

11 When Eve Reads Milton: Undoing the Canonical Economy*

CHRISTINE FROULA

How do the modes of authority constructed in and through literary texts inform the authority of the literary canon? More specifically, what role does gender play in our conceptions of authority and of literary value? Taking *Paradise Lost* as a canonical text *par excellence*, 'When Eve Reads Milton' brings the poem into dialogue with feminist theory to explore the interrelations of gender and authority both in Milton's depictions of Adam and Eve and in his representations of his own poetic authority. Arguing that Milton's poem reveals the repression of maternal authority as the genesis both of *Genesis* and of *Paradise Lost*, Froula points to the need to augment a pedagogy that approaches 'Great Books' as sacred texts, and the canon as (in Harry Levin's words) 'our most valued patrimony, our collective memory', with one that, while recognizing literary value, also calls into question the unexamined hierarchies invoked by the Arnoldian ideal, 'the acquainting ourselves with the best that has been thought and said in the world'. Through strategies of rereading that expose the deeper structures of authority and through reading canonical texts alongside texts of a different stamp, teachers of canonical literature might, Froula suggests, pursue a kind of cultural psychoanalysis, transforming 'bogey's' that hide invisible power into investments both visible and alterable.

The appearance of 'When Eve Reads Milton' in 1983 elicited a critical response from Edward Pechter and a reply by the author (1984). Since then, it has been widely cited in debates about the literary canon and, more generally, in work on women and social authority.

Let a woman learn in silence with all submissiveness. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men; she is to keep silent.

1 Tim. 2:11-12

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In *Jacob's Room*, with her nose pressed against a Cambridge window, Virginia Woolf's narrator describes the don within holding forth in speech that is at once coin and communion wafer to an audience of admiring undergraduates:

Sopwith went on talking. . . . The soul itself slipped through the lips in thin silver disks which dissolve in young men's minds like silver . . . manliness. He loved it. Indeed to Sopwith a man could say anything, until perhaps he'd grown old, or gone under, gone deep, when the silver disks would tinkle hollow, and the inscription read a little too simple, and the old stamp look too pure, and the impress always the same - a Greek boy's head. But he would respect still. A woman, divining the priest, would, involuntarily, despise.¹

In the sixty years since Woolf wrote this passage, women in significant numbers have broken the barriers which excluded Woolf herself from 'Oxbridge', and now inhabit some of the rooms formerly occupied by Jacob and his dons. I begin with it, however, not to measure women's progress from cultural exclusion but because in contrasting the places and stances of 'man' and 'woman' in the cultural economy, Woolf opens a more complicated question concerning the effects of women's inclusion: How are the dynamics of canonists selecting, readers interpreting, teachers teaching, and students learning affected by what is beginning to be a critical mass of women in the academy? Woolf's image is useful to a feminist critique of the literary canon because, rather than focusing on a canonical work, it abstracts what we might call the canonical mode of authority embodied in the don's speech and presents different responses of 'man' and 'woman' to this authority. The don, as 'priest', mediates between his sacred books and his flock. A man, partaking of the 'silver disks', respects; a woman, for whom the male-impressed currency is both inaccessible and foreign, involuntarily despises priestly authority. That woman can 'divine' for herself challenges such authority, implying independence of the don's exclusive mediation. Further, even if we suppose her to have acceded to the don's role as cultural mediator, both her historical exclusion and her independent view suggest that she must play that part in a different way, reforming the traditional model of cultural authority in fidelity to her own experience.

But how might Woolf's 'woman' transform the priestly model that has been instrumental in her own cultural oppression? To ask this question is to conceive cultural authority not merely as a commodity which women seek to possess equally with men but as power which has a political dimension realized in particular stances toward literary texts and literary history, toward language and stories, students and curricula. As the traditional literary canon exists in problematic relation to women, so do

the modes of literary authority enshrined in those texts, upon which the social authority that institutes the canon and draws our models of literary history patterns itself. Sixty years after Woolf wrote, it is not only – nor even all – women who are alienated from the modes of authority invoked by cultural canons and priests; for present purposes, therefore, I will borrow Woolf's representation of 'man' as one who 'respect[s] still' the don's mystified cultural authority and 'woman' as one who, 'divining the priest', raises questions about the sources, motives, and interests of this authority. This definition identifies 'woman' not by sex but by a complex relation to the cultural authority which has traditionally silenced and excluded her. She resists the attitude of blind submission which that authority threatens to imprint upon her; further, her resistance takes form not as envy of the 'priest' and desire to possess his authority herself but as a debunking of the 'priestly' deployment of cultural authority and a refusal to adopt that stance herself. Women, under this local rule, can be 'men', as men can be 'women'.²

Following the ground-breaking studies of Simone de Beauvoir, Mary Ellmann, and Kate Millett, many feminists have explored the politics of reading the patriarchal canon, which, as Elaine Showalter points out, holds up to the female no less than to the male reader the ideal of thinking 'like a man'.³ Judith Fetterley, for example, has shown how the study of the traditional American literary canon presses the female reader to identify with the male point of view – the position of power – against herself.⁴ In the last fifteen years, women professors of literature have begun to redress the male bias, both by including women authors in the curriculum – in established courses which their very presence exposes as having been previously, and invisibly, preoccupied with 'men's studies', as well as in courses focused on women writers – and by employing the critical and pedagogical strategies of the 'resisting reader' exemplified by de Beauvoir, Millett, Fetterley, and many others.

The effect of this work has been not simply to balance male bias with female (or marginal) bias – the 'opening' of the canon – but to disrupt the canonical economy as such, the dynamics of cultural authority.⁵ Feminists have moved from advocating representation of voices formerly silenced or 'marginalized' by the established curriculum to recognizing that such representation implies and effects a profound transformation of the very terms *authority* and *value* – cultural and aesthetic or literary – that underwrite the traditional idea of the canon.⁶ As Fetterley puts it: 'To expose and question that complex of ideas and mythologies about women and men which exist in our society and are confirmed in our literature is to make the system of power embodied in the literature open not only to discussion but . . . to change.'⁷ Since the opening of the literary canon has been in some degree accomplished, we can now begin to analyze the impact of formerly silenced voices on the political

economy of the literary canon, on the 'system of power' that controls which texts are taught and how they are taught. How are 'women' writers and teachers, formerly excluded from positions of cultural authority, affecting the economy of literature? I will take up two aspects of this large question: first, the radical challenge that feminist perspectives pose to the concept of a canon as such – not merely to the history and politics of canon-formation but to the *idea* (and ideal) of 'the canon' – and, second, the critique of traditional modes of literary authority that emerges from reading 'canonical' and 'marginal' texts side by side.

