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The Temptation of Eve in Proba's Cento Vergilianus and Milton's Paradise Lost

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Re-narrations of biblical texts have a long and complex history. In this thesis I shall seek to answer two of the questions posed by the re-narration of biblical narratives. Firstly, I shall address the issue of why Christians have felt it necessary to re-write biblical narratives. I shall then turn my attention to the more interesting issue of how these texts could be, and indeed were, received as authoritative after the closing of the biblical canon. I shall begin by providing an overview of the scholarship so far. The second chapter will then address issues of terminology, genre, and methodology. Chapter three contains the first of my case studies, an analysis of the temptation of Eve in Proba's *Cento Vergilianus*. This is followed in chapter four by an investigation of the concepts of authorship and scriptural authority in late antiquity, the importance of an apostolic connection for a work's authority, the development of an authorial apostolic succession, and how this led to Proba's text being received as a form of subordinate scripture. Chapter five presents my second case study, Milton's *Paradise Lost* and is in turn followed by chapter six, which plots the history of literary interpretation as an inspired prophetic activity from its origins in the Jewish literature of the Second Temple period, through the Early Church's authorial apostolic succession, to the re-appropriation of prophetic identity by Protestant Reformers in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Finally, I offer a brief conclusion in which I draw together the various means by which biblical epics have enabled authors to compose scriptural texts after the closing of the biblical canon in order to demonstrate the continuing existence of scripture beyond the Bible, and to call for a re-evaluation of the definition of 'scripture' as a result of these findings.

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2022

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Introduction

In 1948 E. R. Curtius wrote that:

> The Christian story of salvation, as the Bible presents it, admits no transformation into pseudo-antique form. Not only does it thereby lose its powerful, unique, authoritative expression, but it is falsified by the genre borrowed from antique Classicism.[1]

Re-narrations of biblical texts have a long and complex history. From Jewish texts such as Jubilees and the Life of Adam and Eve, through the Qumran and Nag Hammadi codices, to the *kontakia* and other liturgical texts of the early church, late antique Christianity was surrounded by versions of biblical stories other than those found in the biblical text(s) itself. And this plethora of versions did not come to an end with late antiquity. The Old English Andreas and the Genesis manuscripts, the mystery plays, the neo-latin texts of Vida's *Christiad* and Lawrence of Durham's *Hypognosticon*, and the multitude of re-narrations (literary, theatrical, and cinematic) that have arisen in the 19th through 21st centuries all testify to the popularity and continuing appeal of this form of engagement with the Bible. Yet Curtius *ought* to be correct. Despite the fact that recent studies have consistently shown that Curtius' view was not shared by either the authors of biblical re-narrations or their audience, it is the view that they seemingly ought to have held if they really did believe that the Bible was a book apart, the sole and sufficient source of God's written Word.

The closing of the biblical canon made a profound statement as to where the Word of God could be located. In an age of great religious turmoil, the identification of the Bible as the one, true source of divine revelation was a useful means of distinguishing orthodox and heretical believers, and hence it is unsurprising that in both the Early Church and during the Reformation a more than usually vehement emphasis was placed upon the sufficiency of the canonical scriptures.[2] Yet the closing of the biblical canon neither prevented biblical stories being retold,

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[1] E. R. Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Willard R. Trask (London: Routledge & Kegan, 1953), p.462.

[2] Reviel Netz even goes so far as to state that the Christian development of a closed literary canon in the third century led to a completely new definition of culture as a phenomenon based upon and shaped by a canon of texts. Reviel Netz, *Scale, Space and Canon in Ancient Literary Culture* (Cambridge: CUP, 2020), p.803. Perhaps the most helpful recent discussion of the sufficiency of the Bible during the Reformation is to be found in Tim Cooper, 'Elizabethan Separatists, Puritan Conformists and the Bible', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 71.4 (2020), 778-797. See also: Brian A. Gerrish, *The Old Protestantism and the New: Essays on the Reformation Heritag*e (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), pp.51-68; Henk van den Belt, *The Authority of Scripture in Reformed Theology: Truth and Trust* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), pp.1-12; J. K. S. Reid, *The Authority of Scripture: A Study of the Reformation and Post-Reformation Understanding of the Bible* (London: Methuen, 1957).

rewritten, and reimagined, nor denied these reworkings an adjacent authoritative status to that of the canonical text within the Christian community.

I would like to suggest that the traditional dividing line between canonical texts and all other forms of writing is not so much of an impenetrable barrier as is usually claimed.[3] Instead of being an island fortress, defended by its walls and the sheer cliffs of its canonicity, the Bible in late antiquity and Post-Reformation England was more like a homely Norman castle with a small but fluid population of inhabitants building their dwellings outside the castle walls. The inhabitants of this village can pass freely through the gate which separates the fortress from the town without ever losing the inherent and insurmountable separation between the two distinct spheres of influence. To be clear, I am not suggesting that texts other than those of the Bible could penetrate beyond the canonical barrier and set up their dwellings within the castle itself. Instead, I am suggesting that there was a blurring of the boundaries between canonical texts and other texts which enabled the creation of extra-biblical writings that functioned as scripture alongside and in subservience to their biblical overlords.[4]

The permeability of the canonical border owes a great deal to the multiplicity of biblical texts available to the average reader. Despite their difference in wording, the texts in each of these books were recognised to be canonical scripture. Contrary to Jerome's belief that the meaning of the Bible can only be conveyed in the words of the biblical text, the increasing access to Hebrew and Greek manuscripts and the difficulties of translating the Bible into the vernacular led many reformers to believe that there was not merely one set of words which conveyed the meaning behind the biblical texts, but many. Each version of the Bible was scriptural because it was something through which, to a greater or lesser extent, God could speak. Every version of the Bible, whether it be a published translation, or an adaptation of or interaction with such a translation (or even the text in the original language),

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[3] Tim Cooper's recent article on the absolute isolation of the Bible as a source of authority for different groups of English Protestants offers an interesting discussion of how and why the boundary between the Bible and all other texts could reasonably be understood to be impermeable. Tim Cooper, 'Elizabethan Separatists, Puritan Conformists and the Bible', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 71.4 (2020), 778-797. Similar treatments are to be found in studies which examine the Reformer's understanding of the authority and sufficiency of scripture. See, for example, Brian A. Gerrish, *The Old Protestantism and the New: Essays on the Reformation Heritage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), pp.51-68; Henk van den Belt, *The Authority of Scripture in Reformed Theology: Truth and Trust* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), pp.1-12; J. K. S. Reid, *The Authority of Scripture: A Study of the Reformation and Post-Reformation Understanding of the Bible* (London: Methuen, 1957).

[4] This paragraph and the three following paragraphs have been lightly adapted from my undergraduate dissertation on extra-biblical scripture in Elizabethan England.

contained a partial revelation of God without excluding the veracity and authenticity of any other version of the Bible.

The acceptance of the multiplicity of canonical scripture meant that both ministers and people alike were familiar with the idea that the words by which God's will could be revealed to humanity were mutable. Biblical texts could be translated and re-translated without losing their status as canonical scripture because the words themselves were simply vessels for the Word, which refused to be bound by any single set of human words.[5] As a result, the boundary between canonical text and other texts became increasingly indistinct, as the words of the text no longer served as a defining mark of what made a text canonical scripture.

This blurring of the boundaries occurred as a result of the way in which scripture was defined. In order for a text to be recognised as scripture, the Holy Spirit must have played a role in both its production and reception.[6] However, even within the canon the Spirit is not present in the same manner in every text. Although texts which re-narrate biblical narratives are not full equivalents of the canonical texts because the Spirit does not work in and through them to a great enough extent, the Holy Spirit has nevertheless played a role in their composition and reception and therefore they share in the scriptural essence possessed by the canonical texts. As a result, the distinction between biblical and extra-biblical texts is not so much a clean break as a gradual diminution in the Spirit's presence.

In this thesis I shall seek to answer two of the questions posed by the re-narration of biblical stories using a classical genre. Firstly, I shall address the issue of why Christians have felt it necessary to re-write biblical narratives in this way. I shall then turn my attention to the more interesting issue of how these texts could be, and indeed were, received as authoritative after the closing of the biblical canon. I shall draw on the work of scholars who have already begun to challenge the allegedly

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[5] See: Manfred Hoffmann, *Rhetoric and Theology: The Hermeneutics of Erasmus* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), pp.71-88. Cf. Allan Jenkins and Patrick Preston, *Biblical Scholarship and the Church: A Sixteenth-Century Crisis of Authority* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007).

[6] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, ed. by Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann, 55 vols (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957-1986), XXXV (1960), 232, 339, 350; cf. XV, 275; XXIX, 94; XXXIII, 110. Although Calvin does not discuss this issue as explicitly as Luther, the way in which he uses biblical texts suggests that he too understands there to be a scriptural hierarchy. Whereas Calvin frequently uses references to the Psalms, John, and Romans to support his doctrines, he uses Joshua, Judges and Esther no more frequently than he does the Apocrypha. Calvin, *Inst.* i.6.2-3, in *Ioannis Calvini Opera Quae Supersunt Omnia*, ed. Guilielmus Baum, Eduardus Cunitz, and Eduardus Reuss, Corpus Reformatorum 29-87 (31), 59 vols (Brunsvigae: C. A. Schwetschke, 1863-1900), III (1865), 84-87; *Com. Jer.* on 36.2, in *Opera Omnia*, XXXIX, 115-117; *Com. Gen.* argument, in *Opera Omnia*, XXIII, 5-6.

derivative nature of re-narrated biblical stories and extend the temporal focus of these studies into late antiquity and Post-Reformation England. I shall argue that the understanding of interpretation as an authoritative prophetic act first espoused in Second Temple Jewish literature was appropriated and adapted by early Christian communities, and continued to be used in one form or another well into the seventeenth century. By doing so, I shall demonstrate the need for a definition of 'scripture' in late antiquity that reflects more closely the way in which late antique Christians understood, defined, and interacted with scripturally authoritative texts both within and without the canon.

In the first chapter, I offer an introduction to the current state of scholarship on the biblical epic. The second chapter then begins by providing a definition of the key terms, 'canonical', 'scriptural', and 'biblical'. Having established the language of discourse which this thesis will adopt, I then move on to discuss the nature of epics and epyllia in late antiquity, and how the intertextual nature of epyllia make them a particular suitable genre for authors later down the chain of authorial apostolic succession to use. The second chapter then concludes by laying out the methodology that will be used in the following chapters to analyse the biblical epic case studies I have chosen. Chapter 3 contains the first of my case studies, an analyse of the re-narration of the Fall in Proba's *Cento Vergilianus*. This is followed in chapter four by an investigation of the concepts of authorship and scriptural authority in late antiquity, the importance of an apostolic connection for a work's authority, the development of an authorial apostolic succession, and how this led to Proba's text being received as a form of subordinate scripture. Chapter five then repeats the process laid out in chapter three for my second case study, John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. It concludes with a comparison of the intertextual strategies of the two authors, and I suggest that the idea of an authorial apostolic succession is not quite adequate to describe the reception of Milton's text as subordinate scripture. In chapter six, I explore this alternative method for granting post-biblical texts scriptural authority by plotting the history of literary interpretation as an inspired prophetic activity from its origins in the Jewish literature of the Second Temple period, through the Early Church's authorial apostolic succession, to the re-appropriation of prophetic identity by Protestant Reformers in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Finally, I offer a brief conclusion in which I draw together the various means by which epyllia have enabled authors to compose scriptural texts after the closing of the biblical canon in order to demonstrate the continuing

existence of scripture beyond the Bible, and to call for a re-evaluation of the definition of 'scripture' as a result of these findings.

Chapter 1: The Scholarship So Far

In recent years, an increasing interest has been taken in the reasons why early Christians felt the need to rewrite the canonical narratives (both before and after the closing of the canon), and provide themselves with alternative authoritative texts. Usually, the focus of this work is on the way in which disparate groups of 'Christians' required texts with a theological orientation that differed from that of the canonical Gospels.[7] Yet what of those rewritings which occurred within the theological mainstream after the closing of the canon? Although these retellings may have conveyed a theological reality which varied from that of the canonical norm, they were designed not to correct but to complement the canonical scriptures.[8]

These questions situate my research within several broader fields of enquiry. The most obvious of these is the study of canon formation and canonicity, in which the origins of the Christian canon and the relationships between the texts that were and were not canonised are analysed.[9] Closely related to this is the work of scholars such as Robyn Walsh and James Kelhoffer on the idea of authoritative texts and the desire felt by some groups of early Christians to narrate the Christian story in a way other than that found in the Bible.[10] The reception of both the Bible and classical epics provides an important background for my project,[11] as does scholarship that

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[7] For example: *Telling the Christian Story Differently: Counter-Narratives from Nag Hammadi and Beyond*, ed. Francis Watson and Sarah Parkhouse (London: T&T Clark, 2020); Michael Bird, 'Sectarian Gospels for Sectarian Christians? The Non-Canonical Gospels and Baukham's The Gospels for all Christians', in *The Audience of the Gospels: The Origin and Function of the Gospels in Early Christianity*, ed. Edward W. Klink III (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2010), pp. 27-48; Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew* (Oxford: OUP, 2005); Thomas Kazen, 'Sectarian Gospels for Some Christians? Intention and Mirror Reading in the Light of Extra Canonical Texts', *New Testament Studies* 51 (2005), 561-578.

[8] That part of the purpose of re-writing biblical narratives was to offer an alternative/additional interpretation will be discussed further in chapter 1. Cf. *Poetry, Bible and Theology from Late Antiquity to the Middle Ages*, ed. Michele Cutino, (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020) Daniel J. Nodes, *Doctrine and Exegesis in Biblical Latin Poetry* (Leeds: Francis Cairns, 1993).

[9] *Connecting Gospels: Beyond the Canonical/Non-Canonical Divide*, ed. Watson and Parkhouse (New York: OUP, 2018); Ehrman, *Lost Christianities*.

[10] Robyn Faith Walsh, *The Origins of Early Christian Literature: Contextualizing the New Testament within Greco-Roman Literary Culture* (Cambridge: CUP, 2021); James A. Kelhoffer, *Conceptions of 'Gospel' and Legitimacy in Early Christianity* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014).

[11] Gordon Teskey, 'The Bible and John Milton's *Paradise Lost*', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Bible and Literature*, ed. Callum Carmichael (Cambridge: CUP, 2020), pp.200-217; *Epic Performances from the Middle Ages into the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Fiona Macintosh, Justine McConnell, Stephen Harrison and Claire Kenward (Oxford: OUP, 2018); Justin A. Haynes, *The Medieval Classic: Twelfth-Century Latin Epic and the Virgilian Commentary Tradition* (Oxford: OUP, 2021).

engages with the social and cultural relationship between Christianity and the classical tradition.[12]

In order to limit the scope of our discussion, I have decided to focus on those retellings of biblical stories which utilise the genre of epic poetry. Greek epic poetry is generally regarded as first making an appearance in the late Mycenean period.[13] In the late eighth century BC Ionian epic greatly increased in volume, and by the seventh century some of the poems being composed were also being transcribed. Of these compositions, two remain extant: the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Epic poems can be defined according to their form (use of hexameter, substantial length, 'sublime' language) and content (heroic/mythological subject matter often intertwined with historical events, set in a former age, active involvement of the gods).[14] By the third century BC, shorter poems started to become more desirable than the longer epic poems and the epic cycles of earlier generations.[15] Referred to in recent scholarship as 'epyllia' (singular: 'epyllion'), these texts share the use of hexameter indicative of the traditional epic but are shorter in length.[16]

The appropriation of the epic (and/or epyllion) for Christian use is first found, not inappropriately, amongst the works of Nonnus of Panopolis (fl. mid-fifth century).[17] The writing of Nonnus of Panopolis poses an interesting case for scholars. Not only do both of his major works survive intact, but whilst Nonnus of Panopolis' 48-book *Dionysiaca* was probably one of the last (pagan) epics to be composed, his Homeric

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[12] J. M. F. Heath, *Clement of Alexandria and the Shaping of Christian Literary Practice: Miscellany and the Transformation of Greco-Roman Writing* (Cambridge: CUP, 2020); Alberto Rigolio, *Christina in Conversation: A Guide to Late Antique Dialogues in Greek and Syriac* (New York: OUP, 2019).

[13] For a very brief discussion of the origins of epic poetry see: Martin L. West, 'The Formation of the Epic Cycle', in *The Greek Epic Cycle and Its Ancient Reception: A Companion*, ed. Marco Fantuzzi and Christos Tsaglis (Cambridge: CUP, 2015), pp.96-107 (pp.96-97). More detailed discussions can be found in: Jasper Griffin, 'Greek Epic', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Epic*, ed. Catherine Bates (New York: CUP, 2010), pp.13-30; Gilbert Murray, *The Rise of the Greek Epic: Being a Course of Lectures Delivered at Harvard University* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1911).

[14] Hesiod defines epic poetry as poems which recount 'the glorious deeds of men of old and the blessed gods who inhabit Olympus'. Hesiod, *Theog.* 100-101.

[15] Callimachus is the first surviving author to espouse this position. However, his preference for shorter forms of poetry might not be as novel as it appears due to the lack of any substantial volume of poetry from the preceding century. See, for example, Callimachus, *Epigr.* 27-28.

[16] Cf. Sean A. Adams, *Greek Genres and Jewish Authors: Negotiating Literary Culture in the Greco-Roman Era* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2020), pp.37-38; *Griechische Kleinepik*, trans. and ed. Manuel Baumbach, Horst Sitta and Fabian Zogg (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019), pp.8-12; S. Tilg, 'On the Origins of the Modern Term "Epyllion": Some Revisions to a Chapter in this History of Classical Scholarship', in *Brill's Companion to Greek and Latin Epyllion and Its Reception*, ed. M. Baumbach and S. Bär (Leiden: Brill, 2012), pp.29-54; C. U. Merriam, *The Development of the Epyllion Genre through the Hellenistic and Roman Periods* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 2001).

[17] The series of publications in the *Nonnus of Panopolis in Context* series offers the most detailed recent study of Nonnus of Panopolis. *Nonnus of Panopolis in Context*, ed. Konstantinos Spanoudakis, Herbert Bannert, Nicole Kröll, Filip Doroszewski and Katarzyna Jazdzewska, 3 vols (Berlin: De Gruyter; Leiden: Brill, 2014-2020).

cento on the Gospel of John was the first 'biblical epic'. The biblical epic in Greek did not gain much support, with the *Metaphrasis Psalmorum* attributed to (pseudo?) Apollinaris of Laodicea (c.310-c.390) and the cento of the Empress Eudocia (c.401-460) which is a revision of an earlier text by Patricius, being the two most notable examples.[18] However, biblical epics seemed to have gained a far stronger foothold in the Latin speaking world. Juvencus (fl. c.330) and Sedulius (fl. early fourth century) both wrote epic versions of the Gospel narrative, Arator (fl. mid-sixth century) turned his attention to Acts, and the Virgillian cento of Faltonia Betitia Proba (fl. early to mid-fourth century). supplements the Gospel narrative with a rewriting of Genesis.[19]

From late antiquity until the Renaissance, the biblical epics of these poets remained in circulation as didactic texts but without a great deal of attention being paid to them.[20] With the renewal of interest in the Classics prompted by Renaissance Humanism, it is hardly surprising that there was also a reengagement with the genre of biblical epic in early modern Europe.[21] In England, this culminated in John Milton's *Paradise Lost* and its less influential sequel, *Paradise Regained*.[22] Yet how, in a culture so fixated on establishing the Bible as the sole source of God's (written) Word, such interactions with the Bible could exist is a question that has received much less scholarly attention than its significance requires.[23]

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[18] The most recent studies of these authors' works are: Andrew Faulkner, *Apollinaris of Laodicea - Metaphrasis Psalmorum* (Oxford: OUP, 2020); Karl Olav Sandnes, *The Gospel "According to Homer and Virgil": Cento and Canon,* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), pp.181-228. Cf. M. D. Usher, *Homeric Stitchings: The Homeric Centos of the Empress Eudocia* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998); Sandnes, *Early Christian Discourses on Jesus' Prayer at Gethsemane: Courageous, Committed Cowardly?* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), pp.295-305. For a comparable study of the Jewish adaptation of Greek epic poetry see: Adams, *Greek Genres and Jewish Authors,* pp.19-43.

[19] Recent studies include: *Juvencus' Four Books of the Gospels: Evangeliorum Libri Quattuor ,* trans. and ed. Scott McGill (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016); Michael C. Sloan, *The Harmonius Organ of Sedulius Scottus: Introduction to His Collectaneum in Apostolum and Translation of Its Prologue and Commentaries on Galatians and Ephesians* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012); Arator, *Histoire apostolique*, trans. and ed. B. Bureau and P.-A Deproost (Parise: Belles Lettres, 2017); Sigrid Schottenius Cullhed, *Proba the Prophet: The Christian Virgilian Cento of Faltonia Betitia Proba* (Leiden: Brill, 2015). Cf. Sandnes, *The Gospecl "According to Homer"*, pp.141-180.

[20] For further information see Patrick McBrine, *Biblical Epics in Late Antiquity and Anglo-Saxon England: Divina in Laude Voluntas* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017).

[21] A detailed and rigorous study of biblical epic in early modern Germany can be found in: Ralf Georg Czapla, *Das Bibelepos in der Frühren Neuzeit: Zur deutschen Geschichter einer europäischen Gattung* (Berlin: De Grutyer, 2013).

[22] John Milton, *Paradise lost. A poem written in ten books* (London, 1667); Milton, *Paradise regain'd. A poem. In IV books. To which is added Samson Agonistes* (London: J.M., 1671).

[23] This is not just the case for biblical epics. Note also that despite the longstanding recognition that George Herbert intended his collection of poems *The Temple* to serve as an additional psalter, the reason why Herbert (an otherwise entirely orthodox member of the Church of England) thought that a complement to the biblical psalter was desirable, acceptable, or necessary has received surprisingly little attention. Even in those studies that recognise the issue, the quasi-scriptural status of Herbert's additional psalter, and its relationship to its biblical counterpart has been left almost

Although there have been many studies of individual biblical epics,[24] what is missing from the scholarly oeuvre is a definitive study of the genre as a whole and the way these epics have functioned in the lives of those Christians who have encountered them. Most of the scholarly interest in the function of biblical epics lies in its late antique context, when the production of biblical epics was at its most extensive. Studies such as those of Karla Pollmann and Martin Bažil analyse how the utilisation of a classical genre carried cultural authority and so shaped Christian practice and cultural formation in late antiquity.[25] These studies situate biblical epics within a wider context of classical appropriation that enabled late antique Christians to compose texts which could be accepted as literature but without analysing why a unique Christian literary corpus was felt to be necessary alongside the already established biblical canon. The need to address this omission is particularly pressing in light of the classicist Reviel Netz's work on the role of a literary canon in the process of cultural formation.[26] The works of Ralf Georg Czapla and James H. Sims relate a reader's experience of an epic to their wider Christian identity, but still do not examine how the existence of biblical epics has shaped and continues to shape that identity.[27] Patrick McBrine's study of biblical epics in Anglo-Saxon England begins to explore this issue by analysing the way in which biblical epics shaped Anglo-Saxon religious identity and literary culture.[28] However, McBrine fails to explain convincingly why these texts carried the authority that they did.

Broadly speaking, recent scholarship has offered three main reasons for why it was felt desirable to compose and use biblical epics in late antiquity.[29] The first of these

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entirely undiscussed. See: Dierdre Serjeantson, 'The Book of Psalms and the Early Modern Sonnet', *Renaissance Studies*, 29.4 (2015), 632-649 (p.646); Peter S. Hawkins, 'The Psalms in Poetry', in *The Oxford Handbook of the Psalms*, ed. William P. Brown (Oxford: OUP, 2014), pp.99-111 (p.102); Barbara Kiefer Lewalski, *Protestant Poetics and the Seventeenth Century Religious Lyric* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), p.246.

[24] Haynes, *The Medieval Classic*; Andrew Faulkner, *Apollinaris of Laodicea*; Sandnes, *The Gospel "According to Homer and Virgil"*.

