Smith Mary Elizabeth
(University of New Brunswick, Canada)

"In the beginning": Some Literary Derivatives from the Genesis Creation Accounts

One of the supreme literary achievements of the English Renaissance, the so-called King James Bible published in 1611, has been commonly regarded as the most influential book in the history of English civilization. Conceived at the Hampton Court Conference in January 1604 by resolution of King James that "a translation be made of the whole Bible, as consonant as can be to the original Hebrew and Greek"[1] while making comparison with earlier translations and revising them, it was brought into being by 47 scholars, and is known as the Authorized Version. Just prior to its appearance, in 1609 and 1610, the whole of the Douay-Rheims version was published in two quarto volumes, the New Testament alone having first been issued in 1568. This version, which remains the foundation on which most English Catholic versions are based, was a translation from the Latin Vulgate of St. Jerome, which the Council of Trent (1547) had declared authoritative for Catholics, and the impulse for it, too, was the religious controversy of the 16th century, including the plethora of Protestant versions in existence .

If ever there was any question of the enormous significance of the Bible, in one version or another, as a source of allusion and inspiration in English literature, David Lyle

[1] Quoted in F. F. Bruce. *History of the Bible in English*. Cambridge: Lutterworth P., 1961, repr. 2002, p. 96. The Epistle Dedicatory of 1611 commends His Majesty that he "out of deep judgment apprehended how convenient it was, that out of the Original Sacred Tongues, together with comparing of the labours, both in our own, and other foreign Languages, of many worthy men who went before us, there should be one more exact Translation of the holy Scriptures into the *English Tongue."* The 1611 Authorized Version included the Old and New Testaments and the Apocrypha.

Jeffrey's 970 page *Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature* (pub. 1992) would have put it to rest. Of specific relevance for the topic of this paper[2], references to the creation/fall foundations of biblical narrative abound. They range from John Milton's epic-poetic justification of the ways of God to man in *Paradise Lost* (1669) to oblique and passing allusions, such as "Never was such a dinner as that since the world began" in Charles Dickens' novel *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838-1839). Some literary derivatives of the Genesis creation/fall passages read *with (*or out of) the biblical text in sympathy with it, either in imaginative exegesis, or else in eisegetical readings that import assumptions from tradition or culture into the silences of the text. Still other literary derivatives read *against* the Genesis text, attempting subversion of it. In order to undertake a brief exploration of the variety of approaches, this paper will first do close reading of some short poems of Thomas Traherne (1637-1674), Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889), and D. H. Lawrence (1885-1930) to see how they interact with the presentation of creation in the early Genesis material, especially chapter 1. It will then discuss ways in which the creation sections of the anonymous medieval *Service for Representing Adam (Ordo repraesentationis Adae*) and *Paradise Lost* Books IV and IX of Milton (1608-1674) interpret the divine/human relationship and the man/woman relationship of Genesis 2 and 3 especially.

Traherne, Hopkins, Lawrence, and Genesis 1

The sentences through which Genesis presents the third-day creation are unadorned:

> And God said, "Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear;" and it was so. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. And God said, "Let the earth put forth vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each

[2] An early version of this paper was presented at the South Central Conference on Christianity and Literature in Jackson, Mississippi, USA, in 1998.

> according to its kind, upon the earth." And it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, a third day. (Genesis 1. 9-13).[3]

In contrast to the style of the biblical text, Traherne's "Meditations on the Six Days of the Creation: Third Day" (1717)[4] is a meditation on the creation event from a post-Genesis 3 perspective, rapturous yet cognizant that "wretched man" may still "forget to praise" (ll.18-20). His series of twenty rhymed and end-stopped iambic- pentameter lines expand metaphorically on the sparse biblical text. They begin:

> Lo here, within the waters liquid womb
> The unborn Earth lay, as in native tomb;
> Whilst she at first was buried in the deep,
> And all her forms and seeds were fast asleep.
> Th'Almighty word then spake, and straight was heard. (ll. 1-5)

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[3] Translations from Genesis are from the 1611 King James version unless otherwise indicated.