The Politics of Orthodoxy: Canonists vs Gnostics

I begin by extrapolating from Elaine Pagels' book, *The Gnostic Gospels*, to the power dynamics of literary authority, first, as claimed by texts and, second, as 'respected' or 'despised' by readers, teachers, and students. Pagels' study of the second-century gnostic writings discovered at Nag Hammadi in 1945 illuminates the politics implied in the canonist's stance by showing how the rediscovery of the gnostic texts – successfully suppressed by the church fathers in the struggle to establish a unified Church – dispels the widespread myth that all Christians shared the same doctrine in the apostles' time. She shows that early Christianity appears to have been 'far more diverse than nearly anyone expected before the Nag Hammadi discoveries' and that the establishment of the 'one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church' required the suppression not merely of dissenting voices but of an antithetical conception of spiritual authority embodied in certain gnostic writings.⁸

There are, of course, many important differences between the deployment of cultural authority in the social context of second-century Christianity and that of twentieth-century academia. The editors of the *Norton Anthology*, for example, do not actively seek to suppress those voices which they exclude, nor are their principles for inclusion so narrowly defined as were the church fathers'. But the literary academy and its institutions developed from those of the Church and continue to wield a derivative, secular version of its social and cultural authority. Since Matthew Arnold, the institution of literature has been described in terms which liken its authority to that of religion, not only by outsiders – Woolf's woman 'divining the priest' – but by insiders who continue to employ the stances and language of religious authority; see, for instance, J. Hillis Miller's credo in a recent issue of the *ADE Bulletin*: 'I believe in the established canon of English and American literature and in the validity of the concept of privileged texts. I think it is more important to

read Spenser, Shakespeare, or Milton than to read Borges in translation, or even, to say the truth, to read Virginia Woolf.⁹ Such rhetoric suggests that the religious resonances in literary texts are not entirely figurative, a point brought out strikingly by revisionary religious figures in feminist texts. In her recent essay "The Blank Page" and the Issues of Female Creativity, Susan Gubar cites as some of the 'many parables in an ongoing revisionary female theology' Florence Nightingale's tentative prophecy that 'the next Christ will perhaps be a female Christ', H.D.'s blessed Lady carrying a 'Bible of blank pages', and Gertrude Stein's celebration of *The Mother of Us All*.¹⁰ The revisionary female theology promoted in literary writing by women implicitly counters the patriarchal theology which is *already* inscribed in literature. The prophesied female Christ, blank Bible, and female Creator revise images familiar in the literary tradition, and, in contrast to earlier appropriations of religious imagery by Metaphysical, Pre-Raphaelite, and other poets, make visible the patriarchal preoccupations of literary 'theology'. These voices, like the gnostic voices recovered at Nag Hammadi, are only now being heard in chorus; and Pagels' study of 'the gnostic feminism' (as the *New York Review of Books* labeled it) helps to illuminate some aspects of a cultural authority predicated on the suppression or domination of other voices.

Reconsidering patristic writings in light of the contemporary gnostic writings, Pagels argues that claims for exclusive authority made by the self-styled orthodoxy of the early Christian Church depended upon a mystification of history: the church fathers, in order to establish privileged texts, claimed that Jesus himself had invested the spiritual authority of the Church in certain individuals, who in turn passed this power on to their chosen successors. Their claim to a privileged spiritual authority rested upon the interpretation of the Resurrection as a historical event witnessed by the eleven remaining disciples. By this interpretation, all 'true' spiritual authority derives from the apostles' witnessing of the literally resurrected Christ – an unrepeatable experience. Remarketing the political genius of this doctrine, Pagels outlines its consequences, showing how the restriction of authority to this small band and their chosen successors divided the community into those who had power and those who didn't, privileged authorities and those whom such claims to privilege would dispossess of authority. The interpretation of the Resurrection as a historical event placed its advocates in a position of unchallengeable political dominance: 'It legitimized a hierarchy of persons through whose authority all others must approach God' (GG, p. 27).

By contrast, the gnostics, interpreting the Resurrection in symbolic terms, resisted the mediating spiritual authority that the 'orthodox' sought to institute in the Church. Pagels illustrates this conflict between the orthodox and gnostic positions by analyzing a passage from the

gnostic 'Gospel of Mary' in which Mary Magdalene comforts the disciples as they mourn after Jesus' death. Mary tells them: "'Do not weep, and do not grieve, and do not doubt; for his grace will be with you completely, and will protect you.'" Peter then invites Mary, Pagels writes, "'to tell us the words of the Savior which you remember.'" But to Peter's surprise, Mary does not tell anecdotes from the past; instead, she explains that she has just seen the Lord in a vision received through the mind, and she goes on to tell what he revealed to her.' Andrew and Peter ridicule Mary's claim that the Lord appeared in her vision, but Levi defends her: "'Peter . . . if the Savior made her worthy, who are you to reject her?'" Peter, apparently representing the orthodox position, looks to past events, suspicious of those who "see the Lord" in visions: Mary, representing the gnostic, claims to experience his continuing presence' (GG, p. 13).¹¹

The gnostic position, then, held that those who had received *gnosis*, that is, self-knowledge as knowledge of divinity,

had gone beyond the church's teaching and had transcended the authority of its hierarchy. . . . They argued that only one's own experience offers the ultimate criterion of truth, taking precedence over all secondhand testimony and all tradition – even gnostic tradition! They celebrated every form of creative invention as evidence that a person has become spiritually alive. On this theory, the structure of authority can never be fixed into an institutional framework: it must remain spontaneous, charismatic, and open.

(GG, p. 25)

Pagels' study of 'the politics of monotheism' illuminates the fact that the Church's aspirations to 'catholicism', or universality, rendered the gnostic and orthodox interpretations of the Resurrection not merely different, nor even antithetical, but mutually exclusive. The coincidence of spiritual and political authority in the Church's self-styled orthodoxy (or 'right opinion') made 'heretics' of gnostics, defining as politically dangerous those who did not subscribe to the church fathers' mystified historical authority. By contrast, prior to any consideration of the 'truth' of their writings, the gnostics neither claimed for themselves nor honored the historically based, absolute authority that the church fathers claimed. It was not, then, a question merely of competing canons, of differing doctrines or guidelines propounded by groups vying for cultural dominance, but of two mutually contradictory stances toward spiritual authority: one defined in such a way as to subsume political power and the other defined in such a way as to preclude the mediation of spiritual authority and, thus, the concept of a transcendently grounded political authority.

