christ and Bride, a relationship where the Bride mirrors Christ and is linked to him in an intimate spiritual relationship.

Rossetti shows Lizzie and Laura as givers and partakers of a holy eucharistic feast, marking their transition from two types of Eve (the restrained Eve and the sensual Eve) to Christ and the Church. When Lizzie encounters the goblin men, they initially greet her with kindness. They "Hugged her and kissed her: / Squeezed and caressed her" (348-49). They invite her to "Pluck them [the fruits] and suck them," but when she

refuses and declares her intent to buy fruits to take to Laura, they turn violent: “No longer wagging, and purring, / But visibly demurring, / Grunting and snarling . . . Their looks were evil” (361, 391-93). The Goblins proceed to attack Lizzie in a sequence whose sexually violent overtones suggest rape:

Lashing their tails  
They trod and hustled her,  
Elbowed and jostled her,  
Clawed with their nails,  
Barking, mewling, hissing, mocking,  
Tore her gown and soiled her stocking,  
Twitched her hair out by the roots,  
Stamped upon her tender feet,  
Held her hands and squeezed their fruits  
Against her mouth to make her eat. (398-07)

Whereas Laura gives the goblin men her hair, the goblin men attempt to steal Lizzie’s as they “Twitched her hair out by the roots” (404). The sheer number of verbs in this section calls our attention to the constant movement of the goblin men. They quickly shift from hugging, kissing, and caressing to hissing, grunting, snarling, lashing, hustling, elbowing, clawing, barking, mewling, and mocking.

Despite the attack, Lizzie remains pure and virtuous: “White and golden Lizzie stood, / Like a lily in a flood” (408-409). That Lizzie stands is an important detail. Her stance is like the stance of the soul in “A Study (A Soul).” In this poem, Rossetti describes the soul as “stand[ing] as pale as Parian statues stand” (1). The soul’s “feet are



steadfast; all the arduous way,” and “she stands there like a beacon thro’ the night . . . She stands alone, a wonder deathly white; / She stand there patient, nerved with inner light” (9, 11-12). Lizzie also stands like the Christian warrior described in Ephesians who is urged to

Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil . . . Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having put on the breast-plate of righteousness. (Ephesians 6:11,13-14)<sup>52</sup>

The word “stand” also reverberates throughout this passage. The Christian stands, much like Lizzie “stood,” in the face of the action and movement of dark spiritual forces.

Lizzie resists the goblin’s attempts to make her eat, “but laughed in heart to feel the drip / Of juice that syrugged all her face, / And lodged in dimples of her chin” (433-35).

Lizzie’s defiance defeats the goblin men, and Rossetti shows them fleeing from Lizzie “along whichever road they took, . . . Some writhed into the ground, / Some dived into the brook” (440, 42-43). Again, the motion of the writhing and diving goblins stands in sharp contrast to the stillness of Lizzie’s righteous posture.

When Lizzie returns, she offers herself as a eucharistic feast for Laura, faintly echoing the words of institution when she says, “Eat me, drink me, love me . . . For your sake I have braved the glen” (471, 473). If Lizzie presents herself as Christ in these words, Laura presents herself as the humble Bride of Christ who feels shame and

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<sup>52</sup> Authorized Version, 1831

penitence at the thought of Christ's sacrifice. She says, "Lizzie, Lizzie, have you tasted / For my sake the fruit forbidden?" but is nonetheless drawn to the feast, "Shaking with anguish fear, and pain, / She kissed and kissed her with a hungry mouth" (478, 491-92). Although Lizzie's sacrifice is associated with stillness and even passivity, much like Christ's sacrifice, the life Lizzie imparts to Laura is one that brings motion and energy. The communion feast offered by Lizzie is spirit and life altering for Laura whose "lips began to scorch . . . Swift fire spread through her veins, knocked at her heart, / Met the fire smoldering there / And overbore its lesser flame" (493, 495-97). Exhausted from this encounter, "She fell at last; / Pleasure past and anguish past" (521-22). The narrator questions, "Is it life or is it death?" deciding in the next line that it is "Life out of death" (523-24). This feast restores Laura, allowing her to rise from sleep and laugh "in the innocent old way," turning her hair from gray to golden, and causing the "light" to dance "in her eyes" (542).

By making Lizzie a Christ figure, Rossetti goes beyond Lanyer's attempts to establish a link between Christ, women, and Eve. The implications of the decision to assert that women can engage in Christ's work and can be Christ figures are far-reaching.<sup>53</sup> Rossetti conflates her Eve figures with Christ and with the Bride, showing that women are capable of becoming Christ and his Bride, figures who provide and accept redemption. If we accept the argument that Rossetti wrote "Goblin Market" while

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<sup>53</sup> By depicting Lizzie as a Christ figure, Rossetti "blurs the sharp gender distinctions of the nineteenth century. For example, a reader who sees Lizzie as mirroring Christ might then either recognize the feminine aspect in Christ's sacrifice of self or see Lizzie's sisterly sacrifice in masculine terms, that is, might see Lizzie as acting not like a heroine but a hero. Second, by employing a female character as a Christ figure, Rossetti challenges those Victorian readers who, in a society that regarded women as inferior creatures, might easily have disregarded woman's spiritual equality with men" (D'Amico 76).

working at the St. Mary Magdalene Home for Fallen Women at Highgate Hill, it is possible to see the poem as a radical religious and political text.<sup>54</sup> Rossetti sees every woman as capable of engaging in the work of Christ by essentially becoming Christ for each other.

