

EVE IN THE ENGLISH CYCLE DRAMA:
A FEMINIST APPROACH

A THESIS
SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS
IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF THE
TEXAS WOMAN'S UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

BY
MARILYN BOUROUGHES KEEF, B. A.

DENTON, TEXAS
AUGUST, 1992

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ABSTRACT

The middle ages privileged a patriarchal view of women as having no independent role in society, functioning merely as adjuncts to the dominant men in the culture. In the cycle plays of N-Town, Chester, York, and Towneley the dramatists reveal varying versions of the Eve and Adam myth in an attempt to promote the Church's views toward women in general. Using studies and resources published since the 1970s, this thesis is an attempt to demonstrate that Eve is actually shown by the dramatists to be an intelligent, independent, and responsible woman.

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CHAPTER I

A FEMINIST LOOK AT MEDIEVAL WOMEN

Many twentieth-century attitudes pertaining to women's societal values, property rights and individual liberties have been inherited from our medieval ancestors in Britain and on the continent. These inherited values particularly influence those attitudes having to do with the position of women and their role in society. In that the lives of our early women ancestors are reflected in women's lives today, modern scholars should not shy away from a feminist approach to early literature. One such corpus of writings is the medieval cycle dramas.

In the years following the publication of O.B. Hardison's Christian Rite and Christian Drama and V.A. Kolve's The Play Called Corpus Christi, scholars explored the history of medieval drama and its performance. Yet, despite this extensive attention, there is very little documentation concerning women connected with the performances of the plays or their production. In the early 1970s, with the rise of feminist scholarship, scholars such as Theresa Coletti, Katherine Ashley, and Margaret Miles introduced a new awareness of the early male/female gender roles, female images, and the sexual politics of medieval society. Yet still today, this

awareness has yet to substantially influence the body of medieval drama scholarship.

The modern scholar cannot risk believing that the female stereotyping of the few women portrayed in the cycle plays represents the medieval feminine reality. Modern audiences, even those well versed in medieval texts, can too easily mistake authorial commentary for cultural values, and further, often rely on outmoded beliefs about those cultural values. A few years ago a prominent scholar of medieval drama, the late Stanley Kahrl, protested the performance of the Mary plays of the N-Town cycle on the grounds that they are exceedingly anti-feminist, yet these very plays can be demonstrated to present one of the most positive images of women in all of medieval literature. However, according to Ashley, although the cycle plays did perform a social function, one cannot assume that they represent medieval feminine reality (57). It is my intent to present the traditional views of the medieval feminine reality and then show how those traditional views may differ from the actual reality of the women of the medieval period.

Traditionally, the history of medieval women has been a history of wives, mothers, daughters, and sisters of the medieval men who controlled and shaped those women's lives. Medieval women lived in a society in which social standing was determined by the social and economic class.

of the man. This patriarchal organization came from the early practice of the Greeks, Romans, and Hebrews which through their writings formed the matrix of all European culture. The Iliad and the Odyssey, the laws of Rome, and the first five books of the Bible, all shaped the views of later European society in which males were considered intrinsically more valuable and more important than women. These writings remained revered and sacred long after the Greeks, Romans, and Hebrews had ceased to dominate and they had a powerful and far-reaching impact on European history. The writings transmitted a view of warrior cultures in which women were valued less than men and were subordinate to them. Although these writings often portray powerful women, even the most powerful is portrayed as subordinate to a man, and in the Greek writings the most powerful goddess is portrayed as subordinate to a more powerful god. These were the values that later generations of European men chose to inherit, and these were the values that came to the newly emerging European cultures.

The preferred role for all women evidenced in these early writings, aside from being a slave, was that of wife and mother. As the wife, mother, or daughter of a warrior, a woman had a valued and honored role in society. In Homer's Odyssey, Penelope was the faithful wife who remained loyal to Odysseus during twenty years of

separation. Penelope then, was extolled as the ideal daughter, wife, and mother for her steadfastness and was rewarded by a happy reunion with her husband.

In the Hebrew writings passed down to later generations, women are also defined by their relationship to men and are even seen as objects of desire. In the book of Genesis in the Bible, Adam calls Eve "bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh" and it is stated that a man "cleaves to his wife and they become one flesh" (2.23-24). Subordination of women is also evident in the two versions of the creation of human beings in the book of Genesis. The more egalitarian version in which God created "man in his own image . . . male and female created he them" tends to be ignored in favor of the older version. In that version Eve is created from Adam's rib, and it is she who is beguiled by the serpent into disobeying the Lord. The principal basis for female subordination then draws its authority from the Biblical account of God's punishment of Eve:

I will greatly multiply your pain in
childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth your
children, yet your desire shall be for your
husband, and he shall rule over you. (3.16)

Because he "listened to the voice" of his wife, God did punish Adam, although not as severely. God's punishment of Eve and Adam led Christian church fathers to interpolate the notion that women were inherently evil and

would be the downfall of all men, unless men controlled the women in their lives and ruled over them.

Then as Christianity spread throughout Europe, the early writings of the Greeks, Romans, and Hebrews, as well as the Germanic and the Celtic writings, influenced greatly the writings and beliefs of the apostles Peter, Paul and Timothy, and influenced the church fathers Jerome, Tertullian, Augustine, and John Chrysostom. The reasoning goes something like this: The influence of female subordination from these earlier societies is evident in the Old Testament and the commentaries that developed from it. In each case, the basic premise of female subordination--that women were by nature dependent on and inferior to men--was repeated and elaborated. As time went on, these premises became natural, inevitable, and in some cases God-given. Therefore, men's belief of women and what or who they were became an order of God.

But these early writings also bequeathed a confusing legacy of traditions to European women of later years. Traditions subordinating women were powerful, but not all powerful. As feminist medieval scholars, we must remember that the early cultures also contained images and beliefs that glorified and empowered the female. These images and beliefs, or myths, are still evident in our societies today in different parts of the world.

On shelter floors and on the walls of caves of northeastern France, southwestern Spain, and in southern Germany and Czechoslovakia there is archaeological evidence from the earliest prehistoric people that they worshipped some sort of female deity. There are accounts of Sun Goddesses in the lands of Canaan, Anatolia, Arabia and Australia, as well as among the Eskimos, the Japanese, and the Khasis of India. Female deities of the Near and Middle East were worshipped as the Queen of Heaven, and in Egypt the ancient Goddess Nut embodied the heavens themselves (Stone 2). This early Goddess religion appears in every area of the world and was apparently earth centered and of this world, not otherworldly. Humanity was viewed as a part of nature and death as a part of life. Before the onslaught of patriarchy and the suppression of the Goddess, all that lived was bound into a sacred fabric, all were part of a whole, and all were responsible to each other, women equally with men. Then later, the Goddess had to share her power with a pantheon of Greek and Roman sky gods, although her worship continued to be widely popular well into the early Christian period (Gadon 13).

The final blow to the Goddess culture was actually delivered by Judeo-Christian monotheism in which one male, all powerful and absolute, ruled both the heavens and the earth. Monotheistic faiths were the immovable foes of the

Goddess according to Elinor Gadon, and a continuous battle was waged by the ancient Hebrews against the worship of the Goddess.

With the suppression of the Goddess, much was lost to human culture, and, of course, to women. As history was written by the earlier Greek, Roman and Hebrew writers, the Goddess religion was portrayed as heretical, bad, and "of the devil." Gadon states that the transition was not just a gender change from Goddess to God, but a paradigm shift with the imposition of a different reality and different categories of being, and all deeply affected every human relationship. Woman, the female, the feminine, was excluded in the shift of consciousness and all that was most valued in the Goddess culture was devalued, given lesser priority, or rejected altogether (14).

But there were other empowering images of women to be noticed by the medieval woman. The lives and accomplishments of women such as Sappho, Cleopatra, and Boudica were part of the traditions inherited by European women. Most all of the early cultures, except the Hebrews, gave supernatural powers to female figures. The chief god in the Greco-Roman and Germanic-Celtic cultures was male, but all these groups also showed powerful female forces who controlled the lives of heroes and sometimes even the gods. Centuries after the old empires and

kingdoms had disappeared, women would take inspiration from these female images and figures. Overall, the subordination of women was perpetuated and justified by the Church and male scholars, but women inherited empowering images and memories of goddesses and historic women.

One empowering image found in the Old Testament of the Hebrews was a woman named Deborah who held an untraditional female role. Found in the book of Judges, the story of Deborah calls her a prophet and a judge as well as a wife and mother. She rallied the Hebrews against their enemies with the help of another woman, Jael, and herself slew the enemy general by hammering a nail into his head (5.24-27). Deborah's reward was fame and honor for having saved her people.

