

## Genesis, Sexual Antagonism, and the Defective Couple of the Twelfth-Century *Jeu d'Adam*

### The Myth of Origins and Vice Versa: Reading—The Creation

WHEN THE AUTHOR OF the twelfth-century religious play known as the *Jeu d'Adam* rewrote the Eden narrative of Genesis for dramatic performance, he presented the Fall of Man as both cause and effect of what he conceived to be the natural antagonism of male and female. Acting out the origins of that antagonism, the Old French *Adam* play thus offers the earliest known mimetic etiology of what in more modern terms has been called the “flagrant incompatibility and permanent warfare of the sexes.”<sup>1</sup>

But how could our adapter have imagined an “original” Fall from perfection as both introducing, and resulting from, male-female agonism? As it happens, this contradiction is expectable, even inevitable. Not only because the reciprocal substitution of cause and effect (metalepsis) is a common trope in the metaphoric of the unconscious, but also because the substitution in question here is no more than the local enactment of a more basic, habitual dialectic in Western thought and representation. To name it in literary terms, that dialectic could be called the conflict of “narrative” and “drama” if we take these terms not in the narrow sense of *diegesis* versus *mimesis* (by which poetics distinguishes literary genres and conventions), but rather as the playing out, in literary art, of the competition (or continuum) in psychoanalytic theory between primary- and secondary-process signification. In primary-process representation (as in the *Adam* play), the ordinary space-time, linear-causal logic of consciousness (and of narrativity as traditionally conceived) is bypassed and undone by the skips and lapses that more regularly mark the (sporadically logomimetic) signifying processes of dream and drama—“drama,” that is, as the name of those affects that characterize playing-like, acting (or acting out) the impossible narratives of the Other. For the discussion at hand it is not necessary to explore in detail this particular area of conceptual overlap between psychoanalytic and narrative theory; the point in that overlap I do wish to explore concerns the metaleptic moment mentioned above. Thus intersecting rhetoric and psychology, my hypothesis is that the dramatization of the Fall in the *Jeu d'Adam* was able to achieve its much admired “dramatic

realism” only by dint of an imperceptible sleight, a slight slippage in mental processing of causes and origins that invisibly reversed the narrative logic of the biblical source.

Some preliminary questions of method: first, how much can we know from the Old French text? From the (merely indexical) *text* of this play/ritual designated in the manuscript as an *ordo representationis*—a “performance ‘script’”—certain cultural assumptions emerge with sufficient clarity to delineate the salient attitudes of an implied spectator, and an implied writer; but we must take care not to reduce, or enlarge, the poetics of dramatic performance to the textual poetics of narrative. In practical terms, this means our first question must be: What did the author of the Adam play hope to gain by recasting, for his congregation, the biblical narrative in the form of a play? (That is, why not just read the scriptural text aloud? Why add mime, gesture, costumes, scenery, props?) To take this question further, we must read the text “from the inside,” as Paul de Man put it in trying to describe a certain type of reading in which one “participates in the problematic possibility of [the text’s] elaboration” by attempting to think oneself into “the nearly inaccessible zone where the possibility of a work’s existence is being decided.”<sup>2</sup> To read the Adam play in this way (and this is the approach I will adopt here) means that we must ask first off: What technical problems would the writer have had to confront when he said to himself, “All right, this year it’s going to be different: instead of standing up there in front of the congregation and reading to them, in Latin, the same old *lectiones* and *responsaria* from the Septuagesima liturgy, this year we’ll *act it out*. Not in Latin, but in French; they’ll get much more out of it.” To approach the *Jeu d’Adam* in this way will be to try to reconstruct the compositional pragmatics in which a twelfth-century writer sits down to adapt a Latin prose narrative text for dramatic performance, when the text in question happens to be, for his audience, the founding narrative of human history,<sup>3</sup> and when the constraints on the dramatization he has in mind include that it be a vernacular performance in verse, in a liturgical setting, for an audience some twenty-two centuries distant from the events in the original.

The result is a sequence of three episodes dramatized in French (Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, a Procession of Prophets), which alternate in the performance with Latin scriptural readings and choral responsaries. (The proportions are approximately 4:1 French to Latin in the text as a whole, but much closer, 3:2, in the Adam and Eve segment.)<sup>4</sup> So with liturgical texts glossed by dramatization, the adapter’s technical problem (“I don’t want to read it all to them in Latin, I want to act it out in French”) led to a variant of the common technique of bilingual *amplificatio* that Paul Zumthor called *farcture*, in which an “original” Latin text is translated and elaborated on in the vernacular.<sup>5</sup>

“Original” here is in quotes because there is no original, no known or knowable origins. This of course is the reason for the Genesis story in the first place: a narrative, an etiology, to explain being, how we got here. But I doubt the Adam

poet worried much about the authenticity of his Latin source. And beyond it, he could have had no knowledge of the more remote coalescence, a couple millennia back, of the ancient Near Eastern oral sources of the Yahwist's narrative in Genesis 2.4b–3.24, a composite Hebrew text that the Adam poet knew in Latin simply as “Genesis,” the Greek word for its incipit, *Bereshit*, “In the beginning.”<sup>6</sup> But for those of us who, unlike the Adam poet, like to believe we have alternatives to ontotheological thinking, and tell other stories about the transcendental signified and the infinite substitution of its surrogate signifiers, an effort should be made to understand more clearly how this twelfth-century poet was able to rewrite the biblical text powerfully enough to engender Genesis, for himself and his audience, and to create, for them, the Creation. And not just for them: the ordinary (nonspecialist) conception of the Adam and Eve story that prevails today is based less on Genesis than it is on texts like the *Jeu d'Adam* and *Paradise Lost*. So to speak of the Adam poet as “engendering Genesis” and “creating the Creation” is simply to refer to the paradoxical fall of reading into writing.

A few words on that paradox as it relates to our protagonists. Any sustained reflection on the representation of the heterosexual couple in Western literature eventually ends up with Adam and Eve, whether we start today (*Redeeming Eve; Adam, Eve, and the Serpent*; and so on),<sup>7</sup> or with *Paradise Lost*, or on page 1 of the Bible.<sup>8</sup> The medieval case at hand, then, is both arbitrary (randomly preserved in a single, incomplete manuscript) and paradigmatic. When we focus on that case, on how an anonymous Anglo-Norman in the twelfth century poeticized the problem of the couple in a text called the *Ordo representationis Ade*, the two essential questions we must ask would have to be asked about Milton's or any similar representation of an “Adam” and “Eve”: 1) How did this man read Genesis? and 2) Why did this man give us to read a Genesis story so radically rewritten? Both questions reduce to the fundamental question of reading, which is to say distortion. The *Jeu d'Adam* obviously is, and is not, “Genesis.” To say that the medieval playwright “creates Creation,” then, is simply to remind ourselves that reading is a process not subject to standardization—not even in theological or philological scholarship. There is no “definitive text” of anything. Traditionally inclined readers in the historical disciplines tend to find this pill somewhat easier to swallow when presented by the doctor of cognitive science (rather than the literary theorist) with the assurance that each person's decoding and recoding of experience (in this case a story set down by someone else) proceed through his or her uniquely intricate neurophysiological network of stimulus filtration and matching, and that matchings are necessarily always partial, therefore never “true.”<sup>9</sup>

So while the extant text of the Adam play is itself woven from preconstituted readings—liturgical readings matched and paired up against (translated) biblical

texts—it is not the nature of the chain itself that matters most (whether or not the liturgical readings were taken verbatim from St. Gregory’s *Liber responsalis* in the form we know it is not of interest here); what matters most is the nature of the process: a particular oscillating structure of re-reading and re-writing in which an originating Latin citation is “filled out” (*farci*)—provisionally—by vernacular commentary. This technique, along with the parenetic function of the Septuagesima liturgy emphasizing at the approach of Lent the necessity of penance for redemption, accounts in general terms for the main structural features of the Adam play.