[25] Karla Pollmann, *The Baptized Muse: Early Christian Poetry as Cultural Authority* (New York: OUP, 2017); Martin Bažil, *Centones Christiani: Métamorphoses d'une forme intertextualle dans la poési latine chrétienne de l'"Antiquité tardive* (Paris: Institue d'Études Augustiennes, 2009); Pollmann and Otten (eds), *Poetry and Exegesis in Premodern Latin Christianity: The Encounter between Classical and Christian Strategies of Interpretation*, ed. Willemien Otten and Karla Pollmann (Leiden: Brill, 2007); Nodes, *Doctrine and Exegesis*.

[26] Netz, *Scale, Space and Canon*.

[27] Czapla, *Das Bibelepos in der Frühren Neuzeit*; *Milton and Scriptural Tradition: the Bible into Poetry*, ed. James H. Sims and Leland Ryken (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1984).

[28] McBrine, *Biblical Epics in Late Antiquity and Anglo-Saxon England*.

[29] There was, of course, a preliminary stage to the re-appropriation of the epic by Christian poets. Before Christian authors could begin composing epics the issue of the role and acceptability of poetry had to be addressed. Both Jerome and Augustine had a generally negative view of poetry, seeing it as a distraction rather than an aid to contemplating God (Jerome, *Epist.* 53, 58; Augustine, *Doctr.chr.* 4.6). Nevertheless, Christian poetry became an increasingly accepted art form, due primarily to the inability of dissenters to prevent Christians from writing poetry rather than from any decisive

reasons is one that is mentioned in the preface to Proba's cento: the desire to bring out the true, Christian meaning latent in Virgil's text. The most striking of these references is that of Proba who, with characteristic brashness, declares unhesitatingly that 'Vergilium cecinisse loquar pia munera Christi'. The desire to prove that Virgil was a pre-Christian Christian was nothing new. Marcus Minucius Felix had discussed the similarity between the opening verses of Genesis 1 and Anchises' description of creation in the *Aeneid* in order to prove that Virgil had been endowed with an innate knowledge of Christianity (Felix, *Oct.* 19.2).[30] However, this theme is not developed by Proba, nor is it found clearly expressed as a justification for the work of any of the other biblical epicists. Sandnes attributes a comparable motivation to Juvencus, and although he is right in stating that Juvencus does not have an inherently negative view of Virgil's works, it is less clear that Juvencus wanted to bring Virgil's work to some sort of fulfilment as Sandnes claims.[31] Juvencus himself seems to be far more interested in proving to his readers that if they think highly of Virgil, who speaks about things that are false, then they should think even more highly of him as his poetry relates the glory of God (Juvencus, *Evang. libr. quatt.*, praef. lines 15-20).

The second reason why biblical epics may have been desirable in late antiquity is their ability to serve as Christian alternatives to pagan epics within the educational curriculum. In 362 Julian the Apostate issued a decree stating that Christian teachers could not teach in schools as it was hypercritical for them to expound on texts they elsewhere decried as false (*Codex Theodosianus* 13.3.5). The decree itself focuses exclusively on the ability of Christians to teach; it makes no claims to preventing Christians from attending schools. In a clarificatory epistle, Julian reiterates this point explicitly, even going so far as to tacitly encourage Christian students attending school in the hope that their experience will encourage them to abandon their Christianity (Julian, *Epist.* 36, 424a-b). However, this was not the way in which the Christian community interpreted the decree. In the histories of Socrates,

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theological reasoning. Useful introductions to this process can be found in: Faulkner, *Apollinaris of Laodicea*, pp.35-44; Mark Vessey, '"Quid facit cum Horatio Hieronymus?" Christian Latin Poetry and Scriptural Poetics', in Pollmann and Otten (eds), *Poetry and Exegesis in Premodern Latin Christianity*, pp.29-48. Cf. J.L. Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry: Parallelism and Its History* (Baltimore: John Hopkins, 1981), pp.149-156.

[30] Compare: 'In principio creavit Deus caelum et terram, terra autem erat inanis et vacua et tenebrae super faciem abyssi et spiritus Dei ferebatur super aquas' (Gen 1.1-2 (Vg.)), and 'Principio caelum ac terras camposque liquentis lucentemque globum lunae Titaniaque astra spiritus intus alit (Virgil, *Aen.* 6.724-725).

[31] Sandnes, *The Gospel "According to Homer and Virgil"*, pp.53-57 (n.b. p.57). Cf. Cullhed, *Proba the Prophet*, pp.2-3.

Sozomen, and Rufinius the decree is described as prohibiting Christian participation in education in order to prevent their intellectual growth and resulting ability to use their skills for the cause of Christianity.[32]

For some scholars this suggests that Christian authors were forced to compose their own texts in order to continue educating their students.[33] However, there is no evidence that Christian communities were interested in developing an educational curriculum separate from the classical model, and no reason why Christian students excluded from conventional education could not continue to be taught the same curriculum by those Christian teachers who were excluded from teaching it.[34] There is limited evidence in primary sources that argue for this educational motivation. Both Socrates and Sozomen claim Julian's decree to be a motivation for (Pseudo?)-Apollinaris' version of the Psalms (Socrates, *Hist. eccl.* 3.16; Sozomen, *Hist. eccl.* 5.18.3). Victorius states unequivocally that his text was designed to serve an educational role, and Avitus implies that same about his own paraphrase (Victorius, *Alethia*, precatio, lines 104-105; cf. Avitus, *Epist. ad Euphr.*). There is likewise tangential evidence that Nonnus' epic version of John's Gospel served an educational purpose, if only in Egypt.[35] Nevertheless, it will be noted that despite the educatory remarks made by biblical epicists, not one of them claims that their compositions were designed to replace classical epics. Dependent as biblical epics are on a knowledge of the Classics for an understanding of their intertextual meaning, it seems unlikely that they were intended to do so. Furthermore, Juvencus' epic pre-dates Julian's decree. Even if this were *a* motive for the production of later biblical epics, it could not be the only or the primary motive.

The final reason posited by scholars for the purpose and function of biblical epics is the desire for a more elevated form of Christian literature than the New Testament is able to offer.[36] The problem with this argument can be seen in the way it is

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[32] Socrates, *Hist. eccl.* 3.12.7; 3.16.1, 19; Sozomen, *Hist. eccl.* 5.18.1; Rufinius, *Hist. eccl.* 10.33; cf. Zonaras, *Epit. Hist.* 13.12; Theodoret, *Hist. eccl.* 3.8.1-2; Augustine, *Civ.* 18.52.
[33] Faulkner, *Apollinaris of Laodicea*, pp. 33-39; Filippomaria Pontani, 'Hellenic Verse and Christian Humanism: From Nonnus to Musurus', *International Journal of the Classical Tradition*, 25.3 (2018), 216-240 (pp.217-221); Sandnes, *The Gospel "According to Homer and Virgil"*, pp.84-96.
[34] Pollmann, *The Baptized Muse*, p.28; Roger P. H. Green, *Latin Epics of the New Testament: Juvencus, Sedulius, Arator* (New York: OUP, 2006), xv-xvi, 133.
[35] The poems of Dioskoros of Aphrodito seem to suggest this. See: G. Agosti, 'Niveaux de style, littératiré, poétiques', in *« Doux remède... » Poésie et poétique à Byzance*, ed. P. Odorico (Paris: Centres d'études byzantines, 2009), pp.99-119 (p.113).
[36] Simon Goldhill, 'Homer and the Precarity of Tradition: Can Jesus Be Achilles?', in *Reception in the Greco-Roman World: Literary Studies in Theory and Practice*, ed. Marco Fantuzzi, Helen Morales and Tim Whitmarsh (Cambridge: CUP, 2021), pp.371-398 (p.387); McBrine, *Biblical Epics in Late Antiquity and Anglo-Saxon England*, pp.5-6; Sandnes, *The Gospel "According to Homer and Virgil"*, pp.65-83; Green, *Latin Epics of the New Testament*, pp.130-131, 373-374; Michael Roberts, *Biblical Epic and Rhetorical*

expressed in Cullhed's recent study of Proba's cento. In discussing the reasons why Proba composed her cento, Cullhed explains that there was 'a growing demand for biblical texts transposed to a higher stylistic register' and that Proba's cento was an attempt to meet this need.[37] Cullhed continues: '[t]hus, we should not look towards the Church fathers with their generally negative attitudes towards centos to understand Proba's project but to [...] its popularity in the contemporary senatorial aristocracy'. Cullhed provides no evidence to demonstrate the alleged popularity of Proba's cento amongst the 'contemporary senatorial aristocracy',[38] and having dismissed the only other primary evidence available (the writings of the Fathers) as not representative of wider Christian opinion, he is unable to provide any significant contemporary evidence to support his theory.[39]

That Christians were embarrassed by the lack of (rhetorical) sophistication in their sacred scriptures is evidenced in their defence of the New Testament texts. The opening chapters of the sixth book of Origen's *Contra Celsum* are devoted to defending the Bible from the charge of being εὐτέλεια, that is shabby and of little worth (Origen, *Cels.* 6.2). Interestingly, Origen argues that the Bible is not effective despite its lack of finesse but precisely because of it. For what, Origen asks, did the fine words of Plato really achieve? Nothing. They failed to bring anyone into a more perfect relationship with God. By contrast, the Bible has brought many people to God through its lowly (εὐτελής) style (Origen, *Cels.* 6.5). Lactantius similarly explains that it was by God's express desire that the biblical texts were to be written in a simple (*simplex*) and unadorned (*nuda*) way (Lactantius, *Inst.* 3.1.3). This defence of the plainness of the biblical text is summarised nicely by Augustine who explains that the humble nature of the biblical texts is appropriate, and the more humble the appearance the greater the impact on the reader and the wider the variety of possible readers (Augustine, *Doctr. chr.* 4.26).

Paraphrase in Antiquity (Liverpool: Francis Cairns, 1985), pp.67-69; Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, pp.458-462.

[37] Cullhed, *Proba the Prophet*.

[38] Cullhed does signpost the reader towards discussions of the influence of Proba's cento on later writers of biblical epics, but this is not the same thing. See Cullhed, *Proba the Prophet*, p.4 (n.14).

[39] Cullhed cites the following authors: Averil Cameron, 'Poetry and Literary Culture in Late Antiquity', in *Approaching Late Antiquity: The Transformation from Early to Late Empire*, ed S. Swain and M. Edwards (Oxford: OUP, 2004), pp.327-354 (pp.347-348); W. Evenepoel, 'The Place of Poetry in Latin Christianity', in *Early Christian Poetry: A Collection of Essays*, ed. J. den Boeft and A. Hilhorst (Leiden: Brill, 1993), pp.35-60 (pp.48-51); W. Kirsch, *Die lateinischen Versepik des 4. Jahrhunderts*, (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1989), p.136; Roberts, *Biblical Epic and Rhetorical Paraphrase*, pp.67-70; Reinhard Herzog, *Die Bibelepik der lateinischen Spätantike: Formgeschichte einer erbaulichen Gattung* (Munich: Fink, 1975), pp.xl, 94-95; C. J. Brown, 'Aspects of the Christianization of the Roman Aristocracy', *Journal of Roman Studies* 51 (1961), 1-11 (p.178).

However, despite the need to defend the uncomplicated style of the biblical texts felt by all three of these authors, it will be noticed that at no point do any of them suggest that a more rhetorically polished version of the New Testament is necessary. Instead, they emphasise the necessity of the very lack of elegance for which the texts were being criticised.[40] Nevertheless, some scholars associate the desirability of a literarily competent rewriting of the Gospels with the desire to convert educated pagans by appealing to their aesthetic tastes.[41] In the preface to the *Metaphrasis Psalmorum*, (Pseudo?)-Apollinaris declares that he is writing ' ἐξατόνοις ἐπέεσσιν, ἵνα γνώωσι καὶ ἄλλοι' (Apollinaris, *Meta. Psalm.*, praef. line 32). This seemingly explicit reference to the conversionary aims of the text is supported by the associated desire for all the nations to kneel before Christ expressed two lines later (Apollinaris, *Meta. Psalm.*, praef. line 34). That poetry could be used for this purpose is convincingly demonstrated by Karla Pollmann. However, the application of this theory to biblical epics is problematic.[42]

The intertextual nature of biblical epics demands from the reader a high degree of familiarity with the biblical text. McGill's admission that those who were unfamiliar with the New Testament would have found Juvencus' epic obscure is something of an understatement. His attempt to defend his theory that it was in order to appeal to cultivated pagans that Juvencus wrote in this way, primarily as a means of enticing the reader to explore the New Testament itself through this delectable retelling of it, is poorly made and evidenced.[43] That Juvencus might have wanted to provide a more elevated form of Christian literature with his epyllion is entirely plausible, but that his purpose in doing so was to appeal to and convert pagan readers is nonsensical.[44] The genre in which Juvencus was writing was dependent for its efficacy on a prior knowledge of the Gospels and therefore could only have been written with a Christian audience in mind. If Juvencus wanted to provide elegant Christian literature for non-Christians then there were plenty of other

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[40] It is also worth noting that in the series of apocryphal letters between Seneca the Younger and Saint Paul, the seventh letter Seneca rebukes Paul for writing in a way that does not reflect the majesty of his subject matter. *Il Carteggia apocrifo di Seneca e San Paolo*, ed. L. Bocciolini Paagi (Florence: Academia Toscana di scienza e lettere, 1978).
[41] Pontani, 'Hellenic Verse and Christian Humanism', pp.221-222; McGill, *Juvencus' Four Books of the Gospels*, pp.23-24.
[42] Pollmann, *The Baptized Muse*, pp.2-12, 216-217.
[43] McGill, *Juvencus' Four Books of the Gospels*, pp.23-24.
[44] Note that both Paulinus of Nola and (Pseudo?)-Apollinaris of Laodicea comment on the pleasure that their compositions were designed to induce. Paulinus, *Laus. Sanct. Iohan.*, lines 18-19; Apollinaris, *Met. psalm.* praef. line 2.

classical genres which did not involve such a high degree of intertextuality available to him.[45]

The problem with these explanations is that they all treat the classical as something that is problematic and needs to be corrected or purified rather than something that enables the epicist and their readers to engage more closely with the biblical narrative that is being retold. It is at this point that my thesis begins to contribute to the current scholarly understanding of biblical epics. By arguing that the appropriation of the epyllion genre endows biblical epics with scriptural authority, I am able to challenge current scholarly consensus in two key areas. Firstly, I am able re-evaluate the previously negative role which scholarship has attributed to the Classics in their Christian re-appropriation. Secondly, by identifying biblical epics as scripturally authoritative texts located outside of the biblical canon I am arguing for the need to replace the black-and-white distinction drawn between canonical and non-canonical texts and substitute it with a more nuanced model that is capable of describing a textual community with varying degrees of scriptural authority.

The creation and acceptance of re-narrations of biblical narratives which were intended to speak with scriptural authority was a normative and necessary part of Christian culture in late antiquity. This practice arose because it was a means of negotiating identity formation and harmonising biblical narratives with the situations in which contemporary Christians found themselves.[46] By analysing biblical epics not as works of Christian literature but as Christian scripture (albeit scripture with a subordinate status to that of the Bible), I am able to evaluate the way in which these epics shaped Christian practice and cultural formation in a more nuanced way than ever before. Whilst it is possible to debate whether or not 'gospel' was a new genre, with epic, one cannot debate - it was clearly a Christian appropriation of the classical tradition and the significance of the Christian reception of classical genres in the selection and canonisation of scripturally authoritative texts is an area that has yet to be integrated into debates about the

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[45] Gregory of Nazianzus' poetic output is but one example. See: Christos Simelidis, *Selected Poems of Gregory of Nazianzus: i.2.17, ii.10, 19, 32: A Critical edition with Introduction and Commentary* (Göttingen: Vandenhoech & Ruprecht, 2009), pp. 30-46.

[46] Ralf Georg Czapla convincingly demonstrates how biblical epics in early modern Germany functioned as a means of embedding Protestant identiy, and of reflecting on contemporary happenings (his examples include the *Herodes* and the Thirty Years War, and the *Olivetum* and the Peace of Westphalia). Czapla's study provides an excellent analysis of the ways in which authors could adapt biblical narratives to meet contemporary needs. The only thing that is lacking is any rigorous reflection on why the epic was chosen as the means of doing this and how these epics achieved their aims. Czapla, *Das Bibelepos in der Frühren Neuzeit*, pp.345-504.

Christian canon. As a result, this thesis opens up questions in relation to how Christian textual practices and concepts of scripture interact that have yet to be properly considered.

Chapter 2: Defining the Biblical Epic

Defining Key Terms: Canonical, Scriptural, and Biblical

In order to determine why Christian authors decided to re-write biblical stories in epic form, it is first necessary to define the status and role of the biblical canon itself in late antiquity. One of the greatest challenges in discussing canon and canon formation is that of language. Many of the terms used to categorise texts in scholarly literature (apocrypha, pseudepigrapha, Old Testament) are anachronisms that are simply not appropriate for describing how texts functioned in late antiquity. Of these terms, by far the most problematic are 'canon' and 'scripture'. The trouble with these terms is two-fold. Firstly, they are terms used both today and in late antiquity, and in late antiquity their meaning was not synonymous as it is in present usage. Secondly, and more problematically, the definition of 'canon' in late antiquity was not stable.

The Greek word κανών derives in all probability from the Semitic קנה, meaning 'reed'. These reeds were used as measuring sticks and hence metaphorically for a rule or standard by which to measure something. It is this idea of a normative rule which is the intended meaning of κανών (and its derivatives κανονικός and κανονίζειν) when it is used by Christian authors in the second and third centuries (Gal. 6.16; 1 Clem. 1.3; 4.1; Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.9.4; 5.20.1; Tertullian, *Praescr.* 13, 27; Clement of Alexandria, *Stom.* 4.15.98; 6.15.124; Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.32.7; 5.24.6). By the middle of the fourth century the meaning of κανών was beginning to refer not to the *regula fidei* but to the collection of texts in which the church perceived this rule to be found (Athanasius, *Decr.* 18; *Epist. fest.* 39; Council of Laodicea, *Can.* 59).[1] As the earliest extant biblical epics date from approximately the same time, it is this definition of κανών as a fixed collection of texts that will be adopted in this thesis.[2]

Having addressed the issue of the two-fold meaning of 'canon' in late antiquity, we can now turn to the definition of 'scripture'. late antique Christianity possessed a large body of more-or-less authoritative texts, some of which would eventually be

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[1] Note also Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 6.25.3. However, despite the emphasis on the authority of written texts in this particular passage, it is not clear whether Eusebius is referring to a 'rule' or a list of writings as his preferred term to describe those writings validated by the church is ἐνδιάθηκος (eg. 5.8.1; 6.14.1; 6.25.1).

[2] Tertullian vilifies Virgilian and Homeric centos around the turn of the second century, but these texts are no longer extant and we have no indication as to their content or whether they took epic form. Tertullian, *Praescr.* 39.3-6. The earliest extant epic is Juvencus' *Evangeliorum libri quattuor*.

canonised. In order to explain the scriptural authority of those texts that failed to gain admittance to the canon, recent canon criticism has come up with a variety of terms to distinguish the eventually-canonised texts from their non-canonised counterparts. James A. Sanders, followed by Bruce Metzger, used the term *norma normans* to refer to those texts which functioned authoritatively and thereby defined Christian practice and identity, and *norma normata* to refer to the collection of texts which gained authority because they were used to define Christian identity and practice.[3] Gerald Sheppard uses different terminology, but describes much the same phenomenon. According to Sheppard there are two classes of 'canon'. 'Canon 1' texts are any texts that function in an authoritative manner in a given community. 'Canon 2' texts are canon 1 texts that have become so well-established that their authority outranks all other canon 1 texts. Over time these texts form a distinctive corpus which sets them apart from all other canon 1 texts.[4]

Yet both before and after the closing of the canon, the term 'scripture' (γραφή, γέγραπται etc.) was used indiscriminately to refer to those authoritative texts incorporated in the New Testament (*Barn.* 4.14; Polycarp, *Phil.* 2.2-3, 12.1; Theophilus of Antioch, *Autol.* 1.14) and to those refused a canonical status (*De cent.* 55.5-6, 58.10-11; *De aleat.* 4). Therefore, instead of inventing further complicated terminology that fails to add anything significant to our understanding of the nature of these texts, I shall adopt the terminology used by the church from the mid-fourth-century.

In the most basic terms, by the fourth or fifth centuries at the latest, Christianity had chosen a fixed body of texts by means of which to tell the Christian story. These texts were deemed to be canonical and were gathered together as the 'New Testament'. They were placed alongside what had previously been referred to as the 'Jewish Scriptures', and the collection thus formed became the 'Bible'. However, alongside the biblical texts were all those texts which had not been selected to form part of the canon yet which had had, and in some cases continued to have, authoritative status within (certain) Christian communities. These texts can usefully be referred to by the name which they were ascribed in late antiquity: 'scripture', a term that could be applied to an authoritative text regardless of its canonicity.

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[3] James A. Sanders, *Torah and Canon* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972), p.91; Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (Oxford: OUP, 1987), pp.282-283.
[4] G. T. Sheppard, 'Canon', in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. M. Eliade (New York: Macmillan, 1987), III, 62-69; Lee Martin McDonald, and Stanley E. Porter *Early Christianity and its Sacred Literature* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2000), pp.600-602.

To clarify, for the purposes of this thesis the definitions I shall use are as follows:

- canonical *or* biblical - the 27 books of the New Testament and the 39+ books of the Old Testament as we have received it[5]

- scriptural - any piece of Christian or re-appropriated Jewish *literature* (i.e. excluding creeds, canons, the liturgy) that was accepted as in some sense authoritative by some Christian communities regardless of the position of the universal church.[6]

Biblical Epic Genre

In order to compose these additional scriptural texts, it was necessary to find a genre that enabled authoritative texts to be produced without these new texts challenging the authority and status of the biblical texts. The use of genre as a means of subordinating authorial authority without also subordinating the later text to the earlier was not a novel development by early Christian authors. In fact, Christian authors demonstrated a remarkable lack of ingenuity, simply following the example of classical authors who had themselves desired to position their own compositions alongside an influential predecessor.[7] This dependence on classical precedents is evidenced by the fact that perhaps the most significant, and certainly the most enduring, genre through which this sublimation of authorial authority has taken place in Christian practice is the epyllion. Amongst the authors contained in the lists of 'virtuous men' compiled by Jerome and Gennadius, the number of authors who fall into the 'scholarly' category of mediation greatly outweighs the

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[5] As the boundaries of the canon are not under discussion in this thesis, a more precise definition of the Old Testament books is not necessary.

[6] Cf. Albert Sundberg: 'Since it was cited as authoritative, it is proper to call it "scripture". But since it was not a closed collection, it is not proper to call it "canon". Thus a clear technical differentiation between "scripture" and "canon" becomes essential to a clear and accurate history of the New Testament canon. "Scripture" is religious literature that is appealed to for religious authority. Whereas "canon" is a closed collection of "scripture", to which nothing is to be added, from which nothing is to be subtracted.' Albert C. Sundberg, 'Towards a Revised History of the New Testament Canon', in *Studia Evangelica 4: Papers presented to the Third International Congress on New Testament Studies held at Christ Church, Oxford, 1965*, ed. Frank Leslie Cross (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1968), pp.452-461 (pp.453-454). See also Harry Y. Gamble: 'If in connection with Christian writings the word "canon" originally had the specific sense of a fixed list of authoritative documents, the term "scripture" designates writings which are taken to be religiously authoritative and are used and valued as such, yet without regard to their systematic enumeration or limitation. Whereas the concept of canon presupposes the existence of scriptures, the concept of scripture does not necessarily entail the notion of a canon, and this was in fact the situation in the first several centuries of Christianity.' Harry Y. Gamble, *The New Testament Canon: Its Making and Meaning* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), p.18.