[4] **Third Day.** From "Meditations on the Six Days of the Creation" Thomas Traherne.

> Lo here, within the waters liquid womb
> The unborn Earth lay, as in native tomb;
> Whilst she at first was buried in the deep,
> And all her forms and seeds were fast asleep.
> Th'Almighty word then spake, and straight was heard.,
> The Earth her head up from the waters reared.
> The waters soon, as frighted, fled apace,
> And all were swiftly gathered to one place.
> See now the Earth, with life and verdure crowned,
> Spring from her bed, gay, vigorous, and sound;
> Her face ten thousand beauties now adorn,
> With blessing numberless from plenty's horn.
> Here, there, and every where they richly forw,
> For us almighty bounty them does strow.
> The hills and dales, the lawns and woods around,
> God's wisdom, goodness, and his power resound.
> Both far and near his wonders they proclaim.
> How vilely then is wretched man to blame,
> If he forget to praise that liberal hand,
> Out-spread from sea to sea, from land to land?

This poem, and Lawrence's "Let There be Light!" are included in Robert Atwan & Laurence Wieder, *Chapters into Verse: Poetry in English Inspired by the Bible*. Vol.1., Oxford UP, 1993.

Here the birth images "liquid womb," "unborn Earth," "seeds" are juxtaposed with the death images of "tomb" and "buried," carrying back into the freshly created world post-lapsarian connotations of new life emerging from concealment (whether in nature or in the resurrection), while also carrying the possibility of bursting forth from a position of being "fast asleep" even in death into our world. Traherne imagines the speech-action-result of the Word-*Logos* of Genesis in the swift personal-like response of a personified Earth and waters. The Earth rears "her head" up from the waters, while the waters "as frighted" flee into one place (ll. 6-8). This is language consistent with biblical presentations of mountains and hills that sing (Is 55:12), trees that both sing for joy and clap their hands (Is 55:12; Ps.96:12), and stones that would cry out (Lk 19:40) in response to their Creator. In an extended image of richness and splendor Traherne's "hills and dales," "lawns and woods" are "crowned" with "verdure," adorned with a "thousand beauties," and strewn with "blessings numberless" that proclaim God's "wonders" and "resound" with his "wisdom, goodness, and his power" (ll. 9-17). Throughout, plain diction such as "Lo here," "See now," "fled," "swiftly," "spring," "vigorous," and "flow" provide movement, while "spake," "heard," "sound," "resound," "proclaim," and "praise" break the silence. The natural world of the third day demonstrates and celebrates God's glory just by being; it is indeed, in Gerard Manley Hopkins words, "charged with the grandeur of God."

Not so close an image of Genesis as "Meditations," Hopkins' version of an Italian sonnet, "God's Grandeur" (1918)[5], still invites the reader into the same pristine delight as

[5] **God's Grandeur.** Gerard Manley Hopkins.

THE WORLD is charged with the grandeur of God.
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil
Crushed. Why do men then now not reck his rod?
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;
And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

Traherne's poem in its opening two lines, even while it soon juxtaposes images of the flaming, shining, and gathering-to-a-greatness of God's grandeur with the artificiality of foil and the contaminating potential of oozing oil, both of which belong to the post-lapsarian world which is "smeared with trade." The poignancy of the question "Why do men then now not reck his rod? (with the ambiguity of its "then now" which may mean 'therefore, now' or 'then, as well as now'), draws together the Genesis 3 disobedience as archetype with that of subsequent generations to emphasize the broken relationship between humans and their Creator and recalls the question that ends Traherne's meditation, contrasting nature as proclamation of God's glory with man's potential ingratitude: "How vilely then is wretched man to blame, / If he forget to praise that liberal hand, / Out-spread from sea to sea, from land to land?"