### **The Making of Modern Marriage in Medieval France**

As for other “background” issues concerning the problem of the couple in the Middle Ages, the major considerations of historical interest that are pertinent to the Adam poet’s rereading of Genesis can be briefly summarized without going too deeply into the vast (and now abundantly explored) field of medieval marriage. A convenient starting point for the purpose of the discussion here is Georges Duby’s 1981 book *Le Chevalier, la femme, et le prêtre: Le Mariage dans la France féodale*.<sup>10</sup> There Duby draws together the ideological and material threads that link the economics and politics of feudal hierarchy and dynastic stability, in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, with the concomitant theology of marriage elaborated in the rigorist circles of Gregorian reform. For the couple, this ideological synthesis solidified, as an institutional fact of life, the theological claim that the male-female relationship of superior-inferior was a necessary component in (and reflection of) the universal hierarchical order that was seen to structure society as a whole, indeed all of creation. Order and hierarchy thus conceived ensured that power and authority would vest in the father and husband as if by a law of nature. Reviewing the foundations of this ideology, Duby surveys the major sources of early antifeminine and antimatrimonial thought from St. Paul, St. Augustine, St. Jerome, St. Gregory the Great, all the way up to St. Yves of Chartres.<sup>11</sup> Without belaboring the obvious (that the Middle Ages was not a golden age for women), it is important here to keep in mind that the author of the *Jeu d’Adam* thought in, and against, these fundamentally antifeminine mental and social structures. While obvious to some, this baseline misogyny has been all too easily forgotten in previous studies of the *Jeu d’Adam* in particular, and in literary medieval studies in general. While modernists are not exempt from obliviousness of this sort, medieval studies seem especially prone to the tautology that consists in taking a medieval text and proving, after much erudite contortion, that it is, in fact, a medieval text: my point is not to “prove” that the *Jeu d’Adam* is antifeminine (how could it be otherwise?).<sup>12</sup> My point is to see

whether we can determine more clearly how the *Jeu d'Adam* makes its male voice heard, and thereby to move closer to understanding the problem stated at the outset: Why and how, in his attempt to portray honestly, and not crudely, what appeared to him to be the irreconcilable contradictions of male and female, this male voice—the voice of the Father, a feudal aristocratic voice of authority—nonetheless modulates through a remarkable range of tones, from gently easy, subtle, and assured to a strained and brittle rigidity that speaks uncertainty, suspicion, and fear.

For the “poetics of the couple” in the *Jeu d'Adam* is, in essence, a rhetoric of blame. Eve the victim (in the Bible) here becomes Eve the evil. Somewhere between Genesis and the *Jeu d'Adam*, Eve had become temptress and deceiver.<sup>13</sup> In Genesis, she is deceived by the serpent, but she is not herself a deceiver. Moreover, in the Adam play she is not merely tricked, but seduced, which also is not in Genesis. And so Eve the deceived is now Eve the deceiver: the patient of Genesis is the agent in the Adam play and, by the same mental trope,<sup>14</sup> Eve the tempted becomes the temptress, takes on herself the devil's role, becomes, in the metonymy of blame, the devil herself. Eve has become the devil.<sup>15</sup>

### The Rhetoric of Blame

A selection of passages will show clearly how the adapter textualized these metonymies. In the opening scene, Figura (God) addresses Adam and Eve in turn, to instruct them in their duties. First, obedience: “I formed you, Adam, from the clay of the earth; against me you must never rebel”(6).<sup>16</sup> “I have given you a matching helper;<sup>17</sup> she is your wife and equal”(11). “Love each other” (13). “She must obey you, and both must obey me” (15–16). Figura repeats the same points to Eve: love, and above all obey (29–38).

At this point, Adam and Eve have not yet spoken to each other, only to Figura, promising obedience. Their first exchange comes after the two temptation scenes (the devil has tried unsuccessfully to tempt first Adam, then Eve). So not until halfway through the episode does the couple actually speak to each other. The scene is the famous one analyzed by Erich Auerbach in *Mimesis*.<sup>18</sup> Though Auerbach's approach has been challenged on various grounds, he was certainly right to emphasize that Eve is not humble and submissive in responding to Adam's questions, which he hurls, or snarls, at her in a tone of anger and provocation (Adam approaches Eve “furious”—“moleste ferens” reads the stage direction; 570). Is this how you talk to your wife? Is this how one talks to an equal—Eve may well be wondering, recalling lines 11–13—someone who is joined to you in a relationship of mutuality and reciprocity? Adam's fulminations against the devil (“He's a stinking liar [*il est mult de pute foi*] . . . a jerk like that [*tel paltonier*], I don't want him coming near you”; 288ff.) are interrupted by the appearance of the

serpent in the tree. Eve cups an ear, listens, then takes the apple: “Try it, Adam, you don’t know what it is” (293).

In a single defiant action, not with words (her words merely confirm and celebrate the effect of the act), Eve has restored—or established—the power balance in the relationship. The equality of the couple, up to now theoretical, has at this moment become a reality. For how does Adam respond? Does he remain in character and react with violent anger? On the contrary, he only stammers, mesmerized, “Is it that good?” (*Est il tant bon?*; 295). Now Eve is on top.<sup>19</sup> Realizing her advantage, and her power, she taunts him for his weakness, his hesitation: “You won’t know unless you try it” (come on, are you afraid?). Adam admits that he is, in fact, afraid: “J’en duit” (297). Again she taunts him for his cowardliness, appropriating from the male arsenal of Old French epic diction a ritual syntactic formula of insult and provocation: “Del demorer fai tu que las!”; “You’re such a coward, just standing there like that!” Piqued to the quick, Adam capitulates: “All right, I’ll do it!” (299). Calmly, savoring her victory (I just wanted him to listen to me; I just wanted to get his attention [recall that previously she had *refused* to take the apple while alone with the devil; 205–76]), calmly she bites into the fruit, rhapsodizes on its effects, and proffers it to Adam. Suspense. “All right,” he says (313), “I’ll go along with it” (*Jo t’en crerra, tu es ma per*; your vote counts as much as mine). “Eat!” she answers; and then, with a final twist of the knife: “You can’t still be afraid” (*Manjue! Nen poez doter*; 314). Adam bites, and “realizes his sin immediately” (*cognoscet statim peccatum suum*; 647). And now it’s all over for the couple. Reverting to his violent suspicion and fear of his wife, Adam assails her as a traitor (“Evil woman, full of treachery . . .”; 535), and prophesies that “never will [she] bring any good to man, but always will act against reason” (*Ja ne saveras vers home bien atraire, Mes a raison serras tot tens contraire*; 553).

Thus in the Adam play the dramatic poetics of the couple originates in a rhetoric of blame and reproach. Adam’s accusations are brutal and abusive. Eve is more subtle, but more devastating, with the insinuating jibe, the “putdown.” In the scene just analyzed, she knows her audacity in the face of Adam’s paralysis makes him feel small, and that her words annihilate his superiority. (Were she as direct, or crude, as Adam, we should have known the Old French word for “wimp”; but Eve is caustic, not crude.) And so this Eve and Adam *do* unite in a kind of mutuality and reciprocity: together they lacerate each other with blame and reproach. And together they were doomed before they were damned. Eve because she dared too much, Adam because he dared too little.

