

PROPHETIC UN-SPEAKING: THE LANGUAGE OF INHERITANCE AND
ORIGINAL SIN IN *PARADISE LOST* AND *SALVE DEUS REX JUDAEORUM*

BY

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Abstract

This study tracks the way two seventeenth-century religious poets' works respond to the traumatic social and legal changes at work in the wake of early capital, particularly where those changes dispossessed and disempowered women as legal subjects. In both cases, the narrative of Original Sin offers the poet a means of understanding alterity and resistance to a Law that does not capture or reflect the infinite mysteries of God's grace. This narrative, consequently, acts as the site at which poetic and prophetic language can problematize and refute the privileged speech acts of the Law. Relying on queer and feminist theoretical lenses and Cultural Materialist approaches to contemporary political debate, this study argues that the prophetic troubling of language performed by Aemilia Lanyer, Milton's Satan, and both poets' representations of Eve serves also to queer the meanings of the Law as a product of language and point to (feminine) desires that the early modern State actively erases. By doing so, I conclude, the prophetic speaker insists on the present possibility of social and legal change that resists and reverses the violence to which women and other social groups had been subjected in the period.

Introduction

Much work has been done to suggest that the coalescence of early capital and its colonial projects brought with it a series of radical social changes in early modern England. Alan Bray, for instance, notes that the gradual dissolution of feudal systems and the rise of professional service brought with it an increased policing of male friendships, and his work has been buttressed by a series of scholars, including Steve Patterson and Arthur Little, who have emphasized the presence of a concurrent social pressure toward heterosexual marriage as a means of regulating the movement of capital through space and time (Bray 4, 11, Little 216-217, Patterson 10). Specifically, marriage became increasingly important during the transition from the Middle Ages as a means of reproducing and, indeed, increasing the labor force as well as securing the inheritance of wealth accumulated through investment and enclosure. Little, in particular, describes marriage's cultural import in terms of a "heterofantasy," or the hope that accumulation of material wealth and the value of an individual subject's life would be given meaning by the production of a child—especially a legitimate child in wedlock (216). The institution of marriage in the period of transition, thus, serves the joint purposes of justifying (through the promise of fantasy) the impact of macropolitical sexual and economic regulations on the individual subject and allowing the individual—in performing the legal ritual of marriage—to become complicit in the structure of legal regulations.

As heterosexual marriage gradually gained privilege within the social imaginary at the expense of homosocial friendships, however, women did not see a corresponding gain but rather a loss of social and material power in England. Historians Christopher Clay and S.J. Payling, for example, have demonstrated that the gradual recovery of

population levels from the devastation of the Black Death in the fourteenth century allowed for a newfound tendency toward the dispossession of heiresses and the concentration of land by sale into the possession of increasingly fewer male owners (Clay 504-505, Payling 414). Meanwhile, critic Jennifer Munroe has observed that women's rights to own and control property within marriage and even in widowhood eroded across the period, particularly in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as the traditional property protections for women enshrined in ecclesiastical law gave way to a common law system primarily interested in the consolidation of male inheritance and male wealth (77).

Similarly, Silvia Federici has productively argued in her monograph *Caliban and the Witch* that the increased independence of late medieval laborers effected by demographic changes including that of the Black Death brought about a correspondent push from European states to force population increases that would allow for a labor market in which workers could be more easily exploited (Federici 62, 65-68). As a consequence, legal codes put deliberate pressure on women to enter marriage and to reproduce, often for fear of incredible acts of violence like those of the witch hunt, at the same time that women's economic freedom within marriage was foreclosed (12). Thus, what Marx called "primitive accumulation" on the early modern scene—the acts of violence, dispossession, and general "force" necessary to establish the preconditions of capitalist production—put new and intense pressures on social and sexual reproduction that brought with it a similarly violent constriction of the performances of the (female) body and its connection to land ownership (Marx 784-785). Little's heterofantasy, in other words, might also be seen as a particularly bloody phantom.

This becomes particularly and even unexpectedly apparent in the religious verse of the seventeenth century, by which time enclosure and its concomitant social reformations had long been keen public concerns. Taking Aemilia Lanyer's *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* and John Milton's *Paradise Lost* as representative examples, the social anxiety over inheritance is indeed of cosmic and spiritual proportions. Joseph Jenkins has quite productively read Satan's conflict with the Father in Milton's text as the legal struggle of a second-born son to claim his father's property, elevating this kind of familial legal dispute to an epic scale in which the salvation of the human race quite literally hangs in the balance (Jenkins 153). Lanyer's construction of an epistolary community of women organized by their reception of mystical spiritual truths, similarly, reinterprets the narrative of Original Sin to challenge logics that justify the accumulation of both material and textual ownership in male hands—a challenge that the latter portion of her text subtly materializes in the form of her dispossessed patroness Margaret Clifford, Countess of Cumberland. Taken together, then, these texts not only reify the pervasiveness of the inheritance dispute as a trope in the contemporary social imaginary but also offer a vision of imagined modes of resistance to the economic and even psychosexual structures that contain and determine the process of accumulation.

Indeed, both texts insist, recurrently, on the juxtaposition of and Symbolic connection between language and Original Sin. As I will argue in the chapter that follows, Lanyer's *Salve Deus* posits that her poetic ability, the ability to use language to “present unto you [Margaret Clifford] even our Lord Jesus himselfe,” is derived precisely from Eve's alleged moment of transgression (“To the Ladie Margaret” Line 7). For Lanyer, however, this moment is far from anything like sin. Instead, she claims to inherit

from Eve a privileged relationship with God that forms the basis of her textual authority and, as a consequence, her authority to challenge the dispossession of herself and her patroness. Milton, likewise, famously appeals to the Holy Spirit to achieve what his language alone cannot, “justify[ing] the ways of God to men” (*PL* 1.26). At the same time, and after a fashion that is, in many ways, oppositional to Lanyer’s version of the story but nonetheless complementary, Milton also allows that Original Sin is a moment of epistemological rupture in which the presence of Satan and his children effects meanings within God’s historical narrative other than what the deity intended. In the second chapter, describing *Paradise Lost*, I will demonstrate that Milton’s construction of Original Sin as an act of criminal speech identifies a germ of alterity or play always inherent in the system of language, including the Law that underpins capitalist accumulation. In both cases, then, the poetic-rhetorical space operates as that in which the political discourse of the Law, the language of power, might be out-performed, out-manuevered, and ultimately subverted. What this project aims to demonstrate, in short, is that Original Sin operates as a Symbol, for both poets, of the queer space in which the attempt to construct in language a single social hierarchy breaks down. This queer space, thus, affords new conceptions of owning the body and owning land that acknowledge and resist the violence of ongoing primitive accumulation and its perpetuation in systems of inheritance.

By focusing on the intersection of tropes of figurative and literal inheritance, this study attempts to approach these texts at the nexus of queer-feminist,¹ Marxist, and

¹ As I discuss later in this introduction, it is not my intent in linking these terms to flatten their distinct interests or to assume that membership in one theoretical or identitarian

psychoanalytic approaches. Specifically, my argument relies upon a Cultural Materialist methodology wedded to queer theorist Elizabeth Freeman's concept of "*chronormativity*, or the use of time to organize individual human bodies toward maximum productivity" to contextualize the tropes of inheritance and legal/linguistic conflict that I will identify within these texts (Freeman 3). Freeman, using Dana Luciano's term "chronobiopolitics" to indicate the way in which this temporality or temporal ideology becomes state policy, argues that the oppression of sexual minorities corresponds directly to the dissonance of such groups from the normative temporal order, or the order of labor and reproduction deemed socially/commercially productive (3-4). Insofar as Freeman stresses inheritance—both as a legal device affecting individuals and as a metaphor for nationalist histories—as the material and psychological mechanism by which these socio-temporal regulations are effected, her work necessarily anticipates my reading of the figures of sexual and material authority like Adam, God the Father, and the absent Earl of Cumberland within these poems.

Nonetheless, the bulk of my project is driven by specific close readings. In particular, I argue that Lanyer's peculiar and protracted detour into a defense of Eve during her narrative of the Passion in the central poem "Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum" offers a series of notably ambiguous verbs, including her claim that Eve "alleadg'd Gods word" by repeating His prohibition of the forbidden fruit, and similarly suspect pronouns that decidedly displace Eve's culpability in the Fall ("Salve Deus" Line 775). In doing so, Lanyer implies an alternative, feminine, and decidedly moral epistemological system to

grouping necessitates the other but rather to locate my work in their spaces of overlap and indicate the presence of a common oppressor in the form of (white) capitalist patriarchy.

which she and Eve lay claim, predicating her textual authority on this alternative knowledge of the divine. Furthermore, this claim to alternative knowledge, much like Satan's competing claim to the divinity of the Father and the Son or the promise of knowledge he makes to Milton's Eve, constitutes what psychoanalytic queer theorist Lee Edelman would describe as the Symbolic function of queerness.

Queerness, for Edelman, operates as something like "a theory of irony, that queerest of rhetorical devices," on the psychosexual plane, wherein the ability of the Lacanian Father to create meaning through the promise of a perpetually-deferred future (represented by the Child) is thwarted by a refusal of the Child or of procreation (*No Future* 22-24). In Edelman's schema, this process occurs not only in sexual terms but linguistic and epistemological ones as well, representing twin threats to the "überleben and fortleben²" that constitute the basis of his "reproductive futurism," or the fantasy of fulfillment and immortality through the Child ("Hamlet's Wounded Name" 99, *No Future* 2-4). By denying the Will of the Father and claiming their own forms of knowledge, therefore, Satan and the two depictions of Eve each work to disrupt the process of "fortleben" embedded in the attempt of the Lacanian Father to educate the Child in his image, and, in doing so, these rebels lay claim to a series of spatial conquests: the female poetic community of Lanyer's dedications, the Cookeham estate,

² Independent of their literal translations, Edelman glosses his theoretical use of these terms as, respectively, the materials that survive the death of the subject and those that evade death altogether, acting generally as a distinction between the bodily, biological survival of the Father through sexual reproduction and his linguistic legacy in the mind of the Child—both of which are necessary for the realization of his fantasy ("Hamlet's Wounded Name" 99).

the earth that Satan conquers for his children, and the “paradise within” which Milton’s humans discover only after their Fall (*PL* 12.587).

My argument is particularly gendered in both texts, specifically describing the relationships to Law and land with which the poems engage in terms of their effects on women as legal subjects. As such, the queer theoretical approach I have thus far described deserves to be read in conversation with feminist theorists including Julia Kristeva and *Hélène Cixous*, whose works on feminine semiotics and Woman’s danger to the Symbolic Order seem, at times, to be precisely the methodologies that later scholars like Edelman have in mind. Edelman, for instance, describes the queer resistance to signification as “the force that insists on the void (replete, paradoxically, with jouissance) always already lodged within, though barred from, symbolization: the gap or wound of the Real that inhabits the Symbolic’s very core” (*No Future* 22, emphasis added). In doing so, he conjures yonic imagery and even a distant sense of castration that correspond loosely to Cixous’s claim in “The Laugh of the Medusa” that women’s writing occurs in the “white ink” of “mother’s milk,” thereby refusing the “simple or linear or ‘objectified,’ [or] generalized” signification of “speech which has been governed by the phallus” (881). What I am suggesting here is that these overlaps point to the binary tendency of the Symbolic Order, its psychotic tic, which sets the male Self against an Other that is variously queer or female.

I have privileged the use of queer theoretical terminology, therefore, for two reasons. The first is that it is not entirely distinct from these feminist theoretical projects to the extent that the queer is historically and Symbolically constructed in ways that may, in the early modern period as well as our own, often also be used to describe the

construction of Woman. In arguing, for example, that the fantasy of the Child to which queerness is opposed is “not to be confused with the lived experiences of any historical children,” Edelman divorces the Symbolic burden of queerness from any notion that it stems essentially from the reproductive or non-reproductive quality of sexuality (*No Future* 11). This leaves open the possibility that the queer is only a Symbolic burden and can be differently constructed in different eras, leading medievalist and queer theorist Tison Pugh to argue in his 2014 monograph *Chaucer’s (Anti-) Erotics and the Queer Middle Ages* that even forms of heterosexual desire that challenged the Church’s sexual regime would, for medieval readers, be understood in terms analogous to what scholars like Edelman call the queer (111). Taken to its next logical step, then, this model allows that the Symbolic threat of Woman as Other and of her desire might also be construed as queer in a political system controlled largely by male actors.

The second impetus for my privileging of these terms is that the discourse surrounding queer *jouissance* more fully applies to the pleasure of thwarting the Symbolic, a pleasure I identify in each of the poems discussed in this study. Edelman, drawing on Lacan, glosses this *jouissance* as “a movement beyond the pleasure principle, beyond the distinctions of pleasure and pain, a violent passage beyond the bounds of identity, meaning, and law” (*No Future* 25). As I will argue in the chapters that follow, it is this violent pleasure, more than Cixous’s notion of Woman “arriving over and again,”³ that is captured in both the self-destructive desire of Lanyer’s Muse to describe the indescribable deity and Satan’s desire to use his language to destroy “all pleasure.../Save what is in destroying” (Cixous 877, *PL* 4.477-478, “Salve Deus” Lines 281-288). That is

³ Although, this recurrence too is suggestive of a drive.

to say, each of these poets imagine language as a site in which *jouissance* can be accessed and, for good or ill, desires can be fulfilled and pleasures obtained that are excluded or proscribed—literally, *written out*—by the Law. These desires are not only erotically figured, although Eros forms an essential part of their configuration for each of these poets. They are instead all those which threaten the fantasies, particularly reproductive futurism and its articulation into a capitalist heterofantasy, that subtend social order.

What is at stake in the reading this study puts forward, therefore, is identifying ways in which these religious poets, in contemplating the irreducibility of God, come face-to-face with the limits of the reproductive fantasies that undergird the proto-capitalist economic system in which they operate and the structures of Law that this system uses to manipulate and exploit women. I mean, specifically, that the impossible task with which both poets grapple—the task of representing God in language—points to the impossibility of representing God and his Will in the system of ritualized language known as the Law. As such, the imperfection of the Law as a system of language calls into question the validity of the fantasies that the early modern English State enacts on the bodies of its citizens through legal and biblical texts. More than that, the imperfection of language and Law leaves open the possibility of re-conceptualizing and re-organizing the Law and the economic order it secures in ways that privilege not the hypothetical or anticipated rewards of fantasy but the immediate experience of the living subject. By at once affirming and denying the signifying power of language, these texts succeed in overthrowing the “fortleben” built into the Law and liberating the desire of the subject from the Will of the Father, be that a literal God or mortal actors with pretensions to godhood. In doing so, they constitute an un-spoken language—one that denies itself even

as it is spoken—that queer rejections of futurity have never predicted: a prophecy⁴ of queerness.

⁴ Here, as throughout most of the rest of this study, I intend “prophecy” to signify not necessarily that which foretells coming events but instead language that attempts to convey something that can only be fully understood in a process beyond language like revelation, inspiration, or intuition.

“The Fruit Beeing Faire”: *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*

Aemilia Lanyer’s *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* is the ideal place to begin this study because it exists, as did its author, at the intersection of potent discourses of division and resistance in the wake of the enclosure movement and contemporary social change. The ways in which Lanyer’s text positions her in relationship to Scriptural authority, moral conduct, and land ownership both as a woman and as a commoner have, correspondingly, yielded broad and, at times, opposing schools of political and theological criticism. Various names—a feminist, sycophant, cynic, Jew, Protestant, Catholic, prophetess, tribade, and would-be revolutionary—Lanyer hovers queerly on the edges and in-between of familiar discourses, and, in so doing, she shatters their boundaries with the force of her own irreducibility, mystifying the categories of the critical vocabulary in a way not unlike the mystery of the Incarnation on which her text is founded. It is not my ambition here to resolve her epistemological resistance to such categorization—in other words, to offer what claims to be a definitive reading of Lanyer or to pigeonhole her, despite her protestations, into being a certain kind of poet. The purpose of this chapter is instead to follow precisely this irreducibility, this irruption into the known, to the furthest of its threatened ends: the dissolution of social hierarchies and the apocalyptic unity of all things in God.

More specifically, I aim to track the way in which Lanyer insists on the impossibility of recording the mysteries of God and his grace in language and, simultaneously, maintains that her poetic project offers the first step toward understanding and contemplating the same. I argue that this process of both contemplating and exceeding language through personal, imaginative interpretation is the

process in which Lanyer conceptualizes a reader developing a true relationship with God, one that brings with it an erotic fulfillment that defies rationalization or codification in language. In doing so, Lanyer demonstrates that the attempts to reduce the human experience of the divine and of God's creation (the earth) to the narrow linguistic confines of the biblical text and the secular system of Law inevitably butt up against and are ironized by the infinite and irrational grace of God. That is to say, in place of the institutions of Church and State that have used the fantastical fixity of language to consolidate male power and distance women from Scriptural as well as legal authority, Lanyer posits a radical protestant belief in spiritual conversion that flattens class hierarchies and values the lived experience of the individual (and especially impoverished, female, and/or sexually deviant) believer over the interests of the State or the wealthy that support it.