[7] For a more detailed discussion of the similarities between classical and Christian practice see: Netz, *Scale, Space and Canon*, pp.751-779.

authors who choose to adopt the 'literary' approach. Nevertheless, the composers of some of the earliest known biblical epics (Juvencus, Avitus, and Victorius) all find their places within the lists and are treated on an equal footing with their more orthodox colleagues (Jerome, *Vir. ill*, 84; Gennadius, *Vir. ill.* 182, 195).[8]

The appeal of the epyllion as a means of mediating biblical texts lies in its intertextual nature. Dependent as it is on a symbiotic relationship between the epyllion and the larger narrative on which the epyllion expands, it requires both texts to be treated as authoritative and containing equally valid interpretations of the narrative that is conveyed by each text. The difference between the two texts is understood to be a result of the mediatorial character of the epyllion. Epyllia were designed to engage in a dialogue between the biblical text and the concerns and experiences of later generations of Christians. Yet despite the differences between the texts in the Bible and in the epyllion, the story these texts were conveying was the same, the epyllion was simply doing it in a way that made it more accessible for later generations of Christians. The recognition that the epyllia presented an equally authoritative depiction of the events of the biblical story, even though the way they did this (both the words used and the details of the narrative they told) did not carry the same authority (dependent as these features were on the efforts of authors further down the chain of authorial apostolic succession), meant that the epyllia were able to present an alternative account of a familiar biblical story in a manner that was both scripturally authoritative and at the same time still respectful of the canonical boundary that separated the biblical text from all other compositions.

This highly nuanced account of the role of the epyllia is expressed most concisely in Reinhard Herzog's widely disputed claim that epyllia 'geschieht nicht also Kommentar, sondern als Erzählung, mit dem Anspruch, die Bibel selbst zu sein.'[9]

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[8] Recent editions of these works include: McGill, *Juvencus' Four Books of the Gospels*; Avitus, *Histoire Spirituelle: Tome I (Chants I-III)* trans. and ed. Nicole Hecquet-Notie (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1999); Victorius, *Aletheia*, ed. J. Martin and P. F. Hovingh (Turnhout: Brepols, 1960).

[9] Herzog, *Die Bibelepik der lateinischen Spätantike*, p.115, 140-145. Part of the reason why Herzog is able to make this claim is because he is locating the biblical epic alongside another interpretative genre that blurs the boundaries between the biblical author and the later exegete. Like biblical epics, biblical paraphrases re-appropriated a classical form. The most helpful definition of biblical paraphrase is found in the writings of Erasmus. In a letter to Luis Coronel, Erasmus explains that a paraphrase is not a translation but a kind of continuous commentary in which the person speaking does not change; it is the same person who is speaking both the biblical text and its explanation. 'Est enim paraphrasis non translatio, sed liberius quoddam commentarii perpetui genus, non commutatis personis.' Desiderius Erasmus, Epistle 1274, lines 38-39, in *Opus Epistolarum des. Erasmi Roterodami,* ed. P. S. Allen and H.M. Allen, 11 vols (Oxford: Clarendon, 1924), V, 47. For scholarly analyses of this phenomenon see: Jane E. Phillips, '*Sub evangelistae persona*: The Speaking Voice in Erasmus' *Paraphrase on Luke'*, in *Holy Scripture Speaks: The Production and Reception of Erasmus' Paraphrases on the New Testament*, ed. Hilmar Pabel and Mark Vessey (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), pp.127-150; Robert D. Sider, 'Historical Imagination and the Representation of Paul in Erasmus'

Whilst Herzog's language is a little too brazen for conveying the intricate relationship between epyllia and the Bible, his recognition of the shared scriptural identity of these texts is fundamental for appreciating how they functioned. More recent scholarship has tended to play down the audacity of Herzog's claim that the epyllia were intended to be the Bible, yet the significance of his statement continues to persist in defining how scholars view the relationship between epyllia and the Bible. Roger Green correctly asserts that although the epyllia were for Herzog 'tantamount to a gospel that reflects the concerns of its own generation', this gospel 'would be a kind of extra gospel, a gospel emanating from and moulded by a particular Sitz im Leben' rather than a replacement or correction of the biblical text.[10] There is only one flaw in Green's explanation: as a matter of genre, these texts were not Gospels, but epyllia.

The utilisation of the epyllion was of the utmost importance for the continuation of scriptural literature after the closing of the biblical canon, a fact attested to by the continued use of the genre for this purpose well into the Early Modern era.[11] The

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Paraphrases on the Pauline Epistles', in *Holy Scripture Speaks*, pp.85-109. For the applicability of this theory to late antique biblical epics see: Laura Miguélez-Cavero, 'The Re-creation of a Narrator: Nonnus of Panopolis' "Paraphrase of the Gospel of John" 1:1-45', *Symbolae Osloenses*, 93.1 (2019), 209-233; Green, 'The Evangeliorum Libri of Juvencus: Exegesis by Stealth?', in Pollmann and Otten (eds), *Poetry and Exegesis in Premodern Latin Christianity*, pp.65-70 (p.71).

[10] Green, *Latin Epics of the New Testament*, xvii. See also Renaud Lestrade's explanation that the epyllia were designed to result in 'une intériorisation et [une] amplification du message et de la fable biblique'. Renaud Lestrade, 'Usage des sources poétiques classiques et perspectives « théologiques» dans l'Heptateuchos de Cyprien le Gaulois (Ve s.)', in *Poetry, Bible and Theology from Late Antiquity to the Middle Ages*, ed. Michele Cutino (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020), pp.105-126 (p.122).

[11] For a concise summary of the way in which the humanist basis of the English educational system encouraged the utilisation of the epyllion see: William Weaver, *Untutored Lines: The Making of the English Epyllion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), pp.1-13. Note that Weaver does not argue that the Early Modern English epyllion arose as a result of English poets' encounter with ancient epyllia, but through the classical educational techniques used in the curriculum which provided poets with the skills that made the epyllion a natural form in which to compose. Weaver's study is particular helpful in counteracting trends espoused in earlier literary studies. Barbara Kiefer Lewalski's discussion of the appropriation of the epyllion in early modern England is severely constrained by her focus on the Renaissance critical theory of classical texts rather than with the classical texts themselves. Lewalski, *'Paradise Lost' and the Rhetoric of Literary Forms* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), pp.3-17. An alternative history of the Early Modern English epyllion is provided by W. Macneile Dixon, who associates the early modern texts with the Junius Manuscript (*Genesis A, Genesis B, Exodus, Daniel*) and the retelling of Judith that occurs alongside *Beowulf* in the Nowell Codex. (Note that there is one other extant example of an Old English epic with which Dixon appears to be unfamiliar. *Azarias* is contained in the Exeter Book and is a re-narration of part of Daniel.) As these Old English texts probably owe their origins to the Latin epyllia (Christian and pagan) of late antiquity which were imported during the various invasions and attempts to convert the English from c.600, Dixon makes a valiant attempt to prove the continuity of the epyllion genre across the ages. Nevertheless, despite the similarity between *Genesis B* and *Paradise Lost*, it is impossible to prove whether Milton was familiar with these Old English texts. More convincing evidence can be offered in favour of Milton's familiarity with the late antique epics themselves due to their wider circulation and use in Medieval English education. Dixon, *English Epic and Heroic Poetry*, pp.90-97. Cf. McBrine, *Biblical Epics in Late Antiquity and Anglo-Saxon England*. For more holistic histories of the epyllion see: Czapla, *Das Bibelepos in der Frühren Neuzeit*, pp.19-201; E. M. W. Tillyard, *The English Epic and its Background* (Westport: Greenwood, 1976).

way in which a story is told shapes the way in which it will be received. By changing the genre of biblical narratives, the authors of epyllia were able to alter the way in which biblical stories were understood by later generations of Christians. Their purpose was to mediate between the biblical text and their fellow Christians by accommodating the biblical story to the needs of a contemporary audience. However, they had no desire to reduce the authority of the narrative they were telling or to remove its scriptural identity in the process. By appropriating a genre whose nature was inherently intertextual, authors lower down the chain of authorial apostolic succession were able to continue to write scriptural texts designed to complement the biblical texts by mediating between them and later generations of Christians even after the closing of the canon.

'Epics' and 'Epyllia'

This chapter is concerned with setting out the key theoretical principles and primary evidence with which I shall defend my argument that the re-appropriation of the epyllion genre allowed authors to compose texts with scriptural authority after the closing of the biblical canon. In order to do this, it is now necessary to provide definitions for more of the key terms that will be used throughout this work, namely: 'epyllion', 'epic', and 'genre'. The purpose and utility of genre is a particularly pertinent concern because the term 'epyllion' was not an ancient genre name. The works to which it is now applied were simply referred to as 'epics' by their authors, intended audience, and multiple generations of readers after them. This begs the question of the nature of genre and whether it is appropriate or useful to apply genre labels which differ from those used at the time of a text's composition. Therefore, the first term I shall define is 'genre'.

The questions surrounding the nature of 'genre' are manifold. Is a genre prescriptive or descriptive? Is it a set of criteria or a means of communication? Is a genre defined through the author's intentions, the reader(s)' interpretation, or the critic's analysis of a text? Are they anachronisms which hinder understanding or an integral part of the way in which texts convey meaning? [12] In recent scholarship, the idea that a genre has an *a priori* existence has become increasingly untenable, and the

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[12] A helpful (if somewhat dated) survey of the possible answers to these and other questions concerning the nature of genre can be found in: Gerhard R. Kaiser, 'Zur Dynamik literarischer Gattungen', in *Die Gattungen in der vergleichenden Literaturwissenschaft*, ed. Horst Rüdiger (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1974), pp.32-64.

focus has moved more towards an understanding of genre as a means of communication.[13] In this regard, Thomas Pavel's description of genres as 'good habits' is particularly helpful.[14] Instead of seeing genre as either primarily prescriptive or descriptive, Pavel's definition helps us to understand the way in which genre expectations enable communication between a writer and their readers by means of the expectations produced in a reader's mind through their encounters with other, broadly similar literature.[15] From the authorial perspective, choosing to write within a certain 'genre' means choosing to interact with a series of expectations which a reader of that genre will bring to the text. Some of these expectations will be prescriptive and non-negotiable.[16] Other features can be conformed to or not, depending on the impact that the author wants to make with a particular text. Indeed, the intentional non-fulfilment of a readers' expectations for a specific genre can be a means of identifying that work more firmly as pertaining to that genre.[17]

If a genre is a series of 'good habits' with which a reader approaches a text and with which an author may or may not choose to comply (or, in the case of later generations of readers, even be aware of), then the question arises as to whether it is appropriate for a critic to define or suggest the habits with which readers should approach a certain group of texts. Todorov defines a genre as 'the codification of discursive properties'.[18] For the intended readers of a text written in a different temporal, geographical, social, or culture location there exist a different set of 'good habits' with which texts are expected to comply from those held by its new readership. The 'good habits' with which the author was expecting to interact may not be so obvious to later readers.

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[13] The rejection of genre as an *a priori* category was first made by Benedetto Croce at the start of the twentieth century. For a recent English translation see: Benedetto Croce, *Breviary of Aesthetics: Four Lectures*, trans. Hiroko Fudemoto (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007). Ultimately this move towards the communicative owes its inspiration to the work by Mikhail Bakhtin and Tzvetan Todorov on speech genres as communicative systems. See: M. M. Bakhtin, 'The Problem of Speech Genres', in *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, trans. Ver W. McGee, ed. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986); Tzvetan Todorov, 'The Origin of Genres', in *Genres in Discourse*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge: CUP, 1990).
[14] Thomas Pavel, 'Literary Genres as Norms and Good Habits', *Literary History* 34.2 (2003), 201-210.
[15] Cf. Bakhtin: 'Each separate utterance is individual, of course, but each sphere in which language is used develops its own *relatively stable types* of these utterances. These we may call *speech genres*.' [emphasis original] Bakhtin, 'The Problem of Speech Genres', p.6.
[16] Pavel gives the example of a sonnet, which is only a sonnet if it has fourteen lines and uses one of a set number of rhyme schemes. Pavel, 'Literary Genres', p.203.
[17] Pavel, 'Literary Genres', p.210. Cf. Alastair Fowler, *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1982), pp.60-72.
[18] Todorov, 'The Origin of Genres', p.18.

The function of genre is to serve as a pragmatic tool designed to aid our understanding of the process of communication between authors and readers. Genre classifications are intended to enable critics to understand how the choices made by an author would be received and interpreted by a reader.[19] These classifications need not necessarily be the same as those with which the author of the text was themselves familiar, as the readers to which they are addressed are different and have divergent 'good habits' with which they approach texts. The purpose of genre classifications should be to open up the 'worldview' of a text, including its temporal, spatial, causal, ethical, and aesthetic values, to readers and critics alike, thereby enabling the process of communication from author to reader to continue.[20] Therefore, if by applying a generic label to a text we are able to further our understanding of that text then we should do so, *even if* that label was not used by the original author and their intended readers.[21]

Unlike the epyllion, the 'epic' as a genre has been acknowledged since Antiquity. Aristotle devotes two books of the *Poetics* to describing the similarities and differences between epics and tragedy. In his account Aristotle explains that epics should be structured dramatically around a single plot-line with the focussing being placed on characters rather than events, with the result that epics include the voices of the characters as well as the author's voice. Epics have a special dispensation to be exceedingly long, and this allows them to deal with a great variety of incidents and to tell them in a grand style. The use of hexameter has arisen out of habitual use and is to be retained due to its stateliness and dignity (Aristotle, *Poet.*, 23.1459a.18-24; 24.1459b.7-9, 18-22, 35-1460a.1; 1460a5-7). In terms of content Aristotle is less specific, but Hesiod deftly explains that epics tell of the great and glorious deeds of gods and men (Hesiod, *Theog.* 100-101).

The relative succinctness of these two early definitions is not a feature of more recent attempts to define the epic genre. Even Aristotle's seemingly obvious category of length has not been left unchallenged. Nevertheless, certain features can be used with a greater or lesser degree of confidence to concoct a definition of 'epic' that reflects the nature of those texts identified as such in Antiquity. Of these

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[19] More detailed discussions can be found in: Pavel, 'Literary Genres', p.202; Peter Seitel, 'Theorizing Genres: Interpreting Works', *New Literary History* 34.3 (2003), 275-297 (p.275); Adena Rosmarin, *The Power of Genre* (Minneapolis: Unniversity of Minnesota Press, 1985), pp.25-26, 48-50; Paul Hernadi, *Beyond Genre: New Directions in Literary Classification* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972), pp.7-9.
[20] Seitel, 'Theorizing Genres', p.279.
[21] This question is addressed in relation to the epyllion in: Virgilio Masciadri, 'Before the Epullion: Concepts and Texts', in *Brill's Companion to Greek and Latin Epyllion and its Reception*, ed. Manuel Baumbach and Silvio Bär (Leiden: Brill, 2012), pp.3-28.

features, metre is probably the least controversial. The use of hexameter in Greek, and hexameter or an equivalent vernacular parallel in Latin and other languages, is an almost stable hall-mark of the epic genre.[22] Formal features such as similes,[23] ekphrasis,[24] and analepsis[25] have all received a relatively strong scholarly consensus as to their normative status in ancient epic.[26] Moving away from formal concerns to those of content, the involvement of the gods, both within the narrative and through the poets' inspiration by the Muses, is another relatively uncontentious feature of epics (at least the narrative/mythological and historical epics which dominate the genre).[27] Likewise the inclusion of a hero whose relationship with humanity and the gods is transformed during the course of the narrative is a feature that is present more often than not.[28] Type scenes are another frequently cited criteria,[29] as is the location of the narrative in the distant past.[30]

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[22] Peter Toohey, *Reading Epic: An Introduction to the Ancient Narratives* (London: Routledge, 1992), p.1; P. Merchant, *The Epic* (London: Methuen, 1971), vii.

[23] Ursula Gärtner and Karen Blaschka, 'Similes and Comparisons in the Epic Tradition', in *Structures of Epic Poetry*, ed. Christiane Reitz and Simone Finkman, 2 vols (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019), I, 727-772; Denis Feeney, *Explorations in Latin Literature: Epic, Historiography, Religion (*Cambridge: CUP, 2021), I, 286. The use of similes is one of the features that has been associated with the epic genre since antiquity. One set of sources that provides early evidence for how critics perceived and defined the genre of the epic are the scholia on Homer and other classical authors. For an introduction to the scholia see: René Nünlist, *The Ancient Critic at Work: Terms and Concepts of Literary Criticism in Greek Scholia* (Cambridge: CUP, 2009). For the section on similes see pp.282-298.

[24] Stephen Harrison, 'Artefact "ekphrasis" and Narrative in Epic Poetry from Homer to Silius', in *Structures of Epic Poetry*, I, 773-806; Philip Hardie, 'Ancient and Modern Theories of Epic', in *Structures of Epic Poetry*, I, 25-50 (p.27).

[25] Anke Walker, 'Aetiology and Genealogy in Ancient Epic', in *Structures of Epic Poetry*, I, 609-652; Hardie, 'Ancient and Modern Theories of Epic', pp.43-44; N. J. Richardson, 'Literary Criticism in the Exegetical Scholia to the Iliad: A Sketch', *Classical Quarterly* 30.2 (1980), 265-287 (pp.266-267).

[26] Other features that are often cited are those listed by Aristotle in his *Poetics* and cited above.

[27] Claudia Schindler, 'The Invocation of the Muses and the Plea for Inspiration', in *Structures of Epic Poetry*, I, 489-530; Hardie, 'Ancient and Modern Theories of Epic', pp.28-29; Griffin, 'Greek Epic', pp.23-24; A. Laird, 'Authority and Ontology of the Muses in Epic Reception', in *Cultivating the Muse: Struggles for Power and Inspiration in Classical Literature,* ed. Efrossini Spentzou and Don Folwer (Oxford: OUP, 2002), pp.117-140. Cf. Nünlist, *The Ancient Critic at Work*, pp.267-281.

[28] Joseph Farrell, 'The Narrative Forms and Mythological Materials of Classical Epic', in *Structures of Epic Poetry*, I, 51-80; Toohey, *Reading Epic*, pp.7-8. The idea of the epic hero as being of a superior social status, preeminent among his fellow men, and acting upon the highest moral principles derives from Aristotle (Aristotle, *Poet.* 1448a.1-4). This description of the hero is problematic and does not fit with certain important epic heroes, most notably Jason. Bär, 'Inventing and Deconstructing Epyllion: Some Thoughts on a Taxonomy of Greek Hexameter Poetry', *Thersites* 2 (2015), 23-51 (pp.32-33); Steven Jackson, 'Apollonius' Jason: Human Being in an Epic Scenario', *Greece & Rome* 39.2 (1992) 155-162; Richard Hunter, '"Short on Heroics": Jason in the Argonautica', *Classical Quarterly* 38.2 (1988) 436-453; Theodore M. Klein, 'Apollonius' Jason: Hero and Scoundrel', *Quaderni urbinati di cultura classica* 13 (1983) 115-126. Another example might be Encolpius in Petronius' *Satyrica*. See Toohey, 'Roman Epic', in *The Cambridge Companion to Epic*, pp.31-54 (pp.48-49).

[29] *Structures of Epic Poetry*, II.1-2; Heinz-Günther Nesselrath, '"Almost-Episodes" in Greek and Roman Epic', in *Structures of Epic Poetry*, I, 565-608; Farrell, 'Narrative Forms and Mythological Materials'. Cf. Nünlist, *The Ancient Critic at Work*, pp.307-315.

[30] Toohey, *Reading Epic*, p.8; Richard P. Martin, 'Epic as Genre', in *A Companion to Ancient Epic*, ed. John Miles Foley (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), pp.9-19 (p.10).

From this overview it is relatively clear that the specific criteria which define the epic genre are a matter of considerable debate. Nevertheless, there is a relatively stable group of broad criteria that can useful be used to discern whether or not a text would have been regarded as an epic in Antiquity. Many of those features can be seen in the texts often described as biblical epics, suggesting that the 'epic' designation is not inappropriate.[31] The most obvious divergence between biblical and classical epics is their content. Whilst the subject matter of biblical epics is necessarily different from classical epics, it shares many of the same features (the direct involvement of the divine, a setting in the distant past, a hero whose relationship with the human and divine is altered during the course of the narrative). In any case, the thematic diversity of ancient epics is one of the features that has been commented upon not only in recent scholarship, but also in Antiquity (Quintilian, *Inst. orat.*, 10.1.46-50; Manilius, *Astro.*, 2.1-66).[32] The one really significant difference between biblical epics and their classical counterparts is that of length. Biblical epics are invariably compact works, and this has led some scholars to adopt the term 'epyllion' rather than 'epic' when describing them.[33] The challenge of using this terminology is that the definition of an epyllion is even more hotly debated than that of an epic.

A typical definition of an epyllion looks something like this:

An epyllion is a short and therefore concentrated narrative composed in hexameters and using a mixture of epic and other genres which expands on one specific character or event from a longer (usually mythological) tale. Due to the limited length, the narrative setting is often a lot smaller than in traditional epics (eg. instead of going on a quest the 'hero' will be depicted in a domestic setting). It is usually fast-paced but with long speeches from the principal character(s). These principal characters normally fall into one of three categories. (1) Minor characters in the longer tale. (2) Major characters but described at earlier/later points in their lives.

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[31] Pollmann, *The Baptized Muse*, pp.62-68; McBrine, *Biblical Epics*; Faulkner, 'Faith and Fidelity in Biblical Epic: The "Metaphrasis Psalmorum", Nonnus, and the Theory of Translation', in *Nonnus of Panopolis in Context: Poetry and Cultural Milieu in Late Antiquity with a section on Nonnus and the Modern World*, ed. Konstantinos Spanoudakis (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), pp.195-210; Carmen Cardelle de Hertmann, and Peter Stotz, '"Epyllion" or "Short Epic" in the Latin Literature of the Middle Ages?', in *Brill's Companion to Greek and Latin Epyllion*, pp.493-518; Sandnes, *The Gospel "According to Homer and Virgil"*, p.65; Roberts, *Biblical Epic and Rhetorical Paraphrase*.
[32] For discussions in secondary literature see: Bär, 'Inventing and Deconstructing Epyllion', pp.31-32; Toohey, 'Roman Epic', p.31; Walter Allen, 'The Epyllion: A Chapter in the History of Literary Criticism', *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, 71 (1940), 1-26 (p.1).
[33] Adams, *Greek Genres and Jewish Authors*, pp.35-42; Czapla, *Das Bibelepos in der Frühren Neuzeit*, pp.228-230; Cf. Cullhed, *Proba the Prophet*, pp.12-13.