### **Faire Croire**

How much of this is in the Bible? At the outset I imagined circumstances under which it seems plausible, from what is known of medieval liturgical

drama in general, for a play such as this to be written: a Christian apologist feels the need to make a body of liturgical readings more vivid and believable; the whole movement of the adaptation is in that direction. But for any story to be believable, it first must be understandable. Can we assume that in the twelfth century the logic of the Genesis narrative was any less problematic than it is today—i.e., that if an attempt were made to recast the Eden story in a contemporary (twelfth-century) context, it would be intelligible and believable *telle quelle*? I think we must assume the opposite: that it was precisely because the mystery of the Paradoxical Fortunate Fall was so supremely paradoxical, or so overwhelmingly obscure and counterintuitive, that the Adam poet had no choice, given the purpose of his adaptation, but to write himself into the company of the theologians who for centuries had been trying to make the story “accessible.”

The main technical problem encountered by our adapter (like all commentators before and after) is the naked sparseness of Genesis 2–3. The Yahwist took no pains to provide what we call “motivation.” This is fine for a storyteller, but it makes things difficult for an evangelist. The Adam poet knows, and knows that his congregation knows, that normal people don’t do things like that (listening to snakes and defying their husbands) for no reason. And they especially can’t just go around casually committing all humanity to eternal sin and death, not to mention having to eat our bread in the sweat of our brows and bring forth children in pain and travail. To maintain the faith, win converts, and correct heresy, there have to be good explanations for these things. So imagine again our twelfth-century etiologist at his work table: All right (he says to himself, in Anglo-Norman), I have to dramatize this Genesis story; so I’m going to have to fill in (*farcir*) all those gaps in the text, or it just won’t make sense.

I have been arguing that the Adam play is an attempt to make a sacred text accessible to a congregation in terms it will understand.<sup>20</sup> But if the purpose of the play as a whole (not just the first section focused on here) is to drive home the message that redemption is always available to the penitent sinner, then the question of realism (the need to make the story believable) is only the technical side of a larger ideological purpose. This larger purpose is the priest’s sacerdotal mission not only to create belief, but continually to nurture it against strong retroclivities toward relapse into older or easier beliefs.<sup>21</sup> “Why should I believe this story you’re telling me?” (*Créire? Et j’eo pur quei?*) is the fundamental question the Adam poet, like every apologist, is responding to. Like Paul, like Pascal, he poeticizes or rhetoricizes the problem of the unbeliever. The first unbeliever was Eve. Much nonsense has been written about Eve’s “natural” (i.e., feminine) weakness, curiosity, credulity, sensuality, and so on; but her disobedience in this play is a rational, deliberate choice. She knows exactly what she is doing. I really *do not believe* (she said to herself) that eating that fruit will destroy us; *I don’t believe it*. In fact, “*I’m not going to believe anything*,” she tells Adam (285), “until I find out about it for myself” (*Car nel crerai/De nule rien tant que l’asai*). When she *does* find out, she

blames the serpent for lying to her, but accepts the responsibility: “Li fel serpent . . . me fist mangier la pome . . . si quidai por bien faire” (575–77). “I *believed* I was doing the right thing.” So what are we to conclude? 1) Eve was wrong not to believe God and Adam? 2) Eve sinned because she was a frail woman? 3) Eve sinned because she was a strong woman? or 4) Eve sinned because she was stubborn and full of pride (*orgueil, superbia*). Adam answers “1” and “2”: Eve was wrong not to believe, *and* she sinned because she was weak, weak in faith. But then we turn the page and find a different answer, to exactly the same question of unbelief (the question “You expect me to believe that stuff?”), at line 654: “Ja est ço fable!” (“That’s nonsense!”) and again: “Or oez furor!” (“Listen to that madness!”; 661). Is this a “frail woman” talking? No, it’s the tough, brutal Cain, addressing Abel (see also 611–18). From the text, then, it is clear that the problem of obedience is a problem of *belief*, and the problem of belief (at least in this play) precedes or transcends gender. Here both Eve and Cain are emblems of the same lesson, the poet’s way of saying to the audience: “See? *That’s* what happens to you when you think you know better; when you think you can say, ‘you expect me to *believe* that stuff?’”

### “Realism” and the Etiology of the Defective Couple

Hence the play’s “realism” so strongly emphasized by commentators, especially since Auerbach. But in fact, nothing is realistic about the Adam play *except* for the technical features pertaining to the needs of dramatization: dialogue and characterization. Everything else is not only not realistic but to the highest degree unrealistic. The realism of dialogue noted by Auerbach and the psychological realism elaborated on by others following in his path are mere scraps of “reality effect” that anchor us in a fantastic context.<sup>22</sup> For by what standard of “realism” are we being asked to accept the events of the creation narrative? And once we have contracted to listen to that narrative, is it any less preposterous for Adam to be told that a bite of an apple will make him equal to God than for us to be told, for example, that Adam lived 930 years? (Gen. 5.4–5). The function of the reality effect, in biblical narrative just as anywhere else, is to establish a threshold of credibility through real-looking small things so that larger ones will pass unnoticed—like the identification of Adam and Eve as “our first parents,” yours and mine.

Because for the larger, ideological purposes of “realism”—for the you and I of the audience to identify with this Adam and Eve—what is important is not their status as first parents but as first *simmers*, sinners *like us*, not all good, but *bad* like us.<sup>23</sup> The creator, says Diabolus, made them bad: “Mal cuple em fist li criator”; “The creator made a bad couple” or “made the couple badly” (231).

They're not compatible. He's too hard, she's too soft. Or, according to the Christian learned tradition, he's reason, she's flesh. Female is body, male is spirit. Woman is sense, sensory, sensual; man is reason, rational, reasonable. The playwright believed these things, or at least accepted them, and we can assume his audience did too. But what matters here is not the banality or debility of the arguments; what matters is that the dramatist, faced with the need to motivate a preposterous story and to *make* it believable, chose to do so with the most authentically believable, most universally "realistic" explanation there was, and is: "*He's* too much this, *she's* too much that." It makes no difference what the content of these propositions is, the structure of the argument is intact after hundreds of generations: He's too this, she's too that. Again, the content is irrelevant; you can even invert the categories: she's too hard, he's too soft; she's mind, he's body. But neither deconstruction nor radical feminization changes the outcome: for the Adam poet, it's still a *mal couple*, no matter who is on top.

But this position is impossible. Or rather, it became possible only by "forgetting" the original premise of a *fall from perfection*. That is, to become believable ("realistic"), the Fall required violating the logic and chronology of the narrative such that imperfection would have to have become the cause of itself. That the original premise was in fact forgotten is clear from God's description of Paradise earlier in the play: "Femme de home n'i avra irur, Ne home de femme verguine ne freür"; "Here woman from man will have no anger, and man from woman no shame or fear" (93–94). It is precisely Adam's anger/shame/fear on Eve's account, displaced by the adapter to a time *before* the sin (*Adam veniet ad Evam moleste ferens quod cum ea locutus sit Diabolus*, etc.; 570) that reveals obsessions strong enough, in their (chronologically inopportune) return, to override the author's technical concern for a dramatic realism based on the logic of consistency. Otherwise stated (in the dialectic formulated at the outset with categories borrowed from rhetoric), "drama" here has overcome "narrative." Again, this logical contradiction is expectable, even inevitable.<sup>24</sup> Milton in *Paradise Lost* rediscovered the same slip—reforgot the same premise—in the logic and chronology of Genesis, having Eve quarrel with Adam *before* the temptation scene with the serpent (book 9).<sup>25</sup>

### Setup (*Engin/Engingnier*)

What then is the *Jeu d'Adam*? Mystery play? Liturgical play, semiliturgical play, dramatized sermon? Whatever else it is, the *Jeu d'Adam*, in the most powerfully ironic sense of the word *jeu*, is a game: a setup, the enactment of the primal *play* of language and of power, of mastery and domination.