The Virgin Mary was yet another female image contained in the Scriptures that empowered women in the later centuries. Like Mary, a young woman could marry, bear and nurture children, and live as wife and mother while still vowing godliness. Through devotion and actions toward others, a woman could find protection and gain honor and even sanctity from the Church. By identification with Mary, a woman could find her way to God outside the family. The male leaders of the Church made this identification with Mary as well, thus giving the experience potential authority.

In addition to the female images that empowered women, there was the image of Jesus, whose life and teachings were later institutionalized as the beliefs and practices of the Christian Church. Jesus added to the traditions that empowered women because his words and actions included women in ways that were surprising and confusing to many of the church fathers. Jesus appeared to reject traditional ideas of status, of free or slave, subordinate or inferior, and He saw no special flaws in the nature of woman. He included women in His teachings and calling for a reversal of traditional attitudes, offered women a life and a role outside the family and the relationship of men. He did this by offering anyone who embraced His teachings, regardless of status or gender, the "kingdom of heaven," or life after death. Thus, Jesus rejected much that the earlier cultures had taken for granted concerning women and their subordinate role in society. The equality implicit in His doctrine became significant to future generations of European women because His actions and words rejected the idea that women were inferior. Rather, His words and actions instructed that women were created in God's image just like men. He also never referred to the second creation story depicting Eve created from Adam's rib. More importantly, Jesus never ascribed to the idea of "Eve's sin" in the Garden of

Eden, but referred to the Fall as an act of disobedience by both Eve and Adam.

Jesus' favorable attitudes toward women as recorded in the Scriptures continued throughout His life. Women rather than men played the key roles in the events surrounding his death and his resurrection. The gospels of Matthew (26.56), Mark (15.50), Luke (22.24), and John (19.25-27) describe the crucifixion and tell how all the apostles fled, except John, but all the women remained to pray at the foot of the cross. The women prepared Jesus' body for burial, and it was Mary Magdalene who returned to the tomb to discover that His body was gone (John 20).

The importance of women to the history of earlier cultures and the presence of Jesus showing equality to women in the Gospels have both been powerful images for women of later centuries. But a scholar must be aware of the constant contradiction between the two traditions: the images of woman as the embodiment of evil and the images of woman as saintly. This contradiction is evident in the writings, the art, and in the drama of the medieval period. The Church, in waves of religious reform, upheld the old traditions of male dominance and female subordination that was passed down from the early church fathers, and was likely fearful of the powerful images of women from earlier cultures. The Church aspired to a male

dominated, patriarchal society, but this was not the reality.

Just as the Church perpetuated the idea of a male dominated society, the male monastic authors of the Corpus Christi cycle plays perpetuated woman's role as subordinate to man. Keeping in mind that the plays do not reflect a complete picture of women's roles in actual medieval society, we must try to understand that the playwrights must have believed that female subordination was part of the function of the plays, in that the plays depicted idealized mores of society.

One of the believed functions of the dramas was that the cycle plays offered an idealized Christian approach to life, one that the monastic authors of the plays may very well have intended for the general populace. Thus, many of the "doctrinal concepts" revealed in the plays, according to Miles, may have been used by the "early Christian leaders to stamp out the remnants of pagan idolatry that repeatedly threatened the religion" (4). To reaffirm the idea of one God who was the Father of all men, the plays functioned as a visual testament for Christianity. The ignorant would not misunderstand what they could see with their own eyes and the remnants of pagan idolatry would disappear.

Also, during a period of intense lay-pious movements, the civic magistrates felt they had a separate

responsibility from the clergy for the morals and education of their people. Not only were magistrates expected to entertain the citizens, they were expected to present a moral example to the city that supported public worship and the views of the Church (Clopper 128). They fulfilled this obligation by presenting religious drama in the streets of their towns testifying to Christianity. According to Rosemary Woolf, authors of the plays intended to instruct the unlearned; so one might assume that the civic magistrates felt a duty to aid in developing the social mores that would help confirm laymen in their Christian religion (75). Thus, another function of the drama was possibly one of educating the uneducated masses in the doctrines and views of the Christian Church.

However, it has also been emphasized by many cultural theorists that cultural performances such as the dramas, or festivals, or games may be reflexive, in that they may question the society's accepted assignments of power, wealth, status, or value. Categories of people who were normally separated by social roles and functions were brought together during these performances, with the result that everyday structures were possibly weakened or dissolved and values elevated (Ashley 60).

Plays, especially cycles or collections of plays, tended to occur in those cities where civic government, especially by trade guilds, was strong, and often the plays seem to have been introduced or elaborated when the balance

of power shifted toward secular dominance.
(Clopper 128).

Ashley reminds us that in performing the cycle plays, the community may dramatize an idealized image or perhaps a distorted image of itself (61). These images, whether reflecting idealized or distorted societal assignments, leaves the basis of society's views open to question. Thus, one may describe the function of these cultural performances as one of socio-political criticism.

Thus, from a traditional perspective, the cycle plays typically portray "women who are helpmates and servants; these women attest to events more often than they participate in them; they are, in many instances, marginal to the central action" (Coletti 80). This marginality creates problems for the advancement of a feminist approach to the cycle plays, and the difficulty is compounded in the drama's treatment of gender roles and women's behavior. But considering these probable functions of the cycle dramas and the possibility of many more, feminist medieval scholars dare not consider the drama as reflecting women's reality. The male authors of the cycle plays no doubt believed what the Church taught regarding women and their role in society, but there are consistent contradictions between the belief that women are evil and the belief that women are saintly, or "between misogyny and the idealization of women, a tension

customarily registered in the familiar dichotomy of Eve and the Virgin Mary" (80).

One may believe that the monastic authors felt compelled to support the Christian attitude inherited by the early church fathers when designing the cycle plays because there is an inherent ambiguity in the reality of medieval women's lives and in the images of women offered by the men of medieval society. As far as we can determine, not a single image of any woman--saint, Mary, scriptural or apocryphal figure--was designed or created by a woman. The images we must deal with are images provided for women by men. They formulate and reflect a culture designed by men for the benefit of men. Images of women are men's images of women. They represent a male response to women, a male way of relating to women, and a male way of communicating with women (Miles 64). The traditional belief that men were "superior" to women was shown in the plays by using the older version of the creation of human beings from the book of Genesis. But the plays also represent the ideal view of women in the Virgin Mary, the epitome of womanhood in her purity. These images within the plays are based on Scripture, but interpreted and retold by the male monastic authors in order to inspire strong emotion while asserting that this presentation is realistic. This perplexing medieval

ambivalence about women is instilled by the Church and then evident in the drama.

So it would be a mistake to understand male representations of women as formulating accurate descriptions of social experience (85). There is no doubt that medieval society allowed to women not only private influence, but also the widest liberty in public affairs. These socio-political aspects of the life of medieval woman can be pieced together from the few remaining laws, deeds, wills, and records of religious houses. Picture sources are particularly important in piecing together woman's contribution to medieval society, as they provide immediate visual information about women's work environments and the tools of their craft or trade.

Judging from the records available from all dimensions of medieval society; medieval politics, medieval religion, medieval philosophy, medieval art, and medieval literature, the medieval feminine reality becomes somewhat clearer. The medieval woman was a keen organizer and manager, resourceful, remarkably energetic and versatile. Whether the household was rich or poor, all women were responsible for the preparation of food; the making of cloth and clothing; the care of children, servants, and animals; healing the sick and injured; and assisting at childbirth. The peasant woman worked beside her husband in the fields and would also hire out to

neighboring manors and farms for seasonal labor, receiving the same pay as her male counterpart. Townswomen worked in skilled trades as apothecaries, goldsmiths, silk workers, artists, and surgeons--jobs that required apprenticeship and training. The developing businesses of the later Middle Ages were also frequently in women's hands. Noblewomen and manor wives ran large households in city and country, instructing farm laborers, bailiffs, and servants in their duties, collecting payments, keeping the accounts, and when their husbands were absent, defending their property in courts of law or in battle against intruders. In records of the Middle Ages, we find women working in partnerships with fathers, husbands, and sons; with mothers, sisters, and daughters; with other women; and for themselves.

Women can be seen in all these roles through illustrations from the medieval period. The labors of the months are a typical medieval genre found in the calendar pages of books of hours, prayer books that included meditations and Bible readings for each hour of the day. The best known example of these is the Tres Riches Heures of Jean, duc de Berry. Illustrations show men and women engaged in agricultural work according to season--mowing, slaughtering, sowing, harvesting--and enjoying leisure hours--feasting, courting, hunting and hawking. Women are

seen at work and occasionally at play, in village, town, and country displaying remarkable abilities.