(3) Major characters who are given an opportunity to re-narrate an event in a way that differs from its depiction in the longer narrative.[34]

Other features that may occur in such definitions include the focus on women and domesticity,[35] the active participation of the narrator,[36] and the use of ekphrasis.[37]

More problematic even than the variety and vagueness of the criteria suggested is the question of the appropriateness of using the term 'epyllia' to describe this possible genre. On the one hand there are those scholars who argue that the epyllia were recognised as a specific genre in (Late) Antiquity and so there is no reason why we should not continue to recognise and refer to them as such today.[38] On the other hand, the majority of more recent scholarship recognises that the term epyllion was not a specific genre category in Antiquity. Some scholars, whilst accepting that the terminology is anachronistic, continue to use the term epyllion on the basis that it is a useful means of analysing a specific group of texts.[39] Others take a firmer approach and maintain that the refusal of ancient critics to group these texts together means that it is inappropriate for later scholars to do so, thereby advocating both the abandonment of the term 'epyllion' and a rejection of the usefulness of studying these texts as a specific literary entity on the grounds that we have no direct evidence that ancient readers associated these texts with each other.[40]

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[34] Cf. Adams, *Greek Genres and Jewish Authors*, pp.40-41; Nicola Hömke, 'Epic Structures in Classical and Post-Classical Roman Epyllia', in *Structures of Epic*, I, 443-488 (pp.447-448); *Griechische Kleinepik*, p.9; Bär, 'Inventing and Deconstructing Epyllion', pp.23-24; Annette Bartels, *Vergleichende Studien zur Erzählkunst des römischen Epyllion* (Göttingen: Ruprecht, 2004), pp.3-4; Merriam, *The Development of the Epyllion Genre*, p.159; A. Perutelli, *La narrazione commentata. Studi sull'eppilio latino* (Pisa: Giardini, 1979), p.28; M. Marjorie Crump, *The Epyllion from Theocritus to Ovid* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1931), pp.22-24.
[35] R. O. A. M. Lyne, 'The Neoretic Poets', *Classical Quarterly* 18 (1978), 167-187 (p.172); Merriam, *The Development of the Epyllion Genre*, p.159.
[36] Perutelli, *La narrazione commentata*, pp.67, 89; C. Richardson, *Poetical Theory in Republican Rome: An Analytical Discussion of the Shorter Narrative Hexameter Poems Written in Latin during the First Century before Christ* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1944), p.89.
[37] Bartels, *Vergleichende Studien zur Erzählkunst*, pp.3-4; Merriam, *The Development of the Epyllion Genre*, p.21; Kathryn J. Gutzwiller, *Studies in the Hellenistic Epyllion* (Königstein: Hain, 1981), pp.2-9; Crump, *The Epyllion*, pp.1-24.
[38] Adams, *Greek Genres and Jewish Authors*, pp.35-42; S. Koster, 'Epos - Kleinepos - Epyllion? Zu Formen und Leitbildern spätantiker Epik', in *Leitbilder aus Kunst und Literatur*, ed. J. Dummer and M. Vielberg (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2002), pp.31-51; Merriam, *The Development of the Epyllion Genre*, p.2; Paul W. Miller, 'The Elizabethan Minor Epic', *Studies in Philology* 55.1 (1958), 31-38; Toohey, *Reading Epic*, p.100; Crump, *The Epyllion*, pp.22-24.
[39] Bär, 'Inventing and Deconstructing Epyllion'; Masciadri, 'Before the Epullion', pp.3-28; Marco Fantuzzi and Hunter, *Tradition and Innovation in Hellenistic Poetry* (Cambridge: CUP, 2004), pp.191-192; Gutzwiller, *Hellenistic Epyllion*, p.5; Elizabeth Story Donno, *Elizabethan Minor Epics* (New York: Columbia, 1963), p.6
[40] Gail Trimble, 'Catullus 64: The Perfect Epyllion?', in *Brill's Companion to Greek and Latin Epyllion*, pp.55-79; Allen, 'The Epyllion'.

There are only five extant uses of the term 'epyllion' in early Greek sources, and only two uses of the Latin cognate.[41] Of these ancient uses, three are found in Aristophanes and one in Clement of Alexandria. On each of these occasions ἐπύλλιον is functioning in its etymological sense as a diminutive of ἔπος (Aistophanes, *Ach.* 398; *Pax* 531; *Ran.* 942; Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 3.3.24). In the two Latin examples, the term is used in a deprecatory sense, and not as a definition of genre (Ausonius, *Cent. nupt.* 360.14-15; *Griph. tern.num.* 355.56-58). That leaves only one source which could be used as evidence that ἐπύλλιον was a recognised genre in Antiquity. Athenaeus refers to the pseudo-Homeric *Epikichlides* as an ἐπύλλιον (Athenaeus, *Nat. deip.* 2.65b). Whilst it is possible that Athenaeus used the term to indicate the *Epikichlides*' genre, it is more likely that he was using it in the same way as Aristophanes and Clement, to denote size. After more than a thousand year gap in which the term 'epyllion' was occasionally used self-reflexively by poets but not by critics or scholars, the term 'epyllion' found its way into classical scholarship towards the end of the eighteenth century in the works of Karl David Ilgen and his contemporary Friedrich August Wolf.[42] Its continuing use and increasingly restrictive definition has been traced most recently by Stefan Tilg, who suggests that for the term to be of any use in modern scholarship something nearer to the broad definition with which it was initially used is necessary.[43]

Having discounted the line of thought that argues for the use of the term on the basis of its historical authenticity, we are now left with two further lines of scholarly reasoning surrounding the use of the term 'epyllion'. There are those scholars who argue that it is anachronistic and that these texts should simply be analysed within the contexts of epics and the other ancient genres which they resemble.[44] Other scholars, myself among them, argue that reading these texts together is useful and insightful, and should therefore be encouraged.[45] Yet even for those scholars who do see the value in recognising a meaningful similarity between these texts, the question remains as to which factors must exist for a text to be acknowledged as an epyllion. The sheer variety of formal and content-related features expressed by

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[41] These sources are discussed in detail in: É. Wolff, 'Quelques Précisions sur le Mot « Epyllion »' *Revue de philologie, de littérature et d'histoire anciennes* 62 (1988), 299-303 (pp.299-300).
[42] Carolus David Ilgen, *Hymni Homerici cum reliquis carminibus minoribus* (Halis Saxonum: E libraria Hemmerdeana, 1796), p.355; F. A. Wolf, *Hesiodi quod fertur Scutum Herculis* (Leipzig: K. F. Ranke, 1840), p.67. See: Tilg, 'On the Origins of the Modern Term "Epyllion"', pp.29-54 (pp.33-34).
[43] Tilg, 'On the Origins of the Modern Term "Epyllion"', p.46. See also: Wolff, 'Quelques Précisions'; Glenn W. Most, 'Neues zur Geschichte des Terminus "Epyllion"', in *Philologus* 126 (1982), 153-156; John F. Reilly, 'Origins of the Word "Epyllion"', *Classical Journal* 49 (1953/1954), 111-114.
[44] See above, ns. 37, 39.
[45] See above, n. 38.

possible epyllia mean that neither can all of the possible factors be found in any single example of the relevant texts, nor does any one factor occur in all of those texts.[46] Nevertheless, I believe that it is possible to define 'epyllion' in a meaningful way if the focus is shifted away from formal and content-related features and towards the intertextuality espoused by all epyllia.

The variety in the lengths of extant epyllia is often cited as a reason why length cannot be used as a criterion by which to formalise the genre.[47] However, I would like to suggest that it is not the length of the epyllion itself, but the length *in relation to the narrative it is re-narrating* that is the homogenising factor. All extant epyllia are significantly shorter than the texts they are re-narrating, even though they may not in and of themselves be 'short' texts.[48] Another possible means of defining an epyllion is through its content. Once again, the problem with defining the genre in this way is the diversity of the texts involved. I would suggest that this approach to content is too specific, and that once again it is not the content of the epyllion itself, but its content *in relation to the narrative it is re-narrating* that is the unifying factor. Each epyllion takes an aspect of a longer narrative and expands or develops it in greater depth than in the longer narrative from which the character or event is taken.

The thing that makes 'epyllion' a useful genre label is that it describes the way in which one group of texts (epyllia) are related to another. Therefore, I would like to propose the following as a working definition for an epyllion which allows for the wide variety of content and formal features whilst also recognising the intertextual methodology adopted by all of these texts:

> An epyllion is a text that re-narrates or expands upon a specific character or incident taken from an already extant and widely received text. An epyllion is smaller in scale than the text it is developing due to its focus on a single event rather than on an extended narrative history.[49]

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[46] This point is famously made in the vitriolically polemical article by Allen, and in a more recent and restrained form by Silvio Bär. Allen, 'The Epyllion', p.1; Bär, 'Inventing and Deconstructing Epyllion', pp.31-32. For examples of suggested criteria see above, n. 33.

[47] Bär, 'Inventing and Deconstructing Epyllion', pp.28-29; Baumbach, and Bär, 'A Short Introduction to the Ancient Epyllion', in *Brill's Companion to Greek and Latin Epyllion*, ix-xvi.

[48] For the relative lengths of classical epyllia see: Bär, 'Inventing and Deconstructing Epyllion', pp.26-27.

[49] Note the parallels with the definitions used by literary scholars in regard to Elizabethan epyllia. For example: Clark Hulse, *Metamorphic Verse: The Elizabethan Minor Epic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), pp.15-34; Donno, 'The Epyllion', in *English Poetry and Prose, 1540-1674*, ed. Christopher Ricks (London: Longmans, 1971), pp.82-100; Donno, *Minor Epics*, pp.1-20. Miller's study is particularly useful in this regard as, despite labouring under the severe handicap of believing that the epyllion was an accepted genre in antiquity, he is nevertheless able to demonstrate a convincing

The epyllion is a fundamentally intertextual composition. It relies upon the readers' knowledge of the wider (textual) tradition surrounding the character and events described, and it expands the already familiar story and/or retells it from a slightly different point of view.[50] At the same time, the expectation is that a knowledge of the epyllion will then go on to shape the way in which a reader approaches the larger narrative. As a result, I believe that using the term 'epyllia' to describe these texts is a valid and useful activity. Without a correct understanding of the intertextual nature of the epyllia it is not possible to interpret them correctly. Genre is supposed to aid the text-reader communication process and, I would argue, readers today need the intertextual nature of the epyllia to be highlighted in a way that their intended audiences did not.[51] This is because we have a preconceived idea of a strict textual hierarchy whereas in late antiquity the textual community can be more accurately described using a less hierarchical and more equal centre-and-periphery model.[52]

Amongst late antique Christians, the continuing inspiration of texts both inside and outside of the canon gave an authoritative status to any orthodox work, from the Bible itself, through the liturgy, hymns, and *kontakia*, to poetry and biblical epics, to sermons, treatises and conciliar decrees. The differing genres and functions of these texts and their shared source of inspiration made a strict hierarchical ordering

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argument for why the later epyllia should be read alongside the classical epyllia and how doing so results in a more nuanced understanding of the later texts. Miller, 'The Elizabethan Minor Epic'. Compare also: Baumbach and Bär, 'A Short Introduction'*,* ix; Crump, *The Epyllion*, pp.22-23.

[50] That a reader was already expected to be familiar with the larger narrative with which an epyllion interacts is indicated by the way in which epyllia omit the introduction of characters and their relations to each other, and the narration of events which influence a character's action but which are not described in detail in the epyllion. Note that in the case of cento the intertextuality is not only with the biblical texts but also with the Homeric and Virgilian sources of the verses used.

[51] Silvio Bär reaches a similar conclusion when he completes his article on the utility of the term 'epyllion' by arguing compellingly that whether or not we call a certain group of texts epyllia or not is irrelevant: 'what is important, however, is the fact that it is not a set of generic "rules" that counts, but rather the intertextual engagement of a text with other texts, and the conclusions which can be drawn from an analysis of this engagement.' In which case, modern scholarship needs a way of indicating this. As the term 'epyllion' has been used to do this for the past three hundred years there does not seem to be any great need to abandon it now despite the fact that (or perhaps precisely because of it) no genre of this name, or even for this group of texts, existed in Antiquity. Bär, 'Inventing and Deconstructing Epyllion', p.41, 43-44.

[52] For an explanation of the utility of such a model see: Bartels, *Vergleichende Studien zur Erzählkunst*, p.8. It is also worth noting Thomas Greene's seminal work on Renaissance texts which use what he describes as a 'dialectical mode' to critique a former text without denying its authority. Thomas M. Greene, *The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982). For the application of such an approach to late antique texts see: Hömke, 'Epic Sturctures'; Kirsch, *Laudes sanctorum: Geschichte der hagiorgraphischen Versepik vom IV. bis X. Jahrhundert*, 2 vols (Stuttgart: Anton Hiersemann, 2004); Kirsch, *Die lateinische Versepik*. That this is not just a later scholarly theory but reflects the way in which late antique readers understood their textual world is supported by the way in which the scholia defend such practices of critiquing without rejecting. See: Richardson, 'Literary Criticism in the Exegetical Scholia', p.271.

impracticable. Instead, a single-level model with the Bible at its centre and with the other authoritative texts surrounding it in a closer or nearer position depending on their categorisation as biblical, scriptural, or otherwise inspired is more pertinent.

The appropriateness of a centre-periphery model, and its resonance with the way in which late antique theologians thought about their textual world can be seen in the writings of theologians such as Athanasius and Eusebius. Athanasius understood there to be two basic divisions of texts. There are those texts which are θεόπνευστος γραφή (inspired writings), and those texts which are τὰ λεγόμενα ἀπόκρυφα (those called 'apocryphal'). The apocryphal texts are an invention of the heretics (αἱρετικῶν ἐστιν ἐπίνοια) and so are not inspired.[53] Of the 'inspired writings' there are two categories. The primary category is that of those texts which are κανονιζόμενα (canonical); that is the παλαιᾶς διαθήκης βιβλία (books of the Old Testament), and the καινή (New). The secondary category is formed of those books which are οὐ κανονιζόμενα (not canonical) but τετυπωμένα [...] παρὰ τῶν πατέρων (have been sealed with approval by the fathers). The examples which Athanasius gives of books which fall into this latter category include the Wisdom of Solomon, Sirach, Judith, Esther, Tobit, the *Didache*, and the *Shepherd of Hermas* (Athanasius, *Ep. fest.* 16-21). Eusebius' principal category, like that of Athanasius, comprises the ἐνδιάθηκος (encovenanted) writings. The second category is formed of the ἀντιλεγόμενα (disputed) writings (namely: James, Jude, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John). A subsidiary category of disputed books, or potentially a category in its own right, are the νόθος (spurious) texts, including the Acts of Paul, the Apocalypse of Peter, the Epistle of Barnabas, the *Shepherd of Hermas*, but also Revelation. Eusebius' final category parallels Athanasius', in that it contains the writings of heretics (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.25.1-7).

Deleuze and Guittari's rhizomatic model is particularly helpful for demonstrating the interconnectedness of the textual world of late antique Christianity. In contrast to the 'arborescent' structure typical of hierarchical models in which one point leads to another, which leads to a third, the rhizome model is a web of interconnected points on a single plane. There is neither a beginning nor an end to the model, neither is there a single direction of progression. Instead, all the points are connected to each other. They grow from a midpoint to which every point in the

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[53] Note that 'apocryphal' is not used by Athanasius in the same way as it is used today. As is evident later in the paragraph, some of the texts that we would describe as apocryphal (Tobit, Judith etc.) do not fall into Athanasius' group of apocryphal writings.

model is connected. However, this midpoint is not a fixed entity; it changes and is changed as the model itself expands and is reshaped.[54] Moving from the central 'nodes' of the Bible, through the scriptural, to the inspired, to the heretical (authoritative as these texts are for heretical groups), the rhizomatic model recognises that there are varying degrees of authoritative texts without forming them into a rigidly hierarchical structure that fails to reflect the way in which people understood and interacted with these texts in late antiquity.[55]

Summary and Methodology

The argument I am proposing in this thesis is that the intended audiences of biblical epics received them as scripturally authoritative texts despite their extra-biblical location. Dependant as this is on reader reaction, the most convincing evidence to support this theory would take the form of written records made by the intended readers of the way in which they interpreted these texts, or evidence of how they used these texts in order to define or defend their theological viewpoints. Such accounts simply do not exist. We are therefore dependent on the critical tools of reader-orientated literary theories in order to hypothesise how these texts may have been received and understood by their intended audience.

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[54] '[L]e rhizome connecte un point quelconque avec un autre point quelconque, et chacun de ses traits ne renvoie pas nécessairement à des traits de même nature, il met en jeu des régimes de signes très différents et même des ats de nonsignes. [...] Il n'est pas fait d'unités, mais de dimensions, ou plutôt de directions mouvantes. Il n'a pas de commencement ni de fin, mais toujours un milieu, par lequel il pousse et déborde. Il constitue des multiplicitiés linéaires à n dimensions, sans sujet ni objet, étalables ser un plan de consistance [...] Une telle multiplicité ne varie pas ses dimensions sans changer de nature en elle-même et se métamorphoser. À l'opposé d'une structure qui se définit par un ensemble de points et de positions, de rapports binaires entre ces points et de relations bi-univoques entre ces positions, le rhizome n'est fait que de lignes: lignes de segmentarité, de stratfication, comme dimensions, mais aussi ligne de fuite ou de déterritorialisation comme dimension maximale d'après laquelle, en la suivant, la multiplicité se métamorphose en changeant de nature. On ne confondra pas de telles lignes, ou linéaments, avec les lignées de type arborescent, qui sont seulement des liasons localisables entre points et positions.' Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Capitlism et Schizophrénie 2: Mille Plateaux* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1980), pp.31-32.
[55] Recent studies of the Qumran literature have begun to recognise that certain 'rewritten bible' scrolls may in fact have been intended to function authoritatively alongside those texts eventually canonised in a way that was designed to aid and support these texts rather than to challenge or replace them. Note particularly the comments of Brent Strawn in: Brent A. Strawn, 'Authority: Textual, Traditional, or Functional? A Response to C. D. Elledge', in *Jewish and Christian Scriptures: The Function of 'Canonical' and 'Non-Canonical' Religious Texts*, ed. McDonald and James H. Charlesworth (London: T&T Clark, 2010), pp.104-112. Cf. Charlesworth and McDonald, 'Preface', in *Jewish and Christian Scriptures*, x-xii (x-xi). The majority of the Fathers were willing to use biblical and extra-biblical texts interchangeably, despite recognising a difference between these texts and the biblical texts (Clement of Alexandria, *Stom.* 2.45.5; 3.45.3; 3.63.1; 3.64.1; 3.66.1-2; 3.92.2-93.1; 5.96.3; *Exc. Theod.* 67.2; Cyril, *Cat.* 4.36; Athanasisus, *Ep. fest.* 39.20-21; Jerome *Praef. libr. Sal.* 19-21; Rufinus, *Symb.* 36).

Recent scholarship on both the late antique epyllia and *Paradise Lost* has started to realise the importance of moving beyond the hierarchical hypotext-hypertext model which has previously been used to study these works. Although the Bible may serve as a hypotext in the compositional process of the epyllia, for a reader the canonical text informs the interpretation of the epic *and* the epic informs the interpretation of the canonical text. The relationship is reciprocal and symbiotic. Even though the canonical text has a higher status within the scriptural community, it is still part of that community and relates to other texts within that community as a compatriot as well as as a lord. The first move in this direction in Milton scholarship was the volume of essays edited by James H. Sims and Leland Ryken. This volume was intended to outline a critical approach to Milton's works that used the Bible as an 'interpretive context' for Milton's poetry rather than as its source.[56] As Ryken explains, the focus of this approach is not on identifying allusions made by an author to a source text, but on trying to understand how a reader's knowledge of other texts (in this case the Bible) would shape their interpretation of Milton's text.[57]

The origins of this reader-oriented critical approach lie in the parallel movements of the *Rezeptionsästhetik* developed in West Germany and the reader-response criticism developed in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s.[58] By the early 1980s Gérard Genette had been able to complete an ambitious attempt to provide a typology of text-to-text relations by providing a coherent and comprehensive system of hypertextual relations.[59] Although Genette's work remained focused on authorial activity, his theory has provided the basis for other scholars to re-frame his categories in such a way that the focus is shifted from the author to the reader. In 1985 Manfred Pfister offered a set of criteria by means of which the intertextual intensity (and so the ease with which a reader could make intertextual connections) of a text could be discerned. The following table presents an abbreviated version of Pfister's criteria:[60]

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[56] Leland Ryken, 'Introduction', in *Milton and Scriptural Tradition: The Bible into Poetry*, ed. James H. Sims and Leland Ryken (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1984), pp.3-30 (p.3).
[57] Ryken, 'Introduction', pp.15-16. Cf. Quint, *Inside "Paradise Lost"*; Harold Bloom, *A Map of Misreading* (New York: OUP, 1975), pp.125-143.
[58] A history of the development of this field of literary criticism can be found in: Manfred Pfister, 'Konzepte der Intertextualität', in *Intertxtualität. Formen, Funktionen, anglistische Fallstudien*, ed. Ulrich Broich and Manfred Pfister (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1985), pp.1-31; Robert Holub, 'Reception Theory: School of Constance', in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, ed. Raman Selden (Cambridge: CUP, 2004), VIII, 319-346.
[59] Gérard Genette, *Palimpsestes: La littérature au second degré* (Paris: Seuil, 1982), n.b. p.41.
[60] Pfister, 'Konzepte der Intertextualität', pp.26-29.

Criterion	Low-Intensity Intertextuality	High-Intensity Intertextuality
Referentiality	seamless adoption of a phrase or image	adoption of a phrase or image in a prominent manner, intended to emphasise it and to provoke the reader to think about it in an intertextual way
Communicativeness	intertextuality that is non-intentional and arises through a shared cultural milieu rather than a specific intertextual connection	author is aware of the intertextuality and assumes that a reader will also be aware of it
Auto-reflexivity	no authorial mention of intertextuality	the author comments within the text on its intertextual nature
Structural significance	the work would be structurally stable without the intertextuality	without the intertextuality the structure of the work would fall apart
Selectivity	intertextual references are broad and generalised	intertextual references are to highly specific parts or features of another text
Dialogicity	a faithful adaptation of one text by another	a skilful interaction between texts that emphasises the tensions between them

In another essay in the same volume, Monika Lindner suggests two additional criteria: the location of the intertextuality and its extent.[61] The value of Pfister and Lindner's combined criteria has been acknowledged most recently by Martin Bažil, who adapted their criteria in order to apply them to early Christian centos.[62] Bažil's refined criteria were:

- the ability of the intertextual element to recall the other context in which a reader has encountered it
- whether the intertextual element is being used with the meaning it had in its other context or whether the meaning has been adapted
- whether the intertextual element is an isolated occurrence or whether it forms part of a network of intertextual elements from the same external context in order to structure a part or a whole of the text
- how an author marks intertextual connections in order to bring them to a reader's attention
- how the text portrays itself as being intertextual
- the semantic relationship between two texts.

In order to carry out my diachronic analysis of biblical epics I have developed my own set of criteria of intertextuality, based on the criteria already identified by Pfister/Lindner and Bažil.[63] My criteria are intended to discriminate between the words and meaning of the biblical text, the words and meaning of any other (primarily classical) textual references, and the words and meaning of the biblical epic. Therefore, unlike the criteria of Pfister/Lindner and Bažil which are designed to carry equal weight, for the purposes of this thesis my criteria have a hierarchical order of precedence. This is because my focus is not on analysing the intensity of the intertextuality but on the combined effect of the intertextuality on a reader's interpretation of both the epic and the biblical text. Therefore, my first criterion is **whether or not the meaning of an intertextual element is the same in the**

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[61] Monika Lindner, 'Integretionsformen der Intertextualität', in *Intertxtualität*, pp.116-135 (p.118).
[62] Bažil, *Centones Christiani*, pp.65-74.
[63] I have omitted both of Lindner's criteria, Pfister's criteria of 'communicativeness', 'auto-reflexivity', and 'structural significance', and Bažil's third, fourth, and fifth criteria. Lindner's criteria, Pfister's 'structural significance', and Bažil's third criteria are all omitted on the grounds that both Proba and Milton are re-narrating biblical narratives and so the structure of their work is of necessity based upon an intertextual relationship with the biblical text. Whilst these criteria are applicable to my case studies, they do not aid the study which I intend to make of them. Similarly, Pfister's criteria of 'auto-reflexivity' and Bažil's fourth criteria are both applicable to my chosen texts, but there are no examples of these characteristics in the excerpts I have selected. Pfister's criteria of 'communicativeness' and Bažil's fourth criteria are not relevant to the analysis undertaken in this thesis as they are interested in authorial intent and awareness rather than reader reception.

biblical text and the epic (Bažil criterion 2; Pfister 'dialogicity'). This is the criterion which carries the most weight as it is the dialogical relationship between the two texts, their agreements and disagreements, which offers the epic the opportunity to critique and modify the meaning of the story which both it and the Bible are telling. This criterion will also be applied to the Virgilian intertextuality in Proba and the broader classical intertextuality in Milton in order to discern how the appropriation of the Classics shapes the degree to which an intertextual element has the same meaning in both the epic and the biblical text.[64] Similarly, the use and influence of other extra-canonical literature and Jewish and Christian exegetical works will be considered using this criterion. My second criterion is **the degree of precision used in the selection of the intertextual element** (Pfister 'selectivity'). The more precise the intertextual feature the epic is using, the more detailed the dialogue around that feature can be. The next criterion is closely related to this, in that it is interested in **the prominence of the intertextuality** (Bažil criterion 1; Pfister 'referentiality'). This applies both to the intertextual element itself (is it something significant in the biblical text or only a minor feature?) and to its positioning within the epic (is it passed over in silence, mentioned briefly, or discussed in more depth?). My final criterion is **the semantic relationship between the biblical text and the epic** (Bažil criterion 6). This is the least significant criterion as it is the most superficial relationship possible between two texts. As it is not known which Bibles our authors used, I shall compare Proba's text with both the Old Latin version and the Vulgate despite the latter's anachronism, and *Paradise Lost* with the Geneva Bible and the King James Version.[65]

In the two chapters that follow, I intend to apply my theory to one late antique and one Early Modern biblical epic so as to study the genre of the biblical epic rather than its function in a particularly temporal or geographical location. The late antique

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[64] This is particularly important in the case of Proba's text due to the direct use of Virgil's verse. The intertextual intensity on the semantic level is very high between the *Cento* and the *Aeneid* and it is therefore likely that the Virgilian context would have been recalled by the readers and shaped their interpretation of the use of Virgil's verse in Proba's work.