The rhetorical structure of Genesis 1 presents humans as the pinnacle of the process of creation, as the crown set on the brow of the world, made in God's image and entrusted with dominion as vice-regents over the rest of the creation that God pronounces "good." Extrapolating from this, such humans might in turn be expected to imitate their Creator by speaking good things into being, including wise care of their environment. In the New Testament Jesus (who is Word-*Logos*) will be seen speaking (or narrating) salvation (forgiveness of sin; physical, emotional and spiritual healing; eternal life) into being, and his followers will also speak words that give life. In contrast, Hopkins' poem stresses the blurring of the image and the perversion of dominion in fallen humans, with resulting devastating effect to the earth. The threefold repetition of the monosyllables "have trod," together with the assonance and

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And for all this, nature is never spent;
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;
And though the last lights off the black West went
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs –
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.

Poems and Prose of Gerard Manley Hopkins. Ed. W.H.Gardner. – Penguin: Harmondsworth, Mlsx., 1953, repr. 1970, p. 27.

alliteration of "seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil" and "wears man's smudge and shares man's smell," forces the reader to ponder the unrelenting movement of the generations across the face of the earth. These things, and the opposition between the soil that is now bare (which in Genesis 1 yields vegetation of every kind) and the foot that is now shod (which in Genesis 2 is bare), create an impression of increasing distance from Eden.

Nevertheless, in the face of such bleakness the second section of the poem optimistically embraces a motif of death and rebirth in an affirmation of the inexhaustibleness of a natural world to which the grandeur of God continues to impart a "freshness deep down." That affirmation and the ecstatic "Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward springs" ("though the last lights off the black West went") recollect the promise of perpetual renewing of creation made to Noah: "I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake. ... While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease" (Genesis 8:21-22). The final profound image of the poem links the hovering or brooding of the Holy Ghost over the bent (or round) world in the process of original creation in Genesis 1:1 with the idea of continuous brooding over the bent (distorted, twisted, or sin-infected) world as the source of its "dearest freshness deep down." This is an image of a Creator still actively involved with and devoted to creation, an image of a God whose relationship with a creation that "groaneth and travaileth in pain" (Romans 8:23) is defined by a "warm breast" of compassion and "bright wings" of mercy.

In stark contrast, D. H. Lawrence's short free-verse poem "Let There Be Light!" (ca.1909),[6] rather than reading Genesis 1

[6] **Let There Be Light!** D.H.Lawrence.
If ever there was a beginning
there was no god in it
there was no verb
no Voice
no Word.

as life-giving story or poem enriched with mystery as Traherne and Hopkins do, reacts to a supposed literal scientific or pseudo-scientific reading of it. Lawrence writes *against* the Genesis text, dismissing the *who* of creation (God created) in relationship with the *what* of creation (humans and the natural world) and the *how* (God's speaking into being). Viewing the Bible with Emily Dickinson as "an antique Volume - / Written by faded men,"[7] rather than from the faith position of Traherne and Hopkins, or a non-faith position that accepts the Genesis text as literary artefact, the speaker in Lawrence's poem dismisses an assumed *how*-methodology ("Mr. God switching on day") as non-event, as event that didn't happen. It would be irrelevant to the speaker whether the methodology of God's speaking (or switching on day) were creationist, evolutionist, or something else, for the poem recognizes no "god," even in the sense of a First Cause. Indeed, the poem expresses uncertainty that there was a beginning and certainty that to propose a possible beginning as divinely ordained is "Just man's conceit." Genesis's "first day" is seen as having come about through some kind of spontaneous generation. That "the incomprehensible plasm of life" struggles and *becomes* light is the best solution Lawrence's poem can offer (and the poem gives no hint how the plasm of life is derived). Absent from such a solution are the purposefulness, order and symmetry that

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There was nothing to say:
Let there be light!
All that story of Mr. God switching on day
is just conceit.

Just man's conceit!
– who made the sun?
– My child, I cannot tell a lie,
I made it!

George Washington's Grandpapa!
All we can honestly imagine in the beginning
is the incomprehensible plasm of life, of creation
struggling
and *becoming* light.