It is worth beginning, then, with what Lanyer presents not as the beginning of her own text but as the beginning of women's text itself: the instance of Original Sin and the words she records of Eve. Retold in a narrative voice that elides Lanyer's narrative voice with that of Pilate's wife, Lanyer's poetic revision of Genesis goes to great—and oft-remarked—lengths to exculpate the first woman from the crime attributed to her in traditional exegesis: Eve's "fault," Lanyer writes, "was onely too much love" ("Salve Deus" Line 801). More specifically, Lanyer's use of pronouns in rebuking Adam draws attention to the rhetorical conditions under which God's prohibition against the Tree of Knowledge was issued, as when she writes, "He never sought her weakenesse to reprove,/With those sharpe words, which *he* of God did heare" ("Salve Deus" Lines 805-806, emphasis added). Eve's absence from the audience of God's speech, thus, becomes a

focal point in their differing degrees of culpability. This is not to say that Eve does not know of the warning *per se*, given that she is obviously conscious of it in Lanyer's account of the moment of her temptation. In keeping with traditional exegesis, the implication is instead that Eve must have heard the prohibition's reiteration from Adam in the time between (775-776). Given the length to which Lanyer goes to flesh out and contextualize much of the other biblical narratives with which she works, her decision *not* to provide an explanation for why Eve should receive a Law that applies to both sexes from Adam rather than God is particularly unusual.

In place of such an explanation, Lanyer offers a decidedly slippery couplet at the critical moment, the instance of temptation. Here, Lanyer contends that Eve, confronted by the serpent, "alleadg'd Gods word, which he denies,/That they should die, but even as Gods, be wise" (775-776). On its surface, the sentence here reads that the serpent "denies" "Gods word" after Eve has repeated or "alleadg'd" it, and she simply capitulates to him, ruining all mankind. Lanyer's diction is interesting, however, as "alleadg'd" distinctly opens up the possibility that what Eve says to the serpent—"that they should die"—is not actually God's word but merely what she *claims* is God's word⁵. That Eve was *absent* in the moment that God's Law was pronounced, thus, affords the reading that it was never intended for her reception. It is, in short, not "*they*" who should die, but *he*.

Granting this reading of the Law, the language of the serpent's treachery, who "betraide" and "abusde" Eve with his deception, could easily be interpreted as some other form of deception than leading Eve to eat—even as neglecting to mention that Adam

⁵ The Oxford English Dictionary Online supports this reading of the word by the time of Lanyer's writing and long before ("allege").

should not *also* eat (“Salve Deus” 767, 781). Lanyer’s point here, however, is not the serpent’s culpability but rather that Adam alone was imbued with

...powre to rule both Sea and Land,

Yet with one Apple wonne to loose that breath

Which God had breathed in his beauteous face,

Bringing *us all* in danger and disgrace. (789-792, emphasis added)

Beyond the overt contention that Adam is to blame for the fallen state, then, what Lanyer implies is that Eve possesses an entirely discrete spiritual status from Adam. Put another way, if Eve’s consumption of the forbidden fruit is *not* a sin, then the Fall is a product not only of Adam’s disobedience to God but also his willingness to eat from a Tree of Knowledge that God has reserved for women. Read as a sacred object, then, the apple presents something like an alternative, feminine kind of Eucharist⁶, a holy access to the divine truths of Good and Evil through the act of consumption and ingestion by women. This is particularly so because Lanyer emphasizes the seemingly beneficial knowledge the fruit brought to Eve before she unthinkingly shared it with Adam, observing that Eve gave “to *Adam* what shee held most deare” out of her hope “That what shee tasted, he

⁶ The emphasis on the Eucharist is unusual for such a radically Protestant author as Lanyer; however, I would argue that its application here is particularly worthwhile. Lanyer, as discussed later in the chapter, frequently describes her own verse as the body of Christ, and scholars like Yakov Mascetti have argued that the Eucharist was a frequent metaphor in contemporary Calvinist theology for the contemplation of the Scripture (Mascetti 262). Lanyer’s re-deployment of the metaphor for pelapsarian and perhaps pre-linguistic access to God’s Truth, thus, seems singularly apt. For more on Lanyer’s re-incorporation of older Christian traditions into Protestant theology, see Keohane, Catherine. ““That Blindest Weaknesse Be Not Over-Bold’: Aemilia Lanyer’s Radical Unfolding of the Passion.” *ELH*, vol. 64, no. 2, 1997, 359-390. *MLA International Bibliography*.

might likewise prove,/Whereby his knowledge might become more cleare” (764, 803-804).

This clarity of Good and Evil, as well as its dependence on consumption, further, ties Eve’s Eucharistic knowledge to the rhetoric with which Lanyer presents her own book in her numerous prose and verse dedications. Perhaps most notably, Lanyer writes in her dedication to Queen Anne that she has clothed Eve herself

In all her richest ornaments of Honour,
That you faire Queene, of all the world admired
May take the more delight to look upon her:

For she must entertaine you to this Feast,

To which your Highnesse is the welcom’st guest. (“To the Queenes Most Excellent Majestie” Lines 79-84, emphasis added).

Thus, the “Feast” of Lanyer’s text is not just a “pretious Passeover” or “Paschal Lambe,” as she renames it in the following stanza, but one presided over by Eve herself (85, 89). In emphasizing not only Eve’s presence but her precedence—that Eve *must* be the one to host this “Feast”—Lanyer suggests that her Eucharistic feast is precisely that epistemological ingestion that belonged to Eve before the Fall. And, just as Eve’s consumption revealed Knowledge of Good and Evil, so will Queen Anne’s consumption of the text “Let [her] faire Virtues in [Lanyer’s] Glasse be scene” (90). Lanyer’s consolation for the suffering of Mary in the title poem further buttresses this reading by presenting Christ as Mary’s “faultlesse fruit” in whom “All Nations of the earth must needs rejoyce,” implicitly recasting the acceptance of Christ and salvation through faith as an act of ingesting or internalizing that fruit (“Salve Deus” Lines 1025-1026). Put

another way, to ingest the body of Christ is to consume the fruit of Mary and, Lanyer insists, of Eve.

Insofar as Eve and, by presenting her text as the body of Christ, Lanyer are able to offer the sacrament of the Eucharist to a congregation of female dedicatees, furthermore, Lanyer insists on a kind of irruption into the tradition of male religious authority and, as such, into the knowledge of God. Achsah Guibbory, in “The Gospel According to Aemilia: Women and the Sacred,” has pointed quite productively in the direction of this reading by observing the lengths to which Lanyer goes to refute the Pauline injunction to women’s silence on religious matters (195). According to Guibbory, Lanyer posits instead that “the masculine ‘Sexe,’ in its supposed [political, intellectual, and worldly] strength competes with and hence may exclude divine illumination” and thereby suggests that her feminine relationship to Christ is in fact more authoritative than that of male clergy and exegetes⁷ (195-196). Indeed, as Guibbory points out, Lanyer’s opening invocation of the Holy Spirit in “Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum” as well as her claims to a revelatory dream-vision in the closing epistle “To the Doubtfull Reader” give her an equal claim to the divine inspiration that empowered and continues to empower the authors of the gospels (196).

Moreover, at the same time that Lanyer provides this challenge to Church authorities, a challenge that Guibbory likens to the struggles of apostles recorded in the

⁷ Anne Marie D’Arcy has since argued that Lanyer’s seeming subversion of St. Paul’s denunciation of female speech is actually metaphorical for a rather conservative understanding of women’s Spiritual Priesthood (D’Arcy 635). D’Arcy’s reading does little to explain, however, the directness with which Lanyer addresses Margaret Clifford rather than differentiating between Margaret’s literal self and her “soul” in the way that D’Arcy argues readers must (635).

Gospel, the language in which Lanyer presents her inspiration challenges the very bases of her contemporary theological epistemologies (196). She writes to herself and her inspired Muse:

Thinke when the eye of Wisdom shall discover
Thy weakling Muse to flie, that scarce should creepe,
And in the Ayre above the Clowdes to hover,
When better 'twere mued up, and fast asleepe;
They'l thinke with *Phaeton*, thou canst neare recover,
But hellesse with that poore yong Lad to weepe:

The little World of thy weake Wit on fire,

Where thou wilt perish in thine owne desire. (“Salve Deus” Lines 281-288)

More than just a differentiation between essentialized masculine and feminine knowledges, then, Lanyer suggests that the “desire” for God that animates her Muse is directly opposed to, even scorned by, “the eye of Wisdom.” Even further, in the next stanza she suggests that the want of “Sence” in her verse actually ensures that Christ “shines” all the brighter (290). As such, Lanyer offers the reverie of the Muse and her desire as an alternative experience to the very structures of knowing encapsulated in “Wisdom” and “Sence.” The Muse’s zealous desire occupies a place, consequently, not unlike that which Edelman ascribes to “the figural burden of queerness,” which is to say that it marks the “jouissance,” or irrational pleasure, of the “void” that gapes between the

rational attempt to make *sense* and the Real that cannot be understood⁸ (*No Future* 22). In short, Lanyer affirms in her connection to God a pleasure that defies “Sense” and brings with it a knowing beyond “Wisdom,” thus calling into question the very signification of these terms: the connotations of physical sensation and rational cognition contained in “Sense” are resisted by the self-destructive desire of the Muse to “perish in thine own desire,” a death that would seemingly be both irrational and, after Phaeton’s example, beyond mortal sensation. Lanyer’s senseless revelation, thus, irrupts into and ironizes the notion of a totalized Wisdom or understanding just as, for Edelman, the queer ironizes attempts to build meaning (*No Future* 24-25).

In the closing couplet, Lanyer makes the connection between the pleasure of revelation and the play of language most explicit, transmuting the desire of the Muse into a wedge that sunders the Symbolic Order. Her observation that “thou [the Muse] wilt perish in thine owne desire” is both an invocation of the *petite mort* and, more importantly, the expression of a desire embedded in the breakdown of signification (“Salve Deus” Line 287). That is, the pleasure of the Muse is, ironically, derived from

⁸ Feminist psychoanalysts like Julia Kristeva and Helen Cixous have made similar arguments about the place of Woman within the Symbolic Order and, especially in the case of Cixous, read this position as antagonistic to reason and sense. While I do not begin to imagine a flattening of the political experiences of women and queer people, the Symbolic structure of each of these theories overlaps significantly as a kind of binary (Straight Man/Self vs. Other), and Edelman’s understanding of queerness as opposition to the Symbolic Order opens up readings of any number of elements as “queer” that one would not equate to “gay” or “lesbian” and may even be read to include what other theorists see as the radical potential of Woman (*No Future* 17). I have privileged Edelman’s terms over these others throughout this discourse primarily because his interest in *jouissance* and rejection of certain social values is more explicitly like those Lanyer puts forward. For a look at Cixous’ resistance to phallogocentrism, see Cixous 879-881. For more on the overlap between these theorists and my use of their work, see my introduction, pages xi-xiii.

seeing “the World of thy weake Wit” set “on fire” (288). What Lanyer’s Muse experiences through her heavenly soaring “in the Ayre above the Clowdes,” thus, is something that the poetic language of “Wit” can never adequately convey (283, 287). It is, nonetheless, the *Muse* that experiences this pleasure, and as such Lanyer’s poetic project is fundamentally a kind of prophetic un-speaking: an attempt to use language to convey what can only be experienced through revelation. More concretely, at the same time that Lanyer insists on her text’s substance as the body of Christ, seemingly closing the gap between signifier and signified, Lanyer draws attention to the impossibility of perfectly representing the divine, even in language that is “infuze[d]” with “powerfull Grace” and inspired by a prophetic dream (“Salve Deus” Line 1291). The challenge that Lanyer puts forward to the male biblical tradition, thus, reenacts her narrative of Original Sin on the field of Scriptural authority by splitting apart access to divine truth into discrete and even competing instances of revelation.

Put another way, Lanyer claims the right to defy apostolic restrictions on women’s speech, posit her own priestly authority, and, in turn, redefine these *mandates* as “corruptions of Christ’s teachings,” to borrow another phrase from Guibbory, by arguing that she and the apostles have independent claims to represent a divine truth that can never be fully contained or expressed in language (206). More specifically, what is a partial and benevolent understanding of God in the hands—and words—of Lanyer is divisive and hostile in the verses of Paul. In her prose dedication to Margaret Clifford, Lanyer affirms an exegetical hermeneutic that depends on just such an understanding of language’s limited signification, claiming that Christ’s glory will “receive no blemish, nor impeachment, by my unworthy hand writing; but wil with the Sunne retaine his owne

brightnesse and most glorious lustre, though never so many blind eyes looke upon him” (“To the Ladie Margaret” Lines 24-27).

Lanyer contends, that is, that the transmission of divine insight occurs not through language—evident in the fact that even her inspired language will leave many eyes still blind—but in an act of reading that moves intuitively *beyond* language. Seeking knowledge of God is to see, by the power of “the most perfect eyes of your understanding,” not only a text but “the mirrour of your most worthy minde” (28, 30-31). Reading God’s Word is, in this sense, an imaginative, personal act that exists beyond the meaning of the written word and requires deep personal conviction. In fact, Lanyer presents her own vision of the crucified Christ in the title poem as seen “with the eye of Faith” rather than the “barren skill” of her poetic language (“Salve Deus” 313, 319). In doing so, she re-invokes the semantic gulf Edelman later describes as “the void” and transfigures it into the very basis of a spiritual knowledge that moves beyond text and into mystical vision (*No Future* 22).

Marie Loughlin’s essay “Fast Ti’d unto Them in a Golden Chaine” has usefully pointed out that Lanyer’s privileging of the reader’s faith and intuition in the interpretive process here bears a powerful resonance with contemporary Calvinist fixation on the obscurity of the Book of Revelation. She writes:

In short, according to Calvin, the Book of Daniel and by implication Revelation as well speak only to God’s elect. For ‘God’s enemies,’ Daniel ‘remains a “booke...in a straunge...tongue”’...Lanyer thus suggests that *Salve Deus* is not just an inestimably valuable and therefore guilt-inducing gift, but a gift which

offers itself to an audience already spiritually prepared to discern its value and encounter its mysteries. (Loughlin 151)

For my purposes here, however, what is of primary significance is not the supposed election of Lanyer's discerning dedicatees but the implication of their inverse—the blind, illiterate, or inattentive reader. That is to say, Lanyer maintains that her words are the product of and do record her experience of “our Lord Jesus himselfe, whose infinit value is not to be comprehended within the weake imagination or wit of man,” even though it may even be difficult for someone who does not possess Margaret Clifford's purity to discern her meaning (“To the Ladie Margaret” Lines 7-9). Thus, she also maintains that the influence of the divine inspiration for her and for the apostles, rather than a semantic guarantor, remains open to misreading. She *insists*, simply put, on the void, and, in queering what is the very foundation of the Scripture, she threatens the authority of the biblical text qua text and the men who have derived their power from the letter of its Law⁹.

Indeed, Lanyer's project brings the force of this void, this queerness, to bear on the very signifier of the Law itself. Andrew Fleck has recently observed in his essay, “‘To Write of Him and Pardon Crave,’” that the timing of Lanyer's publication would have put it in an exceptionally uneasy political position, arriving well after James I's announcement of his biblical project and just before its publication in 1611 (Fleck 547). Fleck subsequently contends that “Lanyer's *Salve Deus* defensively positions itself and its subject in the void created as English readers awaited the new translation” and that

⁹ Cixous would, similarly, describe this as “explod[ing]” the system of signification, “blow[ing] up the law,” and “break[ing] up the ‘truth’” so that Lanyer can create a position from which to be heard (887-888).

“Lanyer anxiously adopts several strategies that might compensate for her audacity” (Fleck 547, 548-549). The notion of a particularly anxious Lanyer, however, decidedly mistakes the tone of her text—perhaps especially in respect to the void. Instead, Lanyer writes that she “seeke[s] his Glory” “in other phrases than may well agree/With his pure Doctrine, and most holy Writ,” suggesting quite overtly her disinterest in ensuring the consistency of her text with the royally sanctioned biblical translation or even with traditional exegesis (“Salve Deus” Lines 305-306, 308). Mascetti Yakov, in a similar reading to Loughlin’s, observes that the metaphors of mirror and Eucharist with which Lanyer presents her text immediately recall both Calvin’s and Erasmus of Rotterdam’s theological depictions of the Scripture as simultaneously the living, unembodied presence of Christ and a reflection of the reader’s own being: he observes that

The Gospel is a mirror in which the reader, to use Erasmus’s words, sees his own image merging with that of Christ, who is himself the image of God. A contemplation of these three personae in one, reading is a veritable act of transformation, a moment in which the individual, gazing upon the text, sees God’s semantic icon in the words and then, while seeing himself reflected in the scriptures, sees himself in God. (Mascetti 260).

By wielding the same metaphors to describe the reading of her own text, Lanyer posits the semantic power of her own verse as an equivalent to the Scripture rather than a derivative. Her claims to divine inspiration and willingness to stray from the letter of the Scripture, as Mascetti argues, “oppose the passive approval of male-authored versions of the sacred writ” (Mascetti 266).