[65] *Genesis*, ed. Bonifatius Fischer (Frieburg: Verlag Herder, 1951-1954); *Biblia Sacra Vulgata: Editio Quinta*, ed. Robert Weber and Roger Gryson (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2009); *The Bible and Holy Scriptures Conteyned in the Olde and Newe Testament. Translated According to the Ebrue and Greke, and conferred With the best translations in diuers langages. With moste Profitable Annotations vpon all the hard places, and other things of great importance as may appeare in the Epistle to the Reader* (Geneva: Roland Hall, 1560); *The Holy Bible Conteyning the Old Testament and the new: Newly Translated out of the Originall tongues: & with the former Translations dilligently compared and reuised by his Maiesties speciall Comandment* (London: Robert Barker, 1611). For a discussion of the versions of the Bible with which Milton was most likely familiar see: Shoulson, 'Milton's Bible', pp.69-70.

text I have chosen is Faltonia Betitia Proba's *Cento Vergilianus*.[66] Among the numerous biblical epics composed in late antiquity there is a small group of centos. These centos take verses or half-verses from Virgil or Homer and paste them together in order to compose their biblical epics.[67] As my purpose is to demonstrate the importance of an intertextual methodology, a cento is a particularly appropriate case study because of its use of two levels of intertextuality. On the one hand, there is the biblical text which provides the *res* of the biblical epic, and on the other the Virgilian or Homeric text which provides the *verba*. Furthermore, the similarity between the method of composing a cento and the practice of composing new psalms by collaging verses from the biblical Psalms together which flourished in Early Modern England serves to connect my two case studies by suggesting that a similar understanding of and approach to texts was in operation in both of these periods.[68] The second case study is Milton's *Paradise Lost*, chosen as a result of the lasting impact it would have on English literature.[69] In order to facilitate a comparison of the intertextual nature of Proba and Milton's epics, I shall analyse the same biblical story in each case. The story I have chosen is the temptation of Eve in Genesis 3. The introduction of sin to the world is not only an important story in general terms, but the significant debates surrounding the means, methods, and prerequisites of salvation in both the Early Church and Post-Reformation England make this story a particularly interesting one to examine.

This thesis proposes that readers of biblical epics understood these texts as carrying scriptural authority. In order to evidence this, I have chosen two case studies which demonstrate the necessity of an intertextual approach to determining a reader's response to biblical epics. By recognising the intertextual nature of the epyllic genre, we are then able to ask not only how a knowledge of the Bible and the Classics would shape a reader's response to biblical epics, but also how a knowledge of the biblical epics would then (re)shape a reader's response to the Bible.[70]

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[66] The edition used is: Faltonia Betitia Proba, *Cento Vergilianus*, ed. Alessia Fassina and Carlo M. Lucarini (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015).

[67] Note that I have chosen to retain the traditional but inaccurate spelling of 'Virgil' throughout this thesis in order to emphasise the way in which he has been Christianised.

[68] Henry Bull, *Christian Praiers and holie Meditations, as wel for Private as Publique exercise* (London: Henrie Middleton, 1578), pp.350-354; Thomas Rogers, *A golden chaine, taken out of the rich treasurehouse the Pslames of King Dauid* (London: Henrie Denham, 1579); Folger Shakespeare Library, MS. V.a.519; MS. V.a.482, fos.36r-39r.

[69] The edition used is: John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Gordon Teskey (New York: Norton, 2020).

[70] The inevitability of this two-way re-shaping is discussed in Pfister, 'Konzepte der Intertextualität', pp.26-27.

Chapter 3: The Temptation of Eve in Proba's *Cento Vergilianus*

Proba's *Cento Vergilianus* is an important piece of Christian literature, not least because it is the earliest extant work known to have been written by a woman. It is therefore only mildly ironic that despite knowing the gender of the author, her precise identity remains a subject of considerable debate. The two candidates for authorship are Faltonia Betitia Proba and her granddaughter, Anicia Faltonia Proba. The arguments for and against each author have been rehearsed repeatedly since the sixteenth century, and will probably continue to be debated over as there is very little evidence that explicitly addresses the issue.[1]

Anicia Faltonia Proba was the wife of Petronius Probus, and the mother of Probus (a consul), Olybrius, and Probinus (joint consuls). She was an important and influential woman in Rome's cultural life, and she is known to have corresponded with people such as John Chrysostom (Ep. 169), Jerome (Ep. 130), and Augustine (Ep. 130, 131, 150). The evidence for her authorship is circumstantial and is not overly convincing. One line of argument is based on the idea that Faltonia Betitia Proba had died prior to 351 and so could not have known of the civil war between Magnentius and Constantius which lines 1-8 are often understood to refer to is not supported by any contemporary evidence. Similarly, the idea that the *Cento* must have been written after 387 as lines 689-694 seem to refer to a debate surrounding the dating of Easter is problematic, as the time at which Easter was to be celebrated was a source of debate on more than one occasion (although the incident in 387 was particularly prominent). The argument that is based on the linguistic similarities between lines 13-17 of the *Cento* and lines 20-24 of the anonymous *Carmen Contra Paganos* does not help as there is no way of determining which text inspired the other. The most convincing piece of evidence for Anicia Proba's authorship is Jerome's Epistle 53, in which he condemns those authors who use Virgil's words to speak of Christ in a way that seems to parody the proem of the *Cento Vergilianus*. The significance of Jerome's remark is that he uses the present tense to describe the scribal activity of the authors he is condemning. This could be used to argue that he

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[1] A detailed presentation of both sides of the argument is provided in Cullhed, *Proba the Prophet*, pp.20-23. The Teubner edition supports the identification of the author as Faltonia Betitia Proba (see Proba, *Cento Vergilianus*, vii-xi) as does Sandnes, *The Gospel According to Homer and Virgil*, pp.141-143; and Green, 'Which Proba Wrote the Cento?', *The Classical Quarterly* 58.1 (2008), 264-276. The identification of Anicia Faltonia Proba as the author is argued most strongly by D. Shanzer, 'The date and identity of the centonist Proba', *Recherches Augustiniennes* 27 (1994), 75-96; and John Matthews, 'The Poetess Proba and Fourth-Century Rome: Questions of Interpretation', in *Institutions, société et vie politique dans l'Empire au IVe siècle* (Rome: École Française de Rome, 1992), pp.277-304.

believed his contemporary, Anicia Proba, to be the author of the text. However, as the addressee of the letter (Paulinus of Nola) is currently considering composing poetry in this vein, it is more likely that the present tense is used for rhetorical effect rather than as an indication that all the authors which Jerome is condemning are currently alive.

The most likely author of the *Cento Vergilianus* is Faltonia Betitia Proba, the wife of Clodius Celsinus Adelphius (an urban prefect), and the mother of Q. Clodius Hermogenianus Olybrius (a consul), and Faltonius Probus Alypius (a prefect). She is identified as the author of the *Cento Vergilianus* in a now lost tenth century manuscript seen by Bernard de Montfaucon when he visited the Benedictine monastery of Mutina in 1697, and in the titles of a ninth and eleventh century manuscript containing the *Cento*.[2] More importantly, Isidore of Seville twice provides her with a brief biography in which he identifies her as the author of the *Cento*. In his *Etymologiae* 1.39.26 he states that Proba, Adelphius' wife, composed a cento from Virgilian material which tells the story of the creation of the world and the Gospels.[3] This is a clear and succinct identification of Faltonia Betitia Proba as the author of the *Cento Vergilianus*. Isidore's other reference to Proba and her cento is even more significant. In his *De viris illustribus*, Isidore only includes one woman, Proba. Her writes:

> Proba uxor Adelphi proconsulis femina inter viros ecclesiasticos idcirco posita sola pro eo quod in laude Christi versata est, componens centonem de Christo virgilianis coaptatum versiculis. Cujus quidem non miramur studium sed laudamus ingenium. Quod tamen opusculum legitur inter apocryphas scripturas insertum.[4]

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[2] Proba uxor Adelphi, mater Olibrii, & Aliepii (sic pro Alypii), cum Constantini (sic pro Constantii) bellum adversus Magnentium conscripsisset, conscripsit et hunc librum. Bernard de Montfuacon, *Diarium Italicum sive Monumentorum veterum, Bibliothecarum, Musaeorum etc. notitiae singulares in Itinerario Italico collectae* (Paris: Joannem Anisson, 1702), p.36. Incipiunt indicula centonis Probae, inlustris Romanae; Aniciorum mater de Maronis qui et Vergilii, Mantuani vatis libri praedicta Proba, uxor Adelphii, ex praefecto urbis, hunc centon(em) religiosa mente amore Christi spiritu ferventi prudenter enucliate defloravit. Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Pal. lat. 1753, fo. 62r. Flatonie Vetitie Probe clarissime femine Vergiliocenton Genesis et Evangeliorum incipit. Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Reg. lat. 1666, fo. 41r. The validity of the evidence which this final manuscript offers is sometimes challenged on the grounds that a marginal gloss on line 692 states that the author's 'sweet husband' was called Alypius. However, as this is not true for either of the Proba's, and as Alypius was the name of one of the elder Proba's sons, it is likely that the scribe did indeed have Faltonia Betitia Proba in mind as the author of the *Cento Vergilianus*.

[3] Denique Proba, uxor Adelphi, centonem ex Vergilio de Fabrica mundi et Evangeliis plenissime expressit, materia conposita secundum versus, et versibus secundum materiam concinnatis. Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Pal. lat. 82.121.

[4] Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Pal. lat. 83.1093.

Isidore's inclusion of Proba in his *De viris*, and his statement that she is a woman amongst 'viros ecclesiasticos', locates Proba firmly amongst the authorial apostolic succession. Furthermore, Isidore goes on to recognise the scriptural status of her work which results from this identity by describing the *Cento* as belonging to the 'apocryphas scripturas', the apocryphal scriptures. Although Athanasius used the term 'apocryphal' as a synonym for 'heretical' (Athanasius, *Ep. fest.* 15), Isidore cannot be doing this as he would not describe a heretic as belonging to the 'viros ecclesiasticos', or even include one in his list of illustrious men in the first place. Instead, he must be using the term in a similar way to that in which we use it today, that is, of inspired scriptural texts that form part of the Bible, but which are differentiated from other scriptural texts and contained in a category of their own.[5] This description of Proba's *Cento* as 'apocryphas scripturas' is the only explicit evidence we have for her (near-)contemporaries recognising her work as scriptural.

Proba's cento is a 694-line re-narration of parts of Genesis leading into a synopsis of the Gospels. The text is taken from the works of Virgil, primarily the *Aeneid*, but also the *Eclogues* and the *Georgics*. Proba then splices these verses together (without altering the Virgilian text) in order to create her re-narrated version of the biblical text. In the rest of this chapter I shall analyse Proba's use of intertextuality according to the four criteria laid down at the end of chapter one. I shall examine each of the criteria separately, beginning with the most important: the use of the meaning of the intertextual element as a fundamental part of Proba's text. This is necessary in order to demonstrate how Proba is able to endow her text with subordinate scriptural authority by creating a text that is intended to aid biblical interpretation but which requires a pre-existent familiarity with the biblical narrative in order to do so.

Criterion One: Meaning of Intertextual Elements

Due to the nature of cento, the criterion of the meaning of the intertextual element is not only the most significant but also the most prominent element of intertextuality. This can be seen from the very opening words of Proba's description of the temptation of Eve. 'Iamque dies infanda aderat' is a quotation from *Aen.*

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[5] That is, corresponding to Athanasius' category of writings which have been 'sealed with approval' (*Ep. fest.* 20), and which include many of those texts which we would describe as apocryphal (for example, Sirach, Judith, and Tobit).

2.132.[6] In order to try and persuade the Trojans of the harmlessness of the massive wooden horse that the Greeks had left outside their city gates, Sinon is commanded to lurk around it in order to answer any questions the Trojans might ask. In order to have a convincing reason for why he is hanging around on the Trojan side of the battlefield, Sinon claims that the Greek's were going to sacrifice him as a result of Phoebus' oracle. This oracle, Sinon explains, said that in order for the Greeks to leave Illyria blood must be spilt. Therefore, the Greeks had decided to sacrifice him. Sinon then explains how, when the 'dies infanda aderat' (the day of horror was at hand), he escaped from the Greek camp and made his way towards the Trojan walls.

In both cases, the 'dies infanda' refers to a day on which an act of deception and temptation takes place.[7] Sinon and the serpent both deceive their auditors as to their purpose and intentions by means of their skilled speech. Moreover, both Sinon and the serpent go on to tempt their listeners to do something which they know to be folly. They persuade their audience that the beautiful thing they can see (whether wooden horse or delicious fruit) is worth having, even though their common sense tells them that that is not the case. In the *Aeneid*, the 'dies infanda' which required the shedding of blood was not really the imagined day on which Sinon was to be sacrificed. Instead, it was the day on which the Trojans brought the wooden horse within their gates and were slaughtered by the Greek troops hidden inside. Similarly, in Proba's *Cento*, the 'dies infanda' results in the deaths of those tempted into folly.[8]

The second half of line 172 is also interesting in relation to this criterion for intertextuality. The phrase 'per florea rure' comes from *Aeneid* 1.430, where it is used to describe the activity of bees busily buzzing about in the springtime. In its original context, Aeneas is using the phrase as a metaphor to describe the labour of those engaged in building and expanding the city of Carthage. As Adam and Eve were set the task of gardening and caring for the garden of Eden, it is not inappropriate for them to be compared to bees. Yet part of the serpent's allegation against Eve is that she has been overcome with idleness (line 185). Nowhere does Proba explicitly describe what Adam and Eve were doing in the garden before the Fall. She

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[6] The version of the *Aeneid* I have referred to is: Virgil, *Eclogues. Georgics. Aeneid: Books 1-6*, trans. H. Rushton Fairclough, G. P. Goold, Loeb Classical Library 63 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999); Virgil, *Aeneid: Books 7-12. Appendix Vergiliana*, trans. H. Rushton Fairclough, G. P. Goold, Loeb Classical Library 64 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).

[7] See also the comparison between the serpent and the cyclops in line 175 and *Aen.* 3.621, and the serpent and Drances in line 176 and *Aen.* 11.337.

[8] The comparison between the serpent and Sinon is continued in line 193, quoting *Aen.* 2.157.

describes the beauty of the garden (lines 160-168), and its ability to produce food of its own beneficence (line 169). Therefore, it is possible that Adam and Eve were doing nothing but relaxing and enjoying themselves. Yet every other claim the serpent makes in his speech is false. By recognising the origin of the phrase 'per florea rura' as part of a metaphor for diligent work, a skilled reader would know that Eve was not idle as the serpent claimed, but busy pottering around and tending the garden with which she had been intrusted.

Line 173 begins with the phrase 'ecce inimicus atrox'. It is derived from *Georgics* 1.407, where it refers to Nisus as he pursues Scylla through the skies. Nisus was the king of Megara until Scylla, his daughter, cut off a special lock of his hair in order to betray the city to Minos. As a result, Scylla was turned into a ciris (a type of bird), and Nisus was turned into a sea eagle in order to continually chase her across the skies. The fact that Nisus is not truly an animal but has been turned into one is suggestive. Proba's depiction of the serpent is of something whose form has been changed (tot sese vertit in ora), and the idea that the serpent was really Satan was not uncommon in early Christian exegesis (Gregory of Nyssa, *Hom in Gen.* 16.2; Augustine, *De Gen. ad Litt.* 11.27-29; cf. *Deut. Rab.* 5.10). This understanding of the hellish origin of the serpent is then picked up again in lines 177-179. These lines form an extended quotation from *Aeneid* 7.325-328 in which Juno, realising that heaven will not help her prevent Aeneas becoming king of Italy and marrying Lavinia, turns to hell (in the form of the furies) for aid.

The physical description of the serpent also draws on the context of the original texts. In Virgil, the phrase 'immensis orbibus anguis' (*Aen.* 2.204), is used to describe the appearance of two serpents who rise from the deep just as Laocoön is about to sacrifice a bull. The serpents kill Laocoön's two sons as a punishment for his profanation of the sacred oak. The association of a snake bringing death with a violation of a sacred tree is an unusual theme, and it is likely that Proba chose to use this particular description of a serpent because of the similarities of the two narratives. Similarly, 'vipeream spirans animam' is originally used to describe a snake whose purpose is to bring about death (*Aen.* 7.359).[9] In the *Aeneid*, Allecto (one of the furies) is employed by Juno to provoke a war between the Trojans and the Latins. Allecto decides that the best method is to throw an enormous snake onto King Latinus' wife (Queen Amata). The snake is intended to drive her mad so that

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[9] Note that some manuscripts read 'inspirans' so that the quotation for the *Aeneid* is exact.

she will provoke the desired war. In both the *Aeneid* and the *Cento*, a snake is the means by which a woman is used to bring about death and destruction on a massive scale. However, it is interesting to note that Queen Amata is not simply being persuaded by the serpent but controlled by it. This begs the question of whether Eve too really had any control of her actions or whether, after hearing the serpent's voice, she was so compelled by the serpent's persona that she was acting as if hypnotised, with no strength to refuse his suggestions.

The preceding examples of intertextuality are all relatively clear. A more difficult proposition is posed by the single word 'relinquat' in line 181. The rest of the verse is a quotation from *Aen.* 8.206 (describing the demigod Cacus' attempt to steal some of Hercules' cattle). Due to the fact that 'relinquat' is only a single word, it is impossible to decide with any certainty which source text Proba was using. There are four possibilities in the *Aeneid*. Two of these, *Aen.* 5.326 and 6.841, are not promising intertextually. However, the other context in which the verb occurs does offer some interesting possibilities. Dido uses the verb twice in her attempt to persuade Aeneas to disobey the gods' commandments (*Aen.* 4.415, 432). This use of the verb in a context of persuasion, when a tempter tries to lure someone away from obeying a divine command, is suggestive. Whereas Aeneas obeys the gods and it is Dido, the tempter, who dies, Eve obeys the tempter and it is she who suffers as a result. By choosing to use this particular verb, Proba might be suggesting that had Eve chosen not to take the fruit then she, like Aeneas, might have been the cause of the tempter's downfall rather than her own.[10]

In his speech, the serpent sketches Eden using the words Musaeus used to describe the realm of the dead (lucis habitamus opacis riparumque toros et prate recentia rivis incolimus). The significance of this lies not in the description, but in the context from which the words are drawn. Musaeus concludes his speech by saying 'si fert ita corde voluntas' (if your heart desires). By framing his speech in this way, the serpent is able to suggest to Eve that eating the forbidden fruit is not his

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[10] 'Quis prohibet' in line 189 is another example of where the text chosen is drawn from a context that encourages disobeying a divine command. The extant sources are fairly evenly split between 'quis' and 'quid'. As 'quis' is the form found in *Aen.* 5.631 it is possible that 'quid' is the original reading and that 'quis' has been introduced in order to harmonise the *Cento*, with the Virgilian text. However, it is also possible that 'quis' was the original reading and 'quid' was introduced as a result of scribal error. I favour the latter explanation as Satan is here attempting to suggest that God (a 'who' rather than a 'what') has acted wrongly and should therefore be disobeyed. In the case of *Aen.* 5.631 Iris, sent by Juno, tries to persuade the Trojan women to stay in Alcestes' kingdom rather than continuing the journey which the gods have decreed. See also line 194 which is taken from Venus' attempt to persuade Juno to convince her husband (Jove) to abandon his plans for Aeneas and let him marry Dido instead.

suggestion, but her own secret desire. She is, so the serpent claims, prevented from enjoying the full fruits of Paradise because of a senseless command from God. Therefore, what could be more natural than that she should desire to eat of the fruit and so be fulfilled through a knowledge of death. Like his opening question in the biblical text (hasn't God said that you must not eat from any tree?), the serpent's use of these words underline his deviousness, as he attempts to persuade Eve of something she knows to be false.

The adjective 'ignavia' has a twofold meaning. On the one hand it refers to idleness and sloth (as I have interpreted it above). On the other hand it can also be used to indicate cowardice. Both of these meanings are suggested by the phrases' Virgilian source, and I would like to suggest that Proba is also playing with both meanings of the term. In the *Aeneid*, 'quae tanta animis ignavia venit' forms part of Tarchon's speech to his troops when they are frightened by the appearance of Camilla (the rightful queen of the Volscis) and her army (*Aen.* 11.733). Tarchon (the Etruscan king) declaims to his troops that they are so despicable they do not know the meaning of shame, perpetually lazy, and cowards/indolent (ignavia). Despite the immediately preceding adjective suggesting that 'indolent' would be the most appropriate interpretation of 'ignavia' in this verse, it is more likely that Virgil is playing with both meanings, as they are each expounded on by one of the previous adjectives. Even if this were not Virgil's original intention, it is a possible interpretation of the verse that would have been available to Proba. That the charge of cowardice is implied by this vocabulary in the *Cento* is supported by the snake's question to Eve about what is preventing her from disobeying God's commands (line 189).

As the serpent continues his speech, the description of Paradise he offers appears on the surface to be that of an idyllic haven (line 186). And in one sense it is. The line is taken from *Eclogues* 7.54 which describes the plentiful trees with fruit strewn around them. Everything is smiling (omnia nunc rident) in its abundance and beauty. However, all of this bounty is dependent on one thing, the presence of Alexis (a shepherd boy with whom Corydon, a shepherd, is in love). If Alexis were to leave then the rivers would dry up (flumina sicca) and so the land would become barren and sterile. Similarly, if Eve continues to live in the garden as she has been then the beauty and splendour of Eden will continue unabated. But if, like Alexis, she were to turn away from what she has known, then she would bring death and destruction in her wake.

The implicit censure of Eve for failing to be satisfied with the things that she has already been given is then continued in the first half of line 187. The passage of the *Georgics* from which this line is taken describes the despair of a bull who dies in misery despite having done no wrong. The bull is said to have refrained from indulging in food and drink, and has instead eaten only healthful food and pure water (*Georg.* 3.526-530). If Eve had been content with the life-giving sustenance which God had provided for her then she would have stood a chance of remaining peacefully in Paradise for ever. But because Eve was not satisfied, she deserved the fate which the bull did not. She indulged herself by wanting more than she needed and so earned for herself the fate due to gluttons.

The paranomasia of the phrase 'causas penitus temptare latentes' is only evident to those readers who were familiar with its meaning in *Aen.* 3.32. On the surface, Proba appears to be using it to refer to the knowledge of death that God has withheld from Eve by granting her eternal life (lines 190-192). However, it also functions as a pleonasm which recalls the serpent's wish that Eve's plucks the fruit from the tree as the means of probing the 'hidden causes'. In the Aeneid, the phrase is used a 'tree' from which Aeneas is attempting to pluck branches in order to decorate an altar to offer thanks for his safe arrival in Thrace. When Aeneas pulls off the branches, the trees begin to bleed. Eventually a voice from the ground explains that the trees are in fact the spears which killed Polydorus, the emissary whom Priam sent to the Thracians when he knew that Troy was going to be besieged. Unfortunately, instead of sending Priam aid, the Thracians slaughtered his messenger. The meaning in the *Aeneid* is primarily that of removing branches from a tree, and secondarily that of discerning what has caused the tree to bleed. In the *Cento*, Proba has reversed the order. The meaning is first and foremost related to the discovery of things unknown, and only secondarily does it refer to the act of plucking fruit from the tree.