[7] Atwan. – P.3

the pattern of Genesis 1 emphasizes through stylized repetition as an integral aspect of the narration of the beginnings of life.

The Genesis chapter is organized around the Hebrew words *tohu* (without form) and *bohu* (void) into three days of forming followed by three days of filling, and then by a day of rest to complete the seven-day structure familiar in ancient Semitic literatures. Each day begins "And God said" and ends "And the evening and the morning were the ... day" and is punctuated with the formulas "And it was so," and "God saw that it was good." Only the creation of male and female persons in God's image on the sixth day is more expansive, adding both the blessing of fruitfulness and the responsibility of dominion, while the poetic form of 1:27 heightens the sense of relatedness between Creator and people as God forges a bond with humanity. Rather than being a random process without personality and thus without emotion as in "Let there Be Light!," the creation in Genesis is personal and thus holds emotion within its highly stylized rhetorical pattern. As there is no "god" in Lawrence's poem, so there is "no Verb/ no Voice/ no Word"– no dynamic action, no personal speaking, no *Logos.* The combined use of a lower case 'g' for "god" and upper case 'V' and 'W,' all preceded by a terse "no," clearly seeks to negate the Hebrew *Elohim* God of Genesis. It would relegate to the status of non-being One whom Genesis 1 *shows* as a revelatory Being who allows the mystery of the God-Self to be apprehended through what God does and speaks – as a self-contained, singular being who has community or society within the unified Godhead and whose separateness from and sovereignty over creation does not preclude interest in and concern for that creation. The complementary narrative in Genesis 2, which re-formulates the fifth and sixth days of creation so as to place humans at the centre of attention, balances any possible impression of aloofness of God from humans by *showing* interaction between them.

Milton, the *Adam* play and Genesis 2 - 3

The simplicity of the story form of Genesis chapters 2 and 3 manages to manifest relationships of warm intimacy between man and woman, between them and nature, between them and God, and between God and nature. The Creator, known here by the personal name of *Yahweh Elohim,* forms man and places him in a specially-prepared environment, functioning familiarly *like* a potter, parent, and gardener. The dominant garden image which, as a literary symbol, has come to signify sanctuary (a protective enclosure), aids in establishing the atmosphere of closeness at once. In Genesis 2 the earth is a garden, God's pleasure-garden (or Eden) shared in fellowship with man and woman and the animals. Even the tone of the command against eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil can be heard as a risk-taking God's expression of trust in humans and an indication of their capability to cooperate if they will. It can be heard as cautionary, expressing a desire to keep them from death, and is a personal prohibition.

Images of profound closeness and unity define the relationship between man and woman, depicted in physical as well as spiritual terms: "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (2:23). The King James version of the Hebrew narrative tells of the Lord God's making the woman as a "help meet " (2:18) for the man who, in this account, has already been made out of dust. The 1609 Douay version says "let us make him a help like unto himself," while some twentieth-century translations say God makes the woman "fit for" (RSV), "suitable for" (NIV), "corresponding to" (Fox) the man, "a helper as his partner" (NRSV), a "sustainer beside him" (Alter).[8] There is utterly no warrant in the text for John Calvin's (1509-1564) assertion that the woman was "nothing else than an accession to the man" and that therefore "the order of nature

[8] In addition to the KJV and Douay-Rheims versions, others cited here are: Revised Standard Version; New International Version; New Revised Standard Version; Robert Alter, *Genesis: Translation and Commentary*. New York, 1996; Everett Fox, *The Five Books of Moses*. New York, 1995.