My point here is that Lanyer takes the void opened by the promise of a coming authoritative translation of the bible as *precisely* the opportunity to make her claims on this authority, pitting herself against official versions of the Gospel and against James I's in particular. Her competing claims to divine inspiration and even her insistence on the faultiness of language as a mode of representing divinity, thus, pose an immediate challenge to James's stated ambitions for the Hampton Court Conference, out of which precipitated his commission for an authorized translation, to "confirm what I find settled already" with respect to Protestant doctrine established by Henry VIII and "settled" by Elizabeth I (qtd. in Curtis 64). Indeed, Lanyer's intervention, appearing before the publication of James's translation, ensures that there is little "settled" of the matter, refuting at the same time the claims the translators would eventually put forward to have made "out of many good ones [translations], one principall not justly to be excepted against"¹⁰ ("The Translators to the Readers" 7). Not only willing to make exceptions against the forthcoming text, Lanyer's dedication to Queen Anne presents her opposition to James's textual authority with what is perhaps singular boldness. Emphasizing her text again as Christ himself, she writes:

Here may your sacred Majestie behold
That mightie Monarch both of heav'n and earth,
He that all Nations of the world controld,
Yet tooke our flesh in base and meanest berth:

¹⁰ I have elected not to standardize the spellings of the contemporary edition of the Authorized Version used throughout this chapter just as I have refrained from standardizing Lanyer's text but, following the example of Susanne Woods, have for clarity made certain character substitutions—namely, by inserting the modern "J" for the original "I" and the modern "V" or the original "U".

Whose daies were spent in poverty and sorrow,
And yet all Kings their wealth of him do borrow.” (“To the Queenes Most
Excellent Majestie” Lines 43-48).

Lanyer thus locates James, as a worldly king, in a place of subjection at the same time that she seemingly affirms a kind of divine right—arguing that his “wealth” is derived from the “Monarch both of heav’n and earth” that Lanyer communicates to readers through their active consumption of her verse. James’s translation project is, consequently, doomed from its very outset never to become the original and authoritative text he intended. Rather than the “principall moover and Author of this work” that the translators would later make him out to be, Lanyer presents him as a copyist, attempting to capture in an act of laborious research and painstaking translation—albeit outsourced—what Lanyer has already revealed in her poetic mirror (“The Translators” 5). Even further, Lanyer’s verse insists that the formal obsession of translation is itself moot, that no accuracy of translation or of language can account for the final stage in the transmission of divinity, which occurs beyond the letter and in the mind of the reader.

In doing so, Lanyer undercuts James’s attempt to inscribe a singular biblical tradition upon their own and subsequent generations. Lanyer in fact insists on this generational focus, assuring Margaret Clifford that her text, more so than any bible, would “remain in the world many yeares longer than your Honour, or my selfe can live, to be a light unto those that come after” and that “when I [Lanyer] am dead thy name in this may live” (“The Description of Cooke-ham” Line 206, “To the Lady Margaret” Lines 31-33). Her verse, thus, mobilizes both senses of queerness as Edelman deploys them: the senseless erotic desire that the Muse, if not the poet, experiences for God,

which obviously cannot lead to sexual reproduction, becomes itself a means to refuse and refute the Symbolic Father's attempts to impose his Will on the Child. In this case, Lanyer's *jouissance* specifically intervenes in James's attempt to impose his Will on the many children of his nation.

Biblical historian David Daniell's observation that the remark that inspired James's project at the Hampton Court Conference came "apparently as an afterthought in a discussion of the catechisms" usefully cements this distinction (Daniell 432). Where James would prescribe in the 774,746 words of his new bible a singular education in the Word of God, authorized by his government and, as historian A. Kenneth Curtis notes, purged of the "subversive" elements of the Geneva translation, Lanyer emphasizes instead a radically Protestant relationship to God—a personal, individual relationship based on the reader's reception of the holy text (Curtis 66, Daniell 453). Nor is this relationship something mandated, or even expected, but *desired*. Indeed, it is not the populace writ large that Lanyer promises will consume her text and follow in the Countess of Cumberland's example but those "*desiring* to tread in the narrow path of virtue" ("To the Ladie Margaret" Lines 32-33, emphasis added). Hers is, in short, a queer kind of piety, a love for God that resists the boundaries of the Fathers of Church and State and seeks its fulfillment in a pleasure beyond rationalization.

Neither the Eros of Lanyer's project nor its danger to the Law is contained within this reading of Scriptural authority, however. Instead, Lanyer, in making Margaret Clifford the primary addressee and bride of Christ in her two body poems, consistently stresses her patroness's power as an erotic object. In one of the earliest sections of the title poem, marginally titled "An Invective Against Outward Beauty Unaccompanied

with Virtue,” for example, the author names Margaret “Thou faire example,” recalling significantly the “fruit beeing faire” that tempted Adam¹¹, before she claims (“Salve Deus” Line 798):

That outward Beautie which the world commends,
Is not the subject I will write upon,
Whose date expir’d, that tyrant Time soone ends;
Those gawdie colours soone are spent and gone:
But those faire Virtues which on thee attends
Are alwaies fresh, they never are but one:

They make thy Beautie fairer to behold,
Than was that Queenes for whom proud *Troy* was sold. (“Salve Deus”
Lines 185-192).

Lanyer, thus, calls attention again to a meaning that exists beyond the sign, suggesting that Margaret’s beauty is not desirable of itself but instead for the inward beauty that it can only partially represent. This representation is partial, indeed, because she is made “fairer” by her virtue, though she may have been fair without such spiritual cosmetics. Thus, Margaret’s body is, for Lanyer, a text: one which she not only “write[s] upon” but reads precisely as she reads and writes the body of Christ in verse. Her assertion that this “Beautie” is “fairer to behold” than Helen of Troy, therefore, implicates Lanyer in the act of simultaneous gazing and reading to which she invites her female readers, looking beyond the body (of text) and finding the erotic attraction of something not fully

¹¹ Wendy Miller Roberts has also argued in “Gnosis in Aemilia Lanyer’s *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*” that Lanyer’s choice of adjective for the apple implicates Adam in the sin of lust (Roberts 16, 19).

expressible in material terms. In keeping with Lanyer's framing of this kind of reading as a spiritual feast, then, she is not only gazing upon but also metaphorically eating the body of Margaret Clifford in both the erotic and Eucharistic senses of the verb—a queer piety indeed.

Moreover, Lanyer goes to exceptional lengths to posit the likeness between the bodies of Margaret and Christ as well as their effects on readers. Presenting the married love of Solomon and Sheba as a biblical typology for their attraction, she posits that “Spirits affect where they doe sympathize,/Wisdom desires Wisdome to embrace,/ [and] Virtue covets her like” (“Salve Deus” 1593-1595). The likeness between Margaret and Christ, then, both inspires the grand romance between the two and also issues from it. That is, because Margaret is like Christ, she longs for him, and, because she longs for him, she is able to walk “the narrow path of virtue” that makes her like him (“To the Ladie Margaret” 33). The optic effect is again a kind of mirroring that Lanyer is able to capture, at least in part, through textual—and Scriptural—example. At the same time, it is difficult not to read in this theory of like attractions a direct but distanced longing. That is, Lanyer's consistent exaltation of the virtues Margaret embodies and her declaration of spiritual conversion in the dedication to Susan Bertie, Countess Dowager of Kent, would suggest that Lanyer is like to Margaret in her devotion to Christ and, thus, that she is in the act of “covet[ing] her like” (“Salve Deus” 1595, “To the Ladie Susan” Lines 1-6). This becomes perhaps most explicit in her assertion that “Beauty sometime is pleas'd to feed her eyes,/With viewing Beautie in anothers face,” which links Lanyer's meditation on Margaret's inward and outward beauty at the poem's beginning to the mythical erotic desire shared between Solomon and Sheba (“Salve Deus” 1597-1598). Put more

concretely, Lanyer would seem to imply her own Solomon-esque desire for Margaret by providing such an extensive “viewing” of Margaret’s beauty and, thus, feeding her eyes on the countess.

At the same time, Christ appears within the text as far more than a simple pander, his presence serving not only to facilitate but sublimate what Amy Greenstadt has called “an eroticized power dynamic between women that is mediated by artificial devices” (68). To return again to her dedication to the countess, Lanyer’s claim to a textual legacy through Margaret’s power to act as “a light unto those that come after, desiring to tread in the narrow path of virtue, that leads the way to heaven” powerfully recalls Christ’s own language in the eighth chapter of the Gospel of John: “Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life”¹² (John 8:12, “To the Ladie Margaret” Lines 33-34). The text which is “our Lord Jesus himselfe” and also “the mirrour of your [Margaret’s] most worthy minde,” thus, works to conflate their persons such that Margaret can stand in entirely for Christ, reflecting his virtue so completely that she acts as a moral beacon and a guide to the eternal life of the blessed in Heaven (“To the Ladie Margaret” Lines 7, 30-31). Accordingly, to desire Christ as “Bridegroom” is also, by extension, to desire his image reflected onto the body and soul of his beloved Margaret Clifford (“To All Vertuous Ladies in Generall” Lines 9). Lanyer’s desire, however erotic it may be, is thus sanctified by its origin in love for God.

¹² All quotations from the Scripture, except where noted, are from the modern Minerva Books edition of the King James translation.

Worth noting, then, is that behind and beneath Lanyer's Scriptural allusion is also a stress on the decriminalization of female sexuality. It is, after all, an adulteress to whom Christ speaks in the preceding verse from the Gospel of John and this only after declaring to her accusers, "He that is without sin among you, let him cast the first stone at her" (John 8:7). While he may command the woman to "go, and sin no more," therefore, what is of interest here is that the appropriate regulation of her sexuality within the narrative is neither decided nor executed by men but by a direct and personal experience with Christ himself (John 8:11). Lanyer's emphasis on Margaret's likeness to Christ in this episode, similarly, resists the obvious interpretive temptation for the modern reader—and perhaps, her original audiences—to associate the countess, famously estranged from her by then late husband, with the nameless adulteress. As such, Lanyer's text implicitly devalues worldly and especially male monitoring of female desire at the same time that it esteems the power of this desire to lead women to God, as it seems to have done for Margaret. In other words, the homoerotic quality of Lanyer's gaze is rendered immaterial when weighed against the "infinite value" of Christ obtained through loving Margaret ("To the Ladie Margaret" 7-8).

Lanyer, thus, finds the means to envision the breakdown of the male Phallus in very material terms: not only the dissolution of male textual or Scriptural authority but also of the actual punishment and regulation of (queer)¹³ women whose bodies have been

¹³ In implying that women like Lanyer and/or Margaret are "queer" I am indulging here in a deliberate anachronism. This is not to imply, however, that the women in question would have understood themselves as "queer" or felt their identity categories defined by their sexual experiences. Instead, what I mean here is that contemporary women who oriented their relationships wholly or in part by same-sex desire would have found themselves especially vulnerable to the social and legal pressures that restricted women's

socially and legally inscribed. Building on historian Alan Bray's argument that the changing class relationships effected by early capitalism cast suspicions of sodomy onto aristocratic male friendships and patronage relationships, Greenstadt argues that Lanyer's relationship to Margaret is replete with indications of similarly understood and socially proscribed forms of female homoerotic desire (Bray 12-13, Greenstadt 72). Specifically, Greenstadt points to recurrent instances of Lanyer's imagined penetration of other women, including her textual projection of Christ into their hearts and minds, as specters of Renaissance "tribadism," or the feared and hated notion of a masculine woman who penetrates other women with her abnormally large clitoris¹⁴ (Greenstadt 67-68). Indeed, the very notion of Lanyer's hermeneutic of reading, of seeing *into* and beyond Margaret's body, suggests the penetrative quality of Lanyer's verse. In so doing, the poet simultaneously conjures up the fear of the tribade and invokes religious piety as a means of allaying it. This almost exorcismal raising and allaying is, perhaps, most explicit in Lanyer's retelling of the romance between Solomon and Sheba:

Here Majestie with Majestie did meete,
Wisdome to Wisdome yeelded true content,
One Beauty did another Beauty greet,
Bounty to Bountie never could repent;
Here all distaste is troden under feet,
No losse of time, where time was so well spent

sexuality and property ownership in the period. This desire is, thus, queer in that it is both more than heteroerotic and also proscribed by and resistant to the Law.

¹⁴ For an extended discussion of tribadism as a cultural concept, see Traub, Valerie. "The (In)significance of 'Lesbian' Desire on the Renaissance Stage." *Queering the Renaissance*, edited by Jonathan Goldberg, Duke UP, 1995, pp. 62-85.

In virtuous exercises of the minde,
In which this Queene did much contentment finde (“Salve Deus” Lines
1585-1592).

Her representation of the erotic desire between the two monarchs here, queerly rendered as the physical and intellectual sameness of twinned “Beauty” and “Wisdome,” finds itself noticeably haunted by the specter of impropriety. That is, the compulsion to mention that “all distaste is troden under feet” implies, ironically¹⁵, that something which might be read as distasteful is in fact at work in the greeting between two beauties. This should come as little surprise, however, since the logical extreme of this sameness would be a couple devoid of sexual difference. Thus, the implicit valuation of homoerotic desire would necessarily open up the potentiality for (mis)recognition as tribadism or sodomy, in which one partner appears exploitative and, by extension, penetrative¹⁶. Likewise, the poet’s framing of the interaction as a series of “virtuous exercises of the minde” self-consciously attempts to elide and abject this “distasteful” specter, figuring the erotic attraction between the two as a means of spiritual instruction not unlike the act of reading Lanyer’s book.

Lanyer, thus, displaces the sexual taboo through religious devotion. Put another way, because the homoerotic desire registered in the exchange between Solomon and Sheba maps onto Lanyer’s system of erotic attractions that lead to Christ, her homoerotic

¹⁵ Hence, queerly. For Edelman’s discussion of the inextricable relationship between irony and queerness see *No Future* 22-24, 26-28.

¹⁶ Bray points out that accusations of sodomy among men tended to occur only where one partner, especially of a lower class, was thought to have “mercenary” ends, and Greenstadt likens tribadism in Lanyer’s context to the same model (Bray 12-13, Greenstadt 72).

desire too is sacred. Margaret and Lanyer in this system might love each other with impunity because each, like herself, loves God, and they might each love God because the other is, like herself, Godly. Therefore, while Heather Findlay observes in “Queering the English Renaissance” that legal and other punishments were available for sodomitical women among Lanyer’s contemporaries, such representations of this love as criminal pale in comparison to the sanctifying devotion to Christ entwined in Lanyer’s erotic vision¹⁷ (235-236). Her contention near the close of the Solomon and Sheba episode that “all love, all lawe/Remaines in him that keepes all worlds in awe,” thus, mobilizes St. Paul’s declaration that “he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law” against his Scripture’s otherwise consistent endorsement of State power and social order (Romans 13:8, “Salve Deus” 1647-1648).

The presence of the Jacobean State, in particular, becomes more pronounced when Lanyer’s insistence on the likeness of erotic lovers is read against contemporary legal codes that would have proved decidedly un-equal and even contentious for husbands and wives like Margaret and George Clifford. As Jennifer Munroe has usefully observed in “Inheritance, Land, and the Garden Space in Aemilia Lanyer’s *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*,” Lanyer and her audience would have found their legal rights to property vis-à-vis their husbands increasingly restricted in the period. Traditional guarantees to premarital property for both wives and widows became gradually less enforced by the early modern English State, and the assurances to a “widow’s portion,” or one third of an estate, afforded by ecclesiastical law were regularly dismissed by the ever-more-

¹⁷ Findlay nonetheless maintains that such punishments would have been rarely invoked, as homoerotic experiences between women were categorically denied and overlooked (235-236).

prevalent common law system (Munroe 77). For Jacobean women in the position of Margaret and Lanyer, each of whose husbands' reckless spending ravaged the financial security with which they began their marriages¹⁸, the erotic attraction of likenesses thus presents the entangled imaginations of multiple solutions to common law dispossession.

On one level, the homoerotic charge implicit in Lanyer's theory of desire lends itself to analysis through Adrienne Rich's popular twentieth-century notion of a "lesbian continuum," by which she means a range of desires that orient women affectively and (sometimes) sexually toward one another and away from the exploitative power dynamics of heterosexist relationships (Rich 648-649). I am suggesting here that Lanyer gestures toward a replacement of the legal baggage of her and Margaret's male husbands with each other as female lovers. Lanyer's careful feminizing of Christ, the ideal Bridegroom, further supports this reading, particularly where she presents her vision of the risen Christ:

This is that Bridegroome that appeares so faire,
So sweet, so lovely in his Spouses sight,
That unto Snow we may his face compare,
His cheeks like scarlet, and his eyes so bright
As purest Doves that in the rivers are,
Washed with milke, to give the more delight;

¹⁸ Lanyer married her cousin Alfonso while in possession of a significant inheritance from her father Baptista Bassano, which Alfonso managed to spend into nonexistence long before his death and her subsequent destitution (Munroe 78-79). Likewise, Munroe observes that George Clifford entered his marriage with the greatest holdings of any living Clifford man and eventually died with "the most modest fortune in his family" (79).

His head is likened to the finest gold,
His curled locks so beauteous to behold;

Blacke as a Raven in her blackest hew;
His lips like scarlet threads, yet much more sweet
Than is the sweetest hony dropping dew,
Or hony combes, where all the Bees doe meet;
Yea, he is constant, and his words are true,
His cheeks are beds of spices, flowers sweet;

His lips, like Lillies, dropping downe pure mirrhe,

Whose love, before all worlds we doe preferre. (“Salve Deus” 1305-1320)

As many scholars have noted, these stanzas read strikingly like the feminine blazon of medieval romance and early modern love poetry, not only making Christ out to be an object of desire but one with distinctly feminine cosmetic appeal. Munroe, in particular, has pointed out that Lanyer frequently “associates women in her poem with flowers and nature” but offers up only Christ as a similarly “sweet” or floral man, so marked here by his flowery cheeks and lips “like Lillies” (Munroe 86, 88). Munroe further contends that the similitude between Christ and conventional descriptions of literary women here suggests both Christ and women deserve better than the poverty they experience in life (88).