By the thirteenth century, women commonly engaged in trade at all levels including investing in overseas commerce, keeping shops in town, running small entrepreneurial businesses, and even peddling goods at town markets and fairs. Women merchants had to be tough and legally astute and some women learned to use the laws and courts to protest abuses for themselves. In 1465, Margaret Paston was called upon to defend her absent husband's interests during his absence against so important an adversary as the Duke of Suffolk. The Paston manor of Drayton had been unlawfully claimed by the Duke. Margaret fought him through the local courts and wrote to her husband telling of the circumstances (Rowling 88).

Thirteenth and fourteenth century English court records tell of other legally astute women. Isabella, Countess of Arundel (d.1282), confronted the king himself when he claimed the wardship of one of her vassals. Juliana, widow of Robert Underburgh, successfully kept her dower against three separate law suits in 1329 (Anderson and Zinsser 328). According to information provided by Martha Driver for January in The Medieval Woman: an Illuminated Calendar, Margery Russell, a merchant's wife from Coventry, was robbed of her merchandise by Spanish pirates. As a result, she obtained "letters of marque,"

royal documents authorizing her to seize Spanish cargo in English ports as compensation. Margery then apparently took more than her due, for records show she provoked a counter-complaint from the Spaniards.

Large numbers of women also worked beside their husbands in shops. Family partnerships created an influential, economically powerful merchant class, and women were the backbone of this developing middle class economy, providing for themselves and their children, supporting the trading activities of sons, husbands, and fathers, and keeping a careful eye on the finances of the family business. Wives and widows of masters were often admitted to guilds, along with single women (who had the legal right to own property, as did married women working in occupations outside their husbands' trade).

In all European towns, women worked in trades often involving strenuous physical labor; among these were laundering and bleaching, and working as bath house attendants, which involved giving massages and sweat baths as well as cupping and bleeding patrons, clipping their hair, and ridding them of lice and other vermin. Evidence from written and pictorial sources also shows women at work in the building trades (sometimes as masons and glaziers), for which great physical strength was required.

As teaching nuns and as schoolmistresses in both convents and secular schools and manor houses, as mothers

teaching their children the rudiments of reading, writing, and arithmetic, as well as social and other skills, women were prominent in the teaching profession. They also were employed as scribes, and those who were wealthy often were book patrons, even commissioning the preparation of manuscripts. In these ways women promoted learning and literacy in medieval society.

One of the earliest women known to display a remarkable talent for writing is Marie de France and her vernacular narrative poetry is justly admired to this day. However, the most famous medieval woman writer is Christine de Pisan (1365-c.1431). Christine--as she is known today--was widowed young and turned to writing as a way to support herself and her three children. Scholar, poet, and feminist, she was enormously productive writing in many styles and genres: lyric poetry, romance, allegory, biography, manuals of instruction for knights and women, social criticism, and political tracts. An early feminist, she was an advocate for women, praising the abilities of women and eloquently cataloging contributions to society and cultural life that women had made in the past and in medieval society as well. Acclaimed and widely read in France and in England, Christine numbered many of the nobility among her patrons, not only writing for them but also supervising the preparation of valuable presentation manuscripts, even

overseeing the daily copying and minute details of illumination. Martha Driver informs us in a calendar entry for December that Christine employed Anastaise, a gifted and renowned woman artist to decorate her manuscripts. Driver says that Christine writes of Anastaise

in The City of Ladies that "one cannot find an artisan in all the city of Paris--where the best in the world are found--who can surpass her, nor who can paint flowers and details as delicately as she does."

Little else is known about Anastaise, but that is only to be expected since medieval artists were respected primarily as crafts people who worked as part of a team of artisans rather than as individual artists. Even writers often worked anonymously--as did the dramatists who created the great cycle dramas of the era.

And let us not forget the noblewomen and queens, who with intelligence, political savvy, and tremendous strength of character not only supported their husbands and their children but their realm.

No account of the role of women in the middle ages could be complete without reference to that most famous of medieval queens: Eleanor of Aquitaine, the magnetic, headstrong woman who married two kings and ruled first France and then England. Sources attesting to power struggles between Eleanor and each of her royal husbands are still extant, and she was an important center of power

in the Angevin empire for most of a lifetime. She taught her grand-daughter, Blanche of Castile, how to develop strategy and administer a kingdom, and Blanche ruled ably for many years. Another able and important ruler was the fifteenth century queen of France, Jeanne de Bourbon, the wife of Charles V of France, who served as Christine de Pisan's model for the ideal queen in Treasure of the City of Ladies (1405).

These powerful women, influential on the political, social, and cultural canvas of the middle ages are hardly the tender, wilting, ladylike heroines of medieval romance or troubadour poetry. And not only did they influence national and international politics. They gave birth to large numbers of children (Eleanor, for instance, gave birth to ten children including the romantic Richard the Lionheart). These queens ran households as large and complex as the Pentagon, and oversaw the necessary migrations of those households from castle to castle. Then, as now, royal women patronized the arts and education: they founded schools and colleges, established convents, and built libraries. We know a great deal about them today because as the most important women in their countries it was natural not only for their names to appear and re-appear in court records, wills, and in other accounts, but also for those records to be preserved.

So clearly, the privileged male view of the medieval woman as having no independent role in the society, functioning merely as adjuncts to the dominant men in the culture is one promoted by the Church and has little basis in fact. These were the societal values the Church aspired to. However, while the history of women has been a history of wives, mothers, daughters, and sisters of the medieval men that were responsible for writing the history, these same women were active shapers of and participants in their society. Let us then look at the cycle plays in such a way as to examine not only the way the monastic authors portrayed Eve in the Creation plays, but also to discover, by being resisting readers, what vestiges of women's empowerment may also be found.

CHAPTER II

EVE IN THE N-TOWN CYCLE

To take a feminist look at the way the Creation Play of the N-Town cycle portrays Eve, we must remember to do three things: 1) to look at the play textually regarding the scenes concerning Eve; 2) to analyze Eve's dialogue with Adam and God, and 3) to try to understand the implications of what is not said and what that message means to the audience. But first let us consider some points that the myth of creation on which this play is based reveals.

In the N-Town Creation play we see one version of the myth, which is perhaps the richest of all ancient myths. Ancient symbols of the Goddess, such as the serpent and the tree of knowledge, are given a new meaning and the seal of patriarchy and female subordination are strong messages. According to Coletti, this is noteworthy in light of "N-Towns' preoccupation with the female presence in religious myth and practice" (83).

The biblical title of Eve, Mother of All Living, was a title which had been widely used in Mesopotamia as the name of the all-powerful Goddess. In the Hebrew faith it is still believed that the name of God, YAHWEH, must not be pronounced because it manifests the full creative

powers of God the Creator. But perhaps that is not the only reason that God's name is taboo. In fact, the secret of God's name of power, was that three-quarters of it invoked not God, but Eve. Mascetti explains it this way. YHMH, came from the Hebrew root, HWH, meaning both "life" and "woman," in Latin letters E-V-E. With the addition of an I, it amounted to the Goddess' invocation of her own name as the Word of Creation, which had been a common idea in Egypt and other regions where the Mother Goddess reigned supreme. It was not only the Hebrews who gave the name of God the power to invoke; other ancient peoples believed that by pronouncing the name of the Goddess one could invoke her power and she would become manifest. The same belief is still held in Tibetan Buddhism in which mantras such as "OM," the soundless sound, are chanted in meditation in order to unite the self to the powers of the universe (Mascetti 142).

The creative power is also significant in another way: According to Gnostic scriptures it was Eve, and not God, who created Adam. Adam is said to have been made out of blood and clay: it was common practice in the worship of the Goddess and the God of Fertility, to shape a god-like man made out of clay to represent the power of creation of the Goddess. The legend of Adam's rib out of which Eve was created is now popularly known to be a patriarchal inversion of the myth of the hero-god born

from the Goddess earth, a myth which pre-existed Christianity and from which the new faith had drawn (Mascetti 143).

The symbol of the serpent was also inherited from earlier mythologies in which the Mother Goddess took a serpent as a spouse and, after uniting with him, gave birth to all living things (Mascetti 144). The serpent was the universal symbol of regeneration in many of the earliest cultures, and the coiled snake was the ultimate fertility symbol (Gadon 333). It has frequently been observed that in each area in which the earlier Goddess was known and revered, regardless of her name, she was extolled not only as the Prophet of great wisdom, closely identified with the serpent, but as the original creator, and the patron of sexual pleasures and reproduction as well (Stone 198).