Pagels concludes that the gnostic gospels reopen for our time the central issue of the early Christian controversies – 'What is the source of religious authority? . . . What is the relation between the authority of one's own experience and that claimed for the Scriptures, the ritual, and the clergy?' (GG, p. 151) – for that issue was formerly settled by fiat, by the violence of political suppression as the cult of orthodoxy, aspiring to *culture*, sought and gained dominance over other cults. In literary culture, the concept of the canon preserves in secularized form some important aspects of the politics of cultural domination which Pagels elucidates in the early Christian Church. As the rediscovery of the repressed gnostic texts casts a new light on the conquests of orthodoxy and the idealization of 'one faith' at the cost of many voices, so the entry of marginal texts into the modern literary curriculum not only 'opens up' the canon but opens to question the idea of a canon. To explore more fully the workings of canonical authority in a literary context, I will turn now to a passage in *Paradise Lost* – the canonical text par excellence of English literature – which represents the conversion of Eve to orthodoxy. My interest in this passage is not in the dimensions of Milton's views on women as such but in the lines of force already inscribed in the Genesis story that Milton's retelling makes visible.¹²

The Invention of Eve and Adam

Eve's story of her first waking in book 4 of *Paradise Lost* is an archetypal scene of canonical instruction. Nowhere are the designs of orthodoxy more vividly displayed than in this passage in which Eve herself utters the words which consign her authority to Adam, and through him to Milton's God, and thence to Milton's poem, and through the poem to the ancient patriarchal tradition.¹³ Eve opens her narrative with an apostrophe to Adam –

O thou for whom
And from whom I was formed flesh of thy flesh,
And without whom am to no end, my guide
And head

(4:440–3)

– which shows that she has already absorbed the wisdom of her teachers, for she echoes Adam's naming of her (see 8:494–7) adapted from Genesis 2:23. She repeats this gesture of self-subordination at the end of her own reminiscences. In the space between, however, Eve remembers an origin innocent of patriarchal indoctrination, one whose resonances the

covering trope of narcissism does not entirely suffice to control. Recalling her first waking 'Under a shade on flowers', Eve remembers that she heard a 'murmuring sound / Of waters issued from a cave', which led her to a 'green bank' where she lay down to 'look into the clear / Smooth lake, that seemed another sky' (4:451–9). But it is not, of course, only 'another sky' that Eve sees reflected in the pool; she also sees what she does not yet understand to be her own image:

A shape within the watery gleam appeared
Bending to look on me, I started back,
It started back, but pleased I soon returned,
Pleased it returned as soon with answering looks
Of sympathy and love; there I had fixed
Mine eyes till now, and pined with vain desire,
Had not a voice thus warned me, What thou seest,
What there thou seest fair creature is thyself,
With thee it came and goes; but follow me,
And I will bring thee where no shadow stays
Thy coming, and thy soft embraces, he
Whose image thou art, him thou shalt enjoy
Inseparably thine, to him shalt bear
Multitudes like thyself, and thence be called
Mother of human race

(4:461–75)

This scenario imputes to the newborn Eve as her first desire a 'vain' narcissism, against which her gently accomplished conversion to the wiser purposes of Adam and God seems a fortunate rise. But the master plot in which the untutored Eve plays the role of doomed narcissist only partially obscures the actual terms of her conversion, which require that she abandon not merely her image in the pool but her very self – a self subtly discounted by the explaining 'voice', which *equates* it with the insubstantial image in the pool: 'What there thou seest . . . is thyself.' The reflection is not of Eve: according to the voice, it is Eve. As the voice interprets her for herself, Eve is not a self, a subject, at all; she is rather a substanceless image, a mere 'shadow' without object until the voice unites her to Adam – 'he / Whose image thou art' – much as Wendy stitches Peter Pan to his shadow.

Having reproduced the voice's call, Eve continues in her own voice with a rhetorical question that gestures toward repressed alternatives:

what could I do
But follow straight, invisibly thus led?
Till I espied thee, fair indeed and tall,

Under a platan, yet methought less fair,
 Less winning soft, less amiably mild,
 Than that smooth watery image; back I turned,
 Thou following cri'd'st aloud, Return fair Eve,
 Whom fliest thou? whom thou fliest, of him thou art,
 His flesh, his bone; 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: with that thy gentle hand
 Seized mine, I yielded, and from that time see
 How beauty is excelled by manly grace
 And wisdom, which alone is truly fair.

(4:475-91)

As the benefits or 'graces' of conversion promised by the voice – sexual pleasure and 'Multitudes like thyself' – begin to materialize in Adam, the still autonomous Eve repeals the bargain, for the advertised original does not equal in interest the self she has been called upon to renounce. As she turns away to follow her own desire, Adam himself takes over from the voice the burden of educating Eve to her secondariness, recounting the 'history' of her derivation from his rib. This tale informs Eve of an ontological debt she has unwittingly incurred to the generous lender of her 'Substantial life' – not that she might exist to, for, and from herself but rather that he might 'have thee by my side / . . . an individual [inseparable] solace dear'. Eve is 'Part' of Adam's whole, his 'other half', to which he lays 'claim' by an oxymoronic gentle seizure; her debt to him, as he represents it, is such that she can repay it only by ceding to him her very self.

Eve's relation to Adam as mirror and shadow is the paradigmatic relation which canonical authority institutes between itself and its believers in converting them from the authority of their own experience to a 'higher' authority. It also illustrates the way in which patriarchal culture at large imprints itself upon the minds of women and men. Eve's indoctrination into her own 'identity' is complete at the point at which her imagination is so successfully colonized by patriarchal authority that she literally becomes its voice. As her narrative shows, she has internalized the voices and values of her mentors: her speech reproduces the words of the 'voice' and of Adam and concludes with an assurance that she has indeed been successfully taught to 'see' for herself the superiority of Adam's virtues to her own, limited as far as she knows to the 'beauty' briefly glimpsed in the pool. In this way she becomes a 'Part' not only of Adam but of the cultural economy which inscribes itself in

her speech – or, more accurately, which takes over her speech: Eve does not speak patriarchal discourse; it speaks her.¹⁴ The outer limits of her speech are given by the possibilities of this discourse. So long as she does not go beyond those limits her 'credit' in the patriarchal system is ensured. It is not simply, then, that Eve accepts Milton's cultural currency at 'face value'. Rather, as the nativity story in which she traces her transformation from newborn innocent – *tabula rasa* – to patriarchal woman suggests, she *is* its face value. It is her image that appears on its bills of credit, the image of the idealized and objectified woman whose belief in her role underwrites patriarchal power.

The cultural economy erected upon Eve's credence exists on condition that Eve can 'read' the world in only one way, by making herself the mirror of the patriarchal authority of Adam, Milton's God, Milton himself, and Western culture that the voice tells her she is. Indeed, the poem's master plot is designed precisely to discourage any 'Eve' from reading this authority in any other way. As Diana Hume George points out, it is not primarily narcissism to which the beautiful talking serpent tempts Eve but *knowledge*: to cease respecting the authority fetish of an invisible power and to see the world for herself.¹⁵ That *Paradise Lost*, the story of the Fall, is a violent parable of *gnosis* punished attests to the threat that Eve's desire for experience rather than mediated knowledge poses to an authority which defines and proves itself chiefly in the successful prohibition of all other authorities.