Likewise, Greenstadt suggests that Lanyer uses this moment to call attention to her own impoverished body, given that “She no sooner presents us with her blazon of Christ than she reminds us that it is a textual object that mediates the literary relationship

she is establishing with Clifford as her prospective patron” (Greenstadt 75). Moreover, Greenstadt also points out that this ploy for patronage is deeply erotic: “It is Lanyer who has left this literary ‘picture’ inside Clifford, where it will retain its pleasing stiffness because in this inward space it is ‘environed with love’” (Greenstadt 75, “Salve Deus” 1324, 1326). Taken together, then, Munroe and Greenstadt’s readings gesture toward broader, systemic implications of Christ’s blazon. That is, Lanyer figures the *ideal* spouse for her model patroness as nothing more than a textual cover for her own penetrative body, suggesting in turn that the ideal marriage is actually always between female bodies despite the social expectation of heteroerotic sex. That the language of this marriage is linked to the poverty of women as a whole and of Christ “as a man in miserable case,” furthermore, suggests that Lanyer envisions such queer matrimony as a potential means to escape the poverty to which the Law has abandoned women—to transcend it just as the risen Christ transcends the violence men have done to him (“Salve Deus” 1330).

At the same time, this homoerotic or “lesbian” desire remains gestural or potential as a means of political change insofar as Lanyer does not render Christ fully female. He is presented, after all, with consistently masculine pronouns, and Lanyer’s typological alignment of him and Margaret with Solomon and Sheba at least nominally retains a heterosexual frame even as it works to build on the erotic pull of likeness. As such, Lanyer conjures the specter not only of a lesbian alternative to heterosexist early modern marriage but also of a revised marital relationship between men and women. In imagining an idealized marital relationship as an act of mystical erotic union with Christ, she emphasizes the importance of both a pious rejection of materiality and an imagined identitarian overlap with the beloved in any attempt to reform the marital relationship.

Wedded together, Lanyer suggests, these values open space to consider women's lived and present well-being rather than the demands of what Arthur Little calls the "heterofantasy," or the investment of both the individual life and the accumulation of wealth with meaning through their inheritance by the Child¹⁹ (216). That is to say, these values at once grant the female subject a greater value than her usefulness in the transmission of material wealth between men and transmute sex-based ownership into something more recognizable as an equitable form of joint property.

Margaret's seeming performance of Christ's own works elsewhere in the title poem presents what is, perhaps, the most developed example of these conjoined visions of charity and joint property. Specifically, Lanyer narrates the way in which Christ "Sometime imprison'd, naked, poore, and bare,/Full of diseases, impotent, and lame,/Blind, deafe, and dumbe,...comes unto his faire," using the appearance of the impoverished and downtrodden to test Margaret's devotion even as he courts her ("Salve Deus" 1353-1355). In keeping with the form of Lanyer's panegyric, Margaret necessarily succeeds in all such tests and "bestow[s] all paines, all cost, all care,/That may relieve him, and his health repaire," thus winning "his speciall grace," which "Doth open Heav'n, where [she] behold[s] his face" ("Salve Deus" 1359-1360, 1367-68). The courtly progression from charity to heaven, furthermore, connotes a kind of finality, a culmination of Margaret's displays of virtue in marriage to the deity. Nor is this marriage without material exchange. In place of a ring, the heavenly Bridegroom offers Margaret "those Keyes Saint *Peter* did possesse,/Which with a Spirituall powre are giv'n to

¹⁹ For more on Little and the "heterofantasy," see my introduction, pages v-vi.

thee,/To heale the soules of those that doe transgresse” as well as perform a series of other miraculous functions (1369-1371).

Indeed, Margaret uses the keys in question to carefully reenact the miracles of Christ recorded in the Gospels of Mark and John—healing the blind, deaf, and lame, and even casting out evil spirits (John 5:1-9, 9:1-7, Mark 5:1-15, 7:31-37, “Salve Deus” 1375-1384). This is a marriage, consequently, in which Margaret is not one-sidedly sacrificing her possessions to Christ in the form of charity, though she does continuously perform charitable acts, but instead actually receives his wealth and power in exchange. Lanyer herself expresses this transaction of wealth immediately following her stanza on Margaret’s exorcismal power: “Thou beeing thus rich, no riches do’st respect,/Nor do’st thou care for any outward showe” (“Salve Deus” 1385-1386). As such, Lanyer implies with a characteristic counter-intuitiveness that marital wealth, if not a concern for Margaret (anymore), *is* of a concern for her and her text. If the idealized husband-lover, modeled on and figured by Christ, is one that does not monopolize control of joint assets but invests his spouse with the ability to distribute their wealth at will, as Margaret does through her charitable miracles, then the legal system that subjects women to male proprietarian control and its intensification under seventeenth-century common law are not only imperfect but ungodly so. In the context of the destructive secularization of the legal system, then, Lanyer’s verse insists not merely on a return to ecclesiastical law but to a more radical investment in the “structures of feeling”—to borrow Raymond Williams’s term for the “meanings and values” that influence social ideologies—that ostensibly define the ecclesiastical (Williams 23). Specifically, Lanyer demands a turn to spiritual disregard “for any outward showe” and a complementary focus on giving out of

love both for one's spouse and for the dispossessed, thereby building a system of support for those otherwise without.

The material repercussions of Lanyer's queer piety, therefore, come to a head in the book's submerged yet pervasive fixation on land ownership. The discourse on land rights, as Greenstadt, Munroe, and others have observed, is particularly legible in the country-house poem "The Description of Cooke-ham," appended to the title poem, which offers a beautifully nostalgic vision of the not-yet-Dowager Countess of Cumberland's exploits on the Cookeham estate. The estate itself, as Jessica Malay notes in her essay "Positioning Patronage: Lanyer's *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* and the Countess of Cumberland in Time and Place," did not belong to Margaret or her husband but was in fact leased from the Crown by her brother William Russell, and her stay was likely confined to a few months in the fall of 1604 (Malay 253-254). As a consequence, Lanyer's representation of Margaret as a worthy spouse to her divine Bridegroom encounters the difficult problem of reconciling her claim that "All those that feare him shall possesse the land" with Margaret's very real dispossession and displacement ("Salve Deus" 86). The natural result is a recourse to an imaginative and sacred alterity, an alternative ownership figured as a result of and in terms of Margaret's—and even Lanyer's—erotic desire for God.

Indeed, erotic desire is everywhere on the Cookeham estate. Lanyer enjoins Margaret at the poem's open to think of her experiences there "as dimme shadows of celestially pleasures,/Which are desir'd above all earthly treasures," and by extension to think of them as a prefiguration of the erotic satisfaction awaiting with her Bridegroom ("Description of Cookeham" Lines 15-16). With this in mind, she declares that "against

you thither *came*,/each part [that] did seeme some new delight to frame,”²⁰ particularly when “The Trees with leaves, with fruits, with flowers clad,/Embrac’d each other, seeming to be glad” (17-18, 23-24, emphasis added). And continuing, tellingly:

The very Hills right humbly did descend,

When you to tread upon them did intend.

And as you set your feete, they *still did rise*,

Glad that they could receive so rich a prise. (35-38, emphasis added).

This is not only a phallic but a decidedly orgiastic landscape, where the very fertility of the land is bound up in the language of sexual ecstasy²¹. In this light, Audrey Tinkham’s reading of these lines as a testament to the civic as well as spiritual “virtue” of the Clifford women, whose skillful management of the estate during their tenure there was able to yield such beauty, reveals also a testament to the power of erotic desire (Tinkham 74). That is, because Lanyer describes the land as literally reshaping itself—hills undulating and trees sensually caressing one another—out of desire for Margaret, “nature” not only “reflects the virtuous *noblesse oblige* of Margaret and Anne” but refracts that image into a vision of the transfigurative quality of marriage to Christ (74, italics in original). The trees engage in their sensual caresses, after all, only “While by the

²⁰ The OED observes that the earliest record of the verb used to indicate achieving orgasm appeared in 1604, the same year in which the action of Lanyer’s poem takes place, though older senses include sexual intercourse and impregnation (“come”).

²¹ Greenstadt has provided a similar argument about the Eros of the landscape, suggesting that the desire of Cookeham’s personified plants and elements are another guise for Lanyer’s homoerotic desire because “the idea of an unchaste relationship between a woman and a tree seems patently absurd” (71). While I do not mean to dispute her reading of the dynamic between the women, the absurdity of the erotic landscape is very much my point. I am interested, here, in the way that this relationship to land defies attempts to confine it to reason and to language.

glorious Sunne they were embraced,” alluding paranomastically to the Son²² as well as describing the illumination of the landscape (“Description of Cooke-ham” 28).

Lanyer, thus, re-inscribes on the body of the land the system of signification already coded on Margaret’s body: just as her beauty can only partially portray her inward virtue, so too can the earth only “dimme”ly “shadow” the love of Christ and his coming²³ reward for his beloved (“Description of Cooke-ham” 15). Margaret, consequently, is aligned both with the land which, like her body, is transformed by a virtuous oneness with Christ and with Christ himself, the desiring and, as Tinkham highlights, transformational object of desire. The physical space is, in this sense, a material medium not unlike the book itself, enabling and facilitating an erotic relationship whose full realization is only possible beyond the material world. In fact, the land itself quite explicitly performs just this function, and, from the branches of a stately oak that “did in height his fellowes passe,/As much as lofty trees, low growing grasse,” Margaret

...the time in meditation spent,

Of their [the surrounding lands’] Creators powre, which there you saw,

In all his creatures held a perfit Law;

And in their beauties did you plaine descrie,

His beauty, wisdom, grace, love, majestie. (76-80).

Margaret becomes a part of the landscape, therefore, precisely as a part of this signifying chain. She is able to almost literally read the landscape for the signs of God and

²² Mascetti notes that the pun was almost ubiquitous in the period, as was the allegorical use of sunlight to describe Christ’s light as figured in Lanyer’s dedications and elsewhere in the book (264).

²³ The pun is very much intended.

imaginatively construct the image of Christ's "beauty, wisdom, grace, love, [and] majestic" by bringing her own body into contact with the land, "being seated" in the tree ("Description of Cooke-ham" 67).

The depiction of Margaret's seated meditation on the landscape as an act of reading is reinforced, further, by the almost immediate juxtaposition of this reading of the land with the literal reading of Scripture. Lanyer recounts how Margaret would often "plac[e] his holy Writ in some faire tree,/to meditate what [she] therein did see," and the tree thus becomes a site at which the material signs of both bodies and texts are subject to this kind of imaginative, visual interpretation ("Description of Cooke-ham" 83-84). Lanyer also stresses this process as interpretive or imaginative, detailing the way in which Margaret's meditation leads her beyond "what you therein did see" and into an imaginative space in which "With *Moyse* you did mount his holy Hill" and "With lovely *David* you did often sing" (85, 87). My point here is that the erotic profusion of the landscape at once facilitates and represents the imaginative, interpretive process by which Lanyer envisions Margaret and her other dedicatees leaving or transcending their material circumstances in order to read into and adore God.

If, furthermore, Margaret's erotic relationship to the land is one that moves beyond the physical realities of place and into the imaginative space in which she contemplates God, then it is also necessarily one that resists the closure of sign and signified (legal deed and material property) in Law. That is to say, Margaret acts as "Mistris of that Place" not because the estate *belongs to* her but because it *longs for* her,

privileging the erotic over the proprietarian sense of the phrase²⁴ (“Description of Cookeham” 11). As such, Lanyer challenges the very notion of legal ownership by presenting a kind of ownership that exists only in terms that the Law cannot contain: affect and desire. Indeed, Lanyer insists on the insufficiency of the Law, envisioning with Margaret’s absence a total cessation of the land’s erotic vibrancy:

The Sunne grew weake, his beames no comfort gave,
While all greene things did make the earth their grave:
Each brier, each bramble, when you went away,
Caught fast your clothes, thinking to make you stay: (“Description of Cookeham” 195-198).

Even if another owner, one with legal claim on the land, were to take up residence at Cookeham, Lanyer implies, their possession will not guarantee the re-formation of the kind of imaginative ownership Margaret experiences. With a note of apocalyptic finality, she writes that

The house cast off each garment that might grace it,
Putting on Dust and Cobwebs to deface it.
All desolation then there did appeare,
When you were going whom they held so deare. (201-204)

Having specifically framed Margaret’s relationship to Christ as the reception of “speciall Grace” and Margaret herself as “that Grace where perfit Grace remain’d,” the closure of “grace” for the house evokes not only the disfiguring of the material aesthetic but also the

²⁴ The OED records both the senses of “Mistress” as lover and owner long before Lanyer’s time (“Mistress”).

imaginative, erotic contemplation of God that it facilitates (“Description of Cookeham” 2, “Salve Deus” 1367). Without Margaret’s erotic devotion to Christ, the land as medium no longer serves to link the human and divine. It cannot operate as a space for the literal and metaphorical reading in which Margaret as lover is engaged and, thus, cannot express by means of legal ownership what Margaret experiences in terms of this erotic grace.

This is not, therefore, a poetics of retreat or stoic passivity. It is not the case, for Lanyer, that the Law is inconsequential when compared to Margaret’s power to imaginatively transform and possess the land, nor will the subversive nature of her poem be so readily defanged. Instead, Lanyer’s emphasis on the dissonance between the Law and the mystical queer piety pervading her verse points toward the semantic schism at work within the Law itself—points, once more, unto the void. Put more concretely, Lanyer emphasizes that the Law separating Margaret from ownership of Cookeham is far from the “perfit Law” with which God, in Margaret’s meditation, orders creation (“Description of Cookeham” 77). The common law of the early Jacobean State, much like James’s ongoing biblical project, thus, figures not as a site on which God’s election is inscribed and contained but an ersatz rendition of Lanyer’s proposed path to erotic union with Christ. The State, in short, cannot inscribe the grace of God in Law while the nature of his grace is only fully legible in the imaginative space that exists beyond signification. And the possession of land is, again, for Lanyer, explicitly a product of election, as her contention that the God-fearing “shall possess the land” makes clear (“Salve Deus” 86). It is worth reiterating, however, that Cookeham was by no means Margaret’s ambition. Instead, what is at issue in the poem is the contemporary legal system’s expropriation of women like Margaret and Anne (and even Lanyer) from the

means estates not mentioned in the poem—estates for which Margaret, by the date of composition, had begun a legal battle that would span decades.

The similarity between Lanyer's proto-structuralist criticisms of James's biblical project and of his juridical system is doubly significant, therefore, because James himself acted directly as an antagonist to Margaret's lawsuits. As Malay observes, Margaret put forward the legal argument that the Skipton and Westmoreland estates were granted, before the coronation of James I, to the now late Earl of Cumberland "directly from the Crown" and that such grants could not be willed to indirect heirs, "According to a statute from Henry VIII's reign," but instead passed to the holder's most direct bodily descendant (his child) irrespective of sex (Malay 262). James, in response, used the implication of the lands' forfeiture back to the Crown to grant them directly to George Clifford's brother and Anne Clifford's antagonist, Francis Clifford, essentially ceding his own claims to the land and attempting to void Anne's in the process (Malay 264). As a consequence, Malay glosses Lanyer's panegyric as an attempt to foreground "the virtue of Margaret Russell and the rights of Anne Clifford" before the eyes the court—particularly those of the adult Prince Henry, to whom Lanyer gifted a lavishly bound presentation copy of her book (263, 265).

In making the linkage between moral dessert and legal title, however, Lanyer does more than assert the validity of the Clifford women's suit: she also elucidates the *invalidity* of the Law as a system for securing and transmitting inheritance. In her verse dedication to Anne Clifford, for instance, Lanyer asks of the hypothetical founders of aristocratic dynasties:

Whose successors, although they beare his name,

Possessing not the riches of his minde,
How doe we know they spring out of the same

True stocke of honour, beeing not of that kind? (“To the Ladie Anne” 41-44).

A peculiar kind of double-speak is at work here as Lanyer would, seemingly, be arguing against Anne’s legal claim, suggesting that the bodily inheritance stressed in Margaret’s lawsuit is not actually a legitimate means of distributing property that is rightly owned by merit. And Lanyer does posit something akin to meritocracy as the origin of aristocratic titles, when “some one of worth” among one’s ancestor’s “did honour win” (40). The implication here is that the mental will to virtue can of itself justifiably lift a person to a greater position of privilege. Lanyer is quick to walk back this argument, however, qualifying her reading into something more like Tinkham’s reading of *noblesse oblige*: “If he that much enjoyes, doth little good,/We may suppose he comes not of that blood” (Tinkham 74, “To the Ladie Anne” 47-48).

My point here is that, in repeatedly questioning paternal legitimacy, Lanyer emphasizes inheritance as another form of the inherently flawed process of linguistic signification. Virtue and blood, in Lanyer’s vision, seemingly become coequal symbols, each referring to and enforcing the status of the other. To be virtuous is to be a legitimate heir of the blood, and to be a bodily heir is to inherit the virtue of one’s forebears. Loughlin, like Munroe, suggests that such a system of determining legitimacy has a bi-fold advantage for Anne Clifford: her virtue and legitimacy are secured by those of her mother, while those of her legal foes, men who inherit Adam’s sin, are thrown in doubt (Loughlin 167). Nonetheless, while the argument that unvirtuous men are essentially bastards is compelling in many ways, Lanyer’s interest in problematizing signification

poses a considerably greater threat to the Law than this reading would indicate. After all, Lanyer does not assume that Anne is already a flower of virtue comparable to her mother and therefore a legitimate heir, nor does she, as Tinkham contends, assume that Anne can only demonstrate her worth “through her action as a steward of the estate from which she derives her income and her high social standing” (Tinkham 65).