But the serpent is not the only link between the story of Eve and Adam and the worship of the Goddess. Another most important symbol in the story is that of the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil, from which hung the forbidden fruit. The Tree of Knowledge had an important role in the Sumerian creation myth: The symbol of new life was the "haluppu" tree, which emerged out of the ground into the light and grew toward the heavens. This tree formed the axis of the three worlds, connecting the underworld, the earth, and the heavens. In the Sumerian

creation story, the "haluppu" tree, like the biblical Tree of Knowledge, embodied the forces of a culture now polarized--"consciousness and unconsciousness, light and dark, male and female, the power of life and the power of death" (Gadon 122). Egyptian writings also refer to a sacred tree and a type of tree was represented on the signet rings of Crete. We must also keep in mind the antipathy the Hebrews felt toward the asherim, a major symbol of the female religion. It represented all that the people of the book held to be antagonistic to the proper conduct of their way of life. Therefore, it should not surprise us to learn that the symbolism of the tree of forbidden fruit, said to offer the knowledge of good and evil, was included in the creation story to warn that eating the fruit of this tree had caused the downfall of all humanity. Eating of the tree of the Goddess, which usually stood by each altar, was dangerously "pagan" as were Her sexual customs and Her oracular serpents.

So then the advocates of Yahweh, the Levites, wrote their tale of the creation to announce male supremacy. Thus, the domination of the male over the female was not simply added as another Hebrew law but rather was written into the Hebraic code as one of the first major acts and proclamations of the male creator (Stone 217). It is on this patriarchal revision of the creation myth that the Creation play of the N-Town cycle is based.

The Creation Play of the N-Town cycle shows that God created all of paradise. God creates Eve, "Flesh of thy flesh and bone of thy bone,/ Adam, here is thy wife and mate" (Johnston 100) just before He gives Adam the task of naming all the creatures of paradise. The traditional account of creation in the Bible relies fundamentally on the second, or so-called Yahwist account (Genesis 2:7) which is the understanding most readily appropriated in the patristic and medieval period:

And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul. . . . And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him. And out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof. And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him. And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; And the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of man." (Genesis 2.7,18-23)

This account of the creation of humankind conceives woman, who comes from man, to be secondary, a supplement, or in Paul's description, "man the image of God, woman the image of man" (1 Corinthians 11.7-8).

But the first Biblical version of creation (Genesis 1.27) shows the "simultaneous creation of man and woman,

undifferentiated with respect to their humanness, and whose equality is attested by a common designation...homo" (Bloch 22). "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them" (Genesis 1.27). This version of the Creation was all but forgotten and that it did not endure is itself a story of textual as well as sexual repression by church fathers and the author of this play in the N-Town cycle.

Eve then, as depicted in the Creation play, was "Flesh of thy flesh and bone of thy bone" (Johnston 100), brought into being as Adam's companion and helpmate to keep him from being lonely. The N-Town author omits the reference of Eve being created from Adam's rib, but uses the language from this second Creation story of Genesis to inform audiences that Eve was created from a portion of Adam's flesh and a portion of his bones. Medieval audiences were assured by this tale that the male does not come from the female, but the female from the male. Any unpleasant remnant from ancient myths of man being born from woman was denied and omitted was the possibility of man and woman being created simultaneously. Quite simply, given the didactic purpose of the cycle drama, it would have been too unorthodox to represent creation otherwise.

Then Adam was told by God to name everything in paradise: "Thou give them names, thou alone. Herbs and grass, beets and bran. Thy wife thou give a name also..."

(Johnston 106-8). The taboo on the name YAHWEH derives from the occult power of naming. For Adam to be instructed to name all the creatures and vegetation of the garden, including his wife, sent a clear message of woman as being secondary in the sense of derivative or inferior. Or, according to Miles, "the 'order of creation'--man first, woman second--was understood to reflect cosmic order and to stipulate social order" (17). Thus we are expected to understand that the sole and divine purpose of woman's existence is to help serve man in some way.

Also in the N-Town cycle the manner in which Eve is tempted to eat the fruit of the forbidden tree is never given much thought, but here we must remember that Eve never intends to disobey God. We are first shown an obedient Eve who resists the temptations of the serpent. It is only after she has been convinced by the serpent that knowledge will give her power that she decides to eat the fruit. Clearly we are to understand Eve's acceptance of the fruit as the action of a foolishly gullible woman easily tricked by the promises of the perfidious serpent:

Of this apple, if you will bite,
 Even as God is, so shall you be--
 Wise and knowing--as I you plight.
 Like unto God in all degree. . . .
 All things shall in your power be.
 You shall be God's peer. (Johnston 182-90)

But, notice that the serpent actually appeals to Eve as a woman who desires knowledge, a desire for the most

powerful element in creation. Eve desires the power that knowledge can give to her as an independent and legitimate person to understand the forces of the universe. However, the presentation of the serpent as a source of evil was surely intended to nullify the latent power resident in womanhood, the power of creation itself. That power, combined with knowledge, could not be allowed to threaten the patriarchal establishment. Therefore, the serpent, the woman's familiar counselor in the ancient Paradise myths, had to be presented as a source of evil. It was surely intended also that the serpent be placed in such a menacing and villainous role to teach the lesson that to listen to the prophets of the female deity would be to violate the religion of the male deity in a most dangerous manner.

The ancient Hebrews probably understood the tree of the knowledge of good and evil to represent the sacred tree of the Goddess, the familiar asherah which stood beside the altars of the temples of the Goddess (Stone 220). The N-Town author surely hoped to convey the basic message commonly preached to church followers: Don't think, accept what is, accept what authority says is true. Above all, do not use your own intelligence, your own powers of mind, to question or to seek independent knowledge. For if you do, your punishment will be horrible indeed.

The knowledge that the tree represents is the knowledge of the divine, or enlightenment, and that equates to power. Eve's first response is emphatically "no" in order to obey God's command concerning this particular tree; but when the serpent argues that Eve, as well as Adam, would be "wise and knowing" as well as "God's peer," Eve begins to listen. This power of knowledge was jealously guarded by God for it resided solely in Him. Eve believed that by eating the fruit she would have the independent power that knowledge would provide; to gain that independence, she disobeys God's command. She no longer behaves as the compliant female who simply accepts what she is told. Thus Eve, representing womankind, enacts the most abominable of transgressions; she defies authority. This defiance was justly feared. If the weak and oppressed refused to obey, what medieval thinkers identified as "natural order" would be upset, and chaos--both social and theological--would follow. Hence, Eve's defiance issues a real challenge to established order and threatens established institutions. It is purely and simply the archetypal power play and the patriarchy was well aware of the domino effect it could have.

For example, Eve defied God because of her desire for knowledge, but then she provoked the innocent Adam into doing the same:

Take this fair apple into your hand
 Thereof a morsel bite and assay
 To eat this apple that I have found.
 God's fellow to be always--
 All his wisdom to understand
 And God's peer to be for aye. (Johnston 210-15)

Eve is now shown to have ruined a good thing. The previous blissful life in the Garden of Eden has been destroyed at the hands of the woman Eve.

Why Adam himself was never thought to be equally foolish has never been questioned or worth discussing (Stone 5). Instead, the patriarchy arrogated to itself the sole human ownership of knowledge, denying womankind any but the most bestial kind of creativity. So feared was the sexuality and creative power of womankind that even today women are stereotyped as "dumb" and useful only to serve as vessels for the relief of male sexual tension.

The author of the N-Town Creation play, like the church theologians, interprets this fall from paradise as the beginning of "original sin," the responsibility for which is placed upon woman. But it is important to understand the social and ideological meaning of this play in terms of its historical context.

In fact, it is only from the historical perspective that the story of Eve taking counsel from a serpent makes any sense. The fact that the serpent, an ancient prophetic or oracular symbol of the Goddess, advises Eve, the prototypical woman, to disobey a male god's commands

is surely not just an accident. Nor is it an accident that Eve in fact follows the advice of the serpent: that, in disregard of God's commands, she eats from the sacred Tree of Knowledge. The Tree of Knowledge was a symbol associated with the Goddess in earlier mythology and under the old mythical and social reality a woman as priestess was the vehicle for divine wisdom and revelation (Stone 88). The N-Town author, in an attempt to rid the audience of the remnants of any pagan beliefs, also believed this story to be a vital force in explaining the subordination of women in medieval society, the power politics of imposing a dominator society.

Transforming the ancient symbol of oracular wisdom into a symbol of satanic evil and blaming woman for all the misfortunes of humanity was politically expedient to the male dominated society. It was a deliberate reversal of reality as it had formerly been perceived. The N-Town author sought to remind man of the horrible consequences of Eve's disobedience as well as instill a clear warning to the people to avoid the still persistent worship of the Goddess.