The imprecation '[v]ana superstitio' is of particular significance given the Roman context in which Proba was writing. For Eve, of course, there could be no suggestion that by obeying God's command she was obeying the wrong god. Eve, created at the beginning of the world, knew that there was only one God in control of Paradise, and that was the God who had commanded her not to eat the forbidden fruit. Yet for Proba's readers, it was not necessarily clear that Eve's understanding was correct, let alone that there was only one, true God. The Virgilian origin of this phrase is *Aen.* 8.187. In this verse Evander is explaining to

Aeneas the meaning of the ritual that was taking place when he disembarked from his ships. Evander states that the solemnities (sollemnia), the sacrificial feast (dapes), which is taking place was not a vain superstition made in ignorance of the true gods (veterumque ignare deorum imposuit). Instead, it is a divinely ordained event. Likewise, Satan's condemnation of the commandment not to eat the fruit as a 'vain superstition' is intended to imply that the God who gave the order was not truly God. However, the fate of Adam and Eve (and, indeed, the punishment of the serpent) serves to demonstrate that that is not the case. Commandments from God are not 'vain superstitions' and those who disobey them will pay the price. By placing these words in Satan's mouth, Proba is able to offer a stark warning to her readers about the danger of ignoring God's commandment in order to satisfy one's own desires.

The claim that '[r]erum pars altera adempta est' is just as inaccurate when Satan says it as it is when Turnus utters it in the *Aeneid*. Turnus, the leader of the Latin army, discovers Aeneas' ships abandoned by the shore. He decides to burn them in order to cut off the Trojan escape. However, the trees which Aeneas used to build his ships came from a grove sacred to Opis (Jove's mother). Opis made Jove promise that once the ships have delivered Aeneas to their destination he will turn them into goddesses. In order to fulfil his vow, Jove protects the ships from Turnus' fire by transforming slightly earlier than anticipated. Turnus interprets this to be a bad omen for the Trojans, as half of everything has been lost to them because they are not able to travel by sea any more (in other words, they are restricted to the half of the earth made of land). However, Turnus' interpretation is incorrect. The apparent deprivation from which he suggests that the Trojans are suffering is not a deprivation at all. Not only do the ships/goddesses warn Aeneas of his danger,[11] but Aeneas still manages to successfully capture all Italy. If Eve had been able to see that her apparent deprivation was not really a deprivation at all then maybe she, unlike Turnus, would not have suffered and died as a result of her misguided interpretation of the facts.

The irony of the phrase 'auctor ego audendi' is that in its Virgilian context it forms part of a warning to save someone from death rather than as an enticement to accept death. Juno, who has been doing her best to defeat the Trojans by supporting the Latin's cause, has realised that she is close to defeat. She knows that

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[11] The message which one of the ship/goddesses speaks to Aeneas forms the second half of line 192 (cf. *Aen.* 10.244).

she is going to be unable to protect Turnus any further so she turns to his sister, Juturna, for help. Juno begs Juturna to see if there is anyway to snatch her brother from the jaws of the death and concludes her speech with the remark 'auctor ego audendi' (I am the one commanding you to take the risk). In Juturna's case the risk that must be taken was to do whatever she could to prevent her brother from being killed. In Eve's case, the risk was to believe in the positivity of death and to seek it out.

If the irony of the previous example was too subtle for a reader to notice, the stark warning offered by line 196 would not have slipped by without remark. The line is taken from *Aen.* 3.224. In this verse Aeneas has finally reached a safe harbour after battling through a storm which lasted for three days. After they had disembarked, Aeneas and his men spied vast herds of cattle and decided to slaughter them and have a feast in order to celebrate their escape from the storm. Unluckily for the Trojans, the island upon which they had landed was the Strophades, the home of the harpies. After the Trojans had begun their feast, the harpies came along and despoiled everything, making it unclean by their touch. Just as Aeneas believes that what he finds on the island is a miraculous blessing, so Eve understands the consequences of taking the forbidden fruit and experiencing death. Yet just like Aeneas, Eve quickly discovers the defiling nature of the bounty she thought she was receiving.[12]

The dangers that are associated with defiling sacred trees offer another warning to the observant reader of the danger Eve is about to fall into. The tree to which the phrase 'olim venerabile lignum' originally refers is an olive tree that was sacred to Faunus. Whilst in the midst of battle against the Latins, Aeneas had thrown his spear and it had hit the tree. The Trojans are winning the day, and Turnus is being pursued by Aeneas. Running past the sacred tree, Turnus sees Aeneas' spear planted in its bark. He prays to Faunus to revenge himself on the man whose spear had defiled his sacred tree, and Faunus consents. Aeneas is unable to withdraw his spear from the tree, giving Turnus a chance to escape. Eve too is shortly to discover the dangers of (unwittingly) defiling a sacred tree.

The way in which Proba draws on the original meaning of intertextual elements involves a high degree of intertextuality. Proba is not simply using Virgil as a series of source texts, but as a means to interpret the biblical story to a greater extent than

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[12] The reference to the harpies' desecration is continued in line 201, quoting *Aen.* 3.227.

the words alone would convey. Her choice of material suggests not only her own familiarity with both the Bible and Virgil, but also her readers'. More importantly, although Proba's text is an intelligible version of the temptation of Eve without a precise knowledge of the Virgilian background of the words, it is only with a knowledge of the text's original context that the nuance and detail of Proba's interpretation can be seen.[13] This is significant because it demonstrates that Proba's intertextual technique is dependent on the reader having an intimate familiarity with her intertextual texts. Just as a reader can only make full use of Proba's exegesis if they recognise the Virgilian background to her classical allusions, so a reader can only benefit from reading the *Cento* if they are able to recognise the biblical allusions and so apply Proba's text to their knowledge and interpretation of the Bible. Therefore, Proba's use of intertextuality is fundamental for the *Cento's* subordinate scriptural status as the intertextual relationship between the text of the *Cento* and the biblical text embodies how the *Cento* and the Bible are related.

Criteria Two and Three: Precision and Prominence of Intertextual Elements

I have chosen to discuss the second and third criteria of intertextuality together because they are both related to the positioning of the intertextual element. The most significant intertextual element for these criteria is the serpent's speech in lines 183-196. In the biblical text the serpent says simply: 'quare dixit deus ne edatis ab omni ligno quod est in paradiso' (for what reason has God said that you ought not to eat from every tree which is in Paradise)?[14] In Proba's text, the serpent begins by questioning Eve's idleness ('quae tanta animis ignavia venit?'), before describing the plenitude of fruit lying ready to be eaten ('strata iacent passim suq quaeque sub arbore poma'), and that the only thing missing is the ability to touch this heavenly gift ('caelestia dona adtractare nefas? Id rebus defuit unum!').

The criteria of precision is only evidenced to a small degree in these lines. In both cases the serpent comments on a prohibition that God has made, but whereas in the biblical text he frames it as a mendacious question (God has not prohibited Adam

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[13] I have assumed in this section that Proba was aware of the interpretations that her choice of source texts brought to the narrative she was writing. However, even if Proba was not aware of the implications of these textual choices a perceptive reader would be. As a result, the conclusions I have drawn could all have been (and still be) made by a reader with a good familiarity with both Virgil and the Bible. This would then shape their interpretation of the *Cento* even if Proba had not intended it to be interpreted in this way.

[14] The version quoted is the Old Latin text. The Vulgate reads: cur praecepit vobis Deus ut non comederetis de omni ligno paradisi.

and Eve from eating from *every* tree), in the *Cento* he offers it as a statement before asking Eve what is preventing her from eating the fruit. Likewise, neither the content nor the form of the serpent's speech is particularly prominent in the biblical text. He speaks only briefly, and the deviousness of his question is not commented upon. In contrast, the serpent's speech in Proba's version is very prominent. It not only dominates this section of text, but the use of mendacious quasi-rhetorical questions is used throughout his speech.[15] By allowing the serpent to speak at a greater length and in a more skilful manner, Proba's *Cento* is developing the brief portrait of the snake presented in Genesis 3. Proba uses the serpent's deceitful rhetoric in the biblical text to allow her to provide a more complete explanation of the way in which the serpent persuaded Eve to disobey God's commandment. The prominence of the serpent's oratory is a powerful example of intertextuality as it emphasises a feature of the biblical narrative and expands upon it in a detailed and marked manner.

In the biblical text the serpent then claims that: 'non morte moriemini sciebat enim deus quoniam que die ederitis ex illo aperientur oculi verstri et eritis sicut dii scientes bonum et malum' (you will not surely die! For God knows that on the day you eat from this, your eyes will be uncovered so that you will be godlike, knowing good and evil).[16] In the *Cento*, the serpent continues his disingenuous rhetoric in order to ask why God gave Adam and Eve eternal life if it means that death was taken away from them (lines 191-192). As was the case with the first part of the serpent's speech, the degree of precision between the two texts is relatively slight. Both texts recognise that death is related to eating the fruit. In the biblical text the serpent admits to the negative quality of death but claims that it will not result from eating the fruit. The text of the *Cento*, drawing once again on the image of God as a prohibitor rather than giver, states that God has only granted Adam and Eve eternal life in order to prevent them from experiencing death. Although the serpent does depict God as a prohibitive force in the biblical text (note the framing of his question in 3.1), the prominence which this theme is given in the *Cento* serves to emphasise the serpent's duplicity to a greater extent then in the biblical account.

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[15] There are four in total (quae tanta animis ignavia venit?, line 185; caelestia dona adtractare nefas?, lines 187-188; Quo vitam dedit aeternam?, line 191; and Cur mortis adempta ast condicio, lines 191-192).

[16] The Vulgate reads: nequaquam morte moriemini scit enim Deus quod in quocumque die comederitis ex eo aperientur oculi vestri et eritis sicut dii scientes bonum et malum.

If the serpent is more devious in the *Cento* than in Genesis, it is interesting to note that Eve becomes comparably more innocent. In Genesis 3.6 Eve looks at the fruit, she sees that it looks good to eat and is beautiful to look at, and then she reaches out and plucks the fruit from the tree. In Proba's version, Eve is far more tentative. She is amazed (mirataque) by the leaves and the fruit she knew to be forbidden (line 201), and then she tentatively touches it with her mouth (summo tenus attigit ore). As has become clear from the analysis of the serpent's speech, the degree of intertextual precision is very low in this part of Proba's *Cento*. At the same time, the prominence of the intertextual elements is very high. By emphasising Eve's respectful awe at the sight of the forbidden fruit, and her cautious approach to it, Proba is able to underline the snake's role as the tempter and the innocence of Eve in comparison to the serpent's intentional dishonesty. By contrasting Eve and the serpent in this way, Proba is able to emphasise the original purity of Eve (and by implication Adam) to an extent that is not possible in the biblical text.

Overall, in Proba's version of the temptation of Eve there is a general lack of precision with the intertextual elements used. Basic ideas (such as the serpent's dishonesty, his use of misleading questions, and Eve's appreciation for the beauty of the forbidden fruit) are found in both texts. However, the details of these features differ significantly (for example, the serpent's description of death, and the reason the serpent offer's for why God has forbidden Adam and Eve to eat of the fruit). Yet despite the freedom of the intertextuality, the intertextual elements receive a very prominent position in Proba's text. This prominence suggests that the lack of precision is intended to heighten rather than decrease the overall effect of the intertextuality. Although the imprecise use of intertextual features prevents a high degree of intertextuality in relation to these specific features, when these imprecisions are given a prominent position the intertextuality is heightened as it requires the reader to have a greater familiarity with the biblical narrative in order to understand how and why Proba has interacted with it in the way she has. This is important as it, once again, emphasises the primacy of the biblical text and the requirement that a reader of the *Cento* has a thorough familiarity with (if not understanding of) the biblical text. This in turn emphasises the *Cento's* subordinate scriptural status as the biblical text comes first, but is dependent on the *Cento* for its correct interpretation just as the *Cento* is dependent on the reader's familiarity with the biblical narrative. The two texts need each other, indeed, they cannot function without each other. As a result, they must share the same basic essence, but the

primacy of the biblical text means that it must possess a greater share of this 'essence' than the *Cento*. Hence the *Cento* does have scriptural authority, but not as much as the biblical text.

Criterion Four: Semantic Intertextuality

The final criterion to be applied to Proba's text is that of the semantic relationship between the biblical text and the epic. This is the least revealing of all the criteria as Proba's semantic choices were constrained by her Virgilian source texts. Furthermore, we do not know precisely what the biblical text Proba was using looked like. In the following table I have highlighted in **bold** the vocabulary contained in Proba's Cento, the reconstructed Old Latin Version, and the Vulgate text. As the table demonstrates, there are very few semantic parallels between the *Cento Vergilianus* and either version of the Latin text. The three parallels that do occur (lignum, mors, malus) are almost unavoidable. There even appear to be occasions on which Proba has purposely chosen to use Virgilian material that uses different vocabulary from that of the biblical text. For example, the *Cento Vergilianus* uses 'anguis' and 'vipereus' instead of 'serpens'. Yet 'serpens' is used in the *Aeneid* on more than one occasion (Virgil, *Aen.* 2.213;5.91, 273; 11.753). This suggests that Proba is purposely using her re-written version to interpret the biblical text.[17]

The significance of this semantic alteration is most pronounced in the description of Eve. In the Old Latin and Vulgate texts, Eve is described as a 'mulier' (woman/female). By contrast, Proba's text describes her as a 'virgo' (virgin).[18] If Proba had wanted to use 'mulier' then that would have been possible, as it is a term which Virgil uses (*Aen.* 7.661). The fact that Proba has chosen to specify that Eve is a virgin has important consequences for the interpretation of the Fall. Firstly, reproduction by means of sexual intercourse becomes a consequence of the Fall rather than the way in which God had intended humans to reproduce. If sex is a product of sin rather than a divinely intended process, then the arguments in favour of a celibate, ascetic life are considerably strengthened. This has implications not only for the lifestyle of priests, but also for those men and women who wanted to

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[17] Note also that whereas 'lignus' is used multiple times in both the Vulgate and the Old Latin texts, in Proba's *Cento* it is only used once.
[18] In line 194 she is described as 'coniunx' ('spouse').

demonstrate their commitment to Christ.[19] More importantly, it draws a direct connection between Eve and Mary, who is also described as a virgin (line 341).[20]

The lack of semantic parallels between the biblical text of Genesis 3 and Proba's *Cento Vergilianus* arise partly from the nature of the genre. However, there is also evidence that Proba has occasionally chosen to avoid possible semantic overlap. Although this decreases the level of semantic intertextuality, it heightens the intertextual nature of the text as a whole as Proba is dependant on her readers realising that the vocabulary she is using is an expansion on and explanation of the biblical terminology. She has intentionally used these alternative terms as part of her interpretative re-writing of the Fall.

[19] In the earliest centuries of Christianity, celibacy was often used as a way of demonstrating spiritual purity (see, for example, 1 Cor 7.1-8). It is also worth considering the number of early female saints and martyrs who are described as virgins. Thecla and Euphemia are too early examples. For a more detailed discussion of virginity and piety in late antiquity see Gillian Clark, 'Bodies and Blood: Late Antique Debate on Martyrdom, Virginity, and Resurrection', in *Changing Bodies, Changing Meanings: Studies on the Human Body in Antiquity*, ed. Dominic Montserrat (London: Routledge, 1998), pp.99-115.
[20] Note the fact that both Mary and Eve are described as 'virgins' *despite* also being described as 'wives'.

Vulgate	Old Latin	*Cento*, lines 172-202

<u>Vulgate</u>

3.1 sed et serpens erat callidor cunctis animantibus terrae quae fecerat Dominus Deus qui dixit ad mulierem cur praecepit vobis Deus ut non comederetis de omni **ligno** paradisi

2. cui respondit mulier de fructu **lignorum** quae sunt in paradiso vescemur

3. de fructo vero **ligni** quod est in medio paradisi praecepit nobis Deus ne comederemus et ne tangeremus illud ne forte moriamur

4. dixit autem serpens ad mulierem nequaquam **morte** moriemini

5. scit enim Deus quod in quocumque die comederitis ex eo aperientur oculi vestri et eritis sicut dii scientes bonum et **malum**

6. vidit igitur mulier quod bonum esset **lignum** ad vescendum et pulchrum oculis aspectuque delectabile et tulit de fructu illius [...]

<u>Old Latin</u>

3.1 serpens autem erat sapientior omnium bestiarum quae erant super terram quas fecerat dominus deus et dixit serpens ad mulierem quare dixit deus ne edatis ab omni **ligno** quod est in paradiso

2. et dixit mulier ad serpentem ex omni **ligno** quod est in paradiso edemus

3. a fructu autem **ligni** quod est in medio paradiso dixit deus ne edamus sed neque tangamus ne moriamur

4. et dixit serpens mulieri non **morte** moriemini

5. sciebat enim deus quoniam que die ederitis ex illo aperientur oculi verstri et eritis sicut dii scientes bonum et **malum**

6. et vidit mullier quia bonum est **lignum** in escam et quia bonum est oculis ad videndum et cognoscendum sumpsit fructum de **ligno** illo [...]

<u>*Cento*, lines 172-202</u>

Iamque dies infanda aderat: per florea rure
ecce inimicus atrox inmensis orbibus anguis septem ingens gyros,
septena volumina versans nec visu facilis nec dictu effabilis ulli
oblique invada ramo frondente pependit,
vipeream spiransanimam, cui tristia bella
iraeque insisdiaeque et crimina noxia cordi.
Odit et ipse pater: tot sese vertit in ora
arrectisque horret squamis et, ne quid inausum,
aut intemptatum sclerisve dolive relinquat,
sic prior adgreditur dictis seque obtulit ultro:
"Dic, -ait- o virgo, lucis habitamus opacis
riparumque toros et prata recentia rivis
incolimus: quae tanta animis ignavia venit?
Strata iacent passim sua quaeque sub arbora poma,
pocula sunt fontes liquidi; caelestia dona
adtractare nefas? Id rebus defuit unum!
Quis prohibet causas penitus temptare latentes?
Vana superstitio! Rerum pars altera adempta est!
Quo vitam dedit aeternam? Cur **mortis** adempta est condicia? Mea si non inrita dicta putaris,
auctor ego audendi sacrata resolvere iura.
Tu coniunx, tibi fas animum temptare precando.
Dux ego vester ero: tua si mihi certa voluntas,
extruimusque toros dapibusque epulamur opimis".
Sic ait et dicto citius, quod lege tenetur,
subiciunt epulis olim venerabile **lignum**
instituuntque dapes contactuque omnia foedant.
Praecipue infelix pesti devoa futurae
mirataquenovas frondes et non sua poma,
causa **mali** tanti, summo tenus attigit ore.

Through the selective application of intertextual elements, Proba's *Cento Vergilianus* is able to re-narrate the temptation of Eve in such a way that the story and its interpretation are presented concurrently. The low degree of semantic intertextuality (criterion four) combined with the high degree of intertextual elements which utilise the meaning of their original context (criterion one) creates a text which requires a reader to have a strong familiarity with the biblical text. Similarly, the low degree of precision but the high degree of prominence of the text's intertextual features can only be understood correctly by a reader who is able to recognise the hints at the biblical text through the exegetical interpretation presented in the *Cento*.

By using intertextuality in this way, Proba is able to endow her text with a scriptural authority by positioning her text alongside the biblical texts in the scriptural heartland. The *Cento* is not intended to correct or replace any biblical texts. In fact, the very nature of the *Cento* means that it is dependent on a reader's familiarity with the biblical texts. The *Cento* is trying to mediate between the Bible and later generations of readers. It does this by using a reader's familiarity with other literature (primarily the *Aeneid*) as a means of interpreting the biblical text. The mediatorial role of Proba's *Cento* places her amongst the authorial apostolic succession and endows her work with the scriptural authority appropriate for a text which is located on the lower rungs of the Cassiodorus' Jacob's Ladder. Isidore of Seville's inclusion of Proba as part of his continuation of the authorial apostolic succession in his *De viris illustribus*, and his recognition of the authoritative status of her work provides direct (if limited) support for the reception of the *Cento* as a scripturally authoritative text.

Chapter 4 - Biblical Epics and Extra-Biblical Scripture in Late Antiquity

Authorship and Scriptural Authority

In chapter three, we established that through her use of intertextuality Proba was able to compose a text with a subordinate scriptural status. What we have not yet discussed is how and why both canonical and extra-canonical texts were perceived to be, and received as, scripturally authoritative in late antiquity. The easiest way to begin to do this is to analyse whence the most authoritative pieces of Christian literature, the texts of the New Testament canon, derived their scriptural authority.

The reasons why certain texts were assigned canonical status and others were not has been lost in the mists of time.[1] No sources survive from late antiquity providing a detailed overview of the method of canonisation, probably reflecting the gradual and localised nature of this process. It is not even clear why Christians felt an urge to delineate a specific body of texts as their primary source of scriptural authority. Scholars often attribute this to external pressures such as the desire to distinguish themselves for Judaism and the interactions with heretical groups that played a prominent part in the life of the church during this period.[2] If this were the case, then one would expect the theological orthodoxy of the canonical texts to be the most important factor in the decision to include them in the canon. Whilst this was certainly *a* factor in the decision to canonise these texts, there are significant problems with identifying it as the principal factor.

Despite the lack of sources detailing the process of canonisation, certain principles recur often enough in the writings of the Fathers to form a general picture of the basic criteria. These are identified in scholarly literature under the various titles of apostolicity, antiquity, orthodoxy, usage, universality, and ecclesial approbation.[3]

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[1] The most recent, compact introduction to canon criticism is Einar Thomassen, 'Some Notes on the Development of Christian Ideas about a Canon', in *Canon and Canonicity: The Formation and Use of Scripture*, ed. Einar Thomassen (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum, 2010), pp.9-28. John Barton offers a helpful summary of the state of research at the end of the twentieth century in John Barton, *Holy Writings, Sacred Text: The Canon in Early Christianity* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1997), pp.1-35. For a carefully nuanced overview of the current state of canon criticism in relation to the Gospels see: Watson and Parkhouse, 'Introduction', in *Connecting Gospels*, pp.1-11.

[2] These subjects are discussed in detail in: Dimitris J. Kyrtatas, 'Historical Aspects of the Formation of the New Testament Canon', in *Canon and Canonicity*, pp.29-44. Gamble, *New Testament Canon*, pp.57-66, Metzger, *Canon of the New Testament*, pp.75-112.

[3] For example, Thomassen lists apostolicity, orthodoxy, and ecclesial validation. McDonald lists apostolicity, orthodoxy, antiquity, and usage. Metzger lists orthodoxy, apostolicity, and usage. Gamble lists apostolicity, catholicity, orthodoxy, and usage. Thomassen, 'Christian Ideas about a Canon', pp.22-23; McDonald, 'Identifying Scripture and Canon in the Early Church: The Criteria

Before addressing these criteria it is worth spending some time discussing a criterion that is conspicuous by its absence: inspiration. The idea that biblical texts must be inspired is something of a *sine qua non* in Christian thought, and Christians from late antiquity were unlikely to disagree with this. However, late antique Christians would have been surprised by the equation later Christians have made between inspiration and canonicity. Inspiration has never been limited to canonical texts, and in late antiquity there were a plethora of genres that were accepted as inspired.[4] Biblical epics were often explicitly stated to be composed through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (Juvencus, *Evang. lib. quat.* praef. 25-26; Proba, *Cent. Verg.* lines 9-12; Sedulius, *Carm. pasch.*, 1.85; Arator, *De act. apos.*, 2.577-578). In fact, any text that was not considered heretical was believed to be inspired (Diogn. 11.7-8; Eusebius, *Coet. sanct.* 2; Theophilus, *Autol.* 2.9, 22; Augustine, *Epist.* 82.2; Basil, *Hex.*, proem; *Vita Abercii* 76). Therefore, inspiration was a problematic criterion for separating soon-to-be canonical texts from the wider body of scriptural literature.[5]

Of the remaining criteria (apostolicity, antiquity, orthodoxy, usage/universality, and ecclesial approbation), I shall argue that apostolicity is the principal criterion from which all the others are mere derivatives. The evidence to support the primacy of the apostolic criterion comes in three different forms. Firstly, there is the attribution of apostolic authorship to the anonymously written Gospels and some of the pastoral epistles.[6] Secondly, there is the large quantity of extra-canonical literature attributed to the apostles and therefore subjects of dispute for the Church Fathers as to whether their origin was truly apostolic. Thirdly, there are the comments made by the Fathers citing apostolicity as a criterion in their arguments for why certain texts should or should not be accepted as canonical by the Christian community.