To question the 'face value' of Milton's cultural currency from within the poem, as Milton's Eve does, is to be blasted by the cultural and poetic authority that controls its plot and representation. But a gnostic 'Eve', reading outside the bounds of that authority and not crediting the imagery that Milton would make a universal currency, disrupts that economy by a regard which makes visible what can work only so long as it remains hidden – the power moving Eve's conversion, that is, the power of Milton's God. In Eve's nativity scene, this power is imaged in the disembodied 'voice'; and it is precisely the *invisibility* of this voice and of the 'history' – originating in Adam's dream (see 8:287-484) – by which Adam attributes to Eve her secondary status that strikingly links this imagery to the church fathers' mystified history of the Resurrection, that invisible past invoked to justify their claims to privileged spiritual authority. The invisible voice that guides Eve away from the visible image of herself in the world to him whose image she is allegorizes what is literally the *secret* not only of spiritual and literary authority in Milton's poem but of cultural authority as such. The mystified authority of Christian doctrine underwrites the voice's injunctions, as it does the church fathers' claims to 'right opinion'. In both literatures, invisibility is a *definitive* attribute of authority: the power of the voice and of the church

fathers, like that of the Wizard of Oz, resides in and depends upon invisibility.¹⁶

The dynamics of visibility and invisibility in Eve's and Adam's nativities uncover the hidden operations of power in Milton's text, which elaborately exfoliates the cultural text it draws upon. Their autobiographical narratives reveal a powerful subtext, at once literary and cultural, that works to associate Eve with visibility and Adam with invisibility from their first moments. As Maureen Quilligan observes, the relation of Eve's nativity imagery to Adam's replicates the relation between Eve and Adam themselves; for when Adam woke, 'Straight toward Heaven my wondering eyes I turned, / And gazed a while the ample sky', requesting it and the 'enlightened earth' to 'Tell, if ye saw, how came I thus, how here?' (8:257-8, 274, 277). 'Where Adam looks up at the true sky and then springs up, immediately to intuit his maker,' Quilligan writes, 'Eve bends down to look into "another sky" - a secondary, mediated, reflective sky: a mirror, in more ways than one, of her own being'.¹⁷

Adam's leaping upright to apostrophize a transcendent sky while Eve, recumbent, gazes into a 'sky' that is to Adam's as her knowledge is to his - not the thing itself but a watery reflection - indeed supports the ontological hierarchy so crucial to Milton's purposes in *Paradise Lost*. But these images also intimate - or betray - the deep structure of that hierarchy: a defense against the apparent ascendancy of Eve's power. Eve's first act is to move toward the maternally murmuring pool that returns an image of herself in the visible world. Her 'father' is out of sight and out of mind, but the reflecting face of the maternal waters gives back an image of her visible self. Adam, by contrast, is a motherless child. He sees with joy the 'Hill, dale, and shady woods, and sunny plains, / And liquid lapse of murmuring streams', but he does not identify with earthly bodies - not even his own (8:262-3). Adam 'perus[es]' himself 'limb by limb' (8:267), but like Emerson concludes that his body is 'Not-Him'. The sight of it only inspires him with questions that presuppose not the maternal life source from which bodies come but a father:

Tell, if ye saw, how came I thus, how here?
Not of myself; by some great maker then,
In goodness and in power preeminent;
Tell me, how may I know him, how adore,
From whom I have that thus I move and live
(8:277-81)

Adam projects a specifically male Creator, subordinating body and earth - all that Adam can see - to an invisible father.

While it might seem that in these two scenes Milton is simply setting up intimations of Adam's intrinsic spiritual superiority to Eve, Adam's nativity offers another reading of his orientation toward transcendence. Adam's turn to 'higher' things can also be read as alienation from his body and the visible world, an alienation which his God and the establishment of a hierarchical relation to Eve are designed to heal. Apostrophizing a sky and earth which give back no self-image, Adam finds none until he succeeds in turning Eve into his reflection: 'Whom fliest thou? whom thou fliest, of him thou art.' In this relation, Eve's visible, earth-identified being is subordinated to Adam's intangible spiritual being. Thus Eve can tell Adam that it is she who enjoys 'So far the happier lot, enjoying thee / Preeminent by so much odds, while thou / Like consort to thyself canst nowhere find' (4:446-8) and that he has taught her to 'see / how beauty is excelled by manly grace / And wisdom, which alone is truly fair' (4:489-91). The visible 'beauty' of Eve's image bows to the invisible fairness of 'manly grace / And wisdom' in a contest which appears to originate in Adam's need to make the visible world reflect himself.

Adam's need to possess Eve is usually understood as complemented by her need for his guidance, but Milton's text suggests a more subtle and more compelling source for this need: Adam's sense of inadequacy in face of what he sees as Eve's perfection. The apparent self-sufficiency glimpsed in her nativity account ('back I turned', interestingly misrepresented by Adam in book 8, lines 500-10) is amplified by Adam in talking with Raphael. When he first saw Eve, Adam recalls, 'what seemed fair in all the world, seemed now / Mean, or in her summed up, in her contained' (8:472-3), and he cannot reconcile her apparent perfection with God's assurance of his own superiority. He worries about whether:

Nature failed in me, and left some part
Not proof enough such object to sustain,
Or from my side subducting, took perhaps
More than enough; . . .

[for] when I approach
Her loveliness, so absolute she seems
And in herself complete, so well to know
Her own, that what she wills to do or say,
Seems wisest, virtuousest, discreetest, best;
All higher knowledge in her presence falls
Degraded, Wisdom in discourse with her
Loses discountenanced, and like folly shows;
Authority and Reason on her wait,

As one intended first, not after made
Occasionally; and to consummate all,
Greatness of mind and nobleness their seat
Build in her loveliest, and create an awe
About her, as a guardian angel placed.

(8:534-59)

What is interesting about Adam's representation of his own sense of inadequacy with respect to Eve is that it focuses on the body – specifically, *on the rib* which, he fancies, God took from his body to make Eve. That Adam's anxiety should take this particular form suggests that the 'completeness' he fears in Eve and lacks in himself attaches to the function Adam associates with his rib: the power to create a human being. Adam's dream of Eve's creation from his rib fulfills his wish for an organ that performs the life-creating function of Eve's womb. The initial difference between Adam and Eve, then, is not Adam's inner superiority but simply sexual difference; Adam's fantasy of Eve's subordinate creation dramatizes an archetypal womb envy as constitutive of male identity.¹⁸

Considered in this light, the God that Adam projects in his nativity appears designed to institute a hierarchy to compensate for the disparity he feels between himself and Eve. It is not that Adam is an imperfect image of his God, rather, his God is a *perfected* image of Adam: an all-powerful *male* Creator who soothes Adam's fears of female power by Himself claiming credit for the original creation of the world and, further, by bestowing upon Adam 'Dominion' over the fruits of this creation through authorizing him to name the animals *and Eve*. The naming ritual enables Adam to translate his fantasy of power from the realm of desire to history and the world, instituting male dominance over language, nature, and woman. The perfection Adam attributes to the God who authorizes his 'Dominion' counters the power he perceives in Eve. As Eve seems to him 'absolute . . . / And in herself complete' so must his God possess these qualities in order to compete with her. Milton's curious elaboration of Genesis 2:18 makes a point of God's perfection in contrast to Adam's imperfection without Eve: God baits Adam after he requests a companion, saying in effect, 'I'm alone; don't you think I'm happy?' and Adam replies, 'Thou in thyself art perfect, and in thee / Is no deficiency found; not so is man' (8:415-16). Adam's 'perfect' God enables him to contend with the self-sufficiency he sees and fears in Eve, precisely by authorizing Adam's possession of her. Through the dream of the rib Adam both enacts a parody of birth and gains possession of the womb by claiming credit for woman herself. In this way he himself becomes as 'perfect' as he can, appropriating in indirect and symbolic but

consequential ways the creative power and self-sufficiency he attributes to Eve and to his God.