The "sin" of Eve when she defied God and herself dared go to the source of knowledge was in essence her refusal to give up that worship. And because she--the first and symbolic woman--clung to the old faith more

tenaciously than did Adam, who only followed her lead, her punishment was to be more dreadful.

Woman, you began all this sinning
And bade him break my bidding.
Therefore, thou shalt be underling
And to man's bidding bend.
What he biddeth thee, do thou that thing
And bear thy children with great groaning
In danger and thy death dreading
Unto thy life's end (Johnston 333-40)

Henceforth, she would have to submit to all things. Not only her sorrow, but her conception--the number of children she must bear--would be greatly multiplied. And for all eternity she was now to be ruled by a vengeful God and his earthly representative, man (Stone 89). This indeed is the most revealing example of how the church fathers and the author of the N-Town play serve to interpret the Bible in order to establish and maintain a reality of male dominance, hierarchism, and female subordination.

CHAPTER III

EVE IN THE OTHER CYCLES

All of the cycles depict Eve slightly differently. As we have seen, despite the misogynistic approach of N-Town, Eve in that cycle is independent and responsible. In Chester, she is clearly subordinate to Adam; and in York, and also probably in Towneley, though equal to Adam, she is manipulative and devious.

EVE IN THE CHESTER CYCLE

The Chester play of the Fall differs notably from N-Town, York, and Towneley in its degree of fidelity to the Scriptures. Norma Kroll states that the other plays portray a "God-focused world in Genesis," but that the Chester play is a "complex representation of a human-centered world" (175). Chester does not simply emulate the Scriptures; as Woolf explains, it "firmly embeds the murder of Abel in the life-history of Adam and Eve, [with] the Fall and the murder in fact forming one play" (125). In the other plays the plots are based on Scriptural events but derive their form and the significance of the action from church doctrine.

The Creation play of the Chester cycle, known as the Drapers Play, specifically translates into drama stories that had already been definitively formulated by church

fathers from the Scriptures. One can see that the author tried to remain faithful to the Genesis account of the Scriptures with some reworking, but, according to Kroll, the play emphasizes the "physicality of God's acts, both in building and in managing his creation" (178). The play opens with a monologue by God describing Himself (or Herself as the Toronto production interpreted the event) creating the world; then in stanza 11 God speaks of creating the first woman and man simultaneously "which sets up an earthly system of values [that] ironically competes against allegiance to God." So here, deftly applying the Genesis account, the dramatist portrays "a God who highlights Eve's and Adam's ties to the earth and each other" (179):

Now heaven and earth is made expresse,
make wee man to our likenesse.
Fishe, fowle, beast--more and lesse--
to mayster he shall have might.
To our shape now make I thee;
man and woman I will there bee.
Grove and multiplye shall yee,
and fulfill the earth on hight. (lines 81-8)

Unlike the N-Town play, the Chester play does describe the first account of the creation of human beings. This description is significant

since God's "shape" provides the pattern for Eve's as well as for Adam's body, the two humans are like each other as well as like God. In essence, they are not only equivalent but are also equal, an equality that is confirmed even as it is finally destroyed when the fallen Eve is newly subjected to Adam [in line 318]. (Kroll 179)

In stanza 15 and 16, the author slightly revises the creation of Eve. Here, Adam is created first; following the Scriptures, the dramatist shows God taking a rib and some flesh from Adam. This is significant in that the play now follows the second, or the so-called Yahwist, account of Creation.

Hit is not good man only to bee;
 helpe to him now make wee.
 But excice sleepe behoves mee
 anon in this man heare.
 One sleepe thou arte, wll I see.
 Heare a bone I take of thee,
 and fleshe alsoe with harte free
 to make thee a feere. (lines 129-36)

But, unlike the Genesis account, the dramatist portrays God adding the flesh he had taken from Adam to Eve's body instead of using it to close the gap in Adam's side. According to Norma Kroll, this emphasizes "that Adam and Eve share a double corporeal bond: they are close because they have the same bodily form--bone--and the same earthly substance--flesh." Kroll further argues that this action, this "doubling," elevates Eve's role, making her "Adam's equal complement and 'freere'" rather than stressing the "adoration of God required of their counterparts in the York, Towneley, and N-Town plays" (180). Furthermore, the author's use of the words "likenesse" and "shape" often reveals the belief that God saw woman and man as alike and equal.

After creating Eve, God instructs Adam to awaken and name this creation whatever he desires. As in the N-Town

Creation story, that Adam is given this task suggests that woman derives from man and makes woman secondary. God has made Eve and Adam in the same "likenesse" and of the same "bonne" and "fleshe" but he has also intimated "Hit is not good man only to bee" (line 129), woman is a supplement to the existence of man. Even though the playwright slightly revises this second Genesis account of the Creation, textual repression is still operative in the choice to use the second Creation story to build the play from. Nevertheless, the Chester play does differ from the other versions in that it mentions, however briefly, that God at least had the thought of woman and man being created simultaneously.

But more obvious than the textual repression is the sexual repression present when we read these lines from Adam:

for out of man taken shee is,
and to man shee shall drawe.
Of earth thou madest first mee,
both bone and fleshe; now I see
thou haste her given through thy postee
of that I in me had. (lines 149-156)

In this speech Adam has made it very clear that he is the primary creation and that woman is second. According to Miles this again reflects a canonical cosmic order of males and females and stipulates social order (17). The consequence of this presentation is that woman lacks some vital ingredient in her makeup because she was an afterthought to God's creation of Adam, a belief

perpetuated by an English patriarchal society in religious turmoil.

Then, if we are to follow the sequence of the play, Demon appears. Demon, in his own form, laments his being cast out of heaven and expresses his envy that man is given paradise and he nothing, "should such a caytiffe made of claye/have such blisse? Nay, by my laye!" (lines 177-8). Demon desires to destroy Eve and Adam simply "because they are made of and enjoy the earth" (Kroll 183). According to Kroll, this differs significantly from his counterparts' envy of the first humans' intellectual nature and links to God. Demon then devises a plan to cause the downfall of Eve and Adam. Suggesting a disguise, Demon says he will put on his "adders coate" and approach the woman. Demon reasons that woman will do anything she has been forbidden to do, so he assumes a form that will complement Eve's. He will approach Eve in the guise of "a maydens face" and being female and as young as she, he will earn Eve's trust. She will then do his bidding and eat of the forbidden fruit. But a careful look at this play reveals a flaw--or loophole as the case may be. God's order that Adam shun the Tree of Knowledge occurs prior to the Creation of Eve. Further, we find that Adam neglects to instruct Eve about God's prohibition. This omission enhances Demon's logical appeal to Eve:

Woman, why was God soe nyce
 to byd you leave for your delice
 and of each tree in paradise
 to forsake the meate? (lines 209-12)

Demon asks Eve why God would leave her here in delight and instruct her to not eat of the fruit of any of the trees found in paradise. But Eve informs Demon that they may eat of any tree in paradise except for one, and points the tree out to him. Apparently, Eve has been endowed with clairvoyance as well as with a supreme intelligence, for how else could she know God's wishes? God is never shown giving Eve any direct instructions about a particular tree, nor did Adam give her the instructions he had received from God. Eve receives no verbal instructions of any kind. We are left to surmise that Eve had been endowed with this knowledge directly by God as an element of her creation. The N-Town and the York versions of the Creation story show that Eve and Adam receive God's instructions together concerning the Tree of Knowledge, but in Chester the author has omitted this vital piece of information. We could draw two different conclusions from this presentation: one, that Eve's intelligence is, indeed, superior to Adam's, needing no verbal instruction. More likely, we could also conclude that part of woman's burden is to intuit the desires of man and God.

Stanzas 28-30 of the Chester play show the serpent using his most cunning argument on Eve. He claims that if

Eve eats of the fruit she will not lose paradise but "be as wyse as hee." He tells Eve that she and Adam would be like gods because they will know both good and evil, "welle and woe." In this play he does not argue that she will become God's peer which in York and N-Town is the great lure for Eve. In fact, in Chester, the force of Eve's desire for knowledge propels her to take the fruit with little prompting. Thus, disobeying authority and using the intelligence that God has already given her, she makes the decision in favor of more knowledge and she accepts the fruit, daring to seek power and independence for herself in knowing the difference between the good in the world and the evil.