That is, while Lanyer does explicitly instruct Anne to “Bind up the broken, stop the wounds that bleeds,/Succour the poore, [and] comfort the comfortless” in order to “shew from whence you are descended,/And leave all posterities to your fame,” she also carefully positions these instructions within conceptual returns to the scribal quality of her own text (“To the Ladie Anne” 76-77, 81-82). Lanyer prefaces her outline of proper charitable behavior, for instance, by commanding Anne: “This Monument of her [Margaret Clifford’s] faire worth retaine/In your pure mind, and keepe it from al staine” (71-72). Even the dedication’s first stanza similarly enjoins Anne to “in this Mirror let your faire eyes looke,/To view your virtues in this blessed Booke” in order to demonstrate that her “highest thoughts true honor do imbrace,/And holy Wisdom is of them respected” (5-6, 7-8). As such, the fantasy of nobility’s perfect signification has, for Lanyer, already broken down. Anne is not expected to perform these noble, charitable works because they are inherent to her high blood but because they are learned—and learned, notably, from Lanyer’s text—just as the knowledge of languages and music that marked Anne’s social class would not have come from her blood but from Lanyer’s instruction as her tutor (Woods 30). Indeed, even her mother’s exemplary life is to be understood through the linguistic medium of the poem, Lanyer’s “Monument” to her.

Anne is to accede to her father's land and titles, then, not through claims of blood or inherent nobility but instead exclusively through the "speciall grace" that constitutes her mother's privileged position with respect to both God and land ("Salve Deus" 1367). That is, by insisting on the necessity of her own text to Anne's successful cultivation of virtue, Lanyer suggests that the active reading or consumption of her book and the process of imaginative contemplation it inspires are what will make Anne a worthy heir. The spiritual proof of inheritance Lanyer offers here also finds its origin in the Gospel, where Christ answers Peter's recognition that he is "the Son of the living God" by declaring, "Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven" (Matt 16:16-17). By seeking union with Christ beyond material signs, Lanyer implies, Anne will sanctify her claim to the land she longs for not through rights of flesh and blood but through God. Independent of the *de facto* realities of the Law, Anne's inheritance in this way becomes God's will. Cookeham, thus, becomes a mirror for Anne's connection to the land that she and her mother desire. Just as her mother is desired by and possesses both Christ and the land of the estates she does not own, so Anne will be "inricht with more than fortune can bestowe" ("To the Ladie Anne" 105). The land, in short, belongs to her—even if it is *not* legally bestowed on her.

Embedded in Lanyer's critique of legal inheritance, then, is not only the Law's insufficiency but also its immorality. In the case of the former, her assertion that illegitimate heirs, "although they beare his name," lack "the riches of [their forebears'] minde" pressurizes the ability of the name as a legal signifier to indicate the positive spiritual status of a legitimate heir, whose mind must, like Margaret's and Anne's, move beyond the material and seek the wealth of Christ ("To the Ladie Anne" 41, 42). Thus,

both the notion of natural nobility and the system of legal symbols put in place to secure its meaning function through a fantasy of signification, a dream that the name *can* mean something, which Lanyer's volume replaces with the irrational, senseless grace of God. If, furthermore, God's will and his grace are opposed to the legal fiction that would arbitrarily dispossess Anne, Margaret, and good women like them, then Lanyer has leveled a powerful charge against James, his State, and common law. As she writes of the illegitimate heir,

Nor is he fit for honour, or command,
If base affections over-rules his mind;
Or that selfe-will doth carry such a hand,
As worldly pleasures have the powre to blind
So as he cannot see, nor understand
How to discharge that place to him assign'd:

Gods Steward must for all the poore provide,

If in Gods house they purpose to abide. ("To the Ladie Anne" 49-56).

Lanyer here implies both that James will literally go to Hell for failing to provide for the dispossessed and that his injustice undermines his claims to divine right. James's pretension to divine right would have been particularly relevant at the time of Lanyer's publication, moreover, not only because of his forthcoming biblical translation but also because of his own insistence in public comments, including a speech to parliament the preceding year, that "The state of monarchy is the supremest thing upon earth: for kings are not only God's lieutenants upon earth and sit upon God's throne, but even by God himself they are called gods" (*Select Statutes* 293).

As such, Lanyer indirectly but powerfully turns her inheritance from Eve and her access to a divine truth that cannot be restrained by the Symbolic against James's claim, like that of the male clergy, to inherit the throne of God itself. Before God's truth, she contends, "the Cottage with the Throne" is leveled, and any work to pit language or Law against it is inevitably brought face-to-face with void ("To the Ladie Anne" 19). Like God, kings and patriarchs may speak into the darkness, but Lanyer insists that the attempt to write women out of power will always fail because God is always already there, always already beyond the reach of words. In this place beyond sense, she suggests, there is only one king, and the only possession is his love. More than this, Lanyer argues that, for the soul in the imaginative place that is no place, the only Self is the universal Other—that to truly inherit his throne is to give up the Self to God. Thus, queerly like St. Paul, Lanyer too foresees an end of time and space, an apocalypse in which "all things shall be subdued unto him, [and] then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all" (1 Corinth. 15:28).

Sons of Darkness, Spirits of Heaven: *Paradise Lost*

Over the course of the last three decades, *Paradise Lost* has attracted a significant breadth of psychoanalytic attention, and a wide array of scholars have worked to pathologize Milton's first couple and his God in ways that often productively resist the deity's attempt to explicate and control narrative within the poem. Until recently, this rich tradition has worked almost entirely independently from a more materialist class of critics who have worked to contextualize Milton's epic vis-à-vis contemporary representations of systems of labor and capital. This chapter hopes to bridge the gap between these discourses by reading for the means by which language, in Milton's poem, yokes together systems of material exchange like inheritance and systems of organizing meaning in language, particularly through the trope of naming. The name is a particularly present point of contact between the semantic and the commercial because it not only acts as a signifier of subjective identity but, as I have demonstrated in the previous chapter's discussion of Anne Clifford, also a means of locating its referent within structures of class and inheritance that control distributions of material wealth.

My reading of *Paradise Lost*, therefore, is particularly informed by Mary Nyquist's early suggestion in "The Father's Word/Satan's Wrath" that the poem reads not only as a drama of the (mis)use of language but a drama of language itself. That is, for Nyquist, God's act of begetting the Son, which is also to say "transforming himself into the Word of God," "condemns [him], if not to death, then to the governing of an order split by an adversary who habitually appropriates the Father's Word only as a negative and alienating (*non du père*)" (188, italics in original). Put another way, the chronological narrative of the poem as a whole is one in which the transcendental, including the God's

presence and his Will, is encoded in the Symbolic medium (literally the text of the poem, but also the Law received by humans and, for Nyquist, the metaphorical ‘text’ of the Son’s body) and thus subject to the dangers of (mis)interpretation. Where Nyquist sees Satan reducing the meaning of God’s Law to a simple prohibition of desired objects, the Lacanian *non du père* in the Symbolic Order, this chapter attempts to identify the ways in which Satan also multiplies meanings. The multiplication of meaning, which I refer to throughout this chapter as a semantic or demonic excess, further, unsettles both the attempt of naming to create discrete subjects and, consequently, the Law that depends upon the signifier of the name for its coherence. I will argue that Satan, poised queerly between meaning, offers a spectral glimpse of the possibility of resisting and restructuring the Law that, in turn, makes room for the excluded and oppressed.

More specifically, I will demonstrate that Satan’s irruption into God’s language and Law forces Satan’s diegetic audience (Eve) as well as the poem’s extradiegetic audience (the reader) to confront ways in which the Law might be understood in terms of the violence that early capital brought to Milton and his contemporaries despite the deity’s fantastical and phantasmal representation of Edenic Law as the seamless transmission of a gift. These other potential readings, or excess meanings, I suggest, haunt the fantasy of Edenic abundance and tranquility that justifies God’s authority and, in turn, form the basis of the appeal in Satan’s temptation of Eve. After demonstrating the narrator’s linkage of Satan to language’s potential for radical semantic excess, therefore, I will move in the second section of this chapter to discuss the means by which Satan’s excessive or ironic function highlights the violence (against Eve) masked by God’s moral fantasy. In the third section, I will demonstrate how the articulation of this fantasy as a

gift at once echoes and obscures the violence embedded in early capital as a result of what Arthur Little has named the “heterofantasy” of giving both the Self and personal property meaning through their inheritance by the Child²⁵ (216). In the fourth section, I will discuss Eve’s Fall as a product of Satan’s refusal of divine fantasy and the willful resistance of the violence that fantasy secures. Finally, this chapter will conclude by addressing the way in which Eve’s appropriation of Satan’s semantic excess and his destabilizing effect on the fantasy of Edenic bliss enables her to imagine a new relationship to God and the Law that privileges the immediate concerns of the human (and female) subject, and her relationship to other humans (like Adam) in the present, over the futurist promise of fantasy. In saying so, it is not necessarily my intention to implicate the poet in a deliberate anti-capitalist project, though class and sexual oppressions are visibly present in Milton’s poem, but instead to suggest, with Blakean enthusiasm, that Milton was of such a party without knowing it.

Satan as Sin-thome: Embodying Irony and Excess

Milton’s text directs readers’ attention to the utmost limits of signification from its very beginning, opening with a claim to capture the divine in language. Specifically, Milton’s narrator declares a bold intention to “assert Eternal Providence/And justify the ways of God to men,” a project whose persistent textuality is highlighted by the preceding observation that such a task remains “unattempted yet in prose or rhyme” (*PL* 1.16, 1.25-26). The implication that the poet-speaker will take this task on in language is,

²⁵ For more on Little’s heterofantasy, see my introduction, pages v-vi.

thus, already ironized by the fact that the poem is a creature of neither prose nor rhyme²⁶. This irony is particularly noticeable for readers in and after 1668, when Milton included the prefatory note on “The Verse” which insists that “the measure is English heroic verse without rhyme” (Teskey xxviii, “The Verse” 2). Milton’s text, thus, highlights what seem to be the representational limits of generic form only to replicate them, claiming to “pursu[e]” the transcendence of these conventions while remaining carefully within them (*PL* 1.15). But this simultaneous avowal and disavowal of the ability to represent divinity occurs on a far more profound level than simply that of form. When Milton arrives at his most original narrative addition to the account of Original Sin—which is to say, his summary of the war in heaven in Book V—the narrating archangel Raphael questions

...how shall I relate
To human sense th’invisible exploits
Of warring spirits, how without remorse
The ruin of so many glorious once
And perfect while they stood, how last unfold
The secrets of another world perhaps
Not lawful to reveal? (*PL* 5.564-570).

Raphael, thus, raises two distinct but fundamental linguistic questions: how to represent the absent and how to contain narrative. In the former case, the absent is Heaven itself and the immaterial bodies warring there, a Real and “secret” world totally inaccessible to living humans and thus alien to human experience or imagination. In the latter case,

²⁶ I wish to acknowledge here that Milton may indeed have intended “rhyme” in the general sense recorded by the *OED* as “verse,” yet the irony in his diction still stands—particularly in the later issues of the poem (“rhyme”).

Raphael confronts the dangers of representing such things *too* successfully, creating undue “remorse” for Satan’s destruction and straying beyond the “lawful” bounds of speech. For Raphael, then, Satan is already a tempting specter, laboring to give his words an additional meaning that would frustrate his attempt to fulfill God’s commandment and keep the humans obedient to the Law.

The solution that Raphael actually provides for the twin anxieties of semantic lack and excess, however, leans decidedly toward risking the former of these two dangers. He declares:

...Yet for thy [Adam’s] good
This is dispensed, and what surmounts the reach
Of human sense I shall delineate so
By lik’ning spiritual to corporal forms
As may express them best. Though what if Earth
Be but a shadow of Heav’n and things therein
Each to other like more than on Earth is thought? (*PL* 5.570-576)

Raphael, then, will reveal only so much as is “dispensed” for the first couple, knowing all the while that much remains which “surmounts the reach/of human sense.” Thus, Raphael’s solution to the dangers of signification is a faith in language itself—in the simple substitution of “corporal forms” or words for immaterial and absent other “forms” out of a dubious conviction that “things therein [are]/Each to other like.” Accordingly, the angel is continually faced with the anxiety of insufficient representation with which we began:

...For who though with the tongue

Of angels can relate or to what things
Likened on Earth conspicuous that may lift
Human imagination to such height
Of godlike power!... (6.297-301).

As such, Raphael is caught in another instance of what I have described in my discussion of Lanyer's verse and the introduction to this study as an act of poetic un-speaking: avowing and disavowing at once the power of language to convey that which can only be comprehended fully through a semantic guarantor that exists beyond language. Indeed, the echo of 1 Corinthians in Raphael's narrative here makes this pointedly clear: "Though I speak with the tongues of men and angels, and have not charity, I am become as a sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal" (1 Corinth 13:1).

Where the apostle Paul severs prophecy from this affective guarantor, however, Milton's poetic speaker maintains their interdependence. Paul writes that "though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing," erecting an epistemological hierarchy in which the affective compulsions to self-sacrifice and compassion constitute a greater truth than the other, more direct interactions with the divine he enumerates (1 Corinth 13:2). Milton certainly places a significant value on charity, particularly in Michael's prophetic definition of the term as a name still "to come" for the "soul of all the rest" of the virtues that stem from the recognition of the Son as Messiah (*PL* 3.216, 12.583-587). But instead of a direct appeal to charity, Milton's speaker calls upon the Holy Spirit to supplement the words of the poem and give them meaning, as at the beginning of Book I: "And chiefly thou, O Spirit, that dost

prefer/Before all temples th' upright heart and pure/Instruct me" (1.17-19). In a moment that recalls Milton's own blindness and anticipates the speaker's lament for blindness in Book III, the speaker pleads with the Spirit, "What in me is dark/Illumine, what is low raise and support," in order to successfully represent their "great argument" (1.22-24).

Milton's opening invocation also evokes the prophet Isaiah's declaration that one blessed by the Holy Spirit "shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth" (Isaiah 11:3-4). As such, the poet emphasizes the twofold power of the intervention of the Spirit. On the one hand, it is the grace of the Spirit that is the source of the charitable relationships with which Paul is concerned. On the other, it is that same grace that signifies beyond the fallible sensory power of mortal eyes and ears that concerns both biblical authors. My point here, however, is that the linkage between the ability to signify and the spiritual goods of the Holy Spirit proves no less difficult to control than the deficiency of language which these goods seek to redress. Paul, for example, is insistent on the infinitude of charity, which "Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, [and] endureth all things" (1 Corinth 13:7). Read only slightly against the grain, the argument that Christian charity "believeth all things" contains the spectral threat of heresy—that it might also believe in idols, untruths, or the lies of demons or other deceivers, marking the presence of a dangerous, even demonic, semantic excess in the Scripture. Indeed, Milton argues in *Areopagitica* that the Christian faith is in fact the very opposite of this kind of undiscerning credulity: "He that can apprehend and consider vice with all her baits and seeming pleasures, and yet abstain,

and yet *distinguish*, and yet *prefer* that which is truly better, he is the true warfaring Christian” (*Areo.* 349, emphasis added).

After the same fashion, Milton’s opening invocation of the Holy Spirit not only highlights the infinitude of God, who “from the *first*/Wast present” and “Dove-like sat’st brooding on the vast abyss/And mad’st it pregnant,” but also connects the creative power of the divine presence to demonic excess (*PL* 1.19-20, 21-22, emphasis added). That is to say, Milton’s brief narrative detour into the Spirit’s role in creation serves to call attention not only to its eternity but its originality in the history of the universe, its “first”-ness among all things in existence. This first-ness is a noticeably suspicious quality because it is precisely that quality which the speaker attributes to Satan and his temptation of Eve. In a linguistic repetition suggestive of psychic repression, the narrator implores the spirit to

Say *first*, for Heav’n hides nothing from thy view,
Nor the deep tract of Hell, say *first* what cause
Moved our grand parents in that happy state,
Favored of Heav’n so highly, to fall off
From their Creator and transgress His will

For one restraint, lords of the world besides. (1.27-32, emphasis added).

Thus, even though the poem has actually described the Spirit already in its gloss on the creation of the earth, the speaker here asks that it first describe Satan. At the same time, the speaker’s syntax suggests that Satan is the cause that “first” moved Adam and Eve to sin. That the Spirit “from the first/Wast present,” even before the action of the poem, then, troubles the narrator’s attempt to restrict his originary narrative of evil to the

rebellion of Satan to the extent that both are attributed a contested position at the beginning of this history.