implies that the woman should be the helper of the man."[9] To misunderstand 'help' to connote inferiority is to relegate God to a similar subservient role, since the same language is used elsewhere to describe the role of God who is "our *help* and our shield" (Psalm 33:20), "a very present *hel*p in trouble" (Psalm 46:1). Clearly the woman in Genesis is meant to be fully herself in the relationship with her husband, using all her gifts and talents in it. The image of woman's creation from the same stuff as man (a rib) not only typifies the organic and spiritual unity between them but also, in the side-by-side placement of the rib near the heart, suggests an emotional bonding which is further enhanced by the recognition in "bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh." Remarkably the storyteller, writing in a patriarchal culture where women had few rights, says the man leaves his parents to cleave to his wife (rather than saying the woman leaves to cleave to her husband). There is thus no suggestion that the wife is acquired property; indeed the words "cleave to" or "cling to" could be read to suggest the woman as the stronger partner, since a weaker substance generally adheres to the stronger. The point is in the mutuality of a unity in which the degree of closeness can only be expressed in the "one flesh" image and in the transparency and openness implicit in the image of being naked without shame. To argue for the man's dominant status on the basis of the priority of his creation would, logically, imply that "the dust of the ground" (2:7)[10] is superior to man and would also work against the regular reversal of the law of primogeniture so as to give preference to the second born (Esau / Jacob...). In the Genesis text male dominance comes about as a consequence of the fall and is thus a post-fall condition not an Edenic one.

Not about first and second, primary and secondary, superior and inferior, dominant and dependent, Genesis text leaves no room for Martin Luther's (1483-1546) view that "the

[9] *Commentaries of the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*. Trans. John King. Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, vol. 1m 1868, p. 129-130.

[10] The Douay-Rheims version translates as "slime of the earth".

woman, although she was a most beautiful work of God, nevertheless was not the equal of the male in glory and prestige.'[11] Rather, the story in Genesis 2 presents a compelling sense of belonging one to the other, an "at-oneness." To read it otherwise requires imposing on to the text either limiting readings of such texts as 1 Corinthians 11:3-11 and 1 Timothy 2:11-14 or bias from patriarchal tradition, as the play of *Adam* and Milton's *Paradise Lost* both do.

The twelfth-century play of *Adam* was written in Anglo-Norman French and possibly produced in England where Norman French was still the official language of the court. As O.H.Hardison, Jr. has shown, its content is directly indebted to the readings appointed in the *Liber Responsalis* or Book of Responses for Sexagesima (the second Sunday before Lent), readings themselves derived from a mix of Scripture and doctrine.[12] In the *Adam's* highly patriarchal eisegetical rendering, the "Figure" of God (who is "our Saviour" clad in a dalmatic) tells Adam: "Let her be subject to your commandment" (l.15), "Govern her by reason" (l.21), and instructs Eve, whose demeanor is "not quite sufficiently humble": "To him be obedient at all times, / Do not stray from his discipline. / Serve and love him with willing spirit" (ll.35-37)[13]. Eve agrees to acknowledge Adam "as my partner and stronger than I" (44). While the intentional male dominance is plain, the attribution of Reason as the tool and method of governance of the female recalls Philo's equally unsupported allegorical interpretation of Genesis text, which makes Adam representative of the elevated rational 'mind' of God and Eve representative of lowly 'body,' sensation, and passion. Milton, in *Paradise Lost*, follows suit. In Book IV, while Adam's "fair large front and eye sublime declared / Absolute rule," Eve's "wanton ringlets ... implied Subjection" (IV.300-308). She addresses Adam: "My Author and Disposer, what thou bidst /

[11] *Luther's Works*. Ed. Jaroslav Pelikan. Saint Louis: Concordia. Vol. 1, 1958. 69.
[12] *Medieval Drama*. Ed. David Bevington. New York: Houghton-Miflin, 1975, p.78.
[13] *Service for Representing Adam*, in *Medieval Drama*. Ed. David Bevington 78ff.