The shadow of the repressed mother, then, falls as tangibly over Adam's nativity scene as it does upon Eve's. Necessitated by Adam's awe of Eve's life-giving body and his wish to incorporate her power in himself, this repression mutely signals that patriarchal power is not simply one attribute among others of Adam's God but its primary motive and constituent. As the nativity scene represents Him, Adam's God is a personification of patriarchal power, created in the image of and in competition with the maternal power that Adam perceives in Eve. The overt hierarchy of God over Adam and Adam over Eve which is the text's 'argument' is underlain (and undermined) by a more ancient *perceived* hierarchy of Eve over Adam, still apparent in the 'ghostlier demarcations' of Adam's transumptive myth. In the power dynamics of Adam's nativity scene, the self-sufficient Eve and the compensatory God that Adam projects out of his fear are the true rivals, as Christ's jealous rebuke to Adam after the Fall confirms:

Was she thy God, that her thou didst obey
Before his voice, or was she made thy guide,
Superior, or but equal, that to her
Thou didst resign thy manhood, and the place
Wherein God set thee above her

(10:145-9)

The naticities of Adam and Eve in Milton's poem bear out the archetypal association of maleness with invisibility and of femaleness with visibility that some theorists argue is given in male and female relations to childbirth and, through childbirth, to the world and the future. In *Moses and Monotheism*, Freud celebrates civilization as the triumph of invisibility over visibility. Freud links what he labels 'the progress in spirituality' in Western culture to three tropes of invisibility: the triumph of Moses' unrepresentable God over idols, 'which means the compulsion to worship an invisible God'; the evolution of symbolic language, through which abstract thinking assumed priority over 'lower psychical activity which concerned itself with the immediate perceptions of the sense organs'; and 'the turning from the mother to the father', from matriarchy to patriarchy, which, says Freud, 'signifies above all a victory of spirituality over the senses . . . since maternity is proved by the senses whereas paternity is a surmise'.¹⁹ Following Dorothy Dinnerstein, Jonathan Culler shifts the priorities of Freud's reading of human history. The establishment of patriarchal power, he suggests, is not merely an instance, along with the preference for an invisible God, of the triumph of spirituality; rather, 'when we consider that the invisible, omnipotent

God is God the Father, not to say God of the Patriarchs, we may well wonder whether, on the contrary, the promotion of the invisible over the visible . . . is not a consequence or effect of the establishment of paternal authority'.²⁰ Dinnerstein and other feminists go further, interpreting hierarchical dualism not as a 'consequence or effect' but as the *means* of establishing paternal authority, a *compensatory* effort on the part of the male to control a natural world to which he is bound in relatively remote and mediated ways.²¹ Freud himself runs significantly aground on the question of what motivates the hierarchy of the invisible over the visible: 'The world of the senses becomes gradually mastered by spirituality, and . . . man feels proud and uplifted by each such step in progress. One does not know, however, why this should be so' (*MM*, p. 151). In fact, a few pages earlier, he argues that the *invisibility* of Moses' divine patriarch aroused in the minds of believers 'a much more grandiose idea of their God' and that this august invisible god endowed believers themselves with grandeur by association: 'Whoever believed in this God took part in his greatness, so to speak, might feel uplifted himself' (*MM*, p. 143). So Adam's first colloquy with his God raises him above the earth to literalized heights, the mount of Paradise: 'Adam, rise / . . . he took me raised, [and] led me up / A woody mountain; whose high top' makes Earth seem 'scarce pleasant' (8:296–306). Adam's God enables him to transcend earthly being and in so doing to gain a power he hungers for, as his 'sudden appetite / To pluck and eat' the fruits of paradise implies (8:308–9).

Returning now to Eve's nativity narrative, we can see that her story allegorizes Freud's analysis of the 'triumph' of invisibility. The God that Adam sees is invisible to her; she, too, progresses from a 'lowly' absorption in images of the senses to more grandiose 'conceptions'; and she turns away from the maternal waters in which she finds her reflected image to identify with a patriarchy whose power is specifically *not* visible, prevailing even though it is to all *appearances* 'less fair, / Less winning soft, less amiably mild, / Than that smooth watery image' of herself in the world. The fable of Eve's conversion from her own visible being in the world to invisible patriarchal authority traces a conversion from being in and for herself to serving a 'higher' power – from the authority of her own experience to the hidden authority symbolized in the prohibited Tree of Knowledge.

Yet this power is not transcendent; it must be authorized in Eve's belief – a belief enlisted through the invisible voice's claim that it *already* exists and, further, through its equally strategic representation of Eve as a mere 'shadow' or image that has and can have no value except for what patriarchal authority attaches to her. Eve's value is created by the patriarchy whose discourse she becomes. Her narrative proves the 'triumph' of her education or colonization; she has received the

imprimatur of the realm, has *become* its text, image, and token of value. Assuring her own power within the terms it offers her, she also assures its literal power: her discourse makes its invisible power visible *as herself*. Her passive role in the patriarchal cultural economy – 'what could I do, / But follow straight invisibly thus led?' – resembles that of the paper on which monetary value is inscribed.²² The imprinting of patriarchal authority upon Eve, like the printing of paper money, transforms intrinsically worthless material into pure value. Any object chosen to be the medium of trade must, of course, be worth less than its exchange value; otherwise, it is soon de-idealized, reverting from an image of value to an object of value.²³ Similarly, in order for her to serve as the idealized currency of patriarchal culture, Eve's intrinsic value must be denied; her self, her subjectivity, must be *devalued* to resemble the worthless paper on which the inscription designating money, or credit, is stamped. Eve's subjectivity, her being-for-herself, is the 'paper' upon which patriarchal authority imprints its own valuation, thereby 'uplifting' her allegedly worthless being ('shadow', reflection, 'image') to pure value.

Gubar observes that numerous images of women in texts by male authors suggest that 'the female body has been feared for its power to articulate itself'.²⁴ Milton's Eve brings the threat of woman's self-articulation into focus: it is the danger posed by her speaking from her body, from an experience that exists outside patriarchal authority, as did the untutored, self-reflective consciousness Milton represents as narcissistic. Such speech threatens the very basis of the cultural currency. As woman begins to speak a discourse no longer defined and limited by the patriarchal inscription, Eve's voice recovers its intrinsic value. Just as paper would no longer be available to serve as a medium of exchange were its use-value to exceed its exchange-value, so it no longer profits Eve to hand over the 'blank pages' of her subjectivity to the patriarchal imprint. At this point, the patriarchal currency fails: to overturn a cliché, it is no longer worth the paper it's printed on.