Eve's temptation of Adam takes place in the Chester play in a single stanza in which Adam is convinced that he should eat of the fruit that Eve has offered him. A traditionalist theology influences Eve's failure to tell Adam that the fruit, or apple, will give him knowledge. Eve only tells Adam that the fruit is "fayre; hit may thou not forsake" (line 252). Traditionalists would say that Adam was so attracted to Eve's sexual mystique that he was beguiled by her to eat of the fruit and that Adam then, should not carry the blame for this transgression because woman's devilish sexuality is the cause of this evil. But Adam, using his God-given intelligence, chooses to eat of the fruit just as Eve has chosen to eat of the fruit so

that he may acquire independent knowledge himself. And indeed, God confirms this interpretation, saying to Adam:

Adam, nowe hast thou ty wyllynge,
for thou desyred above all thinge
of good and evell to have knowinge;
and thy desyre fullfilled. (lines 369-71, 376)

Unlike the N-Town play, the Chester play offers no suggestion of hope and "there is no suggestion that, driven from the garden, Eve and Adam find in their mutual sin a common bond to unite them in their woe" (Travis, 91). Travis points out that the act of disobedience has "bitterly estranged [Adam and Eve]: Eve's last words blame the serpent for her sin, Adam's last words continue reviling his wife" (91). God clothes them in "dead beaste skynes," not for protection from the elements, but to remind them that "death noe way may you flee." "Driving the pair from the garden, God pitilessly underlines the ironic fruition of their wish to know 'both weelle and woe': sorrow, hard labor, and death, he explains, will be their lot" (91). This was a powerful message to medieval audiences as it makes clear that all subsequent ills result from Eve's folly.

According to Woolf, this play of the Fall is a satiric attack on women based on the Bible's account of Adam accusing Eve as the wrongdoer. It begins in the Chester play in Demon's opening monologue explaining his decision to approach Eve in a "flagrantly anachronistic

generalization" (123). Thus Woolf argues, Eve's sin is reduced to the level of obstinate perversity, a common theme of anti-feminist satire. The theme is reinforced by Adam when he addresses the audience later in the play:

Now all my kynde by mee ys kente,
to flee womens intycement;
whoe trusteth them in any intente,
truely hee is deceaved.
My licourouse wyfe hath bynne my foe,
the devylls envye shente mee also,
These too together well may goe,
the suster and the brother! (lines 349-56)

A similar warning is given in the York play, where Adam, after reproaching Eve for her disobedience and evil counsel, adds, "Nowe god late never man aftir me/ triste woman tale".

According to Woolf the theme of disobedience and evil counsel is also repeated in the play of Noah, where the playwrights were free to depict a woman who by her speech and conduct exemplified these vices. "Eve, however, could not be characterized with mocking derision: contempt is displayed in what is said about her but not in the presentation of her as a debased comic figure" (123). (It is interesting to note that only in N-Town is Noah's wife presented as anything but a debased comic figure. The N-Town Noah play depicts a totally cooperative, submissive, and compliant Uxor.) Woolf goes on to explain that there is a discrepancy between Eve and the comments that are made about her by Adam and Demon. The discrepancy is used

to draw attention to the beginnings of a pattern, a pattern where all women, prototypes of Eve, are foolish, obstinate, and disobedient.

EVE IN THE YORK CYCLE

In the York cycle, the entire story of the Fall of Man is divided into four plays. The Cardmakers play depicts God creating Eve and Adam; the Regynall of the Fullers Pagyant is the play in which God puts Eve and Adam into the Garden of Eden and then instructs them not to eat of "the tree of good and yll"; then the Cowpers play shows man's disobedience and the fall from Eden; and finally, the Armourers play shows Eve and Adam driven from Eden. All four of these plays tell the story of the Fall of Man and are much more detailed than the single plays presented in the N-Town and the Chester cycle.

In the Cardmakers play the audience sees God the Creator as He creates the stars, moon, sun, trees, beasts, and the fish. After completing this creation in five days, God feels that there is no one beast which by reason of its nature will worship Him. As in the Chester play, God then decides to create beings "aftir my shappe and my liknesse" simultaneously so that they may worship Him and love all that He has created. The York author shows God creating man's blood and bones from the earth as he says, "rise vppe, pou erthe in bloode and bone" (line 35). He then takes man's "lefte rybbe" and creates woman as a

"faithfull freende and sibbe" (line 40). But it is worth noting that only after God has created both humans does He give them both life:

Takis nowe here þe goste of liffe,
And ressayue bothe youre soules of me,
þis ffemalle take þou to þi wiffe;
Adam and Eue youre names shalle bee. (lines 41-4)

Unlike the N-Town and the Chester versions, which follow the Yahwist account of the creation of humankind, the York version depicts God as breathing life into both woman and man at the same time. Here God has moved from conception of the idea for woman and man to the actual gift of life to both as one thought and movement with no distinction as to which one is supreme over the other. God then instructs Adam that "þis ffemalle take þou to þi wiffe" (line 43). The N-Town and Chester plays show God giving life to Adam and then putting him to sleep in order to create Eve from his rib. Both of these versions conceive woman coming from man as an afterthought, secondary to God's creation of man.

The York play differs from the N-Town and Chester plays in yet another way. The York God retains all power over his human creations as he gives them their names himself, "Adam and Eue youre names shalle bee" (line 44). Instead of instructing Adam to name his wife as well as all the other creatures in the Garden, God has retained the power in naming. That the naming of Eve is not a task

given to Adam is significant here because it emphasizes that woman is not a secondary creation to man either in thought or in naming, but that God creates woman so that Adam will not be "with-outyn faithfull freende and sibbe" (line 40).

Unlike the N-Town and Chester plays, the discussion among God, Eve, and Adam is extensive, revealing that to develop this incident into a full play the author elaborated on the facts found in the Scriptures, going into much more detail as to what God hopes for woman and man to accomplish in this world. The Cardmakers play then solidifies the idea of equality between woman and man in 13 stanzas of dialogue among Eve, Adam, and God. In these stanzas Eve and Adam together first see paradise and give thanks to their creator.

The equality between Eve and Adam is exemplified several times in this short play beginning with Adam's quote, "3itte is non made to pi liknesse/ But we allone, a! loued be py name" (lines 51-2). Adam realizes he and Eve are the only creatures made in the likeness of God. This makes him and Eve equals in their garden paradise. Eve goes on to support Adam's discovery commenting, "To swilke a lorde in alle degree/ Be euer-more lastand louynge,/ pat to vs such a dyngnyte" (lines 53-5). Eve supports Adam in his thought and states that because she and Adam are created equally in the image of God they

alone are blessed with a dignity not found in the other creatures. No trace of one human's having power over the other can be found in Eve's or Adam's dialogue.

God's dialogue to Eve and Adam is equally liberating when He states that "Bothe wyse and witty shalle pou bee" (line 69). God uses the plural form of you (pou) in His speech meaning that Eve and Adam will both possess the same characteristics and live in bliss equally together. God then instructs "Comes forthe ȝe two with me" (line 94) as he takes Eve and Adam further into paradise to show them their place of dwelling.

There is nothing quite comparable to this scene found in the N-Town or the Chester plays. In taking it upon himself (or herself) to modify this portion of the Scriptural treatment of Eve in order to add some breadth that the story may qualify as an individual play in the cycle, the playwright refrains from any display of gender bias.

The next play in the York cycle is the Regynall of the Fullers Pagyant. In this play God puts Eve and Adam in the Garden of Eden and this is where instructions are given concerning the "tree of good and yll." A major difference is found in this portion of the York cycle not found in the N-Town and the Chester plays. In the N-Town play, while Eve is present but not acknowledged, God instructs Adam to not eat of "this tree of Knowing" (line

120). The Chester play has God giving Adam the instructions "but of this tree, for weale nor wynne,/ thou eate by noe way" (lines 119-20) just before he puts Adam to sleep and creates Eve. But in the York play, both Eve and Adam are taken into the Garden and both are given the instructions about the "tree" together, and not just once, but reference is made five different times.

The first reference is made when God says:

The tree of good and yll,
 What tyme you eates of thys
 Thowe speydes thy self to spyll,
 And be brought owte of blysse. (lines 56-9)

God says this directly to Eve and Adam together and reinforces the point just ten lines later with:

Therefore this tree alone,
 Adam, this owte-take I,
 The frute of it negh none,
 For an ye do, then shall ye dye. (lines 66-9)

God goes on to hear Adam, and then Eve, promise that they have no cause to disobey for there is such an abundance of other fruit in the garden. God then warns for the third time "look that ye doe as ye haue sayd" in line 80 and then goes on for the fourth time to be clearer in his message:

Thys tre that beres the Fruyte of Lyfe,
 Luke nother thowe nor Eve thy wyf,
 Lay ye no handes there tyll,
 For-why do my byddyng,
 It is knowen bothe of good and yll,
 This frute but ye lett hyng
 Ye speyd your self to spyll. (lines 83-9)

God has again warned Eve and Adam that if they should eat of this tree they will be ruined. Then, for the fifth time he reinforces his message to both of them with "All other at your wyll shall be,/ I owte-take nothyng but this tree,/To feyd you with in feare" (lines 93-5). The York playwright has shown Eve and Adam, simultaneously, receiving instructions concerning the Tree of Good and Evil five different times in the Fullers play. Not only does this play expand the story in the Scriptures, but also it differs from the other cycles. In the York play to this point, Eve and Adam are presented as equal in all things.