From the initial prohibition ("Don't eat from that tree; if you do, you'll die"; 231–36, 103), the play focuses sharply on obedience. Adam and Eve are punished because they disobey. And though obedience is at the core of law and feudal

ethics, what was the playwright to do with that laconic injunction: “Don’t eat from that tree over there . . .”? Surely he knew that when a parent says to a child, “Don’t eat that apple,” what is the first thing the child will want to do?

Precisely: it is a provocation, a setup (translated *engin*, “trick,” in the text; 243).<sup>26</sup> “Did God tell you not to eat from these trees?” asks Diabolus. “He only told you that because he knows that if you do, you’ll have power, you’ll be able to do what he does” (166–68, 189–93, 243–51, 165–69; Gen. 3.5). As in Genesis, the structure of temptation requires that the discourse attributed to Authority (God) appear transparently duplicitous. Thus He tells them in one breath, “You have dominion over the whole world, everything” (61–64; Gen. 1.26, 29–30), and in the next breath, “Except for that tree over there” (101; Gen. 2.16–17, 3.3). In other words, you have dominion over everything except for some things, like the tree of life, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil (245–51). Which is to say: yes there’s more, much more, but you can’t have it.

### **The Tree of Knowledge, “That Dangerous Supplement”**

The reader may have noticed in my treatment of this contradiction certain parallels with what Jacques Derrida in *Grammatology* called the “scandal of the supplement”: the forbidden tree of knowledge would fill a lack, a deficiency; but what could be lacking or deficient in the perfect Paradise of humanity’s first parents? This is more than a logical or theological “paradox” (it was, of course, preeminent among the problems that preoccupied all of medieval theology). Transposed in more modern terms, the supplemental tree of Genesis betrays the essential impossibility of conceptualizing origins in any logical fashion other than circular. As an epistemological problem, the “scandal” of the supplement is that we easily recognize its logical circularity after the fact, but are unable to forestall it; the mental maneuver required to derive, e.g., *imperfect* from its conceptual (but otherwise nonexistent) opposite, is therefore as astonishing and outrageous, under critical inspection, as it is common and unnoticed in everyday language. This is what enables Derrida to argue that the “logic of the supplement” is indissociable from language, and, as a consequence, that originary narratives (all first-causal accounts of things) spring necessarily from a *coincidentia oppositorum*, as in the simultaneously complete and incomplete Paradise of Genesis.

The tree of knowledge of good and evil is, then, an apt figure for the theme and thesis of this essay, a *pars pro toto* that encapsulates and recapitulates the “metaleptic thesis” sketched above. But it is also interesting to note that it corroborates Derrida’s more abstract and garrulous accounts of “the structure of all arguments of ontology in Western metaphysics.” We are perhaps not surprised to find in the forbidden fruit of the Garden that the structure of the supplement

is *already there* “in the beginning” (*bereshit*). But if it is true that the structure of the supplement, like any structure, cannot be thought *without the concept of center*,<sup>27</sup> then what appears to me uncanny about the supplemental tree of Genesis is that, in a manner precisely predictable from Derrida’s discussion of “Western thought” (i.e., Greek philosophy and the modern period; nowhere does he treat Genesis), is that the mythic tree of the Eden narrative provides its own conceptual center as, and *as well as* (note the *sui generis* logic of origins), the center (focus, origin, cause) of the larger narrative structure of the Fall, a story wholly and literally centered on the tree of knowledge. “Literally” because it occupies not only the conceptual (imaginary) center of the story, but also its literal (topographic) center as well: “De ligno quod est *in medio paradisi* ne comedas” (231–32; Gen. 2.9).<sup>28</sup> “In the beginning,” then, the originary tree of logos (*scientia boni et mali*) is already also the archetype of supplement.<sup>29</sup> And it already marks, *in medio paradisi*, not only its own ontotheological center, but also (and consequently) the universal fixed point of centered presence (all ulterior causality) in the Bible’s proleptic parable of the origins of Western metaphysics according to Derrida.<sup>30</sup> Both elements of the myth—*forbidden tree* (as “supplement”) located in the garden’s “center” (as point of origin)—are instances of the same shell-game substitution ploy (surrogate signifier replacing one never “there”) observed earlier as the very condition of our story’s existence: that the poet forgets the “original” premise (the premise of perfection) in order for it to become its opposite. All are variants of the same problem in logic and representation basic to the hypothesis stated at the outset: that the Adam poet’s account of the origins of male-female agonism was possible only through a (logically and psychologically ordinary) series of metaleptic substitutions.

### Patriarchy

Unquestionably the Adam play is about disobedience, the originary fault (defect) of the couple Adam and Eve based on chapter 3 of Genesis. But since disobedience cannot be a premise, since it can refer only from a distance to more basic propositions that precede it, the adapter’s talent for dramatic realism cannot help laying bare what those prior propositions are: order, hierarchy, and power—power to rule others, domination, *seigneurie*. The poet’s vocabulary leaves no doubt on this point. Thus Figura to Adam:

De tote terre avez la seignorie  
 .....  
 A petit vus soit qui vous porte envie,  
 Car tot li mond vus iert encline.

[You have dominion over all the earth . . . / Pay no attention if anyone should be envious, / For the whole world will bow down to you; 61, 63–64]

Then Diabolus to Eve:

En celui [fruit] est grace de vie  
De poësté e de seignorie  
.....  
Bien convendreit tel aventure  
Que tu fusses dame del mond  
.....  
Que de tut fuissez bone maistre  
.....  
Del ciel avez sempres corone,  
Al creator serrez pareil  
.....  
O Deus serrez, sanz faillance  
De egal bonté, de egal puissance.

[In this fruit is the gift of life, / Of power, and domination . . . / It would be fitting indeed / For you to rule the world . . . / And be mistress over all of it . . . / You'll receive straightaway the crown of heaven, / And be equal to the creator; / You'll be enthroned with God, there's no doubt, / His equal in worth, and equal in power; 250–70]

And though Adam is only a slave (*ainz est mult serf*; 224), Diabolus makes him the same offer:

Je te conseillerai en fei  
Que porras estre senz seignor  
E seras per del creator.

[Let me give you some honest advice: / You could have no one above you, / And be equal to the Creator; 190]

“Look, Adam, don’t you see what’s going on here? You’re not ‘master’ in this place. He says you’re master, but you’re just a flunky, a gardener. Is that all you want? Is that all you’re good for?” (180–86). Adam objects, but the seed of doubt has been planted. Diabolus continues: “Adam, you’re not free. He says you’re free. You’re free to *obey*. What kind of freedom is that?” Whereupon Adam breaks off the conversation. Thus Satan appears in this play not merely as Tempter but as archetypal Agitator, with his *cahier de doléances* and an agenda for seizing power (“Adam, you’re exploited; Eve, don’t you see how you’re oppressed? Do what I say and you’ll have power, you won’t be slaves any more”).<sup>31</sup>

If the discourse attributed to God in the Genesis story is inconsistent, what in the world was the average twelfth-century lay person to make of such inconsisten-

cies? Recall Figura's instructions: "The two of you are equal" (11); "but he's superior" (15, 21). Don't forget that: the two of you are equal (11, 313, 355, 373), but Eve, you obey him (35–38).<sup>32</sup> Now the Adam poet is a clever man. Whenever he runs up against this kind of inconsistency—and there are many in Genesis—he puts it in the mouth of the *devil*, thus disculpating, at least for a time, God, the Bible, and theology. And so if the *Jeu d'Adam* offers a more *consistent* view of the couple than does Genesis, precisely because of the "liberties" the author takes in adaptation, then what we call *mastery* would be nothing other than the "reading out" of inconsistencies.