An elision occurs here in which Milton's diction, at least implicitly, allows the act of creation to bleed into Satan's responsibility for the Fall, as though one follows from the other. John S. Tanner's essay, "Say First What Cause," has similarly argued that the imputation of guilt to God is an inherent consequence of Milton's dramatization of Original Sin in narrative because narrative form always requires that actions are associated with proportional causes, forcing one to inquire *why* Satan rebelled and to seek a cause for this rebellion despite the narrator's framing of the event as an internal, unprompted decision (49). For my purposes here, what is significant is that the infinitude of the Holy Spirit, which precedes time and fills the "vast abyss" of Chaos is belied to be unstable—to be capable of producing forces other than what God intended in his creative labor. By extension, if God and his infinite charity are, as Milton's allusions to the Scripture would suggest, actually sources for the signifying power of prophetic²⁷ language, then the potential meaning these sources are able to supply to that language would seem to be infinite as well—perhaps even straying into the realm of the unlawful that troubles Raphael. The prophetic attempt to convey meaning, therefore, is always already haunted by the presence of the demonic, by the potential that the Word might also signify in ways that serve interests other than God's own. In this sense, Satan operates as what Lee Edelman calls the "*sinthomosexual*": the physical embodiment or

²⁷ It is worth re-emphasizing here that by "prophetic" I do not necessarily intend that which predicts the future but that language which attempts to articulate the knowledge of divine revelation or inspiration, including like Raphael's "dispensed" narration of the war in Heaven or the poet's claim to justify God.

personification of the Lacanian “sinthome,” or the manifestation of individual consciousness that cannot be de-coded or explained by the logic that organizes the Symbolic order (*No Future* 35-36). As this consciousness can only exist once the subject has entered into the Symbolic, Dominiek Hoens and Ed Pluth have argued in “The Sinthome” that the Symbolic Order is “ultimately grounded in something that is not of the order itself. From the point of view of the subject, one can say that the condition of the possibility of being a subject implies that it must stick to a certain *sign* that cannot be integrated into the Symbolic order, even though it is not completely alien to the Symbolic” (7).

In other words, Satan is a necessary product of God’s language—his attempt to establish first created beings and then Law—that refuses to participate in the structure of that language. The originary myth of Satan’s naming makes this most apparent because his name is assigned only after and in response to Satan’s fall, when the narrator declares that he is “in Heaven called Satan” for his performance as “th’ Arch-Enemy” (*PL* 1.81, 82). Raphael reveals, however, that this antagonism toward God is in fact derived from Satan’s “envy against the Son of God, that day/Honored by his great Father, and proclaimed/Messiah King anointed” (5.662-664). Satan is, thus, bound in a discursive relationship to God. I mean that, in reacting and even rebelling against God’s proclamation of the Son’s anointed kingship, Satan inserts a kind of irony, what Edelman would call a “void” in meaning, into the law to the extent that God’s promise that “to him [the Son] shall bow/All knees in Heaven”²⁸ (5.607-608). More importantly, at the same

²⁸ I am reading this line somewhat metaphorically because, before nightfall, Satan at least nominally plays the part of celebrating the Son’s appointment (5.616-617). Thus, Satan’s rebellion leaves the literal sense of the line true while making the figurative sense that all

time that Satan resists and contests the Law, his defiance is precisely what gives it meaning. For without Satan's rebellion, no events would ever materialize to act as the signified for God's language of punishment:

...Him who disobeys
Me disobeys, breaks union, and that day,
Cast out from God and blessed vision, falls
Into utter darkness, deep engulfed, his place
Ordained without redemption, without end." (5.611-615).

Consequently, Satan's name, as an adversarial title *issued by God*, fittingly expresses at once his resistance to the Law that precipitated his fall "into utter darkness" and his participation in a structure of Symbolic substitutions in which the signifier of his name can be changed in accordance with the changing nature of his character. The name of Satan is, thus, always spoken in an endless loop of ironic valences: not only does Satan give meaning to the Law *by* defying it, his role in affirming the Law ironizes the meaning of his name as God's "Arch-Enemy" because he is precisely that which supports its structure. He is, in this sense, at once one of the "sons of darkness" that God demands his Son drive out of Heaven and also one of the "spirits of Heav'n," as Satan identifies himself to Death, insofar as he supports the order over which God rules (2.687, 6.715). "Satan," as a signifier, is thus already the site of semantic excess, one at which all these means are simultaneously inscribed.

the angels would obey him false, creating a tension in which meanings are multiplied in unstable ways.

The inherent danger of this semantic (and demonic) excess is that, while it seems to secure the Law in Heaven, it remains recurrently, even symptomatically, uncontrolled. This is particularly true in Eden, where Satan's presence destabilizes the names which the Father, through his surrogate son Adam, has inscribed upon the animals and, in doing so, destabilizes the function of the Law in Eden. As Claudia Champagne observed in her 1991 essay "Adam and His 'Other' Self in *Paradise Lost*," Adam's creation acts as a kind of fantasy of perfect entry into the Symbolic, allowing the first man a preternatural ability to use words to name the parts of the world around him even before he develops a sense of self (49). Adam's fantastical powers of language are most dramatic, she argues, when, in his own words, Adam "named [the animals] as they passed and understood/Their nature: with such knowledge God endued/My sudden apprehension" (*PL* 8.352-354). Champagne contends that Adam here appears to bridge the gap in signification, creating names for the animals that are derived directly from their "nature[s]" rather than imposing arbitrary signs on them (51).

I argue, however, that Satan's entrance into the narrative splits apart this attempt to enclose the sign and signified in a unitary relationship. Where Adam and Eve understood the nature of the Serpent, as she relates it in Book IX, as the "subtlest beast of all the field," they know that creature "not with human voice endued" until she witnesses Satan speaking from inside the Serpent's body (*PL* 9.560-561). Eve's newfound doubt about the Serpent's abilities and her misidentification of Satan, thus, begin the process of re-signifying both the animal and its name. Where Satan begins his wicked task "enclosed/In serpent," as though wearing its skin, Milton's narrator eventually moves to conflate, as Eve does, the tempter with his animate garb: "Such pleasure took *the serpent*

to behold/This flow'ry plat the sweet recess of Eve,/Thus early, thus alone" (9.455-457, emphasis added). The speaker nonetheless draws attention to the fact that the voyeuristic pleasure of gazing on Eve's "sweet recess" is Satan's by informing the reader that, for a moment

...the evil one abstracted stood

From his own evil and for the time remained

Stupidly good, of enmity disarmed,

Of guile, of hate, of envy, of revenge.

But the hot Hell that always in him burns,

Though in mid-Heav'n, soon ended his delight (9.463-468)

Thus, Milton presents two simultaneous ruptures in the process of signification: on the one hand, Satan at least temporarily fails to perform the function of his name as an adversary, having forgotten his "enmity" toward Eve. On the other, "the serpent" stands in as a name for the arch-fiend, creating a synecdochical relationship between the reptile and the infernal power that possesses him. The linguistic substitution of the corporeal Serpent for the spiritual Satan is completed, then, when God "on the serpent...His curse let fall:/Because thou [the serpent] hast done this" with respect to the temptation of Eve (10.174-175). However derivatively the name of the Serpent was bound to its original "nature," then, Satan's actions have elicited from God a new valence of meaning for that term, a meaning which Adam, the Serpent's namer, had never intended and which provokes the punishment of God's Law. Thus, Satan becomes embedded not just within the Serpent but within the very language of Eden, articulating himself as the point at which the excess of meaning, the potential for other readings and misreadings of signs,

both transgresses the Law and transforms the subjects (like the Serpent) that exist within it.

Original Sin-thome: The Ironic Infection of Eve

The most radical transformation that Satan effects, however, is that of Eve, which is also the most crucial for his purposes and to the drama of Original Sin. To be more specific, Satan's queer function within the semantic system of Eden not only introduces meanings that ironize the name signifying Eve's subject position within the Law but, in doing so, exposes and undermines the fantasy that justifies God's Law in Eden. Indeed, Champagne observes that the names of Adam and Eve, like those of the animals, "signify their functions in the world," and thus mark them not only as subjects but objects utilized by and articulated into the system of the Law (51). Eve's name, in particular, implies this objectivity to the extent that Adam insists on its etymological meaning as "Mother,"²⁹ and, in particular, "*Mother of all Mankind*" or "Mother of all things living" (*PL* 11.159, 160, italics in original). Eve's very identity, then, is constructed as a product of her obedience to the Law, specifically to God's command to "Be fruitful, multiply, and fill the Earth" (7.531). As such, the Law governing Eden operates always under the assumption of a fantasy like what Little calls the "heterofantasy," or what Edelman calls the "reproductive futurism" that hopes "to secure the survival of the social in the Imaginary form of the Child" (*No Future* 14). That is to say, because the Child, as

²⁹ Milton, here, is keeping with traditional etymologies of Eve's name, which the *OED* observes is often associated with the Hebrew verb for "to live" and thus translated in roughly the same terms as her appellations in the poem ("Eve").

Edelman constructs it, is an object of fantasy meant to perpetuate the survival of the Father and his Will, the Child is always precluded from accession to its own subjectivity (“Hamlet’s Wounded Name” 100). Eve is, thus, at once a maternal figure producing new subjects to obey God and also presented as a fantasy of the Child in herself, a subject without subjective desires and who instead carries out the letter of God’s command with such obedience that she becomes one with his Word, letting it be inscribed upon her as her name.

In the same way, the agricultural labor that Eve (and Adam) perform(s) is figured within the system of Law as a product of obedience without desire. More specifically, to the extent that Eden is understood as a place of ultimate abundance and satisfaction, a Paradise, it is a place *without* desire, that energy always predicated on lack. Adam makes this prelapsarian abundance and its negation of desire most intelligible when, after his fall and subsequent judgment, he glosses his punishment as a *newfound* linkage between labor and objects of desire and consumption that would inform both pre-capitalist and capitalist agricultural practices in the fallen world: “On me the curse aslope/Glanced on the ground: with labor I must earn/My bread. What harm? Idleness had been worse” (10.1053-1055). Thus, the motivation for Edenic labor is not, as in the case of postlapsarian laborers, the satisfaction of material desires for subsistence or to profit but, as Adam asserts, a simple obedience to the Law that “declares his dignity” (4.617). The fantasy of Edenic bliss and abundance in Milton’s text, then, always comes with the assumption of the absence of subjectivity, allowing the Law to operate on bodies that (re)produce the Will of the Father uncontaminated by the Self.

For readers familiar with Genesis, as most Western readers in Milton's and in the modern era are, Satan has always already ironized these assumptions and, thus, exposed the constructedness of this fantasy. This irony is evident on its surface because Adam's extended explication of Eve's name as "Mother" comes only *after* the couple is already fallen and working toward redemption, leading him to attempt to exorcise the irony with which their sin and subsequent death sentence have infected her name as a signifier for the Mother of the Living:

His [God's] promise that thy Seed shall bruise our foe,
Which then not minded in dismay yet now
Assures me that the bitterness of death
Is past and we shall live. Whence hail to thee...(11.155-158)

I mean that, despite his protestations, Adam and Eve *are*, in fact, still going to die—along with all their progeny—before being redeemed by Christ. To the extent that this is true, Eve is just as much the Mother of the Dead as she is the Mother of the Living. The bitterness of eternal damnation, then, may be "past," but death itself is not. In Edelman's terms, therefore, Satan's temptation almost literally queers the name of Mother, refusing to acknowledge the fantasy of reproductive futurism as a source of boundless life by bringing Eve and her future children face-to-face with the reality of death. A "void," as Edelman terms the Symbolic space of the queer, has opened between "Mother" as signifier and the womb of Eve, and the promise of its closure is not in the past or in coming lifetimes but in the infinitely-deferred future when the "Seed," the Child, will return and end the threat of death forever (*No Future* 22).

Satan's ironic function, furthermore, hastily undoes the abjection of desire from the Garden that sustains the fantasy of Edenic bliss by queering Eve's Symbolic function as Mother in sexual terms as well. The grandiosity with which Adam describes Eve's maternal function, especially, evidences the sexual resignification of her name by opening potential questions about the nature of the first couple's relationship to each other that exude demonic influence and excess. Naming Eve "Mother of all Mankind" while Adam himself is named not only "First Father" but "First Man," for instance, carries with it the strange and spectral implication that Eve is somehow Adam's mother as well as the mother of their future children (*PL* 8.297, 298). A number of psychoanalytic readers, including Champagne and Roberta Martin, have in fact argued that Eve does act as a kind of Mother figure for Adam. For these critics, the first woman represents the sense of self-completion Adam lacks when he grows envious of the paired animals and beseeches God for the "fellowship" of one "fit to participate [in]/All rational delight" (Champagne 52, Martin 63, *PL* 8.389-391).

Martin, furthermore, also stresses in her essay "'How Came I Thus?': Adam and Eve in the Mirror of the Other" that Adam's erotic projections onto Eve come to eerily reflect the likeness of God: where before the Holy Spirit descended to impregnate the earth and the Son "in [Adam's] nostrils breathed/The breath of life," so now Eve "infused/Sweetness" and "from her air inspired/The spirit of love and amorous delights" (Martin 63, *PL* 7.525-526, 8.473-474, 8.476-477). Eve, thus, takes on what Martin calls "a truly God(ess) like characteristic," becoming a source, for herself and for Adam, of the pleasure of psychic wholeness to such an extent that, in Adam's words, "what seemed fair in all the world, seemed now/Mean, or in her summed up, in her contained" (Martin

63, *PL* 8.471-472). Martin terms this divine characteristic the “(M)Other,” evoking Eve’s figuration as both a quasi-divine source of pleasure and a sexual other against whom Adam can define his gendered sense of Self (62-63). More important for my purposes here, however, is that this rendering of Eve as both Mother and Other is, indeed, deeply Oedipal, and the Edenic marriage is consequentially not merely a means of fulfilling the commandment to reproduction but also a site of desire that always already borders on the criminal.

The violation of the incest taboo is a particularly queer rupture into the language of lawful marriage, moreover, because it generates an excess of meaning in psychosexual terms that thwarts the attempt to codify relationships and desires in language. Champagne usefully glosses the immediacy with which God both introduces himself to Adam and imposes the prohibition on the Forbidden Fruit in Adam’s creation narrative in Book VIII as a reflection of the Lacanian *nom du père* and *non du père*—the process(es) by which the recognition of the Father as the source of Symbolic authority thwarts the Child’s desire for the Mother and the wholeness she represents through a prohibition against literal and Symbolic incest (50). In her essay, “The Alimentary Structures of Incest in *Paradise Lost*,” Minaz Jooma also suggests that the prohibition against incest provides the foundational basis for social and legal structure in Eden insofar as Milton’s narrator insists that “Relations dear, and all the charities/Of Father, son, and brother, first were known” as a product of the “mysterious law” of “wedded love” (*PL* 4.750, 756-757). These scholars, thus, collectively gesture toward what Edelman calls “the ‘or’ of categorical thinking,” or “the requirement of the Symbolic order that everything, as Jacques Lacan writes, ‘must be *or* not be in a particular place’” (qtd. in “Hamlet’s

Wounded Name” 97, “Hamlet’s Wounded Name” 102). That is to say, the Symbolic Order is, for Edelman, a rigidly binary structure that maintains its binarism through the Father’s prohibition on the transgression of categorical and sexual boundaries, including a prohibition on “damned incest” like that issued by the ghost of King Hamlet in Shakespeare’s tragedy (*Hamlet* 1.5.83).

Satan’s attempt to represent his relationship to his children in language also belies this epistemological anxiety, as when he greets them on his return journey to Hell: “Fair daughter, and thou son and grandchild both;/High proof ye now have given to be the race/Of Satan” (10.384-386). That is to say, “daughter,” as signifier, shows itself to be profoundly insufficient to contain Sin’s relationship to her father precisely because “son” and “grandchild” overdetermine relations between Satan and her son Death. She is more than simply his daughter, and neither “son” nor “grandchild” can contain the relationship she has given him to Death. Father and Grandfather, Mother and Sister, Mother and Daughter, and Father and Son, as categories, thus, collapse into one another in a way that frustrates the attempt to understand the relationship between these three actors in categorical, familial terms and evacuates each of these signifiers, read without the others, of meaning. As such, the threat of incest is Symbolically linked to the queer, acting as another site of the “void” of meaning and another site at which the Will of the Father is refused³⁰ (*No Future* 22).

³⁰ The legal history of two also reflects an ominous linkage of queer and incestuous desires in the social and juridical imaginaries, particularly given that Scottish historian Brian Levack’s observes that incest (like sodomy) could be and sometimes was punishable by death in seventeenth-century England and Scotland (178).

Furthermore, Milton's juxtaposition of the unholy trinity with the illusion of Adam and Eve's sexually normative marriage completes the resignification of lawful marital love into a monstrous excess of desire to the extent that, as Jooma argues, "Adam and Eve stand in precisely the same relation to one another (father-begetter to daughter-begot) as Satan and Sin" (33). That is, as Adam gazes on Eve, the difficulty Satan has in separating and defining the roles of parent, child, and spouse becomes an increasingly present human problem. Bruce Thomas Boehrer's similar comparison of the infernal and Edenic families in "*Paradise Lost* and the General Epistle of James" is particularly useful here because it elucidates the centrality of desire—and what he describes as a broader "Lacanian Desire"—to Milton's text (313-314). That is to say, Boehrer observes that, just as Eve is created in response to Adam's expression of insufficiency, Sin springs from Satan's mind following the annunciation of the Son and "in the moment that he [Satan] recognizes himself as incomplete, wanting, and 'indebted'" (305). As such, Boehrer contends that Eve and Sin both stem from the longing for the wholeness of the Self that, for Lacan, inserts the subject into language. This is especially true for Sin, whom he reads as the unholy Word, "*(non serviam)* made flesh" (305).