What the failure of its currency means for the patriarchal economy is not that we no longer read its texts but that we read them in a different way, using interpretive strategies that mark a shift from a sacred to a secular interpretive model, from an economy of invisible transactions to one of *visible* exchange. Concluding *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf refers to *Paradise Lost* as 'Milton's bogey'.²⁵ From a gnostic vantage point, *Paradise Lost* loses its power as a 'bogey' or scarecrow and becomes, instead, a cultural artifact situated in history, its power analyzable as that of an ancient and deeply ingrained pattern in Western thought, reinvented to serve the interests of modern society and realized in language of unsurpassed subtlety and *explicable* sublimity. Read in such a way that the invisible becomes visible; the transcendent, historical; the sacred icon, a cultural image; the 'bogey', old clothes upon a stick, Milton's

poem becomes as powerful an instrument for the undoing of the cultural economy inscribed in it as it was for its institution – more powerful, indeed, than less 'pure' forms of patriarchal currency.

The critique of patriarchal/canonical authority assumes that literary authority is a mode of social authority and that literary value is inseparable from ideology. The 'Eves' no longer crediting their image in Milton's poem value his literary achievement no less than do such proponents of canon-making ideologies as Harold Bloom; but the poem no longer shuts out the view. Precisely because of the ways in which our own history is implicated in the poem, we continue to hear the other voices which Milton's literary and cultural history makes dominant and which, presenting different models of literary/social authority, disrupt the canonical economy of Milton's text as the gnostic voices disrupted the economy of Christian orthodoxy.

We may wonder how far the Miltonic sublime derives from linguistic virtuosity and how far from thematic resonances that literary history proves all but invisible to mortal sight. Milton's nativity scenes, I have argued, reveal that the repression of the mother is the genesis of Genesis. Moreover, Milton at once mirrors and exposes the repression that shapes his epic story in the construction of his Muse, which is to say, of his own poetic authority. Opening *Paradise Lost*, Milton invokes what seems at first a perfectly conventional 'Heavenly Muse' – identified by Merritt Y. Hughes with the Urania of book 7 and the Celestial Patroness of book 9 – to tell his epic story (1:6). At line 7, this protean figure metamorphoses into Moses' Muse, the Muse of Genesis, through whose inspiration Moses 'first taught the chosen Seed, / In the beginning how the Heavens and Earth / Rose out of Chaos' (1:8–10). At line 17, the Muse undergoes another, more startling, translation, from *witness* of Creation to *Creator*:

And chiefly thou, O Spirit, that dost prefer
Before all Temples th'upright heart and pure.
Instruct me, for Thou know'st: thou from the first
Wast present, and with mighty wings outspread
Dovelike sat'st brooding on the vast abyss
And mad'st it pregnant

(1:17–22)

It is finally this imagined author of Creation that Milton asks to tell, through him, the story of the Creation.

Milton's startling invocation of the creator as Muse marks the difference between Homer's polytheistic culture and the monotheistic authority of Judeo-Christian tradition, even as it reveals what is at stake

in Milton's revisionary move: the identification of his poetic authority with nothing less than divine revelation as his culture conceives it – that is, with the sublimated social authority of his own culture. Milton moves beyond his merely conventional epic Muse to invoke his God directly, thereby representing his poetic authority as mediating between divine authority and the 'nation' for whom he meant his poem to be 'example'. Much as the doctrine of the Resurrection as historical event supports the church fathers' claims to authority, Milton's Muse underwrites his claims to a poetic authority indistinguishable from revelation, a power grounded in priority of witness to human history – in *having been there*, where his hearers were not. By constructing his Muse as his God, Milton creates a mutually confirming relation between his poetic authority and divine authority as Judeo-Christian culture represents it: as his God confirms his poem, his poem confirms his God, first, highest, and indeed only witness to the Creation it describes.

Milton's creator-Muse, then, is at once a model for and a projection of his own ambitious poetic authority. As Milton's Muse, this 'Spirit' dramatizes its function as Logos, the Word that calls all things into being: its authority for the creation of song is inseparable from its authority for the Creation itself. As such, it is a figure for the cultural authority to which Milton aspires as creator and poet, the absolute authority for history that only one who is both creator and namer can claim. Like Moses' invisible God, like the invisible voice that calls Eve away, like the God who leads Adam to the mount of Paradise, Milton's creator-Muse 'uplifts' him from the human to the sublime, from blindness to vision, from the limitations of the visible to invisible power. It meets Milton's prayer:

what in me is dark
Illumine; what is low, raise and support;
That, to the height of this great argument
I may assert Eternal Providence,
And justify the ways of God to men.

(1:22–6)

As Milton transforms his Muse into his god, an attendant change occurs: the apparently conventional, presumably female 'Heavenly Muse' is transsexualized even as it is elevated. That this is no accident of iconographic tradition is clear from Milton's embellishment of Genesis 1:2: 'The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters.' Milton's apostrophe, '[thou who] with mighty wings outspread / Dovelike sat'st brooding on the vast abyss / And mad'st it pregnant', transforms his Muse not just into a creator-god but into that powerful,

self-sufficient *male* Creator so crucial to Adam in his relations with Eve. Milton's image heightens the procreative 'hovering' or 'brooding' of the Hebrew text but in such a way as to annihilate its female aspect: the maternal – and *material* – life-giving waters of Genesis 1:2 become, in Milton, darkness and silence, an 'abyss', even as the male impregnator, 'Spirit' and divine voice, becomes the author of both the Creation and the creation story which Milton tells.²⁶

Milton's voiding of maternal creativity in his epic invocation once more brings all the elements of Freud's 'progress in spirituality' into play. The male Logos called upon to articulate the cosmos against an abyss of female silence overcomes the anxieties generated by the tensions between visible maternity and invisible paternity by appropriating female power to itself in a parody of parthenogenesis. Milton's image of creation is archetypally patriarchal, figuring an absolutely original and self-sufficient paternal act, prior to and unthreatened by all others, from which issues the visible world. Depicting the genesis of the world as the genesis of patriarchal authority, Milton recapitulates that genesis and that authority in his own. His emphatic suppression of the female in his transformation of Genesis is integral to his authority in patriarchal culture, preenacting the silencing of Eve and the Fall which follows upon her violation of the orthodox prohibition of knowledge.