### Conclusion (Stale Mate)

Let me return, to conclude, to the play's most radical "reading in" with respect to its biblical source. Unlike Genesis, in the *Jeu d'Adam* Adam and Eve are, as we have seen, already at odds with each other *before* they sin.<sup>33</sup> Discord precedes the apple. In agreeing to keep her conversation with Diabolus secret from Adam, and then resisting his injunction against talking to the intruder, Eve asserts her equality. She says, in effect, Don't push me around: "So what if I see him? I'll decide for myself" (283, 285). By showing us a wife who keeps secrets from her husband, and insists on making up her own mind, what is the poet trying to suggest? Of course, none of this is in the Bible. Or is it? On this issue, all exegesis is beside the point; the point (for us, and for the twelfth-century author and audience as well) is that *this* Genesis is a faithful attempt at working out the profoundly troubling realization by the poet that either God was bad—which was impossible—or that God made the couple bad, which was also impossible ("Himself all good, He made all things good"). And yet, the couple *is* bad: "Mal cuple em fist li criator" (231). And it's not just Diabolus who says so, but St. Paul ("It is good for a man not to touch a woman"),<sup>34</sup> and St. Jerome,<sup>35</sup> and the whole subsequent antimatrimonial tradition alluded to above. That tradition was strong enough at the end of the eleventh century for marriage to be considered an inferior state for the ideal Christian, a necessary evil tolerated for social stability and to avoid the greater evils of anarchic fornication.<sup>36</sup> So whether the idea of the defective couple is in the Judaic Genesis or not, it is definitely in the Christian poet's reality, and so he writes Genesis accordingly. Did God make the couple bad? Is man good by himself but brought to sin by woman? Is this because of their natural incompatibility, incompatibility of nature? Because he's too hard, she's too soft, reason versus flesh? Whatever truth value a modern exegete might hazard to assign to any of these propositions, it is clear that the Adam poet in projecting the structures and contradictions of a feudal Christian hierarchy onto the biblical story succeeded—and succeeded brilliantly—in his task of naturalizing, for his then modern audience, what we know to have been the fundamental

conflict not only in his own society, but also in the plot structure of the oldest play in the world: *Nec tecum, nec sine te*.<sup>37</sup>

Before Eve disobeyed God and Adam, according to our play, she had already been set up: equal but inferior. Moreover, according to the play, *both* she and Adam had been set up, and the story of the Garden thus also appears as the allegorical etiology of desire itself: *You have everything, just enjoy it. There IS better, there IS more out there, right over there on that tree. But leave it, you have everything. Use your free will. Control yourselves, and each other. Submit, and be equal.*

And so perhaps we might prefer to say that the beauty of the Adam text is that it does not control its contradictions, does not submit to them, does *not* succeed in rationalizing and naturalizing them. For the only beginning, the only origins we can think arise in contradictions (“sayings against”), hinge of all thought and language elaborated as systems of contraries and opposites: couples. The creator made a bad couple? In his own image made he them. The poet, the adapter, the reader: in our own image/imaginary make we them all. This is the only way we can read.

## Notes

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This essay is dedicated to Suzanne Fleischman. I am indebted to Esther Fuchs for information on feminist readings of Genesis, and to Howard Bloch for advice on fine tuning.

1. Julia Kristeva, “Hérétique de l’amour,” *Tel Quel* 74 (1977): 32.
2. Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight*, 2nd ed., revised (Minneapolis, 1983), 97.
3. For the idea of Genesis as founding narrative and fount of our most deeply ingrained myths of sexuality and the couple, see, e.g., Phyllis Trible, “Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretation,” in Elizabeth Koltun, ed., *The Jewish Woman: New Perspectives* (New York, 1976), 217–40; and Walter Bowie’s exposition on Genesis in *The Interpreter’s Bible*, 12 vols. (New York, 1952), 1:501–2. But as Walter Brueggemann points out, in the overall economy of the Bible, Gen. 2–3 is “an exceedingly marginal text”; *Genesis: An Interpretation* (Atlanta, 1982), 41.
4. As the interconnection of these three segments is not immediately apparent, scholars claiming to have found for the first time “the key” to the unity of the *Jeu d’Adam* disagree radically over the nature of that unity. What this proves is that readers who require unity find unity. Such quarrels say more about reading (as I will do here too) than about meaning.

Cf. most recently Tony Hunt (“The real key to the unity of the *Jeu d’Adam* . . . seems to me to reside in typology and the central motif of the Redemption of Man through Christ’s sacrifice”) versus Maurice Accarie, who sees the unity of the play in the author’s pessimistic and Pelagian emphasis on sin and damnation; Hunt, “The Unity of the Play of Adam,” *Romania* 96 (1975): 370; Accarie, “L’Unité du Mystère d’Adam,” in *Mélanges de langue et de littérature médiévales offerts à Pierre Le Gentil* (Paris, 1973): 1–12; and “Théologie et morale dans le *Jeu d’Adam*,” *Revue des langues romanes* 88 (1978): 123–47. This polarity recapitulates the older one between Willem Noo-

- men's reading ("The *Jeu d'Adam* is a dramatized sermon [*une prédication 'par personnages'*], herein lies its unity, the general subject being sin, requiring redemption") and Paul Aebischer's, emphasizing not redemption but punishment; Noomen, "*Le Jeu d'Adam: Etude descriptive et analytique*," *Romania* 89 (1968): 145–93; Aebischer, ed., *Le Mystère d'Adam* (Geneva, 1973), 23. A variant on the redemption case is the penance case made successively by Michael Twomey, "The Sacrament of Penance and the *Jeu d'Adam*" (Unpublished paper presented at the Twelfth Conference on Medieval Studies, The Medieval Institute, Kalamazoo, Mich., 1977), and Steven Justice: "The rites of public penance and absolution determine the form and scope of the play . . . determine both specific dramatic gestures, and the narrative trajectory of the play"; Justice, "The Authority of Ritual in the *Jeu d'Adam*," *Speculum* 62 (1987): 852.
5. Paul Zumthor, "Un Problème d'esthétique médiévale: L'Utilisation poétique du bilinguisme," *Le Moyen Age* 66 (1960): 301–35, 561–94. For Domenica Legge, this technique is essentially no different from the one "employed for stories from the Bible told in the BBC Friday morning religious programme for schools"; *Anglo-Norman Literature and Its Background* (Oxford, 1963): 321. But for Steven Justice, it is a surreptitious assertion of ecclesiastical authority over the laity. If the use of the vernacular was a concession, he asks, then why were the Latin readings retained *at all*, unless it was to intimidate the laity: "It [use of Latin] instructs the audience, not in the details of the Genesis story, but in the fact that they need instruction and lack the textual expertise to furnish it themselves"; hence the Latin readings "assert by their existence the redundancy of the play itself" (!) and "portray the play's vernacular as an act of condescension to those who are lay and therefore unlettered"; "Authority of Ritual," 854. The most that can be said for this hypothesis is that it is new.
  6. On the J text and oral-composed traditional sources see Howard Wallace, *The Eden Narrative* (Atlanta, 1985). Robert Alter considers these unimportant, emphasizing instead the craft of the writer consciously exploiting the artistic techniques of narrative prose fiction; "Sacred History and the Beginnings of Prose Fiction," *Poetics Today* 1 (1988): 143–62.
  7. Elaine Pagels, *Adam, Eve, and the Serpent* (New York, 1988); Mariette Nowak, *Eve's Rib: A Revolutionary New View of Female Sex Roles* (New York, 1980); Elaine Beilin, *Redeeming Eve: Women Writers of the English Renaissance* (Princeton, N. J., 1976).
  8. Robert Couffignal surveys more than a hundred major rewritings ("œuvres littéraires d'une importance reconnue") of Gen. 2–3, from the second century B.C.E. to 1978 (Michel Tournier, *La Famille Adam*). His introductory remarks include an inventory of Adam and Eve in popular culture and advertising—the "Eden" label on everything from condoms to condos ("En cours de construction: l'*Eden Park*, terrains résidentiels"; "Under construction: *Eden Park* homesites"); Adam underpants for men ("Portez les slips Adam"); for women, a perfume called "Everêve"; and so on; Couffignal, *Le Drame de l'Eden: Le Récit de la Genèse et sa fortune littéraire*, Publications de l'Université de Toulouse-Le Mirail, no. 46 (Toulouse, 1980), 6–7, 43.
  9. Freud used the telephone; today the computer provides our animist metaphors for explaining reading—e.g., the "read-write head" of a disk drive: to "read" text in memory is simultaneously to write it on the screen; it cannot do one without the other. Hence the temptation to agree that all reading is writing. Freud speaking of the psychoanalyst's "reading" of a subject's unconscious used the (at the time) high-tech metaphor of the telephone as a read-write device analogous to the mental coding equipment of the analyst: "Just as the receiver converts back into sound waves the electric oscillations in the telephone line which were set up by sound waves, so the