Unargued I obey. So God ordains; / God is thy law, thou mine (635-7).[14] Milton imagines the “image of God” as, physically, regal adults (king and consort): "Two of far nobler shape [than other creatures], erect and tall, / Godlike erect, with native honour clad / In naked majesty [who] seemed lords of all" (288-290). Eve is elevated as a "universal Dame" whom angels acknowledge with respect even if she is still "Not equal" to Adam, and both are allowed to shine forth "the image of their glorious Maker" (291). Though the "beasts of the earth" frisk about them playfully, though the descriptive language is often sensual, and though the couple said to be "linked in happy nuptual league" (339) enact a physical "one-flesh" relationship in "the rites / Mysterious of connubial love" (742-3), the sense of intimacy, mutuality, and transparency so moving in the simple economy of the Genesis passage are missing. The couple address one another formally in long speeches that are already a debate in which "the patriarch of mankind" (IX.375) attempts to govern Eve with Reason and she attempts to extricate herself from his sway, especially in Book IX. where his role as protector from the Serpent-as-foe becomes prevalent. The intangible mystery of female/male oneness embedded in Genesis 2 has, by being embodied, disappeared.

In Genesis 3 a brief seven-verse question-and-answer temptation/response vignette shows the disruption of unity between the man and woman and between them and God. This happens through an incident that incites the rising action of the biblical narrative, during which God seeks to restore the intimacy of divine/human dialogue in a series of initiatives climaxing in crucifixion and resurrection, though the pattern is not completely resolved until the final urban image of the new Jerusalem. The Genesis vignette offers, in the temptation sequence ending with the woman’s eating from the fruit, in Alter’s translation “that the tree was good for eating,” “lust to the eyes” and “lovely to look at,” or in Fox’s “good for eating,”

[14] Milton, John. *Paradise Lost*. Ed. Scott Elledge. New York, 1975.

"a delight to the eyes" and "desirable to contemplate." Though both KJV and RSV translate the third element in the sequence as "desired to make one wise"(3:6), the point is that the action of eating is contrary to God's instruction to Adam (2:17), as the woman's telling the serpent so (3:3) has just reminded the reader. Genesis text says cryptically only that she "took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her, and he did eat" (Gen. 3:6). It is silent about whether the same temptation/fall sequence applies to the man but clear that he is present. The compactness of the single Genesis sentence implicates him in equal credulity and culpability, indicating only that he is "beside her" (Fox) or "with her" (NRSV). There is no textual evidence for those who, like Calvin, insist that it "is by no means credible " to think that Adam is with Eve, preferring instead to believe later seduction brings his downfall: "... the craftiness of Satan [serpent] betrays itself in this, that he does not directly assail the man, but approaches him ... in the person of his wife. This insidious method of attack is more than sufficiently known to us at the present day."[15] Commentators who take this position generally use 1 Timothy 2:14 as a gloss: "And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression."[16]

Rabbinic tradition about responsibility for the fall holds two streams concurrently, as two apocryphal books illustrate. For example, Ecclesiasticus (Wisdom of Ben Sirach) insists that "All wickedness is but little to the wickedness of a woman ... Of the woman came the beginning of sin and through her we all die" (25:19, 24), while 2 Esdras acknowledges Adam's responsibility:

> ... when Adam transgressed my statutes, then was decreed that now is done. Then were the entrances of this world made narrow, full of sorrow and travail ... O thou Adam, what hast

[15] *Commentaries*, p. 145.

[16] Leland Ryken, in *Words of Delight* (100) thinks "Eve falls deceived by a gradual process and is misled by the serpent ... whereas Adam falls instantly (v.6)." In order to form this opinion he import 1 Timothy 2: 14 as commentary, but it has no support in the Genesis text.

> thou done? for though it was thou that sinned, thou art not fallen alone, but we all that come of thee". (7:11, 12, 48).

The apostle Paul was aware of this double tradition, using it variously according to the argument he was making. Thus in Romans 4:12, wanting to compare Christ as the new Adam with the first Adam he says: "sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned," hence laying the problem at Adam's door. Nevertheless, Captain Cuttle's assertion in Dickens' *Dombey and Sons* that "'Tis woman as seduces all mankind" represents the predominant stream in English literature and the one present in *Paradise Lost* and the play of *Adam*, both of which cause Eve to succumb to persuasion when she is absent from Adam and both of which present Eve as tempter of her husband, neither which situation is shown in Genesis 3:6.