Yet Milton himself reckons the cost of such authority as the repression of another kind of knowledge, that *human* knowledge the absence of which Woolf remarks when she says that Milton gives her 'no help in judging life; I scarcely feel that Milton lived or knew men and women'.²⁷ In the invocation to book 3, Milton writes of his literal blindness in terms which do not represent the invisible power of the sublime as a simple triumph over the visible, or spiritual power as satisfactory compensation for loss of the visible world:

Thus with the year
Seasons return; but not to me returns
Day, or the sweet approach of even or morn,
Or sight of vernal bloom, or summer's rose,
Or flocks, or herds, or human face divine;
But cloud instead, and ever-during dark
Surrounds me, from the cheerful ways of men
Cut off, and for the book of knowledge fair
Presented with a Universal blank
Of Nature's works, to me expunged and rased,
And wisdom at one entrance quite shut out.
So much the rather thou, Celestial light
Shine inward . . .

that I may see and tell
Of things invisible to mortal sight.

(3:40–55)

These invocations, which play out in small the sexual dynamics of *Paradise Lost*, suggest that the story of the epic enterprise, the victory of invisibility, and the compensations of 'Celestial Light' have not yet been fully told. If the epic tradition has in a very real sense been built upon female silence, then the patriarchal authority Milton establishes in *Paradise Lost* is no mere precondition for his story; it is that story.

Notes

1. VIRGINIA WOOLF, *Jacob's Room* (1922; New York, 1978), pp. 40–1.
2. Since the male–female relationship is the archetypal hierarchy in Western culture, 'woman' has become a fashionable image for analysts of cultural politics, notably in deconstructive theory and practice. The dangers of this appropriation to the interests of actual women have been discussed by Nancy K. Miller in 'The Text's Heroine: A Feminist Critic and Her Fictions', *Diacritics* 12 (Summer 1982): 48–53. She argues for combining a post-humanistic theory which throws centre, periphery and subject into question with a critical practice that does not lose sight of the *literally* marginal and precarious position female authors and teachers now hold in the academy. While it is manifestly not true that the 'canonical' and 'gnostic' stance toward authority that I explore in this essay belong in any simple way to actual men and women, respectively, history – and literary history – render these alignments no more heuristic than descriptive.
3. ELAINE SHOWALTER, 'Women and the Literary Curriculum', *College English* 32 (May 1971): 855.
4. See JUDITH FETTERLEY, *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction* (Bloomington, Ind., 1978).
5. This 'opening' was propounded from Third World, feminist, and Marxist points of view in the collection of essays that appeared in the wake of the 1960s questioning of authority *The Politics of Literature: Dissenting Essays on the Teaching of Literature*, ed. Louis Kampf and Paul Lauter (New York, 1972), and later in *English Literature: Opening Up the Canon*, ed. Leslie A. Fiedler and Houston A. Baker, Jr, *Selected Papers from the English Institute*, 1979, n.s. 4 (Baltimore, 1981).
In order to situate the issues of my argument, it is useful to recall here Ernst Robert Curtius' description of the intellectual economy that he considered to have replaced the concept of the canon in the twentieth century. Citing Valéry Larbaud, he distinguishes between 'la carte politique et la carte intellectuelle du monde'. The anachronistic French model of national canons competing for the colonization of intellectual territories has ceded, he says, to literary cosmopolitanism, 'a politics of mind which has left behind all pretensions to hegemony, and is concerned only with facilitating and accelerating the exchange of intellectual merchandise' (*European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, tr. Willard R. Trask [1948; Princeton, NJ, 1973], pp. 271, 272). In Curtius'

- account, which posits the transformation of cultural imperialism into a world market in which intellectual 'goods' are freely exchanged, not only the concept of a closed canon but the canonizing stance itself becomes obsolescent along with the hegemonic and universal (or 'catholic') pretensions of parochial cultures – Judeo-Christian, national, or European. The evangelical projects of ethnocentric beliefs are presumed dead or defunct, and belief in the supremacy of a single cultural authority gives way to diverse and mutually translatable cultural 'currencies'. These admit of equation and free exchange in a global economy governed not by transcendent and hegemonic conceptions of value but by *translatability* – of sensibility as well as language. Curtius' idealized image of a free-market cultural economy usefully distinguishes the cultural issues of the twentieth century from those of earlier periods, but his wishful depoliticization of this economy can be understood only in the context of nationalist politics in the first half of the century. In fact, the 'intellectual free market' has the defects of its economic analogue, and both are, in any case, virtually male monopolies.
6. See, for example, FLORENCE HOWE, 'Those We Still Don't Read', *College English* 43 (January 1981): 16.
 7. FETTERLEY, *The Resisting Reader*, p. xx.
 8. ELAINE PAGELS, *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York 1979), p. xxii; all further references to this work, abbreviated GG, will be included parenthetically in the text. Critics who object that Pagels gives scant attention to the diversity of voices within Christian orthodoxy err in supposing her discussion to concern unity and diversity as such rather than the politics implicit in orthodox and gnostic stances toward spiritual authority. The gnostic position as she describes it leads logically not to political anarchy but rather to a demystification of the political sphere.
 9. J. HILLIS MILLER, 'The Function of Rhetorical Study at the Present Time', *The State of the Discipline, 1970s–1980s*, *ADE Bulletin* 62 (September–November 1979): 12; cited by Sandra Gilbert, 'What Do Feminist Critics Want? or, A Postcard from the Volcano', *ADE Bulletin* 66 (Winter 1980): 20. Miller acknowledges the 'strongly preservative or conservative' character of his pronouncement (p. 12).
 10. SUSAN GUBAR, '"The Blank Page" and the Issues of Female Creativity', *Writing and Sexual Difference, Critical Inquiry* 8 (Winter 1981): 261, 262.
 11. For the complete text, see 'The Gospel of Mary' in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, ed. James N. Robinson, tr. Members of the Coptic Gnostic Library Project of the Institute for Antiquity and Christianity (New York, 1977), pp. 471–4.
 12. John Milton's sexual politics has become an issue of increasing importance in Milton criticism in the last decade; among many illuminating studies are Marcia Landy, 'Kinship and the Role of Women in *Paradise Lost*', *Milton Studies* 4 (1972): 3–18, and '"A Free and Open Encounter": Milton and the Modern Reader', *Milton Studies* 9 (1976): 3–36; Barbara K. Lewalski, 'Milton on Women – Yet Once More', *Milton Studies* 6 (1974): 3–20; Diane McColley, '"Daughter of God and Man": The Subordination of Milton's Eve' in *Familiar Colloquy: Essays Presented to Arthur Edward Barker*, ed. Patricia Bruckmann (Ottawa, 1978), pp. 196–208; Joan Malory Webber, 'The Politics of Poetry: Feminism and *Paradise Lost*', *Milton Studies* 14 (1980): 3–24; Northrop Frye, 'The Revelation to Eve' in *'Paradise Lost': A Tercentenary Tribute*, ed. Balachandra Rajan (Toronto, 1969), pp. 18–47; and Marilyn R. Farwell, 'Eve, the Separation Scene, and the Renaissance Idea of Androgyny', *Milton Studies* 16 (1982): 3–20.
 13. Milton draws his account of the creation of Adam and Eve mainly from that by the J[ahwist] scribe (Gen. 2:4–3:20, ninth–tenth century BC), rather than from the P[riestly] scribe's account (Gen. 1:26–7, fifth–sixth century BC). In the P scribe's text, female and male are co-originary. But, for a discussion of the exaggeration of patriarchal values in the J scribe's Hebrew text by the translators of the English texts, see CASEY MILLER and KATE SWIFT, *Words and Women: New Language in New Times* (New York, 1978), pp. 15–16, citing Phyllis Trible's 'Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretation', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 41 (March 1973): 35–42.
 14. The limits of Eve's discourse in her nativity story illustrate the interest of the concept of authority as reframed by Michel Foucault: "What are the modes of existence of this discourse?" "Where does it come from; how is it circulated; who controls it?" ("What is an Author?", *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard, tr. Bouchard and Sherry Simon [Ithaca, NY, 1977], p. 138).
 15. See DIANA HUME GEORGE, 'Stumbling on Melons: Sexual Dialectics and Discrimination in English Departments' in *English Literature: Opening Up the Canon*, pp. 120–6.
 16. Foucault theorizes that invisibility is inherent in and necessary to the workings of power: 'Power is tolerable only on condition that it mask a substantial part of itself. Its success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms. . . . For it, secrecy is not in the nature of an abuse; it is indispensable to its operation' (*The History of Sexuality: Volume 1, an Introduction*, tr. Robert Hurley [New York, 1980], p. 86).
 17. MAUREEN QUILLIGAN, *Milton's Spenser: The Politics of Reading* (Ithaca, NY, 1983), pp. 227–8. Quilligan pursues a different line of argument, reevaluating Eve's centrality in the poem read as integrally concerned with instituting 'a new kind of family structure concurrent with the "rises" of protestantism and of capitalism with its free market ideologies' (p. 177).
 18. Milton develops with subtlety and precision the motive of womb envy already strikingly apparent in the J scribe's creation story (Gen. 2:4–3:20). The motive of compensation in Adam's appropriation of the power of naming – language – is illuminated by his naming the woman Eve (*Hawwah*), derived from the Hebrew root *havah* ('to live'). Other details contribute to this interpretation of the rib fantasy, not least Eve's impressive birth announcement in Genesis 4:1: "I have acquired a man with the help of Yahweh." Such a reading suggests that the cultural conditions that conduce to the malaise of penis envy are 'erected' on a prior malaise of womb envy; and, indeed, so patriarchal a historian as Amaury de Riencourt writes that our 'original' creation story 'was taken wholesale' from a more original Sumerian mythology centred not on patriarchal namers but on female fertility gods (*Sex and Power in History* [New York, 1974], p. 37; see also pp. 36–8). On this last point, see Wolfgang Lederer, 'Envy and Loathing–The Patriarchal Revolt', *The Fear of Women* (New York, 1968), pp. 153–68. See also Virginia R. Mollenkott, 'Some Implications of Milton's Androgynous Muse', *Bucknell Review* 24 (Spring 1978): 27–36.
 19. SIGMUND FREUD, *Moses and Monotheism*, tr. Katherine Jones (New York, 1967), pp. 142, 144, 145–6; all further references to this work, abbreviated MM, will be included parenthetically in the text.
 20. JONATHAN CULLER, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (Ithaca, NY, 1982), p. 59; see also pp. 58–60.
 21. The most extensive exploration of this theme, linking the structures of individual psychology in Western society to those of its cultural institution, is