- doctor's unconscious is able . . . to reconstruct that unconscious which has determined the patient's free associations"; *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*, ed. James Strachey, 24 vols. (London, 1953–74), 12:115–16. Cf. note 24 below.
10. Georges Duby, *Le Chevalier, la femme, et le prêtre: Le Mariage dans la France féodale* (Paris, 1981). An abridged version appeared in English as *The Making of Modern Marriage in Medieval France*, trans. Barbara Bray (New York, 1983).
  11. See also Philippe Delhaye, "Le Dossier antimatrimonial de l'*Adversus Jovinianum* et son influence sur quelques écrits latins du XIIe siècle," *Mediaeval Studies* 13 (1951): 65–86; and Gabriel Le Bras, "Le Mariage dans la théologie et le droit de l'Eglise du XIe au XIIIe siècle," *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale* 11 (1968): 191–202.
  12. R. Howard Bloch makes the same point in "Medieval Misogyny": "If [this] title seems redundant, it is because the topic of misogyny . . . participates in a vestigial horror practically synonymous with the term *medieval*"; *Representations* 20 (Fall 1987): 1. Bloch's essay also contains probing analyses of Patristic commentary on the creation narrative (9–15). The idea of woman as "secondary, derivative, supervenient, and supplemental" is examined in the Patristic discourse of misogyny with respect to language (woman as trope), dress (woman as ornament), perception (woman as illusion)—anything and everything that could be analogized from "secondary" (in the narrative temporality of Genesis) to "inferior, debased, scandalous, and perverse" (10).
  13. On *Adam* and the exegetical tradition, see Larry S. Crist, "*Le Jeu d'Adam* et l'exégèse de la chute," in *Mélanges René Labande* (Poitiers, 1974), 175–85; and "La Chute de l'homme sur la scène dans la France du XIIe et du XVe siècle," *Romania* 99 (1978): 207–19; and Tony Hunt, "Unity of the Play of Adam." For the tradition of Eve as temptress, see Jean M. Higgins, "The Myth of Eve: The Temptress," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 44 (1976): 639–47; and Bernard Prusak for Jewish apocryphal and pseudepigraphal developments of Eve as (source of) evil, and their early Christian echoes, "Woman: Seductive Siren and Source of Sin?" in Rosemary Radford Ruether, ed., *Religion and Sexism: Images of Woman in the Jewish and Christian Tradition* (New York, 1974), 89–116. For a recent overview see John A. Phillips, *Eve: The History of an Idea* (San Francisco, 1984), and selected texts and commentary in Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Womanguides: Readings Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston, 1985), 61–102.
  14. Also called projection. It is the process that underlies the logic of the rapist who argues he was provoked. (*I was provoked* means "I was able to interpret her behavior [the way she was dressed, the way she looked] as tempting to me, therefore provocative—i.e., she did not prevent her behavior from being interpretable, by a man, as tempting; therefore it was provocative.") This is already the reasoning of the Watcher angels in *Enoch I*, and of *Reuben* (2nd c. B.C.E.) who recounts (5.6–7) that it was the comely "daughters of men" who seduced the Watchers, and warns later generations (in a passage Tertullian and Augustine would recall and pass on) against the dangerous provocations of feminine beauty, i.e., women's lust: "Pay no heed to the beauty of women . . . for evil are women, my children. . . . Women are overcome by the spirit of fornication more than men . . . and by means of their adornment they deceive first [men's] minds, and by the glance of the eye instill the poison, and then, through the accomplishment of the act, take them captive. For a woman cannot force a man openly, but by a harlot's bearing she beguiles him"—*et voilà*, our trope of seduced for seducer (4.1, 5.1–4). In R. H. Charles, ed., *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament, in English*, vol. 2, *Pseudepigrapha* (Oxford, 1913), 298–99.
  15. The association of woman with the devil fed the European imagination—and the fires

of its witch crazes throughout the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries, notably in Germany—from the earliest periods of Christian art. For this theme in sculpture and painting, see, e.g., the Lucien Mazenod collection in *Adam et Eve* (Paris, 1967); Sigrid Esche, *Adam und Eva: Sündenfall und Erlösung* (Düsseldorf, 1957); Engelbert Kirschbaum, ed., “Adam und Eva,” *Lexicon der christlichen Ikonographie*, vol. 1 (Freiburg, 1968); Louis Réau, “La Création,” “La Chute,” *Iconographie de l’art chrétien*, vol. 2 (Paris, 1956). On Eve and the witch crazes, see Allison Coudert, “The Renaissance, the Reformation, and the Witchcraze” (forthcoming). For a recent survey of the Eve-Satan connection see Phillips, *Eve*, 41ff.

16. References are to Willem Noomen’s edition of the *Jeu d’Adam* (Paris, 1971), where the complete text (Latin and French) is numbered on the left side of the page (line numbers in italics here) and, on the right, the French verse text only (line numbers in Roman here). Translations (in quotes) and paraphrases (no quotes) are my own.
17. “A help meet for him” (*ezer kenegdô*; 2.18). The metaphor *a help as his front* (i.e., “his reflected image,” Fr. *comme une réplique*, “a complete vis-à-vis”) emphasizes the quality of being perfectly “matched,” “suited,” “fitted,” “appropriate” (as opposed to the animals, none of which was “suitable” to the man). The exegetical tradition has admired the symmetry of the woman having thus been created in her turn “in the image of” the man. And symmetry there is: balancing anthropomorphism with narcissism, the Yahwist arrives at the same result in both cases (imaginary Other = displaced Same). Thus a modern exegete comments (in all seriousness): “The happiness of marriage is based, not upon the woman being just the same thing as the man, but upon her being one in which he sees his image and counterpart”; R. Payne Smith, commentary on Genesis in *Ellicott’s Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1959).

Proceeding, however, on the observation that since there is as yet no “man” and “woman,” Phyllis Tribble translates *ezer kenegdô* as “a companion corresponding to it” (“it” being the earth-creature *ha-’adam*, sexually undifferentiated at this point). The traditional translation (“helper,” “helpmeet,” “helpmate”) is, she concludes, “totally misleading because the English word *helper* suggests an assistant, a subordinate, indeed, an inferior, while the Hebrew word *ezer* carries no such connotation”; *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia, 1978), 90. Tribble’s *ezer*, like an erstwhile Greimasian *adjuvant*, is only “a relational term, it designates a beneficial relationship. . . . By itself the word does not specify positions within relationships; more particularly it does not imply inferiority”; “Depatriarchalizing,” 36.