Depicting man's disobedience and the fall from Eden, the Cowpers play is the next in the York cycle. As in the N-Town version, the York playwright shows an obedient Eve who initially resists the temptation of the serpent. Though the play is fairly close to the Genesis story, the author again has expanded the scene.

In the York play, as in Chester, Satan makes an initial appearance to lament being cast out of heaven. In the Chester play Demon desires to destroy Eve and Adam simply "because they are made of and enjoy the earth" (Kroll 183). The York play differs in that "Satan gives a new and extraordinary motive for his rebellion in heaven, namely that God had purposed to take upon him man's nature" instead of the nature of His angels (Woolf 116).

According to Kroll, Satan is envious of the first humans' intellectual nature and their links to God and so devises his plan to approach Eve in the likeness of a worm (183).

Satan approaches Eve as "I, a frende" and asks why she does not eat of all the fruit that is available. Eve then explains that God has instructed her and Adam to not eat the fruit of "pat" tree because it would do them harm. Satan then asks for further explanation which Eve patiently gives him. Satan then begins a convincing argument for eating the forbidden fruit. Satan here uses his most cunning argument when he tells Eve she "shalle haue knowyng as wele as hee" so "pat yhe may wirshipped be" (lines 51, 55). But the enticement of worship is still insufficient inducement for Eve, and Satan must make a stronger argument telling her that she will have knowledge and be as wise as God, like a "goddiss shalle ye be" (line 70). After winning Eve's trust Satan gives her the fruit and advises, "byte on boldly, be nought a-basshed" (line 80).

According to Woolf, the temptation of Eve and her consequent persuasion of Adam is managed rather formally in this play, as it is in the Chester play, where the authors keep close to their source in Genesis. The nature of how Eve persuades Adam is briefly presented, probably because the playwright had no source (116). The Chester playwright is even briefer and more subtle than the York

playwright. Eve's temptation of Adam takes place in one short stanza. The York playwright, however, shows Adam deceived by the serpent's promise which Eve repeats. The York author does not specifically follow the traditionalist view of Eve's tempting Adam through her "sexual mystique," but rather shows Eve having to make the same argument to Adam that the serpent has made to her. Woolf states,

there had, however, been detailed analysis of the nature of Adams sin: theologians, following I Timothy ii. 14, held that Adam, unlike Eve, had not been deceived by the serpents promise that they would be as gods, and, following Augustine, that Adam had consented out of "amicabili quadam benevolentia", the good will of one creature towards another. (117)

The York playwright, ignoring this traditional, theological interpretation, shows Adam deceived by the exact argument the serpent used on Eve. Adam then, is as much to blame for this transgression as Eve since both were convinced to do so by the same argument and both used their God-given intelligence to make the decision. Further, the York playwright emphasizes that Eve and Adam are equally to blame when he depicts God punishing them equally:

Adam and Eue, alsoo, yhe
In erthe þan shalle ye swete and swynke,
And trauayle for youre fode. (lines 160-2)

In the treatment of the Fall, the York playwright, like the N-Town playwright, expands and illuminates the

audience's understanding. Woolf points out that the Chester author is the only one to simply paraphrase the Genesis text which shows Adam willing to shift the blame to Eve and Eve to shift the blame to the serpent, "neither gives a dignified impression by acceptance of responsibility and neither expresses contrition, whether towards God or each other" (119). The N-Town author strays from Genesis slightly when Adam, instantly upon eating the apple, blames Eve, but then continues by admitting his own guilt in the transgression. It is at this point in N-Town when Eve and Adam are both thinking of their relationship with God that Eve thinks of the harm she has done to Adam as she invites him to kill her. The issue is not who is to blame: Eve is, indeed, culpable. The issue is why Adam and Eve sinned and whether they accept the responsibility for their sins. Eve does, Adam does not. Thus, the effect in the N-Town cycle is to give Eve the dignity of having been an active participant rather than a passive victim.

In the York cycle the recriminations of Adam and Eve are amplified at length. God condemns and punishes Eve and Adam equally, but interspersed throughout their expulsion are further excuses and reproaches from Eve and Adam. Adam accuses, "womans witte was light" and gives a warning adding "Nowe god late never man aftir me triste woman tale."

Eve here enlarges upon her self-exculpatory accusations by hitting back at Adam's anti-feminist reproach about woman's wit being defective with the rebuke that he should therefore have ruled her, "Mans maistrie shulde have bene more," the traditional moral allegorization of Adam and Eve as reason and senses or soul and body, thus providing the material for what in human terms is spirited but profitless wrangling. (Woolf 120)

Nevertheless, in the final scene Eve and Adam quit recriminating and lament their dual transgression and think only of the nature of their sin and their loss.

In the Chester play, Eve's sin is reduced to obstinate perversity, a common theme of anti-feminist satire. In the York play, a similar warning. Again, Eve is not portrayed as a debased figure, but contempt is displayed in what is said about her. And again we see the pattern, a pattern where all women, prototypes of Eve, are foolish, obstinate, and disobedient. This suggests the degree to which the medieval playwrights may have self-consciously appropriated the prevailing female stereotypes toward a distinctive end.

EVE IN THE TOWNELEY CYCLE

The Creation play in the Towneley cycle is missing approximately twelve leaves which, no doubt, included the temptation of Eve and the expulsion from the Garden of Eden. It is tempting to read significance into that fact when one realizes what a large omission from the Creation play of the cycle that loss represents. One can only

speculate as to what happened to the missing leaves, but there is some reason to think that Puritan influences may have been responsible. Indeed, if the Towneley Eve was as powerful as the N-Town Eve, or even the York Eve, Puritan divines might well have censored the play by removing the offending passages. Nevertheless, the four scenes that are left from the Towneley Creation play show considerable similarity to York. In fact, it is partly this similarity which leads many scholars to assume a common source for York and Towneley. The remnant is sufficiently similar to N-town that we can posit that Towneley--like York and N-Town--based its God-focused world on Genesis.

According to Kroll, in Scripture God both makes Adam in His image and emphasizes that the first man is preeminently a bodily creature:

and God said unto them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth. (Gen. 1.28)

The Old Testament text implies that in some sense God might also have a bodily nature, "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him" (Gen. 1.27). Medieval doctrine nullified any such possibility by interpreting the original in ways that prove God is pure intelligence and that the divine part of man is his mind, not his body. The cycle dramatists then could

choose whether to build on the Old Testament imagery of the body or, to follow doctrine highlighting man's intellectual desires. The dramatists for the N-Town, York, and Towneley cycles differ from the Chester author primarily because they take the latter approach (176).

A striking similarity between Towneley and York occurs in the way that the Towneley God creates Eve and in Towneley's depiction of Eve and Adam as equals in his commands to them after entering Eden. As in the York play, God creates Adam "to our liknes" and gives him knowledge and strength, and in the same creative motions decides that "it is not good to be alone" and creates Eve. Then God states, "Ye both to gouerne that here is" implying that both woman and man would govern equally the paradise which He has created. Also similar to the York play, Adam is not instructed to name his wife; God names them both, thus retaining the power in naming. That the naming of Eve is not a task given to Adam is significant, as in the York play, because it emphasizes that woman is not a secondary creation to man in thought or in naming. Both of these sections in the Towneley Creation play parallel that which is in the York Creation play so much that one can readily see why so many scholars assert that the Towneley author borrowed heavily from the York cycle: clearly the Towneley author took the same liberties with the Biblical text.

Another striking similarity between the Towneley play and the York play is seen in the equality of the treatment of Eve and Adam by God as He leads them together into the garden of Eden, thus both see paradise for the first time together and both hear God's instructions simultaneously. God tells both Eve and Adam His command concerning the tree of life, "Heris thou adam, and eue thi wife, I forbede you the tre of life" (lines 198-9). The equality in the treatment of Eve and Adam by God in the Towneley Creation play is then similar to that of the York Creation play when God commands:

The tree of good and yll,
 What tyme you eates of thys
 Thowe speydes thy self to spyll,
 And be brought owte of blysse. (lines 56-9)

Then it is possible to assume, from what we have remaining of the cycle, that the Towneley Creation play possesses a similar tone to that of the York Creation play. And, that even though there are twelve leaves missing, we might guess that the dramatist took a more liberal interpretation of the original text than did the dramatists of the N-Town and the Chester cycles.