In Boehrer's reading, Milton thus breaks with the Augustinian tradition of criminalizing *all* desire as a form of lust and instead attempts to limit only desire bound to "impotence," which cannot produce legitimate heirs for the desiring, and usually male, subject—in Satan's case, successively bringing Death and yapping monsters (297). Just as Raphael attempts to limit his narrative of Heaven to a single legitimate interpretation and God attempts to represent his desire as the only one in Eden, so does Milton in a reading like Boehrer's endorse a single and very narrow form of monogamous

heterosexuality. In fact, the reduction of moral sexuality to the production of heirs is one form of what Edelman identifies as the narrowing of “the political debate—and, indeed, of the political field—” to “reproductive futurism,” which rests the integrity of the Law on a fantasy of perfect transmission into a desire-less Child (*No Future 2*).

Yet the instances of criminal desire which, as Boehrer argues, expose the unholy trinity’s social unacceptability and its queer destabilization of meaning are never far from mind in Milton’s Eden. This is especially true of Sin’s catalogue in Book II of the series of incestuous relationships that bind the infernal family, particularly because it is first and foremost a narrative of rape. She relates that upon Death’s birth

I fled but he pursued (though more, it seems,
Inflamed with lust than rage) and swifter far
Me overtook, his mother, all dismayed,
And in embraces forcible and foul
Engend’ring with me of that rape begot
These yelling monsters...(PL 2.790-795).

And Eve experiences a less violent but by my no means less coercive first meeting with her male counterpart. Indeed, before her first contact with Adam, God himself announces that “To [Adam,] [thou, Eve] shalt bear/Multitudes like thyself and thence be called/Mother of human race,” leaving Eve no room at all for objection, as she remarks: “What could I do/But follow straight, invisibly thus led?” (4.473-746). Her only subsequent attempt to object, thus, is to turn away from Adam after finding him “less fair,/Less winning soft, less amiably mild” than her own reflection, but here she too is

pursued and her hand “seized” by the sexual partner that has been ordained for her against her will (4.478-479, 4.489).

Maggie Kilgour offers a similar reading in her essay “Eve and Flora,” arguing that the recurrent imagery of joined hands in the poem serves a kind of barometer for the marital relationship, imputing a particularly ominous signification to the seizure of this initial contact (8). As a moment in which Adam’s “power” over Eve operates in the absence of his “tenderness” for her, Kilgour argues, Adam’s establishment of the marital relationship through an act of physical force here evokes a long classical tradition of representing rape as a beginning for later social concord, as in the history of paintings that treat the rape of the Sabine women as the foundation of the Roman Republic³¹ (Kilgour 8). Kilgour concludes that, from its very outset, Eve’s stay in ‘Paradise’ is haunted by the prospect that “power overrides gentleness and marriage itself may be simply a disguised version of rape”—that, in other words, Eve is always haunted by the presence of Satan, Sin, and Death and the criminal sexualities they represent (8).

More importantly for my purposes here, this spectral rape narrative stands in stark contrast to the fantasy of Eve as a desire-less subject mechanically obeying and reproducing the Law of God. Instead, Eve quite visibly expresses her desire *not* to marry Adam and actively attempts to resist the pressure that male authorities put on her to do so. Her desire to return to her pre-social state and refuse the role of Mother, then, is proscribed both by God’s commandment and the violence that God’s enforcer, Adam, is prepared to use to ensure her obedience to the Law and to his own incestuous desire. The

³¹ For an extended discussion of this history, see Zirpolo, Lilian. “Botticelli’s *Primavera*: A Lesson for the Bride.” *The Expanding Discourse: Feminism and Art History*, edited by Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard, Harper Collins, 1992. 101-109.

Law of Eden is dependent upon fantasy, therefore, not only because the notion of inherently obedient laborers is unsustainable in the narrative of humankind's first disobedience but also because the fantasy of such willing subjects covers over the violence with which God and Adam maintain their authority over Eve and shields them from the name of rapists. Moreover, the presence of this rape, in the sense that it remains in the present despite the fantasy which attempts to displace it, functions as a kind of irony, a gap in God's and the narrator's attempt to create a mythological justification for divine authority, made legible precisely by the consequences of Satan's rebellion—by Sin and Death. Satan, thus, recurrently, even symptomatically, rebels against the language with which God narrates and describes his Law and, in doing so, brings to the fore the submerged injustice God has committed against Eve.

'Economic Original Sin': Exposing the Fantasy of Eden as a Gift

As the fantasy of Edenic bliss begins to shatter, not only the sexual violence underwriting Eve's obedience to God's reproductive mandate but also the conditions subtending her and Adam's agricultural labor become increasingly apparent. What I am suggesting here, consequently, is only a slight variation on Marx's assertion that "primitive accumulation plays approximately the same role in Political Economy as original sin does in theology" (Marx 784). Where Marx, in *Capital*, analogizes the capitalist mythology of class hierarchy being inherited from groups of essentially and primally "diligent" or "lazy" people to the Genesis account of Adam's labor as a punishment for sin, I argue that the justification for such power dynamics through mythic

or fantastical narrative, in Milton's text, actually predates human transgression (784). As Saskia Cornes observes in her recent essay, "Milton's Manuring," God's first proclamation to Adam upon revealing himself is that "This paradise I give thee, count it thine/To till and keep," which suggests a kind of legal conjunction of, in Cornes's words, "work and a provisional form of ownership" (Cornes 68, *PL* 8.319-320). More specifically, Cornes argues that

The garden belongs to Adam (and Eve), but only through their labor; it is not theirs, as the enjambment might suggest, but theirs to till and keep. Work therefore becomes an integral part of Adam and Eve's proprietorship in Eden, a dramatic shift in emphasis from the more otiose views of paradise that is marked also at the level of diction. (Cornes 68)

As such, Cornes's suggestion that God does not "give" the land but instead enjoins the human pair to work it inserts what initially seems absent in Eden: a motive for Edenic labor. That is to say, the notion that ownership can be "provisional," to borrow Cornes's term, leaves an implicit threat of dispossession built into the commandment to work, echoing the explicit threat which Satan disregarded and thus incurred. The fantasy of laborers who obey without desire, then, serves to cover the threatened violence of expropriation that compels human labor irrespective of any conflicting subjective desires.

This spectral threat of dispossession is reified, furthermore, when Adam notes that God takes "account" of human labor while overlooking that of the animals, and, as a consequence, observes that "With first approach of light we must be ris'n,/And at our pleasant labor to reform/Yon flow'ry arbors, yonder alleys green" (4.624-626). However "pleasant" the task may seem, therefore, the Great Accountant has inserted Adam and

Eve into a system of compulsory labor that structures their relationship to the diurnal cycle as well as to larger, historical senses of time. That is to say, Adam not only reduces day and night to periods of labor and rest but also observes that the landscapes on which they work “mock our scant manuring and require/More hands than ours to lop their wanton growth” (4.628-629). Reading the same lines, Cornes suggests that Adam points to an Eden suffering a shortage of labor—a shortage which God’s command to reproduce would eventually resolve by setting in motion a narrative of global population growth (69-70).

Rather than the free gift of God’s boundless goodness, then, Eden and its possession are bound by various regulations that resonate more clearly with seventeenth-century inheritance law and the authority of the paternal Last Will. Historian Christopher Clay observes in “Marriage, Inheritance, and the Rise of Large Estates in England” that fathers possessed of large estates by the latter part of the century, particularly among the upper aristocracy, often not only mandated the production of male heirs but even posited conditions for inheritance among male descendants in order to “ensure that [their] own estates retained an independent existence” after their deaths (504). For this reason, Clay notes, landholding fathers survived only by daughters might choose—and one is especially reminded here of Anne Clifford—not only to dispossess their daughters but even to will their holdings directly to a second- or later-born son of such a daughter, leaving the younger child to inherit his maternal grandfather’s lands while the elder retained those of their father³² (505).

³² Clay stresses that this phenomenon was acutely prevalent in the later seventeenth century because fewer males tended to be born in each of the century’s succeeding generations (517). Similarly, medieval historian J.S. Payling has argued in a more recent

While Milton does not seem to imply anything like prelapsarian mortality or the need to bequeath Eden to the humans' sons, this patrilineal model of inheritance is particularly relevant given that God and the archangels stress Adam and Eve's physical inability to personally occupy and tend to the rest of the earth. Raphael, for instance, reminds Adam of God's command to "Be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth,/Subdue it and throughout dominion hold," explicitly linking the subdual of the earth to its habitation by a larger human population (*PL* 7.531-532). Likewise, Michael, in describing the nature of the couple's banishment from Eden, observes that an unfallen Eden would have been "thy capital seat from whence had spread/All generations" and the place to which humans returned "from all ends of th' earth to celebrate/And reverence thee [Adam] their great progenitor" (11.343-346). Thus, while Adam—and, perhaps, Eve—was to retain a kind of primacy over his children from his seat in Eden, possession of the actual territorial space of his mother earth would pass from God to Adam's younger social inferiors while Adam cultivated an independent estate in the Garden. And, as Clay observes, among the most common factors in an heir's or heiress's decision to sell familial lands was the concern that the land would simply be too far away from their adult home for them to feasibly manage its cultivation (516). God's strict regulation of reproduction and conditioning of land ownership, thus, seems carefully calculated to keep the earth in the family, so to speak.

study, "The Economics of Late Medieval Marriage: The Marriage of Heiresses," that the kind of systemic conditioning or negation of female inheritance to which Clay refers only became possible well into early modern period in part because the lingering demographic effects of plague—and the Black Death in particular—in preceding years meant that there were simply not enough living, healthy male heirs to enable such selectivity (414).

As such, inheritance under the Law in Milton's Eden is a means of integrating both distributions of land and the division of labor into a system of what queer Marxist theorist Elizabeth Freeman terms "chronobiopolitics," or the large-scale manipulation of laboring and sexual bodies through time to generate "maximum productivity" (3). Likewise, Marxist critic and historian Silvia Federici observes in *Caliban and the Witch* that population control was of primary interest for contemporary political economists, particularly as a means of ensuring exploitative working conditions for agricultural and other laborers (65). More specifically, Federici traces a history in which greater demand for labor and increased wages generated greater overall wealth for laboring classes by the end of the Middle Ages and, in turn, lead them to a series of revolts across Europe against the harsh working conditions of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (65-66). The governmental response to these revolts was not only the use of brute force but, as Federici observes, the institution of legal codes that redefined "reproductive crimes" and required "new forms of surveillance," including the registration of pregnancies and the compulsory spying of neighbors and relatives, "to ensure that pregnant women did not terminate their pregnancies" and thus that there would be a large enough labor force to afford exploitative working conditions (88). By the seventeenth century, Federici argues, governments in England and across Europe had launched "a true war against women clearly aimed at breaking the control they had exercised over their bodies and reproduction" (88-89).

My point here is that God's representation of the propriety of Eden as a gift constitutes another linguistic construction of fantasy to the extent that he does not actually give the land to them in the sense of a transference of property rights but instead

“gives laws,” as Satan suggests the Son will do when first conspiring with Beelzebub (*PL* 5.693). The echo of Satan’s language here, thus, calls attention to the legal trickery at work in the forms of inheritance that God calls gift-giving, which bestows on the humans not so much a positive good but a series of legal requirements that reenact on the prelapsarian scene the violence that Federici attributes to primitive accumulation. Likewise, in his recent monograph, *Inheritance Law and Political Theology in Shakespeare and Milton*, Joseph M. Jenkins, suggests that obedience to the Last Will and to God’s Will, especially, is dependent not upon piety but a sense of *debt* (166). Specifically, Jenkins argues that the power structure of legal inheritance is always destabilized by “the problem of loss of the donor’s leverage (which is often the forebear’s power to keep the follower submissive) *following* the moment the gift is given”³³ (168, emphasis in original). Applying this logic to the Edenic state, I argue that God’s insistence on the permanent provisionality of Eden, on the conditions that limit human ownership and justify dispossession, glosses over this tension by insisting on the controlling force which the language of the gift disavows: a continuous and perpetual indebtedness.

Similarly suggesting that Satan is “pushed” to his initial disobedience, Jenkins observes that “the claim of indebtedness to God has already been implied by God’s insistence on all the angels’ adoration, their *recognition*” (166, emphasis in original). From here, Jenkins contends that Satan “is given the illusion that his station is of the highest, of the closest to God, only to be demoted by...the declaration by God of the

³³ “Forebear” and “follower” are Jenkins’s terms for designating intergenerational positions and, in the context of male homosocial relationships like Satan’s to God, correspond roughly to “father” and “son,” respectively (1).

Son's preminence," [sic] a demotion justified by God's "insistence" that Satan owes, in his own words, a "debt immense of endless gratitude,/So burdensome, still paying, still to owe" for the gift of his creation (Jenkins 166-167, *PL* 4.52-53). That such a debt can be thought to justify not just eternal service but what Satan takes as a personal sleight, for Jenkins, indicates a "heightened" insistence on that debt that "*increases the burden on the follower*" (167, emphasis in original). To the extent that such insistences in Milton's poem are *always* being heightened, or "*accruing*," to use Jenkins's term, I would like to suggest that obedience to God's Will is a kind of *interest* that God's fantastical language of gift-giving cannot explain and which Satan's resistance inevitably makes evident (6). That is to say, God's heightened demands of recompense for Satan's creation are not actually met with any increased deposition of good toward Satan on God's part. Instead, as the duration from his principal act of creation increases without the complete (and impossible) repayment of that act, God demands increasing sacrifice from Satan and his other heirs. This is not only visible in the way that Satan is expected first to praise God and then to praise him in spite of his sudden sleight but also in the poem's gradual unfolding of Edenic Law from "one restraint" to the realization that Eden includes at least a tripartite legal structure: abstinence from the Tree of Knowledge, labor in the Garden, and sexual reproduction (*PL* 1.32).

Put simply, God's gift is not only, as Satan suggests, a gift of laws (or a retraction of freedoms) but one that locks them into an ever-increasing, gradually-consuming debt of obedience that recalls the compounding interest of modern debt and credit systems. As Liam Haydon argues in "*Paradise Lost and the Politics of Corporation*," such systems were central to the development of English corporations and early capital in the

seventeenth century, and Haydon suggests that Milton understood his relationship to his own father as one of debt because his “career as a poet was funded by grants from his father’s business, and, later, he was able to live off the interest generated by his inheritance” (138, 148). More important for my purposes than Milton’s personal experience or intention is that this model, in which “Milton must use his poetic talent to repay the particular debt owed to his father and the general debt to the corporate-capitalist system from which he continued to derive an income,” serves to link the functions of Father and creditor in such a way that the desire of the Child as subject is enfolded and subsumed into that of the parent (138). Put more concretely, by making Father and creditor substitutable or exchangeable as signifiers, the Edenic system of Law compels the Child to direct their desire only toward the Will of the Father in the same way that Milton, pursuing his poetic interests, must continually reaffirm its use to his long-dead father and his class analogues. The gift, then, is the fantasy that covers this at once proprietarian and psychic violence, denying the existence of subjective desire so that its punishment need never be witnessed.

Playful Spirits: Eve’s Temptation as a Flight from Capital

Accordingly, where God’s fantastic project works to erase both subjective desire and the violence of the Law that subtends Edenic labor, Satan’s temptations work to identify and incite such desire as a means of directing the subject not to labor or the repayment of debt but instead to leisure. The first of these psychic maneuvers occurs in a suitably Freudian act of substitution, whereby Satan transforms Eve’s fear of punishment

into its own impulse toward transgression. Answering her fear of Death, he speculates, “So ye shall die perhaps by putting off/Human to put on gods: death to be wished,/Though threatened, which no worse than this [greater knowledge] can bring!” (PL 9.713-715). Satan, thus, re-presents the absence of life (Death) as a kind of super-abundance of life (deity). Further, Satan, in the guise of the serpent, insists on the proportionality of the transformation the apple would effect: “That ye should be as gods since I as Man,/Internal Man, is but proportion meet:/I of brute human, ye of human gods” (9.710-712). As such, the same material abundance on which the humans apply their augmentative agricultural labor is inverted, signifying not material possession but instead the lack of a correspondent and conjectural state of godhood. At the same time, the subtly gendered claim that the Serpent has become “as Man” suggests the position of authority most visible to Eve and yet denied her: Adam’s role as God’s sexual and legal enforcer. Precisely in response to these articulated absences, and with Satan’s ironic promise still ringing in her ears, “*desire*/Inclinable now grown to touch or taste/Solicited [Eve’s] longing eye” (9.741-743, emphasis added).

Satan’s understanding of deity, however, remains bound to his own declaration of *non serviam*, and labor is the language in which Eve too understands his offer to turn the human pair into “gods” through death. In one sense, the opposition of deity and service are apparent to both parties because such an opposition defines the distance between spiritual and corporeal beings in Milton’s poem. Indeed, despite Beelzebub’s fear of being “enslaved” to the victorious God or Satan’s resolution to “labor” “out of good still to find means of evil,” the damned angels suffering in Milton’s Hell spend their time almost exclusively in recreation—engaging in “Olympian games,” singing songs of their

martial prowess, debating abstract philosophies, and exploring the alien terrain on which they have found themselves (1.164, 165, 2.333, 528-530, 546-555, 570-572). Likewise, the blessed angels with which the human pair are more familiar are particularly inclined to diversion, and even “the angelic guards” placed at the gates of Eden under Gabriel’s command “About him exercis[e] heroic games” and leave their armaments unguarded while Satan is loose and making his way “through wood, through waste, o’er hill, o’er dale” to destroy mankind (*PL* 4.536-552). Thus, unlike the embodied humans, whose time is entirely regulated by their work, the entire gamut of Milton’s spirits are free to entertain themselves even when this seems to limit their execution of the tasks they purport to perform. The angelic spirits that Satan calls “gods,” in short, do not visibly labor in any way that Adam and Eve might understand. Satan’s offer to make Eve and her husband like the gods, then, may very well contain the appeal to vanity that its surface reading would suggest, but it is also an offer to let Eve, like the musical and athletic angels, take time not for labor but for play.