The narratives by which certain apostolic figures became associated with each canonical text are most fully related in Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*. In relation to Mark's Gospel Eusebius tells how those who heard Peter preach were not satisfied with this transitory oral teaching and so they exhorted Mark (as one of Peter's

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Question,' in *The Canon Debate*, ed. McDonald and Sanders (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2002), pp. 424-434; Metzger, *Canon of the New Testament*, pp.251-254; Gamble, *New Testament Canon*, pp.68-71.

[4] In fact, inspiration was not limited to texts at all. The inspiration of the Holy Spirit could be heard in pulpits and found in the church's doctrinal statements and liturgy as well as in its literature.

[5] Note also the very few claims made to inspiration by texts themselves. Of those scriptural texts in circulation in late antiquity, only three made direct claims to divine inspiration: Revelation, *The Shepherd of Hermas* and the *Apocalypse of Peter*. Of these, two were excluded from the canon, and Revelation had a hard time being accepted as canonical, particularly in the Western Church.

[6] As will be discussed further below, even though Mark and Luke were not apostles themselves they composed their Gospels according to the commands or with the explicit approbation of an apostle and so could be accepted as apostolic by succession.

followers) to provide them with a written record of Peter's teachings. After Mark had written his Gospel, the Holy Spirit told Peter about it and Peter confirmed what Mark had written (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 2.15.1-2; 6.14.6-7).

In the narrative described above, it is worth noting a part of the authorisation process that is going to have significant consequences for the continuation of extra-biblical scripture after the closing of the biblical canon. The apostolicity of Mark and Luke's Gospel, Acts, and even Hebrews is derived from their participation in an authorial apostolic succession. Like the ecclesial apostolic succession, the authorial apostolic succession transmits the authority and teaching of the apostles through an unbroken chain of authors. The first link in this chain after the apostles themselves was formed by the followers of the apostles, amongst them Mark and Luke. The second link was formed by people such as Clement of Rome who had encountered an apostle or one of their followers, but who had not themselves been one of those followers. The third link in the chain was then formed by the disciples of the second-link authors. This process continued until a veritable chain of authors, beginning with the apostles and continuing through each successive generation, was able to speak with the same scriptural authority as the apostles themselves due to their participation in this authorial apostolic succession.[7]

Like Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*, the Muratorian Fragment contains narratives that associate the apostles with the canonical texts. This is significant because the Muratorian Fragment is debatably the earliest extant Christian canon list.[8] As part of its list of the New Testament writings, the fragment explains that the fourth Gospel was written by John, one of the disciples, as a result of the urgings of his companions and his bishops. Upon hearing their exhortations John invited the whole company to fast in order to discern whether or not this was the will of God. During the period of fasting Andrew, one of the apostles, received a vision that showed John writing a Gospel and the rest of them reviewing and confirming it (Muratorian Fragment, lines 7-15; cf. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 6.14.7). Luke's authorship of Acts is demonstrated by the omission of events such as the martyrdom of Peter

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[7] These chains of authors were the subject of significant interest to the late antique Church. See the *Ecclesiastical History* of Eusebius or Sozomen, or Jerome's *De viris illustribus* and its sequel of the same title by Gennadius of Massilia for some of the most significant examples. Instead of a chain of authors, Cassiodorus uses the far more appropriate image of Jacob's ladder to describe the authorial apostolic succession. Cassiodorus, *Inst.* praef. 2.

[8] For an introduction to the text and an overview of the debate see: Edmon L. Gallagher and John D. Meade, *The Biblical Canon Lists from Early Christianity: Texts and Analysis* (Oxford: OUP, 2017), pp.175-178.

and Paul's departure from Rome which Luke himself would have been unable to witness due to his presence elsewhere (Muratorian Fragment, lines 35-39).

After identifying the connections between the apostles and the canonical writings, the Muratorian Fragment then goes on to provide us with evidence as to how the criteria of antiquity and universality could be applied in the case of texts whose apostolic origin was in question. In regard to the criterion of universality, the fragment states that only the Apocalypses of John and Peter are received as apostolic, but that the apostolicity of Peter is questioned by some portions of the church. Therefore, whereas the Apocalypse of John is canonical, the Apocalypse of Peter is scriptural but not canonical (Muratorian Fragment, lines 71-73). Likewise, the *Shepherd of Hermas* is accepted as scriptural but it is denied canonical status because it has no apostolic connection. In this case the lack of apostolic connection is proven by the composition of the text in Rome by a man who was writing after the time of the apostles and who had no known connection with the apostles through an authorial or ecclesial apostolic succession (Muratorian Fragment, lines 73-79; cf. Justin, 1 *Apol.* 66.3; *Dial.* 103.8; Athanasius, *Ep. fest.* 39.18; Jerome, *Epist.* 129.3).

Like the criteria of antiquity and universality, the criterion of orthodoxy was only called into play for those texts where the apostolic attribution was perceived to be false. As Eusebius explains, a text that was genuinely written by an apostle (or an individual with an apostolic connection such as Mark, or Clement of Rome, or any other person who participated in the authorial apostolic succession) could not possibly contain heretical statements because the apostles did not proclaim heresy. If a text contained statements deemed heretical by those who participated in the ecclesial apostolic succession, then the authors of such texts could not have participated in the authorial apostolic succession, let alone have been apostles themselves. This explanation also demonstrates the subordination of the ecclesial criterion to that of apostolicity as it, like the other criteria identified above, was only used in order to prove or disprove the apostolicity of a debated text (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.25.6-7; 6.12.3; Muratorian Fragment, lines 79-82; Apos. Con. 6.16.1; Origen, *Hom. Luc.* 2; Innocent, *Epistle 6 ad Exsuperium Rolosanum* 7).

The importance of named authors for establishing the authority of a text is an idea derived from Christianity's Greek rather than Semitic heritage. The concept of authorship was unknown in many ancient societies, with narratives circulating in

anonymous form.[9] This was originally also true of Greek culture. However, for a now unknown reason, the Greeks began to record the names of the people who composed texts and these names became such an important part of the literary culture that even those texts which had previously circulated in an anonymous form were provided with an authorial name. In his pioneering study of the role of the literary canon in the formation of cultural identity in classical and Hellenistic Greece, Reviel Netz describes how the concept of authorship became the determinative factor in judging the quality and status of a text. Netz's analysis of the papyrological evidence demonstrates that ancient readers did not collect genres but specific names within those genres. It was not the genre or the contents of a text that enhanced its desirability but its authorship. This was true to such an extent that named authorship became a pre-requisite for any text that hoped to gain widespread circulation and to be collected into peoples' libraries. The reason why the most marketable factor of a work was its authorship is a result of the way in which literary works participated in a shared narrative realm, a point that is particularly pertinent in relation to early Christianity.[10]

The corpus of early Christian literature on the life and person of Jesus was simply too large for any one person to collect and read. When presented with a choice of texts, the early Christian reader had to use some other criterion in order to determine which text it would be most useful and appropriate to add to their library. Genre was almost as unhelpful as content due to the variety of textual forms in which God allowed his new revelation to be revealed. This left only authorship as a viable means of determining the merits of a particular text. But which authors wrote authoritatively? The authority of a text could not be linked to its content or genre for the reasons explained above. Neither, apparently, was it linked to style and literary competence, to the great regret of certain readers both ancient and modern. In ancient Greece, the persona of the author was formed via their participation in a particular community; it was their association with other authors that granted them the title of 'author'. In a Christian context, the community to be a part of was the

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[9] Reviel Netz provides an insightful comparative analysis of the development of the concept of authorship in Chinese, Semitic, and Ancient Greek culture in Netz, *Scale, Space and Canon*, pp.96-102.
[10] Netz, *Scale, Space and Canon*, pp.96-102, 136-156, 173-177. See also: Tomas Hägg, 'Canon Formation in Greek Literary Culture', in *Canon and Canonicity*, pp.109-128. For a broader overview of the function of canon in late antiquity see: Margalit Finkelberg and Guy G. Stroumsa, *Homer, the Bible, and Beyond: Literary and Religious Canons in the Ancient World* (Leiden: Brill, 2003).

apostolic community. Hence apostolicity became the determining factor in deciding the authoritative status of a text.[11]

In late antiquity it was the association with a named apostle that granted a text authoritative status. Apostolicity was not only the most frequently cited criterion for the inclusion of a text in a canon, but it was also the basis for the other criteria used. If apostolicity is the defining feature of an authoritative text, then there needs to be a way of proving apostolic authorship. This can be done by determining the age of the text and by examining whether or not the content of the text is orthodox, as an Apostle could not have written a heretical text. The Church, as the keepers of orthodoxy as a result of the apostolic succession, are then able to judge whether a text is apostolic in origin and so acceptable for use in the church.[12] If a text was recognised universally as having an apostolic origin, then it eventually found its way into the canon; if that recognition was only local then it often retained its position as scripture but without gaining canonical status.[13]

Authorial Apostolic Succession

The belief that apostolic authorship was the key to scriptural authority means that with the passing of the apostles the composition of scripture should have ceased to be possible. Yet this was not the case. Instead of seeing a cessation of scriptural writings, the Early Church continued to produce a steady flow of texts that were received with scriptural authority. This authority was derived from the apostles by means of a process which can first be seen in the case of Mark and Luke. The authority of the authorial personas of Mark and Luke (and also Clement of Rome according to the tradition which attributes Hebrews to his scribal activities) derives from their direct connection to the apostles. However, the derivative nature of their

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[11] In order to try and shed light on the importance of the authorial figure in antiquity, Netz offers a helpful overview of recent studies examining the effect of prominent names (ranging from poets to brand names) on consumer choice at the start of the twenty-first century. Netz, *Scale, Space and Canon*, pp.106-112. See also: M. Bar-Hillel, A. Moshinsky and R. Nofech, 'A Rose by Any Other Name: A Social-Cognitive Perspective on Poets and Poetry', *Judgment and Decision Making* 7.2 (2012), 149-164; H. Plassmann, J. O'Doherty, B. Shiv and A. Rangel, 'Marketing Actions can Modulate Neural Representations of Experienced Pleasantness', *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 105.3 (2008), 1050-1054.

[12] Note that Jerome, *De viri ill.* 4 could be used to argue against my theory of apostolicity. In this passage Jerome cites age and usage rather than authorship as qualifying criteria. However, as demonstrated above, antiquity is a variation on apostolicity, and usage is a derivation of apostolic authority by means of ecclesial approbation.

[13] A useful introduction to the continuing scriptural function of non-canonised texts within Christian communities is: Jens Schröter, 'Jesus and Early Christian Identity Formation: Reflections on the Significance of the Jesus Figure in Early Christian Gospels', in *Connecting Gospels*, pp.233-256.

apostolicity resulted in a corresponding diminution in the authority that their texts possessed.[14]

Tertullian explains the first rungs of the authorial apostolic succession in this way. Whilst the Gospels of Matthew and John were written 'ex apostolis Ioannes et Matthaeus', the Gospels of Mark and Luke were written 'ex apostolicis Lucas et Marcus' (Tertullian, *Marc.* 4.2.2). The distinction between the noun and the adjective can probably be best translated as follows. The Gospels of Matthew and John were written *by apostles*, and the Gospels of Mark and Luke were written *apostolically*.[15] This distinction between the respective authorities of these texts is then further explained when Tertullian remarks that the authority of Luke's Gospel must be subordinate to that of Matthew and John's Gospel because Luke 'non apostolus sed apostolicus, non magister sed discipulus, utique magistro minor, certe tanto posterior quanto posterioris apostoli sectator, Pauli sine dubio, ut et si sub ipsius Pauli nomine evangelium Marcion intulisset, non sufficeret.'[16]

It is important to remember that at the time Tertullian was writing the New Testament canon had not been solidified. Tertullian was not arguing for a hierarchical relationship between canonical texts, but proposing a theory for how the authority of the wide variety of available scriptural literature should be assessed and categorised. According to Tertullian, the most authoritative texts were written by the twelve apostles. The next most authoritative texts were written by later apostles such as Paul (and presumably also people such as Barnabas). Following the secondary apostles come the pupils of the primary apostles, then the pupils of the

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[14] This phenomenon was not a uniquely Christian one. Jewish texts such as the *Pirke Avot* describe the transmission of the law starting with Moses and proceeding as far as the current Mishnaic authors. However, the function of such a chain in early Judaism was different from the comparable phenomenon in early Christianity. As Josephus explains, after the reign of Artaxerxes the quality of Jewish writing changed due to the cessation of prophetic writings 'διὰ τὸ μὴ γενέσθαι τὴν τῶν προφητῶν ἀκριβῆ διαδοχήν'. Note also that this break in the chain of authors does not prevent other authors writing authoritative literature, but it does mean that this literature has a lower status than that which participates in the prophetic succession. Josephus, *C. Ap.* 1.1.8. The parallels are far stronger between Christian and pagan uses of this 'auto-prosopography'. See, for example: Diogenes Laertius, *Lives*; Iamblichus, *The Pythagorean Life*; Eunapius, *The Lives of the Sophists and Philosophers*. For a more detailed survey of authorial chains of succession see: Netz, *Scale, Space and Canon*, pp.742-745.
[15] The OECT and ANF translations of this passage translate 'apostolicis' as 'apostolic men'. Although this translation reflects the Latin syntax more accurately, I find the phrase 'apostolic men' misleading as it could easily be used as a circumlocution for 'apostles' and fails to convey the subordinate status of the texts composed by Mark and Luke. Tertullian, *Adversus Marcionem: Books IV-V*, trans. and ed. Ernest Evans (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972), p.263; *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Buffalo: Christian Literature Publishing, 1887), III, 347.
[16] Luke was not an apostle but apostolic, not a master but a pupil, certainly less than a master, and even more assuredly of lesser status in accordance with his being a follower of a later apostle (Paul, without doubt), so that even if Marcion had introduced the Gospel in Paul's name it would not suffice.

secondary apostles. After them comes the pupils of the pupils and so on and so forth down through the generations.

Tracing this authorial apostolic succession became an interesting task for the earliest church historians. Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* traces both the ecclesial and authorial apostolic succession by structuring his history around the connections between individuals that led to the establishing and maintenance of the church and the transmission and preservation of apostolic teachings within it. Despite the detailed account provided by Eusebius, certain later historians felt it to be incomplete and in some places in need of correction. In his own *Ecclesiastical History*, Sozomen briefly revises the material covered by Eusebius (book 1 and part of book 2), before updating Eusebius' history by filling in the events that had taken place between the completion of Eusebius' history and the present day (the rest of book 2, and books 3-9).[17]

This interest in tracing the chain by means of which apostolic authority was passed down through the ages was not limited to Greek authors. In Latin, the histories of the ecclesial and authorial apostolic succession began to be recounted separately, most notably in Jerome's *De viris illustribus*.[18] In this work Jerome recounts the systematic history of the authorial apostolic succession beginning with Peter and culminating in no less a person than Jerome himself. Jerome's account is of particular interest to us as his ordering of the earliest authors follows the method proposed by Tertullian for differentiating the relative authority of various texts. First and foremost are the writings of the apostle Peter (Jerome, *Vir. ill.* 1). These are followed by the writings of James, who despite the acknowledgment of his identity as Jesus' brother and disciple still derives some of his authority from his ordination by the apostles (Jerome, *Vir. ill.* 2.1). After James come Matthew and Jude, followed by Paul and Barnabas, who are in turn followed by Luke and Mark (Jerome, *Vir. ill.* 3-8). Thus far Jerome's ordering has followed precisely Tertullian's categorisation of primary apostles, secondary apostles, pupils of the apostles.[19]

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[17] Note that Sozomen's revision of the material already covered by Eusebius was more complete than this description indicates. However, the majority of his corrective task took place in a 12-book work that is no longer extant. The surviving text, referred to as the *Ecclesiastical History*, would have formed the second part of a complete history of the church. Another similar enterprise is that undertaken by Philostorgius. Interestingly, Philostorgius extends Eusebius' history not only forwards but also backwards, beginning his history with the Maccabees. Philostorgius, *Hist. eccl.* 1.1.

[18] Irenaeus, by contrast, focuses purely on the ecclesial apostolic succession. Irenaeus, *Haer.* 3.3.1-3.4.

[19] Note that the section on Mark is by way of an addendum to the section on Peter, in which Mark's Gospel has already been discussed. The section on Mark provides purely biographical details on Mark and does not discuss Mark's writing further. Hence, perhaps, the placing of Luke before Mark (Jerome, *Vir. ill.* 1.4; 8).

The ninth author listed in Jerome's catalogue of authors comes as something of a surprise. On first consideration one would have expected John to have merited a higher place on Jerome's list. However, there is a certain logic in Jerome's decision to discuss John in the position that he does. Because John's Gospel was believed to have been written in order to complete the writings produced by other apostles (Jerome, *Vir. ill.* 9.2), John serves as a useful marker to distinguish between the two main types of authors contained in Jerome's catalogue. On the one hand there are those authors with direct apostolic connections (primary and secondary apostles, and their pupils), and on the other hand there are those authors whose authority comes from being pupils of pupils. That John is being used as a marker in this way is further supported by the first author on the other side of the divide. Hermas is described as one of the persons to whom Paul sends greeting in his letter to the Romans, but is not explicitly described as someone who has had personal contact with Paul (Jerome, *Vir. ill.* 10). Jerome's list then proceeds much as expected, taking as it does a chronological approach beginning just before the martyrdoms of Peter and Paul and concluding at the time at which Jerome was writing.[20] Jerome's project was subsequently taken up by Gennadius of Massilia, whose own *De viri illustribus* details all those authors participating in the authorial chain of apostolic succession from Jerome down to his own time.[21]

Perhaps the most interesting, and certainly the most theologically engaged, study of the authorial apostolic succession is that provided by Cassiodorus in his *Institutiones*. The first book of the *Institutiones* is dedicated to a study of the various ways in which a reader is brought from the most diluted to the purest form of authoritative Christian texts. That is, moving from the writings of contemporaries, through the writings of the Fathers, until eventually the Bible itself is reached (Cassiodorus, *Inst.* 1.1-10, 16-23). The image Cassiodorus uses to explain this progression is that of Jacob's ladder, by means of which the angels travel between heaven and earth (Cassiodorus, *Inst.*, praef. 2). The significance of this imagery lies in the two-fold movement it describes. Like the angels in Jacob's vision, the apostolicity of biblical authors creeps down through each successive generation until it reaches our own age. As it does so it becomes ever more diluted as it moves still further from its

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[20] The most surprising feature is the inclusion of Philo. However, Philo is only included because of the information he provides on Mark and the life of the church that Mark founded in Alexandria (Jerome, *Vir. ill.* 11.1-2).

[21] There is also a third *De viri illustribus*, that of Isidore of Seville. This text will be discussed in more detail in chapter two as it is a particularly important witness for the reception of Proba's text as scripturally authoritative.

apostolic source. By beginning with scriptural texts in their most dilute form and working up the authorial chain of succession, readers are able to gradually digest ever-increasing amounts of God's revelation. The texts at the bottom of the scriptural ladder are therefore crucial for supporting the higher rungs as they provide the means through which readers are enabled to access scripture in its most apostolically infused form.[22]

The necessity of having an authorial apostolic succession able to produce scriptural texts after the closing of the biblical canon derives from the very fact that there is a closed canon whose narratives are expected to continue to be normative for the community in each successive age. The problem with dependency on a fixed canon is that the stories it narrates may fail to address the needs of the community as they change and evolve in time. As the canonical narrative becomes increasingly foreign to the lived experiences of its readers, the normative power of these texts begins to weaken. In order to prevent this degeneration, it is necessary to have a means by which these texts can be approached in such a way that they continue to speak to later generations. That is why the lower levels of the scriptural Jacob's ladder are necessary – it is only possible for the canonical texts to possess authority for later generations of Christians if that authority is mediated through more recent (and therefore more culturally and socially familiar) scriptural texts.

The forms in which authors lower down the authorial apostolic succession could mediate the work of their predecessors can be divided into two basic categories. On the one hand there are 'scholarly' mediations such as commentaries and treatises that were designed to make earlier texts more intelligible by means of extensive explanation. On the other hand, there are 'literary' mediations which aim to bridge the gap between the reader and the canonical text by re-narrating the stories contained in the Bible.[23] Whereas texts in the former category accept their

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[22] This is not to suggest that readers of the texts at the bottom of the ladder were not expected to be familiar with the words of the biblical text. What it does imply is that they were not capable of interpreting the biblical narratives in their canonical form without the additional aids provided by texts lower down the ladder. When a reader read one of these more diluted texts, they were expected to recognise the reference to the biblical text. However, unlike when they read the biblical text, they would be able to understand the reference in this new, pre-digested format. Then, when the returned to the biblical text itself they would be able to interpret what it means by recalling how it had been described in a more easily understandable form.

[23] The terminology of 'scholarly' and 'literary' is, of course, problematic. For example, the 'literary' category would need to include translations as well as re-narrations and dramatisations. The basic distinction I am aiming at is between discursive and narratival mediation. That literary dramatisation as a means of exegetical expansion might have had very early origins within Christian tradition is suggested by Mark Goodacre in his forthcoming book on the relationship between John and the Synoptics. In this book Goodacre argues that many of the parallels between John and the Synoptic

subordination to the canonical text as a result of their position further down the chain of authorial apostolic succession, texts in the latter category place themselves alongside the canonical text by subordinating the authority of the later author to that of their apostolic predecessors. The need to sublimate authorial authority meant that the standard literary forms were problematic as their authorial authority was dependent on the identity, skills, or status of the author themself. In order to overcome this obstacle, later scriptural authors consciously chose to compose in genres where intertextuality was an integral part of the genre.[24] By doing so, these authors were recognising the (temporal) precedence of the canonical text whilst still being able to place their own composition alongside it as a fellow scriptural narrative.[25]

From the evidence considered in this opening chapter it seems clear that in both late antiquity and the Early Modern world, the idea that texts beyond the Bible could hold authoritative, scriptural status was unproblematic and unexceptionable. The biblical canon was seen as the centre of a heterogenous and continually evolving network of texts whose degree of 'scripturality' depended on their proximity to the biblical centre. This textual community was formed originally through the association of texts with apostolic authors. However, those authors lower down the chain of apostolic succession were not satisfied with producing peripheral texts. Instead, they wanted to write texts which could be located nearer the biblical core. In order to do this they appropriated the genre of the epyllion and began to write biblical epics.[26] The epyllion, as a fundamentally intertextual genre,

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Gospels involve the dramatisation of the Synoptic narrative through techniques such as moving narration into direct speech and by naming anonymous characters.

[24] Note the similarity with David Quint's description of Milton's desire 'to reverse his belatedness to his literary predecessors' through his use of intertextuality. David Quint, *Inside "Paradise Lost": Reading the Designs of Milton's Epic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), p.8.

[25] Note that it is the text which is canonical and the story (as narrated inside or outside the Bible) that is scriptural. The text (*verba*) of the biblical narrative cannot be changed due to its canonical status. The story (*res*), as scripture, could exist in multiple forms both within and without the biblical canon. Deuteronomy's redaction of the earlier books of the Torah, Chronicle's redaction of Samuel and Kings, and the overlap between the contents of the Synoptic Gospels are some of the most obvious intra-canonical examples of this.