CHAPTER IV
PRIVILEGED ATTITUDES:
EVE AS TEMPLATE FOR MODERN WOMAN

Clearly, the middle ages privileged a patriarchal view of women as having no independent role in society, functioning merely as adjuncts to the dominant men in the culture. This was the view promoted by the Church and it has little basis in fact. However, while the history of women has been a history of the subordination of women to powerful men responsible for writing that history, these same women were active shapers of and participants in their society.

In the cycle plays the dramatists reveal varying versions of the Eve and Adam myth in an attempt to promote the Church's views toward women in general. Using Eve as an example, the church fathers promoted subordination and misogyny, teaching that woman was created as an afterthought to God's creation of man. In general the cycles portray Eve as lacking some ingredient vital to the makeup of an individual who could fully participate in the society, and that she lacked this ingredient because God did not see fit to give it to her at her creation. This belief was perpetuated by an English patriarchal society in religious turmoil.

In all the cycles we see different versions of that richest of all ancient myths, the Creation story. The N-Town Creation play is based on the traditional account of creation which relies fundamentally on the second, or Yahwist, account--the one most frequently taught in the patristic and medieval periods. This account of the creation of woman and man conceives woman, who comes from man, to be secondary, a supplement to man. Even though the N-Town author omits the exact reference to Eve being created from Adam's rib, the language of the second version of creation from Genesis is used to inform audiences that Eve was created from a portion of Adam's flesh and a portion of his bones. Thus, medieval audiences were assured by the tale that the male does not come from the female, but the female from the male. Any unpleasant remnant from ancient myths of man being born from woman was denied and the possibility of man's and woman's simultaneous creation was completely omitted.

The N-Town dramatist then goes on to further subordinate Eve in the Creation play by making Adam responsible for the naming of everything in paradise, including his mate, Eve. It was believed that there was an ancient occult power in naming, and for Adam to be instructed to name his wife sent a clear message that woman was to be considered secondary--that is, derivative or inferior. This "order of creation" then was understood

by medieval audiences to reflect a cosmic order, and this "cosmic order" carried over into the social order.

But the N-Town Eve is also shown to be independent and responsible. She never intends to disobey God's command concerning the Tree of Knowledge. This obedient Eve resists the temptations of the serpent until he convinces her that the fruit will give her power in knowledge. The only weakness one can accuse Eve of is a driving desire for knowledge which she understands intuitively to be power; she succumbs only when the serpent convinces her that this knowledge will make her powerful. Then Eve courageously accepts responsibility for the transgression and willingly suffers her punishment. All the while Adam accuses her of being the one who caused him to sin. Adam, then, makes it appear as though he would never have thought of eating the fruit, as though only the woman would think of such a thing. This says a great deal, both positive and negative, about Eve's intellect. Ultimately, the effect in the N-Town cycle is to give Eve the dignity of having been an active participant rather than a passive victim, and Eve is revealed as an obedient, independent person, responsible for her actions.

The Creation play of the Chester cycle reveals an Eve clearly subordinate to Adam and translates into drama a story that was definitively formulated by church fathers

from Scripture. In this play the author tried to remain faithful to the Genesis account introducing only minimal reworking. Unlike the N-Town version, the Chester author describes the first account (Genesis 1) of the creation of human beings before going on to portray the creation of Eve from the bone and flesh He takes from Adam. Although the dramatist follows the second account of creation in the Scriptures portraying Adam as created first, it is significant that the first account of creation is mentioned. This significance lies in a more equal portrayal of Eve and Adam. Furthermore, the author's use of the words "likenesse" and "shape" reveals that God saw woman and man as alike and equal.

Then, like the N-Town play, God instructs Adam to name his mate. This again suggests that woman derives from man and makes woman secondary, a supplement to the existence of man. So even though the playwright mentions the first account of the creation of humankind in Genesis, it is the second account on which the play is based. Yet, the play does mention, however briefly, that God at least had some design in which woman and man were created simultaneously.

In Chester the author attempts to show Eve as inferior in that Demon designs his plan for the downfall of humankind around the weak female. Demon suggests that a woman will do anything that she has been forbidden to

do; therefore, he will approach her about eating the fruit from the forbidden tree. But in this play Eve is never shown having received any instructions concerning the Tree of Knowledge, either from God or from Adam. Yet she explains to Demon God's command. That Eve needed no verbal instructions would appear to give Eve a superior intelligence. Hence, Demon must use his most cunning argument on Eve, explaining that Eve and Adam will be like gods. The force of Eve's desire for knowledge (and power) propels her to accept with no further prompting. Eve disobeys authority using the intelligence that God has already given her. She makes a decision in favor of more knowledge, seeking power and independence in the knowledge of the difference between the good in the world and the evil. So instead of showing Eve as completely inferior, the author succeeds in making Eve appear to be intelligent and independent.

But that is the end of Eve's apparent superiority. The Chester author paraphrases the Genesis text when God confronts Eve and Adam for their sin. Here Adam is willing to shift the blame to Eve and Eve shifts the blame to the serpent, neither appearing very responsible for their own actions and neither appearing to regret the transgression. The Chester author then portrays Adam continuously reviling his wife for their troubles, and as God clothes them in the skins of dead animals the powerful

message is clear to medieval audiences that all subsequent ills result from Eve's folly.

In the York cycle, the creation story is divided into four plays. As in the Chester play, God decides to create human beings and speaks of woman and man simultaneously. He creates both at the same time and then gives them both life. Unlike the N-Town and the Chester versions, however, the York dramatist portrays God as giving life to woman and man at the same time, moving from conception of the idea to the actual life-giving breath as one thought and movement making no distinction, no design for one to be subservient to the other.

The York play differs from both the other plays in yet another way. In the York cycle God does not give Adam the task of naming his mate. In this cycle God retains the power in naming and names the female and the male Himself. This is also significant in that it emphasizes that woman is not a secondary creation to man either in thought or in naming. The equality between the two is then exemplified several times in the dialogue among God, Eve, and Adam, and it is clear that God intends Eve and Adam to live in bliss equally together. The playwright has refrained from any display of gender bias.

Gender bias is also lacking when both Eve and Adam are taken into the garden and instructed about the Tree of Knowledge, both promising that they will obey God's

command. Satan then approaches Eve as a friend asking questions but then convincingly explains to Eve that the fruit from the tree will cause all to worship her like a goddess. This enticement is not enough for Eve as she has no desire to disobey God. Satan finally argues that she will be as knowledgeable as God, and this wins Eve's trust. Eve again in this play desires the knowledge to better understand her world and her place in it. It is not until this is made clear to her by Satan that she accepts the forbidden fruit.

The punishment of Eve and Adam in the York play also lacks gender bias. The playwright emphasizes that Eve and Adam are equally to blame when he depicts God punishing them equally. The recriminations are amplified at length as Eve and Adam make excuses and reproach one another. It is only in Adam's attempts to weasel out of his own guilt that true gender bias appears. When the playwright shows Adam explaining that man must never trust a woman, contempt is displayed by what is said about Eve. And so here, again, the pattern surfaces in which all women, prototypes of Eve, are foolish, obstinate, and disobedient.

The four scenes that remain of the Towneley Creation play show a considerable similarity to the York play and a sufficient similarity to N-Town that we can assume it, too, was based on the God-focused world of Genesis

The Towneley play shows a striking similarity to the York play in the way that God creates Eve and Adam as equals and speaks his commands to them after entering Eden. Also similar to the York play is the fact that Adam is not instructed to name his mate as in N-Town and Chester. God names them both, retaining the power in naming. These two sections are so similar that one can see why many scholars assert that the Towneley author borrowed from the York cycle.

The actual creation of Eve and Adam, then, differs significantly from cycle to cycle, and since we know so little about the nature or the beliefs of the dramatists, we can only speculate as to their conservative attitudes. Why do we see such hatred and fear of women in the N-Town and the Chester plays while the York and the Towneley plays reveal a gentler, more equal approach? Women were the core obsession in medieval culture and this attitude together with the need to repress women survives today. Adrienne Rich in Of Woman Born points out (with the help of many others) that there is resentment and anxiety harbored by all men toward women. Rich quotes Joseph Campbell in saying that

there can be no doubt that in the very earliest ages of human history the magical force and wonder of the female was no less a marvel than the universe itself; and this gave to woman a prodigious power, which it has been one of the chief concerns of the masculine part of the

population to break, control and employ to its own ends" (115).

The Corpus Christi cycle plays, as based on the Scriptures, represent a patriarchal monotheism trying to strip the universe of female divinity. Women, therefore, portrayed through Eve, become the property of men, and found their scope and dignity increasingly reduced.

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