Be that as it may—but on this point contrast Phyllis Bird, “Images of Women in the Old Testament,” in Reuther, *Religion and Sexism*, 71, 73–74; and Judith Ochsorn, *The Female Experience and the Nature of the Divine* (Bloomington, Ind., 1981), 195–96—the Adam poet clearly also read (or misread) “helper,” basing himself as he did on the Vulgate *adjutorium simile sibi*.

18. For Erich Auerbach this scene was a masterpiece of “Christian realism,” a category fusing what in classical rhetorical theory corresponds to *sublimitas* and *humilitas*. Thus “a subject of the utmost importance [in a Judeo-Christian perspective] and utmost sublimity [in terms of the classical division of “styles”]. . . the dialogue between Adam and Eve—this first man-woman dialogue of universal historical import—is turned into a scene of simplest everyday reality. Sublime as it is, it becomes a scene in simple, low style”; *Mimesis*, trans. Willard Trask (Princeton, N.J., 1953), 131.
19. On Eve’s (temporary) superiority in Gen. 3 attributed to her spontaneity and initiative, compare J. Walsh, “Genesis 2.4b–3.24: A Synchronic Approach,” *Journal of Biblical*

*Literature* 96 (1977): 161–77 (at 175–76). Tribble dissents; *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 94–105. Cf. note 32 below.

20. Commentators generally imagine (as I do here) that the reason the adapter took liberties with the original was to make the story more convincing. Did he succeed? The remarks of Lynette Muir on this point carry more weight than most, reflecting as they do the experience of a director who actually produced the play (1967) with real actors before a real audience; *Liturgy and Drama in the Anglo-Norman Adam* (Oxford, 1973), 62 and *passim*.
21. Always splitting from the major fault lines of Christian ideology that separate medieval orthodoxy from *definable* heresy are innumerable local fissures within a professed orthodoxy at odds with itself and struggling, within itself, with layers of deeply embedded non-Christian or only partially christianized beliefs. Right up to the Reformation the efforts of the church to bridge this gap by accommodation, to cover it up, or to close it by force accumulate in the epic, or history, we know as the Fall of the Universal (Catholic) Church. But the Catholic Church was always never universal. Useful in the present study is the sharply focused theater-historical perspective in Jean Delumeau, “Les Mentalités religieuses saisies à travers les farces, les sotties et les sermons joyeux (XVe-XVIe siècles),” in *Actes du 99e Congrès National des Sociétés Savantes*, Section de philologie et d’histoire jusqu’à 1610, Besançon, 1974 (Paris, 1977), 181–95.
22. Rosemary Woolf, “The Fall of Man in Genesis B and the Mystère d’Adam,” in S. B. Greenfield, ed., *Studies in Old English Literature in Honor of Arthur G. Brodeur* (Eugene, Ore., 1963), 187–89; Wolfgang Greisenegger, “Religiöses Schauspiel als politisches Instrument: Beobachtungen am altfranzösischen Adamsspiel,” *Maske und Kothurn* 21 (1974): 1–32; Roland Barthes, “L’Effet du réel,” *Communications* 11 (1968): 84–89; Tzvetan Todorov, *Introduction à la littérature fantastique* (Paris, 1970).
23. Following Noomen and others, Accarie, “L’Unité,” describes the play as basically a long sermon about sin. While this and related views are not inconsistent with the problem raised here (the evangelist’s recourse to *theater* in the pragmatics of belief-creation), they do not engage that problem. Thus for Accarie, the episodes from *Genesis* are accounted for simply as “examples illustrating the moral lesson of the play” (123), and so “as a whole, the play can very well come across as one long dramatized sermon” (*un vaste sermon illustré par des images*; 123). See note 4 above.
24. The dialectic or “contradiction” at work here has elsewhere been denounced as “retrospective reading,” “eisegesis,” and other heinous errors of method (Higgins, “Myth of Eve”; Martine Leibovici, “La Position féminine dans la Bible,” *Tel Quel* 74 [1977]: 24–28), as if reading could be something *other* than retrospective (could construct a past abstractable from what is thought to have succeeded it). Or as if it were not illusory to profess in one’s commentary “to reread, not rewrite, the Bible,” as does Tribble; “Depatriarchalizing,” 31. Or as if the imaginary difference biblical scholars posit between exegesis and eisegesis would not have required, to make sense in reality, an object more stable than the labile artefacts of language. And yet, apparently convinced that stories can be handled like the stone and metal objects of biblical archeology, even some of the most recent religious historians are still mired in myths of objectivity (Bird, “Images of Women,” 77, n. 1) and illusions of the scholar’s mission “to simply discover and restrict ourselves to the original intent of the Genesis writer” (Phillips, *Eve*, xiv).
25. See J. M. Evans, *Paradise Lost and the Genesis Tradition* (Oxford, 1968); and Northrop Frye, *The Return of Eden* (Toronto, 1965).
26. On the “setup” motif, cf. 3.10–11: “We hid ourselves because we were naked”; to which

- God replies, "Who told you that you were naked?" (checkmate!). Compare Mieke Bal, "Sexuality, Sin and Sorrow: The Emergence of the Female Character (A Reading of Genesis 1–3)," *Poetics Today* 6 (1985): 35; and the reworkings by Byron, Leconte de Lisle, Strindberg, Zola—plus, in a lighter vein of blasphemy, "Les Aventures de Dieu" in the (now defunct) satirical weekly *Hara-Kiri* 98 (November 1969); Couffignal, *Le Drame de l'Eden*, 75–76, 85, n. 38, 141.
27. Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," in Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato, eds., *The Structuralist Controversy* (Baltimore, 1970), adapted from the original version in *L'Écriture et la différence* (Paris, 1967), 409–28.
  28. Also Gen. 3.2–3 (*Jeu d'Adam*, 147–49): "And the woman said to the serpent: 'We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden'; but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden.'"
  29. There are many opposing theories of what is meant or implied in "knowledge of good and evil." Among recent studies, see David Asselin, "The Notion of Dominion in Gen. 1–3," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 16 (1954): 277–94 (at 287ff.); J. A. Bailey, "Initiation and the Primal Woman in Gilgamesh and Genesis 2–3," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 89 (1970): 137–50 (at 146ff.); Bal, "Sexuality, Sin and Sorrow," 32–34; W. M. Clark, "A Legal Background to the Yahwist's Use of 'Good and Evil' in Genesis 2–3," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 88 (1969): 266–78; D. J. A. Clines, "The Tree of Knowledge and the Law of Yahweh," *Vetus Testamentum* 24 (1974), 8–14; Ivan Engnell, "'Knowledge' and 'Life' in the Creation Story," in M. Noth and D. Winton Thomas, eds., *Wisdom in Israel and in the Ancient Near East* (Leiden, 1969), *Vetus Testamentum* supplement 4:103–19 (at 114–16); John McKenzie, "The Literary Characteristics of Gen. 2–3," *Theological Studies* 15 (1954): 541–72 (at 561ff.); Ruether, *Womanguides*, chap. 5; Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 118ff. For bibliography on this question, see George Coats, *Genesis: With an Introduction to Narrative Literature* (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1983); and Bo Reicke, "The Knowledge Hidden in the 'Tree of Paradise,'" *Journal of Semitic Studies* 1 (1956): 193–201 (at 193, n. 1).
  30. At the end of the Bible is an equally striking parallel to Derrida's argument alluded to here concerning the notions of "structure" and "center." At the absolute end of History, in the same mythic "center" required for the idea of its absolute beginning, is the tree of life in Revelations, standing "in the midst of the pure river of water of life" (22.1–2). For other myths of the tree in the sacred center see Mircea Eliade: "A great number of myths and legends feature a cosmic Tree which symbolizes the Universe. . . . Each of these myths and legends rejoins the 'theory of the center' in the sense that the Tree materializes absolute reality, the source of life and the sacred, and as such is found at the center of the World"; *Traité d'histoire des religions*, new ed. (Paris, 1968), 320 (emphasis added).
  31. The politics of Gen. 2–3, sketched in paraphrase here and in the summary by Couffignal ("The myth [of the Fall] betrays a real aggressiveness against the Master and a ferocious will to autonomy on the part of the individual"; *Le Drame de l'Eden*, 146), are explored in more detail by Coats, who reads in a modern doctrine of consent:

At earlier stages the tradition may have served as a critical judgment on the power of the king in his administration of state affairs. . . . The Paradise Man is the royal man; his garden, his animals, his wife, constitute his court. He exercises dominion over them as he names them (cf. 1.28). The Paradise Man thus wields power in his garden, power to know good and evil, to discriminate between alternatives for the future of his subjects. . . . His expulsion from

the garden is a denial of his power. The story thus derives from circles (wisdom?) who stand over against the king to admonish, instruct, and correct him, or finally to impeach him.

Coats, *Genesis*, 59; cf. Coats, "The God of Death: Power and Obedience in the Primeval History," *Interpretation* 19 (1975): 227–39.

32. This particular inconsistency was created (or inherited) by the Adam poet; there is nothing in Genesis on the subjection of Eve to her husband until *after* the Fall, as punishment for her disobedience to God (Gen. 3.16). Cuthbert Simpson admires "the fact that J, far in advance of his time, sees that this domination of woman by man is an evil thing. The implication is that the relationship between husband and wife was intended by God to be a mutual and complementary relationship of love and respect, not a relationship in which one dominates the other"; Simpson, "The Book of Genesis: Introduction and Exegesis," in *Interpreter's Bible*, 1.439–515 (Gen. 1–3). Bird reaches a similar conclusion ("Images of Women," 73–77), as does Tribble ("Depatriarchalizing," 41; *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 100–105, 128, 133).

But was J really "far in advance of his time"? Exegetical tradition (prior to the 1970s) has generally held that throughout Gen. 2–3 the Yahwist treats the woman as secondary and inferior, a negligible presence. The prohibition is addressed to Adam alone (2.16), as is the summons in 3.8 ("God called . . . 'Where are you [singular]?'"), and although both have eaten of the fruit, only Adam poses a threat ("Behold, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil"; 3.22).

The most concerted and closely argued challenge to this tradition is to be found in Tribble's 1978 analysis of the story, where she lists, then systematically refutes, all the major points cited in support for "traditional interpretations of male superiority and female inferiority"; "Depatriarchalizing," 73. But Tribble's bold and engaging reading is in turn overturned in a cogent and equally systematic critique by Ochshorn (*Female Experience*, 210–17), who also responds to the similar but less radical conclusions of Bird, "Images of Women," 195–97. Phillips dismisses Tribble's views as "wishful thinking" (*Eve*, 33). For alternative feminist readings of Genesis and related stories, see most recently Esther Fuchs, "Literary Characteristics of Mothers and Sexual Politics in the Hebrew Bible" and "Who Is Hiding the Truth? Deceptive Women and Biblical Androcentrism," in Adela Yarbro Collins, ed., *Feminist Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship* (Chico, Calif., 1985), 117–36 and 137–44; and Fuchs, *Sexual Politics in the Biblical Narrative* (Bloomington, Ind., forthcoming).

But if we venture for a moment past poetics (not what the story says, but what it was doing), male primacy in Genesis is most fundamentally apparent in the marriage code. At the top of the hierarchy is polygyny and male-centered close-kin endogamy—the models (Fr. *patrons*) being the patriarchs Abraham and Isaac, both of whom married, as Edmund Leach emphasizes (*Genesis as Myth and Other Essays* [London, 1969]), their *paternal* half sisters (actually Sarah does not become Abraham's half sister until the E text [7th c.]; in J<sup>2</sup> Isaac and Abraham are each represented as having inmarried his sister [Simpson, "Book of Genesis," 447; Bird, "Images of Women," 65ff.]). Weighing all the arguments, Ochshorn concludes that the primary function and honor of women in the narratives of biblical Israel lies in reproduction; but even as reproducers "women appear fairly interchangeable in perpetuating the male line," and "motherhood conferred no special rights on women" (*Female Experience*, 196). Mistaking male-female signifieds for their signifiers, Tribble (*God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 101) and Walsh ("Genesis," 174, n. 32) remain totally at cross purposes on this issue, but cf. Mieke Bal in note 37 below.

33. This fact, if not the implications of its logic, was already recognized by Muir: "By agreeing to conceal something from Adam, Eve takes her first step into sin"; *Liturgy and Drama*, 66–67; and by Crist: "In the *Jeu*, Eve accepts hiding things from Adam, which indicates that there is already a rift in the original couple: Eve's attitude thus prefigures the overturning of natural order which will be consummated in the act of eating the fruit"; "La Chute," 216–17.
34. "Bonum est homini mulierem non tangere"; 1 Cor. 7.1.
35. With pedantic illogicality Jerome decides that Paul's pronouncement (previous note) should be rewritten as an injunctive: "If it is good *not* to touch them, then it is bad to do so," since anything that is not good is bad ("Nihil enim bono contrarium est nisi malum"; *Adversus Jovinianum*, in Migne *PL* 23.218–19; cited in Delhaye, "Le Dossier antimatrimonial," 66, n. 4). Today theologians hold that in context, Paul's exposition of Gen. 2–3 appears less radical, and that certain of the more offensive (misogynist) passages in the epistles are of doubtful attribution; Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 41–43; Winsome Munro, "Patriarchy and Charismatic Community in 'Paul,'" in Judith Plaskow and Joan Arnold Romero, eds., *Women and Religion* (Missoula, Mont., 1974), 189–98; Phillips, *Eve*, 121–27; Krister Stendahl, *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles* (Philadelphia, 1976), 78–96.
36. Le Bras, "Le Mariage"; Delhaye, "Le Dossier antimatrimonial."
37. Mieke Bal muses briefly on the anthropological structures underlying the origins of sexual antagonism in Genesis. In this myth the man is not the parent from whom the woman is born. "He is the son of *ha'-adam*, she the daughter. Their subsequent relationship remains incestuous"; "Sexuality, Sin and Sorrow," 28, n. 7. But only if we stop (as Bal does) with Gen. 3. "Anthropology would claim that this incest motif requires their future enmity, which must safeguard socialization. Difference, that origin of humanity, must be protected against sameness. This gives an anthropological explanation of sexual antagonism" (*ibid.*). Leach goes further (past chapter 3), and sees in the overall structure of Genesis fundamental separations defining "the logical basis of incest categories. . . . Cain's fratricide compares with Adam's incest, and . . . in order that immortal monosexual existence in Paradise may be exchanged for fertile heterosexual existence in reality, Cain, like Adam, must acquire a wife (4.17). To this end Adam must eliminate a sister, Cain a brother"; "Genesis as Myth," 15; cf. note 32 above and Leach, "Lévi-Strauss in the Garden of Eden," *Transactions of the New York Academy of Sciences* 23, no. 4 (February 1961): 386–96 (at 395).