The serpent of *Paradise Lost* awakens ambition for elevation beyond "Fair Consort" in Eve through enticing invocations such as "Queen of this universe" (IX.684) and "Goddess humane" (694). These, together with curiosity, hunger, thoughts of "Godhead," and concern lest she be deprived of "intellectual food," motivate her supposedly reasoned decision to eat. The Eve of the medieval play *Adam* has more obviously Faustian motives, for she is persuaded to eat by the enticement: "you will possess the crown of heaven. You will be the equal of the Creator" (l.265), and her plain response is "I intend to....I'll do it later" (ll.270-271). A warning from Adam, who is annoyed that the devil has spoken to her, underlines the deliberateness of the choice this Eve then makes in pantomime. Milton's Eve, on the other hand, is inclined to keep secret the knowledge she believes she has gained, as a ploy to subvert her given inferiority to her husband: to "render me more equal, and perhaps, / a thing not undesirable, sometime/ superior, for, inferior, who is free" (823-5). This is a power-play that could not be set in motion if Milton had not already introduced the dominance/subjection motif. Eve determines that "Adam shall share with me in bliss or woe" in

case another Eve replace her. Then the seductive temptation scene that follows ends with Adam's supposedly "ennobled" love-choice of life or death with her over "Divine displeasure." Eve's "guide and head" has thus been manipulated into abandoning both reason and rule along with obedience to God. In contrast, the earlier play of *Adam* shows Adam as initially strong against the tempter in two temptation scenes. The enticement of Adam "to do whatever you desire" (l. 63) and to be God's "peer in everything" (l.167) draws a terse response: "I won't do it (l.169)," and he dismisses a second invitation to "reign in majesty"(1.l92) and to "share omnipotence with God" (l.193) equally curtly: "Get away from here!" (L.194). Eventually he accepts the apple from Eve when she threatens his ego with accusations of cowardice and takes the first bite herself. While the Adam and Eve of *Paradise Lost* are presented as regal beings who speak elevated language and those of the play of *Adam* are common folk whose dialogue is in a low-conversational style, both women are vain, ambitious, gullible, and seductive and both men (despite their differences) are easily manipulated by their wives and ultimately appear weak. The major exception to the 'Eve-is-culpable- strand is C.S.Lewis' novel *Perelandra* or *Voyage to Venus* which allows the woman, whose husband is not with her, to resist temptation and remain unfallen. Lewis is able to achieve this 'what if' scenario (that offers an alternative to the Genesis text rather than a reading of it) by distancing it to the planet Venus.

Conclusion

As we have seen, in their different ways Traherne and Hopkins both respond to the biblical material with delight; the short poems examined here convey a sense of relationship with God and a feeling of being at home in the biblical source as inspiration. Both are writing *with* their source, in sympathy with it; Traherne's meditation on the third day of creation is imaginative paraphrase or imaginative exegesis of biblical text, while Hopkins' "God's Grandeur" is sprung from and rooted in that text. D.H.Lawrence's "Let There Be Light!" on the other

hand, cynically engages the biblical idea of God-as-creator from the position of an assumption that it contains both non-sense and non-truth, thus allows the biblical text no authority. Lawrence is the anomaly here, in that his poem dismisses or attacks a faith position, deliberately writing *against* text. Milton appeals to the "Heavenly Muse" to help him assert "Eternal Providence" in *Paradise Lost* and the *Service of Adam* belongs to the twelfth century Renaissance of church drama, indicating intentional writing *with* the biblical text from a faith position. Nevertheless both authors treat the Genesis material eisegetically, importing into its silences from their own culture and biases from tradition, including traditional patriarchal readings. My students who approach the reading of the Genesis text itself for the first time come with assumptions from tradition and from English literature and are surprised to discover the pattern and majesty of Genesis 1 and the dignity and privilege afforded humans. They are surprised to discover no planned male supremacy but rather a mutuality of relationship. They are surprised to discover a fall of both man and woman within one succinct sentence. There is room for new literary imaginings that listen in the silences of biblical text afresh.