As his articulation of manhood and godhood would suggest, Satan’s temptations also make his proffered fantasy of play a particularly explicit offer to break Eve out of the cycle(s) of labor and reproduction to which God and Adam have subjected her. Before offering Eve the forbidden fruit or any explanation for how the Serpent came to speak, Satan showers the first woman with praise for her beauty and asks, “Who sees thee? (and what is one?), who shoudst be seen/A goddess among gods adored *and served*/By angels numberless thy daily train!” (9.546-548, emphasis added). Similarly, his response to Eve’s immediate questions about the Serpent’s accession to language is a conjunction of erotic praise for “resplendent Eve” and an affirmation of her authority: “right thou

shouldst be obeyed” (9.568, 570). In doing so, Satan offers Eve a vision of herself both divorced from physical labor and inserted into an inversion of the power structure that defines her marriage. By this, I mean that Satan not only promises Eve will be “served” and “obeyed” by attendant angels but stages the recognition of her beauty as the grounds for their (and his) submission, elevating her first to the “Fairest resemblance of [her] Maker fair” and then the “Empress of this fair world” (9.538, 568). Thus, the male desire that led to Eve’s creation and Adam’s ominously legalistic declaration that “what thou art is mine” is in Satan’s illusory future not a criterion for possessing Eve but for “gaz[ing on] and worship[ping]” her (9.610, 957). Put yet more simply, where her marriage to Adam is darkened by the shadow of rape, Satan offers her instead the dream of a submissive and obedient lover.

Indeed, the inversion of sexual power dynamics that Satan’s daytime speech constructs, when read alongside Eve’s nocturnal premonition of the Fall, also threatens God’s attempt to regulate the reproduction of the labor force. Specifically, the seductive angel’s apostrophe to the “fair plant” that bears the forbidden fruit opens up the possibility of a sexual pleasure that refuses productivity, something like a queer *jouissance*, as when he asks the plant, “Deigns none to ease thy load and taste thy sweet,/Nor god, nor man? Is knowledge so despised?/Or envy or what reserve forbids to taste?” (5.58, 59-61). This reading too must be qualified because the notion of easing the load of the Tree, or harvesting its fruit, seems generally in keeping with the kinds of labor the couple perform in Eden, yet the flora here are not the only ones “with fruit surcharged,” as Satan describes his arboreal addressee (5.58). Indeed, Raphael’s first greeting to Eve in Book V reasserts the future fecundity of her “fruitful womb,” and he

himself later reminds the pair of God's first command to "Be fruitful, multiply, and fill the Earth" (5.388, 7.531). Just as he literally speaks into Eve's ear while casting the illusion of the dream, therefore, Satan's language directly targets and addresses Eve while appearing to refer to the Tree, obliquely constructing a fantasy of "tast[ing] [her] sweet" while simultaneously disburdening her of children. In yet another series of ironic substitutions, then, Satan transforms the abundance of harvest into a vision of Eve's lack of choice in the reproductive process while also presenting the erotic as the very opposite of the reproductive.

The sense that forbidden knowledge might afford Eve the ability to both engage in pleasurable tasting and also gain control over her reproductive powers, further, pointedly suggests the contraceptive. Nor is the linkage between contraceptive knowledge and Satan unique to Milton but, as Federici observes, a frequent phenomenon in the mythology of the early modern witch hunt (Federici 144). In fact, Federici traces the trope back as far as the 1484 Bull of Innocent VIII that accused witches of thwarting conception with black magic (180). Similarly, Linda Draper Henson has argued in "The Witch in Eve" that Satan's rhetorical turn away from apostrophe and toward the dreaming spectator resounds powerfully with contemporary language of witchcraft, as when he invites Eve to "Taste this and be henceforth among the gods/Thyself a goddess, not to earth confined/But sometimes in the air as we!" (*PL* 5.76-78). To be more specific, the demonic invitation to flight recalls for Henson the belief that witches could fly either while carried by Satan, as she suggests Eve is in the dream, or while riding on (broom)sticks after the fashion of most modern representations of witches (127). The dream of Eve's flight is also implicitly infanticidal, however, because popular myth, as

recorded in Reginal Scot's treatise, *The Discovery of Witchcraft*, also suggested that witches deluded themselves into dreams or hallucinations of flight through a concoction made from poisonous herbs and "the fat of young children" that was applied to various areas of the body³⁴ (103). Like the flight of the witch, then, Satan's offer to the dreaming Eve is one of newfound bodily agency and even transport³⁵ predicated on the sacrifice of children³⁶. In short, he proposes that very thing which Adam's act of naming both affirms and attempts to exorcise: becoming the Mother of the Dead.

Furthermore, Eve's sin is not merely a reproductive but a commercial crime insofar as the burden God has assigned, the recompense he demanded for his 'gift' to her, is in part her reproductive labor. Put another way, Eve accepts from Satan the "debt relief" that Haydon sees the fallen angel attempting to claim for himself, the chance to refuse the debt securing the structure inheritance without paying one's pound of flesh, though this is a debt ensured, as inheritance always is, by the Law (148). Indeed, Eve points specifically to this reading when she chides Adam, after their Fall has been consummated, for assigning blame exclusively to her "default"³⁷ when the same "might as ill have happened thou being by/Or to thyself perhaps" (*PL* 9.1145, 1147-1148). That is to say, embedded in Eve's language is the sense that the cause for their punishment is

³⁴ A testament to the myth-making power of Scot's treatise is that it was reprinted in 1665, some eighty years after its original publication. My citation is from this later edition, which would have been more culturally present for Milton if not directly familiar to him.

³⁵ I mean this in all possible senses—emotional, sexual, spatial, etc.

³⁶ Henson, similarly, observes that witches were generally thought to exchange something of personal value for Satan's power, and she sees the deaths of Eve's future children as just such an exchange (128-129).

³⁷ The *OED* records that "default" would have had its financial as well as legal senses in the time of Milton's composition ("default").

not just disobedience, though it is that too, but a failure to *repay* that which she and Adam owe.

Paradise Within: A Revision of (Edenic) Property Relations

Eve's titular irony, therefore, strikes not just at the "sole" prohibition but at all three parts of the Law governing Eden simultaneously. In other words, by devouring the forbidden fruit, Eve also defiantly expresses her will, her desire, neither to reproduce nor to labor in payment of the debt God has placed upon her. The fantastical social order in which she has participated thus collapses: Eden can no longer be sustained, and the Law that had structured it demands a kind of enclosure of meaning. That is, where punishment has already been ordained for the transgression of the Law, now it must be realized—just as it has been realized for Satan—and, with the debt owed to God unpaid, the "gift" inherited from him must be revoked. As such, Milton's God appears at once as a father whose Will has been shunned and an angry creditor bent on exacting punishment for Eve's default. The arrival of Michael and his band of angels signals just this multivalent portrayal to the extent that God sends them "to seize/Possession of the garden" in what reads remarkably like legal seizure (11.221-222).

By the time Michael and his band depart, however, he has done much more than "remove" the couple or "send [them] from the garden forth," suggesting instead the possibility that they might "possess" an alternative to the physical space of Eden: "A paradise within thee, happier far" (12.586-587). Joshua R. Held's recent essay, "Eve's 'Paradise Within' in *Paradise Lost*," furthermore, suggests that Eve is central not only to

the transgression that precipitates the loss of the physical Paradise but also the ownership of this alternative, mental space. Specifically, Held, drawing on the contemporary traditions of Christian Neostoicism, argues that Eve's final fourteen lines in the poem present her faith in redemption through the "Promised Seed" as the basis for a cleanness of conscience that Calvin and his intellectual heirs in Milton's time described as a "paradise within" (Held 189-190, *PL* 12.623). For my purposes here, however, what is important is not so much this ownership's relationship to the Neostoic tradition but its function as a discursive site at which the material and the intellectual blend and dialogue.

That is to say, Michael's prophecy that "thou [wilt] not be loath/To leave this Paradise, but shalt possess/A paradise within thee" does not simply describe a retreat into the Imaginary in the face of material dispossession but instead re-inscribes and rewrites possession on the material world (*PL* 12.585-587). Put more concretely, Eve's subsequent expression of her willingness to leave the Garden and her affirmation that "In [her] is no delay" are followed almost immediately by the narrator's epic simile describing the advance of the cherubic repossessors (12.615):

To their fixed station all in bright array
The cherubim descended, on the ground
Gliding meteorous as evening-mist
Ris'n from a river o'er the marsh glides
And gathers ground fast at the laborer's heel
Homeward returning. (12.627-632).

Eve's disclosure of her new sense of place, thus, renders the land outside the Garden no longer what Adam, emphasizing its alien quality, called "Inhospitable...and desolate,/Nor

knowing us nor known,” but instead a familiar place, a home, to which the wearied laborers can return and rest (11.306-307). In this sense, their notion of the Garden, of home, is transplanted along with the couple, remaking the lesser earth in its image.

To the extent that this is true, therefore, the system of Law which Eve has transgressed is finally dissolved. The attempt to fix the language of punishment to a signified referent is ultimately frustrated by the intercession of God’s grace, allowing the humans the potential to own Paradise in their minds despite their physical displacement. Accordingly, the possibility that God’s infinite grace might stray into excess, into the demonic proliferation of meaning, recurs even at the moment when grace promises to undo Satan’s queer irruptions into the fantasies of the Law. After all, as Held also observes, Eve is not the first of Milton’s characters to attempt a kind of territorial re-inscription (194). Some eleven books previous, Satan famously apostrophizes:

...Hail horrors, hail

Infernal world! And thou, profoundest Hell,

Receive thy new possessor, one who brings

A mind not to be changed by place or time!

The mind is its own place and in itself

Can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven. (*PL* 1.249-255).

This is not say that the attempt does not prove problematic for Satan, as his confession of guilt and of internal suffering in Book IV makes clear, but instead that the new and blessed ownership that Eve and Adam are able to claim for themselves is patterned precisely on Satan’s ownership of Hell. Like Satan, Eve has knowingly transgressed God’s Law, and, like him, she has found the means to resist the Law’s attempt to

dispossess her. In this sense, the sinthomatic function of Satan's language allows the humans at once to have committed Original Sin and have escaped its punishment and also to be integrated into a new system of Law and of owning structured by the language of God's "promise" in the form of the "Seed."

Most importantly, then, what emerges from the Fall is a system of Law unlike that which was transgressed. Where, in Eden, the obedience to the Law could come at the expense of subjective desire and human sentiment, Michael now expresses the Law primarily in terms of affect. In addition to believing in redemption through Christ, the archangel enjoins Adam to "Add virtue, patience, temperance; add love,/By name to come called charity, the soul/Of all the rest" (12.583-585). That is to say, by stressing charity with the same enthusiasm as the apostle Paul, Michael advises Adam to privilege the needs of (the) other human(s) over his own (1 Corinth. 13:1-13). No more will Adam make the case that Eve's devotion is already owed, as he did following her creation and reluctance to be joined with him:

...To give thee being I *lent*
Out of my side to thee, nearest my heart,
Substantial life to have thee by my side
Henceforth an individual solace dear.
Part of my soul I seek thee and thee claim
My other half. (*PL* 4.483-488, emphasis added).

Eve too stresses this change through what Held describes as "the Renaissance love motif of the lover as a world: that populates erotic sonnets, claiming that Adam is now "all things under heaven, all places" (Held 196, *PL* 12.618). Eve need not resist the Law that

physically dispossesses them, then, because she now dwells in a system in which Adam has been commanded to take her desires into account and in which her desire for him, as a subject rather than an erotic object, can have meaning.

The postlapsarian relationship to place, therefore, is one in which home or possession is not constituted by material factors but by the importation of affective human relationships. In other words, it is precisely the transformation of the marital relationship from a structure of legal power to an affective connection that both brings the peace of mind that constitutes a “paradise within” and also renders the land beyond the Garden familiar—in every sense of the term—to its new possessors. Satan’s influence on the Edenic marriage, therefore, ultimately queers the values on which the system of Law is predicated. By acknowledging her desire and incorporating it into the structure of the Law, God has developed a new system that privileges the lived experience of the subject over reproductive fantasies that demand blind obedience. The verb “privileges” here is very deliberately chosen because I do not mean to suggest that the promise of the Seed is not, as Held argues, of vital importance to this Law. Instead, I mean that Eve is offered a new level of significance, an additional layer of meaning, within the order that governs human affairs, and, as such, Satan’s presence in and as the subversive quality of language gives new weight to her experience in the present moment. In this sense, the Satanic excess of language, the presence of additional meaning that is always already present within the order that structures both text and Law, is always a present source of radical potential. The Law, Satan reminds us, is always at its heart an imperfect and arbitrary medium. It is a kind of speech that can always be retracted, un-spoken, and, most importantly, re-written.

Conclusion

As I have argued in each of the preceding chapters, the most radical potentiality of the prophetic un-speaking in Lanyer's and Milton's religious verse is its imagining of alternative legal systems. The transformations that structure and even necessitate these alternatives, further, are those which attend to the needs and desires of those otherwise neglected, excluded, and actively oppressed by the language of the Law, particularly in the circumstances of emerging capital and its concomitant consolidation of English common law. For scholars like myself, separated from these conditions by the four centuries of modern capitalism, (neo)colonialism, globalization, and revolution that followed, the interplay between these two structures—the oppressive regime of the Law and the liberatory schemes of the prophetic imagination—throws light on both the nature of the oppressions experienced by contemporary subjects, especially women, and the means by which contemporaries found spaces to resist.

Where for Lanyer this constituted a direct appeal to power, conveyed through the presentation copy of her text to James I's son Henry, Milton offers the more insidious implication that transgression, even rebellion, can be used to the redemption of the individual subject and even the State³⁸. Both of these social demands develop a particularly and pertinently queer temporality in addition to their queer resistance to language. Ironically unlike biblical prophecy, which locates its revelations and predictions in an unspecified future, the modes of social change these texts advocate insist on their own immediacy. I mean that Lanyer's emphasis on the dissonance between

³⁸ I should reiterate that I do not necessarily mean that Milton intended the subversive qualities of his text, though it would be tempting to map this structure onto his republican politics, but instead that it reflects the struggle of contemporary cultural forces.

the Law of the Jacobean State and the true, charitable Law of God renders James's injustice against the Clifford women an immediate theological crisis that demands resolution in the present while Milton's portrayal of a revolutionary Eve places in the hands of the subject the potential to force an immediate renegotiation of the Law rather than hoping, as Belial does, that "this horror will grow mild" if long-endured (*PL* 2.220). Despite Edelman's contention that "nothing, and certainly not what we call the 'good,' can ever have any assurance" through the rupture of queerness, therefore, the prophecy at work here envisions an immediate irruption into the Law, a queer destruction of the system of oppression, that brings with it not only *jouissance* but freedom (*No Future* 22).

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Curriculum Vitae

EDUCATION

Wake Forest University, Winston-Salem, NC 2017-2019
Master of Arts in English. GPA 4.0/4.0

Wofford College, Spartanburg, SC 2014-2017
Bachelor of Arts. Major in English. Minor in Government. GPA: 4.0/4.0

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Wake Forest University, Writing Center 2018-Present
Writing Tutor

- Digitally scheduled, canceled, and managed tutoring sessions
- Trained undergraduate students to become future writing tutors
- Assisted students in developing grammatical and argumentative sophistication

Wofford College, Writing Center 2015-2017
Writing Tutor

- Helped students articulate original arguments
- Designed writing workshops and resource materials for students
- Familiarized students with the intricacies of grammatical constructions

Wofford College, Humanities Department 2016-2016
Humanities Preceptor

- Designed original assignments
- Engaged students with course material and writing techniques
- Assessed communicative ability and familiarity with course material

Arcadia Elementary School, Spartanburg, SC 2014-2015
Volunteer Assistant ESOL Instructor

- Lead Group Activities for Adult Students
- Managed Classroom Technologies
- Conducted Basic Translations

CONFERENCE PAPERS

“The Spirit of Sodomy: Symbolic Ruptures and Spectral Justice in *The Merchant of Venice*,” Southeastern Renaissance Conference, Charlotte, NC, October 2018.

“Speaking in (Mother) Tongues: Global Englishness in the Works of Patience Agbabi and Jean ‘Binta’ Breeze,” AEGS Explore Develop Grow Engage (EDGE) Conference, Raleigh, NC, March 2018.

“‘Once You, Once Me’: The Poetics of Unity in Winterson’s *Written on the Body*,” Wofford College Gender Conference, Spartanburg, SC, March 2017.

PUBLICATIONS

“A League of Extraordinary Women: An Introduction.” *A Guide to Printed Books by Women in Z. Smith Reynolds Library, Wake Forest University*, edited by Claudia Kairoff and Megan Mulder, Library Partners Press, 2019, pp. 9-21.

LANGUAGES

Native: English

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PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

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Wofford Merit Scholar

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