Although Lanyer does not go as theologically far as Rossetti goes, both envision strong communities of women who not only help and cheer each other, but teach and correct each other. This community is responsible for passing wisdom down through matriarchal lines.<sup>55</sup> While Lizzie and Laura and tell their tale to an all female audience of their daughters, Lanyer addresses several mother-daughter groups (Queen Anne and Princess Elizabeth, Margaret, Countess Dowager of Cumberland and Anne, Countess of Dorset, and Lady Katherine and her daughters).

Both women want to bequeath the knowledge embedded in their works to future generations. Rossetti and Lanyer urge their female readers to pass down the inheritance of women's poetry and the lessons about gender and spirituality that it teaches to ensure the existence and assertion of women's poetic voices, which bravely redefine the terms woman, Eve, and Christ.

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<sup>54</sup> See D.M.R. Bently, "The Meretricious and the Meritorious in *Goblin Market*: A Conjecture and an Analysis," *The Achievement of Christina Rossetti*, ed. David A. Kent (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1987) 57-81.

<sup>55</sup> Maxwell affirms, "The poem [*Goblin Market*] ends with a celebration of female community and a new female tradition as it seems that an inspiring story of women's strength will be passed from mother to daughter down the generations" (85). See "Tasting the 'Fruit Forbidden': Gender, Intertextuality, and Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market*," *The Culture of Christina Rossetti: Female Poetics and Victorian Contexts*, ed. Mary Arseneau, Antony H. Harrison, and Lorraine Janzen Kooistra (Athens: Ohio UP, 1999) 75-104.

## Conclusion

No satisfactory line of historical “progress” in treatments of Eve emerges from this study. When compared to Lanyer, Barrett appears absolutely regressive. What does emerge are useful transhistorical relationships of similarity and difference between these authors which show their struggle to grapple with and revise ideas about Eve. Milton’s Eve must be taught and corrected primarily by Adam, and secondarily by angels, God, and the Son. Barrett’s Eve is also taught by the male figures, Adam and Christ. Finally, in her depiction of Aurora, Barrett shows us an Eve figure capable of teaching, reading, and writing for herself. Rossetti and Lanyer’s visions of Eve picture her as more radical and independent than Barrett or Milton. Rossetti and Lanyer thrust their women into feminine spheres, charging them to satisfy each other’s intellectual and spiritual needs through the recuperation of the Eve figure and through meditation on, and in Rossetti’s case transformation into, the figure of Christ.

Twentieth or twenty-first century discussions of Eve shift away from ones grounded in a devoutly Christian worldview, but still address many of the same issues and concerns about women’s roles in society, the meaning of the difference between men’s and women’s bodies, and the relationship between the material (particularly the body) and the spiritual. Anne Sexton’s “Consorting with Angels” entirely explodes the category of gender on which Lanyer, Milton, Barrett, and Rossetti’s treatments of Eve rest (however tenuously, at least in Rossetti’s case). Sexton writes:

Then the chains were fastened around me  
and I lost my common gender and my final aspect.

Adam was on the left of me  
and Eve was on the right of me. (26-34)

Here she sees herself as a prisoner, trapped between masculinity and femininity, sentenced to live without her “common gender” and “final aspect.” This loss is one Sexton ultimately and defiantly celebrates. In lines that eerily echo Rossetti’s work, Sexton exclaims,

O daughters of Jerusalem,  
the king has brought me into his chamber.  
I am black and I am beautiful.  
I’ve been opened and undressed.  
I have no arms or legs.  
I’m all one skin like a fish.  
I’m no more a woman  
than Christ was a man. (35-42)

While Rossetti and Lanyer experiment by creating a feminized Christ or by placing themselves in masculine roles, they remain human and retain the dignity that comes from being made in God’s image. Sexton’s speaker does not simply erode gender boundaries, she ventures outside of humanity altogether: she is neither man nor woman, but rather a non-human, non-sexual fish. In “Her Kind,” Sexton identifies not with Eve (as the authors in this study do), but with a witch: “I have gone out, a possessed witch, / haunting the black air, braver at night; / dreaming evil” (1-3). Although Sexton illustrates the way discussions about Eve have shifted, nevertheless, the Eve figure remains an important figure, one employed by other modern artists like Hemingway, who makes use of an

androgynous Eve figure to explore gender roles in his posthumously published, unfinished novel, *The Garden of Eden*; Kurt Vonnegut who uses the figure of Eve as a naïve, child-like figure who is tragically determined to sin; and Eavan Boland, an Irish poet, whose version of Eve in “Anorexic” is stricken with anorexia and desires to reduce her body to the size of the rib out of which she sprang.

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