Dorothy Dinnerstein, *The Mermaid and the Minotaur: Sexual Arrangements and Human Malaise* (New York, 1976).

22. Feminist theories have drawn upon Marxist anthropologists' analyses of women as objects of exchange in kinship systems to analyse women as the 'goods' through which patriarchal power passes; see, for example, Gayle Rubin, 'The Traffic in Women: Notes on the "Political Economy" of Sex', *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. Rayna R. Reiter (New York, 1975), pp. 157-210, and Luce Irigaray, 'Des Marchandises entre elles' [When the goods get together], *Ce Sexe qui n'en est pas un* [This sex which isn't one] (Paris, 1977), pp. 189-93, tr. Claudia Reeder in *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*, ed. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (New York, 1981), pp. 107-10. I am conceiving the issue of cultural authority in terms of credit rather than barter or coins in order to analyse the workings of patriarchal authority, but my argument has some parallels to Irigaray's discussion of the disruption of the patriarchal sexual economy effected by women's removing themselves from this market.
23. Ideally, the medium of trade should be intrinsically worthless; Gresham's law that 'bad' money (coins of baser metals) drives out 'good' money (gold or silver coins) points to the advantage of the almost 'pure' credit embodied in paper money. Gold and silver coins are money conceived as portable stores of value rather than as credit.
24. GUBAR, 'The Blank Page' and the Issues of Female Creativity', p. 246.
25. WOOLF, *A Room of One's Own* (1928; New York, 1957), p. 118. Woolf says that women will write 'if we . . . see human beings . . . and the sky, too, and the trees or whatever it may be in themselves; if we look past Milton's bogey, for no human being should shut out the view' (p. 118). Gilbert takes up the image in 'Milton's Bogey: Patriarchal Poetry and Women Readers', Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven, Conn., 1979), pp. 187-212. Gilbert identifies women writers with Eve and Satan, all 'resisting readers', but, I think, does not fully rescue their gnostic readings from the patriarchal framework within which they are damned.
26. For a related reading of Milton's Muse, see Mollenkott, who views it as androgynous and as 'beautifully symboliz[ing] the womb envy that is so deeply repressed in the human male' but does not acknowledge its appropriation of female procreancy (p. 32). See also Farwell, n. 12 above.
27. VIRGINIA WOOLF, *A Writer's Diary*, ed. Leonard Woolf (New York, 1954), p. 5.

12 Fallen Differences, Phallogocentric Discourses: Losing *Paradise Lost* to History*

MARY NYQUIST

What does it mean to situate a text historically? What sort of claims can literary-critical discourse make when the relations between text and context are kept open? Is it possible to 'correct' a reading without validating positivistic assumptions? Or without contributing to the recuperative aims of the academic study of canonical authors? What is at stake in a misogynist (mis)reading, specifically one that has a venerable and complex history? These questions are particularly pressing when it comes to Milton, who in recent years has been constructed as pro-feminist, as patron saint of the companionate marriage, or, at the very least, as consciously in charge of the contradictory meanings of his literary texts. By reflecting on the issues raised by my own critical discourse in this essay, I try to counter this apologetic, author-centred institutional investment. At the same time (as the unabridged version of the essay shows more clearly), I hold open the possibility that such self-consciousness, with its attendant tolerance for conflicting meanings, is compatible with a responsiveness to the text's participation in the economic and social formations of its time.

I

Milton may be what Virginia Woolf said he was, the first of the masculinists, but he is certainly not the last. And in the case of the simile that is this essay's point of departure, Milton's misogyny would seem actually to be exceeded by that of his ostensibly more enlightened twentieth-century commentators. The simile, to be found in lines

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