[26] An interesting comparison to this approach is found in the *kontakia* of Romanos the Melodist. The *kontakia* re-narrate biblical narratives in the voice, and from the perspective, of one of the biblical characters. What makes these texts particularly interesting is their performative nature. Both the cantor and the congregation end up personifying the biblical characters as they re-narrate biblical events. Note also the interesting parallel between the divine command to sing issued in a dream to both Romanos and the English epicist Caedmon that succeeds in overcoming both authors' reluctance to perform. For a general introduction to Romanos see: Sarah Gador-Whyte, *Theology and Poetry in Early Byzantium: the Kontakia of Romanos the Melodist*, (Cambridge: CUP, 2017); J. Grosdidier de Matons, *Romanos le Mélode et les Origines de la Poésie Religieuse à Byzance* (Paris: Éditions Beauchesne, 1977). For a more specific discussion of the features discussed in this note see: Gador-Whyte, 'Performing Repentance in the "Kontakia" of Romanos the Melodist', *Journal of Early Christian Studies*

was a particularly suitably means of locating later texts within the scriptural heartland. Its intertextual nature meant that it could mediate between the Bible and later generations of Christians without challenging the Bible's position at the centre of the scriptural net.[27]

The epyllia were intended to complement the biblical texts by bringing the Bible into the present *and* by writing the present into the Bible. They were intended to shape later generations of Christians' understanding of the Bible *and* to shape the biblical narratives by re-telling them as if they had been written by later generations. Not only does this serve to emphasise the inherently dialogical nature of the network of scriptural texts in late antiquity, but it also suggests why the genre may have been re-invented in sixteenth and seventeenth century Europe. Early Modern Italy, France, Germany, and (eventually) England all saw the production of biblical epics. The biblical epics of late antiquity had continued to form part of the Medieval educational curriculum.[28] The awakening of interest in classical forms and genres in Renaissance Italy encouraged Italian humanists to try their hand at composing their own epyllia.[29] In Germany, biblical epics were quickly appropriated by the emerging Protestant movement(s) as a useful way of telling their story and locating it within a scriptural understanding of history.[30] In England, the theological use of the genre was a secondary development.[31] Under the influence of du Bartas' two epyllia retelling Genesis, English Protestantism belatedly realised the value of the epyllic genre, leading to the production of one of the most significant literary works of the seventeenth century: John Milton's *Paradise Lost*.[32]

28.1 (2020), 89-113; Thomas Arentzen, 'Voices Interwoven: Refrains and Vocal Participation in the Kontakia', *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 66 (2016), 1-11.

[27] Jeffrey Shoulson recognises the importance of this for Milton in: Jeffrey Shoulson, 'Milton's Bible', in *The Cambridge Companion to "Paradise Lost"*, ed. Louis Schwartz (New York: CUP, 2014), pp.68-80 (p.73).

[28] See: McBrine, *Biblical Epics*; Czapla, *Das Bibelepos in der Frühren Neuzeit*, pp.21-83.

[29] A detailed study of the Italian Renaissance epyllia is provided by Czapla in: Czapla, *Das Bibelepos in der Frühren Neuzeit*, pp.121-202. See also: Kai Bremer, 'Poetologische Prinzipien des frühneuzeitlichen Bibelepos im historischen Knotrast: Samt einem Corollarium zu Ernst Robert Curtius', *Daphnis* 46.1-2 (2018), 15-29; Bernd Rolling, 'Victorious Virgin: Early Modern Mary Epics between Theological-Didactical and Epic Poetry', *Daphnis* 46.1-2 (2018), 30-64.

[30] See: Czapla, *Das Bibelepos in der Frühren Neuzeit*, pp.390-504.

[31] See: Linda Gregerson, *The Reformation of the Subject: Spenser, Milton, and the English Protestant Epic* (Cambridge: CUP, 1995); Tillyard, *The English Epic and its Background*; Dixon, *English Epic and Heroic Poetry*.

[32] The introduction and reception of du Bartas' work in England is carefully analysed by Peter Auger in: Peter Auger, *Du Bartas' Legacy in England and Scotland* (New York: OUP, 2019); Auger, 'Du Bartas' Pattern for English Scriptural Poets', in *Ronsard and Du Bartas in Early Modern Europe*, ed. A-P Pouey Mounou and P. J. Smith (Leiden: Brill, 2020), pp.302-331.

Chapter 5: The Temptation of Eve in John Milton's Paradise Lost

In this chapter, I shall follow the same basic outline as that used in chapter three in order to analyse Proba's *Cento*. I shall begin by offering an introduction to the creation of *Paradise Lost*. I shall then apply the four criteria of intertextuality to Milton's version of the temptation of Eve (9.494-781), in order to determine how Milton uses intertextuality in order to endow his work with a subordinate scriptural authority.

Milton first began playing with the ideas that were to result in *Paradise Lost* in around 1640, when he started jotting down ideas for a biblical drama. The Trinity Manuscript contains sixty-seven such initial ideas, but the topic which gains most of Milton's attention is the Fall. As well as two character lists, the Trinity Manuscript also contains the outline for a five act tragedy entitled 'Paradise Lost', and another entitled 'Adam unparadiz'd'. From around 1660 Milton returned to the idea. By 1665 the text was ready for limited manuscript circulation, and by 1667 it was ready for publication. The contract was signed on 27 April 1667, it was entered into the Stationers' Register on 20 August, and by the autumn *Paradise Lost* was on the market and ready for sale.

Paradise Lost is an epic in twelve books that tells the story of the Fall of mankind.[1] It begins achronologically with a description of Satan and his devils in hell (books 1-2). Book 3 is set in heaven, and recounts the Father's prediction of the Fall of humanity due to Satan's activity, and the Son's decision to die in order to redeem mankind. In book 4 Satan stumbles across the Garden of Eden and decides to do whatever is necessary to bring about the downfall of Adam and Eve. However, he is caught in the act by some of the angels who evict him from the garden. As a result, God sends Raphael to warn Adam and Eve of the dangers which Satan poses (book 5), and describes the cause of Satan's wrath (books 5-6). In books 7 and 8 Raphael explains to Adam how the world was created. At this point, Raphael has provided Adam with all the knowledge necessary to prevent him from being deceived by Satan, and so he returns to heaven. The inefficacy of Raphael's ministrations are then demonstrated in book 9, which describes the Fall, before books 10-12 relate

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[1] Note that the twelve-book format parallels the organisation of Virgil's *Aeneid*. The twelve-book format was a revision that was introduced in the 1674 edition of *Paradise Lost*. The 1667 edition used a ten-book format which contained book 8 as part of book 7, and books 11 and 12 formed book 10.

the punishment of Adam and Eve and the promise God gives them of eventual redemption through the Son despite their misdeed.

Milton's use of intertextuality is far more complicated than that found in Proba's *Cento*. This is partly due to the variety of texts with which Milton is interacting. Milton is drawing not only on the biblical text and classical literature (including Virgil, Homer, and Ovid), but also Patristic and contemporary exegetical traditions. In addition, Milton often combines intertextual features and different levels of intertextuality within the same intertextual element. As a result, it is sometimes difficult to separate the first three criteria. Therefore, I shall discuss the first three criteria in tandem as I work through the relevant section of *Paradise Lost* (lines 9.494-781) in chronological order.

Criteria One to Three: Meaning, Precision and Prominence of Intertextual Elements

One of the most interesting features contained in both the *Cento Vergilianus* and *Paradise Lost* is the extended description of the serpent's physical form which opens the account of the temptation of Eve. The biblical text is silent as to the serpent's appearance. Yet both re-narrations feel the need to paint a more detailed picture of the serpent, albeit with very different results.

Cento Vergilianus, lines 172-182

[...] per florea rura
ecce inimicus atrox inmensis orbibus anguis septem ingens gyros, septena volumina versans
nec visu facilis nec dictu effabilis ulli
obliqua invidia ramo frondente pependit,
vipeream spirans animam, cui tristia bella iraeque insidiaeque et crimina noxia cordi.
Odit et ipse pater: tot sese vertit in ora arrectisque horret squamis et, ne quid inausum,
aut intemptatum scelerisve dolive relinquat,
sic prior adgreditur dictis[...][2]

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[2] [...] Through flowery fields
a cruel and hostile snake moving in enormous coils,
huge in seven gyres, winding in seven loops.
Difficult to behold, and impossible for all to speak of.
With envy it hung down from a green, crooked branch,
exhaling its viperous breath. In its heart
it longed for gloomy wars, anger, betrayal and heinous crimes.
Even the Father hated it. It changed so much in form
and was terrifying with its raised scales. And lest it should
leave any crime or deceit unattempted and untested,
the serpent spoke the following word [...].
Translation by Cullhed, *Proba the Prophet*, p.203.

Paradise Lost, lines 494-505

So spake the Enemie of Mankind, enclos'd
In serpent, Inmate bad, and toward Eve
Address'd his way not with indented wave
Prone on the ground, as since, but on his reare,
Circular base of rising folds that tour'd
Fould above fould, a surging Maze, his Head
Crested aloft and Carbuncle his Eyes
With burnisht Neck of verdant Gold, erect
Amidst his circling Spires, that on the grass
Floted redundant: pleasing was his shape,
And lovely, never since of Serpent kind
Lovelier ...

According to Proba, the serpent is vile and hideous. Its appearance was terrifying and detestable, and everything about it indicated its loathsome nature and evil designs.[3] However, if the serpent really were such a hideous creature, then it seems unlikely that Eve would have been beguiled by him into tasting the fruit. Although the physical ugliness of the serpent may be commensurate with the inner ugliness of his evil purpose, it is unlikely that Satan (as he is identified in *Paradise Lost*) would have chosen such an unpromising tool for his purpose. Realising this, Milton paints a very different picture of the serpent. Milton's serpent is magnificent. Its height, and girth, and splendour are astonishing. No serpent has ever appeared so beautiful before, and no serpent will ever do so again.[4] Yet to the observant reader, there are indications that the serpent's beauteous appearance conceals something unpleasant. Milton's serpent's 'circling Spires', 'surging Maze', erect positioning and raised crests all bear a striking resemblance to Virgil's description of the serpents sent to slaughter Laocoön's sons which Proba uses as the basis for her serpent.[5] By explicitly describing the serpent as gorgeous and lovely while at the same time implying its destructive purpose, Milton is able to represent the serpent's deviousness. More importantly, he is able to provide the reader with a convincing reason for why Eve listened to, and was eventually persuaded by, the serpent which is not present in either the biblical text or Proba's re-narration of it.

Further indications that the serpent is not quite what it seems are provided by the list of comparisons with other serpents that Milton provides. Cadmus and

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[3] See also the account in *Genesis B*, lines 485-541.

[4] Cf. Apoc. Mos. 17.1; du Bartas, *Bartas: His Deuine Weekes and workes*, trans. Iosvah Sylvester (London: Humfrey Lownes, 1605), pp.306-307.

[5] [E]cce autem gemini a Tenedo tranquilla per alta / (horresco referens) immensis orbibus angues / incumbunt pelago pariterque ad litora tendunt; /pactora quorum inter fluctus arrecta iubaeque / sanguineae superant undas, pars cetera pontum / pone legit sinuatque immensa uolumine terga. Virgil, *Aen*. 2.203-208. Cf. *Aen*. 5.84-89.

Hermione were turned into (benevolent) serpents at Cadmus' request after they fled from Thebes (the city he had founded) to Illyria (Ovid, *Metam.* 4.563-603). In Ovid's story, Cadmus is changed into a serpent first. It is only after he embraces his wife that she too is transformed. In both Ovid and the Genesis one spouse is the direct cause of a change of state (human-serpent and innocent-knowing good and evil respectively) in the other. However, unlike in Genesis, in the *Metamorphoses* it is the husband who provokes the change in the wife. It is therefore interesting to note that when Milton lists their names, Hermione is placed first, followed by Cadmus. The most obvious explanation for this would be the metrical constrains of Milton's use of iambic pentameter and the stress patterns which that entails. Yet Milton uses a variety of metrical patterns in *Paradise Lost*, and it would have been possible for him to place Cadmus before Hermione if he had wanted to. The fact that he chooses not to suggests that the displacement of the expected order of the names is intended to jar with a reader's expectations. Having gained his reader's attention, Milton then forces the reader to ponder the significance of the wife being placed before the husband and hopefully to arrive at a recognition of the similarities in the Hermione-Cadmus and Eve-Adam narratives.

The comparison with snakes that were not mere creatures as they appeared to be then continues in the following verses. Lines 506-507 compare the serpent with Aesculapius. Aesculapius was the god of healing who, when a Roman embassy came to Epidaurus, transformed himself into a serpent 'raised breast-high' to accompany them (*Metam.* 15.626-744). Ammonian Jove transformed himself into a serpent in order to seduce Olympias, Alexander the Great's mother, and Capitoline Jove took the form of a serpent to seduce Sempronia and father Scipio Africanus.[6] In all of these cases the serpent is really a heavenly being. The precision of the intertextuality is quite low, but its prominence is very high. This is significant as it points to Satan's status as a fallen angel in *Paradise Lost*, and the heavenly powers which he is able to distort for his evil purposes. What is more significant is that two of the three examples involve seduction and the production of offspring. The idea that the Fall culminated in Satan seducing Eve was part of a longstanding tradition (2 En. 31.6; Tg. Ps.-J. 4.1; Prot. Jas.13.1; Gos. Phil. 61.5; cf. 4 Macc 18.7-8; Cyril, *Cat.* 12.5; Gregory of Nazianzus, *Orat.* 45.8; Augustine, *De. civ. Dei* 14.11). Although Milton frequently makes metaphorical use of this tradition (lines 387, 393, 426, 432, 445, 456, 489, 505, 532, 536), he does not explicitly say that Eve was (physically) seduced

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[6] See Edward Topsell, *The Historie of Serpents* (London: William Jaggard, 1608), p.5.

by Satan.[7] Nevertheless, when Milton's metaphorical appropriation of this tradition is read in conjunction with the mention of the seductions via serpents in these verses, it becomes clear that Milton is intending to implant this idea in his readers' minds as a possible interpretation of Eve's temptation.

'From every Beast, more duteous at her call, // Then at *Circean* call the Herd disguis'd' (lines 521-522), is the first occasion on which there is an intertextual element with the Bible in Milton's version of the temptation of Eve. In Genesis 1.29 every plant that produces seeds (the Hebrew is relatively incomprehensible at this point) is given to the humans which God has created. There is no indication that they will be able to control these plants, just that these plants will serve as a food source.[8] There is also no indication that the birds and the beasts of the field were placed in submission to them. Perhaps a more pertinent comparison is Genesis 2.19-20. God creates the animals and Adam is allowed to name them. Whatever Adam called the animals, that was their name, and their obedience to this act of naming forms a loose parallel with line 521. In the following line Milton provides another example of beasts being obedient to a human. In this case, Milton refers to those of Odysseus' men which Circe turned into swine (Homer, *Od.* 10.212-219; Ovid, *Metam.* 14.45). The comparison of Eve with Circe is both ironic and revealing. It is ironic because whereas Circe gains her power over beasts through her vile magic, Eve will lose that power through her evil act. Even more significantly, Circe manages to manipulate Odysseus' men by means of food and drink, and then degrades them by changing them from men into swine. Eve also uses food to change a man into a beast (contra the serpent's remarks in lines 710-714).

One of the main differences between Milton's use of intertextuality and Proba's is that Milton exploits the weaknesses of the biblical story in a way that Proba does not.[9] For example, one of the reasons which Milton gives for why Eve is persuaded by the serpent is the fact that he can talk. Although the words the serpent used were efficacious in persuading Eve to listen to him (line 550), it is primarily Eve's

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[7] Note also line 597, where it is possible that 'seed' is a double entendre. The only other occasions on which 'seed' is used to refer to something that grows are 7.310 and 11.899 (both occasions direct quotations from the Bible). Otherwise, 'seed' is always used in *Paradise Lost* to refer to offspring (1.8; 3.284; 7.312; 10.180, 181, 499, 965, 999, 1031; 11.26, 116, 155, 873; 12.125, 148, 233, 260, 273, 327, 379, 395, 450, 543, 600, 601, 623). Along with the language of 'desire' (9.584, 592), 'pleasure' (9.586), and 'sated' (9.598) this is another possible reference to the introduction of lust as a result of the fall (9.1013).
[8] This verse is more fully developed in lines 618-624.
[9] See also line 497 in which Milton recognises that prior to God's punishment in Gen 3.14 the serpent must have moved in a way other than by sliding on its stomach.

astonishment at the serpent's ability to speak that grants him power over her (lines 551-553, 764-772).[10] In the Bible there are only two instances when animals defy the rules of nature and speak to humans.[11] In the case of Balaam's ass, the ability to speak arises as a result of God's decision to open her mouth so that she could protest to Balaam about his unjust treatment of her (Num 22.28). In the case of Genesis 3, it is Satan's agency which grants the serpent its super-bestial power (lines 529-530; cf. Apoc. Mos. 16.1; Augustine, *De. Gen. as Litt.* 11.27-29). As was the case with the description of the serpent's appearance, Milton uses the silence of the biblical text as an opportunity to offer the reader explanations for why Eve found the serpent so persuasive (lines 746-749). In both of these instances Milton is dependent on intertextuality that uses a low degree of precision but a high degree of prominence. By placing greater emphasis on the serpent's tempting ability, Milton is offering Satan a more significant role in humanity's demise. In Genesis 3 the serpent encourages Eve to consider taking the fruit, but it is the fruit itself which tempts Eve to pluck and eat it (Gen 3.4-6). In *Paradise Lost*, it is unmistakeably the serpent himself (both his actions and his arguments) who is the decisive factor (lines 745-775).[12]

Perhaps the most effective use of imprecise but prominent intertextuality in Milton's version of the temptation of Eve is the serpent's use of the phrase 'fair and good' in lines 605-606. In Genesis 1.31 God regards everything he has made and declares it to be 'very good'. In *Paradise Lost*, the serpent surveys 'all things visible in Heav'n, Or Earth, or Middle' and decides that they are 'fair and good'. After he has eaten the apple, the serpent feels that he too, like God, has the right to judge creation. The beneficial effects of eating the apple are therefore not limited (according to the serpent's argument) to raising the beasts to the status of humanity. There is even the possibility of being raised to divine status, an argument which the serpent makes explicitly in lines 710-712. When understood in this light, the serpent's next line is oxymoronic. By describing Eve as 'fair and good' he is acknowledging that she is one of the things which God created. Yet he then goes on discuss her 'divine semblance' and her beauty's 'heav'nly Ray', something which is not possible for her

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[10] Cf. Joseph Beaumont, *Psyche: or loves mysterie. In XX. canto's: displaying the intercourse betwixt Christ, and the soule* (London: John Dawson, 1648), 6.276; *Deut. Rab.* 5.10.

[11] Animals do praise God on occasion (eg. Ps. 148.10). However, as the hills and the sky are also able to praise God this does not necessarily refer to speech in the order sense of the term.

[12] A similar account is provided by du Bartas, *Deuine Weekes*, pp.304, 308. See also the version in *Genesis B*, lines 546-560 in which the serpent speaks to Adam in order to persuade him to eat the forbidden fruit.

to possess as she is merely one among many of God's created beings.[13] The contrast between Eve's known created status and the divinity of her image as imputed by the serpent is part of a further piece of imprecise intertextuality as it reflects the serpent's claim in Genesis 3.5 that by eating the fruit Eve will become like a god.[14]

This deification of Eve then continues in the following lines. In line 609 the serpent declares that there is no-one equal to Eve. This is praise only appropriate to God, a fact which his phrasing bears out. The resemblance between the serpent's speech and Horace, *Odes* 1.12.18 (nec viget quicquam simile ant secundum) emphasises this fact, as in its original context the verse refers to the chief of all the gods who rules the sea, the earth, the sky, the times, and the tides, and whom none surpass. That this would be an accurate description of God is evidenced by the fact that God applies it to himself in line 8.407. In line 611 there is an interesting case of intra-textual intertextuality. In some traditions, Satan was expelled from heaven for refusing to worship humanity (LAE 14.1-2; 16.1). However, in *Paradise Lost*, it is Satan's refusal to worship the Son of God that provokes his rebellion and subsequent expulsion from heaven (5.603-615). By declaring Eve to be worthy of worship, however ironically, the serpent is offering Eve a higher place in his estimation than God's Son.

After Eve has replied to the serpent's speech and indicated her consent to come along with him, the serpent is no longer concerned with tempting her with the possibility of divinity. Instead, his attention turns towards the desirability of the tree and its fruit. Yet there are still subtle signs which remind the reader of her possible divine status, as well as picking up on the theme of seduction which Milton has already introduced. A row of myrtles was used by Venus to hide herself from the lustful gaze of the satyrs when they came across her bathing naked in a river (Ovid, *Fast.* 4.1). Myrtles were therefore a sign of chastity and virtue, and going 'Beyond a row of Myrtles' was precisely what Venus did to protect herself from a defiling gaze. The very location of the tree seems to imply modesty and propriety to the still sinless Eve (line 659). Unfortunately for Eve, no row of myrtles will be sufficient to hide her nakedness from either God or Satan. The fact that myrtles could also be used as a symbol for pudenda suggests that Milton is carefully playing with the two

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[13] Note that in *Paradise Lost*, Milton is very clear that Eve is made in Adam's image, and that it is only Adam who is made in the image and likeness of God (see 9.540; 11.239).
[14] Note also lines 708-709, when Milton exploits the plural used in the biblical text (Gen 3.22) to suggest that there is more than one god, and that Eve and her husband could easily become members of the pantheon.

meanings of this imagery. To Eve, the row of myrtles symbolise purity, to Satan they symbolise licentiousness, and to the reader they are supposed to symbolise both.

The serpent's description of the tree and its locale persuades Eve to go along with him, and she instructs the serpent to 'lead' her there. Milton emphasises his choice of verb by positioning it as the first word of the line and thus disrupting the metrical pattern of the surrounding lines. In the lines both before and after line 631 the stress pattern is weak-strong-weak-strong, but in line 631 it is strong-weak-weak-strong. This not only grabs a reader's attention by interrupting the flow of the poetry, but also serves as a metrical chiasm, emphasising the fact that it is Eve who commands the serpent to lead her into sin. This choice of verb suggests the petition in the Lord's Prayer which asks that we are not led into temptation.[15] The use of this imprecise, unpronounced, semantic intertextuality allows Milton to remind the reader that Eve has chosen to be led into temptation. She may have been deceived and beguiled by the serpent, but it is still her decision to make. Her awareness of God's command means that she should have rejected the serpent's words, but instead she choses to listen to them and be guided by him. This concept of free-will is particularly important to Milton's theology. In line 654 Eve herself makes the point that God left her and Adam with a single commandment and for everything else they were to use their reason as a guide (citing Rom 2.14).[16]

Milton continues his use of imprecise, unpronounced, semantic intertextuality in the serpent's final speech. When the serpent refers to dying in order to put off humanity and become gods, he is using a decidedly Pauline formula. 1 Cor 15.53 speaks of the necessity of mortal and perishable bodies to put on immortality and imperishability. Col 3.5 invites the reader to kill the 'earthly' (and by implication evil) parts of themselves, as does Eph 4.22. Both the serpent and the epistles advocate the shedding of the inferior in order to put on the superior. But whereas the New Testament is encouraging people to put aside sinful things in order to become more obedient to God, the serpent is suggesting disobeying God in order to become more like him. The untenability of the serpent's position is therefore made clear to the readers, and it should also be clear to Eve who has been given reason to discern

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[15] See also line 693.

[16] This is one of the reasons why it is necessary for Milton to depict the serpent as being more than usually beguiling in looks, words, and deeds. If the serpent had appeared as horrible in *Paradise Lost* as it did in the *Cento*, then Eve's reason must have warned her against doing what it said.

what is good for her. However, Eve chooses to abuse the free will she has been given by willingly being led into temptation.[17]

In a final attempt to persuade Eve to eat the forbidden fruit, the serpent engages in a bit of character assassination. Following the narrator in the *Aeneid*, the serpent asks whether God is really a very admirable person if he is so full of envy that he needs to prevent Adam and Eve from obtaining knowledge of good and evil.[18] The positioning of the *Aeneid* parallel is significant. In the *Aeneid,* the narrator's rhetorical question occurs right at the very beginning of the poem. It sets out one of the key questions the text is intended to answer: can the gods really be so vengeful? Similarly, in the opening verses of *Paradise Lost*, Milton states that his purpose is to justify 'the ways of God to men' (1.26). In other words, Milton is also interested in addressing the age-old problem of the existence of evil in the world and why God (or the gods) permit it to exist. By making the serpent speak this particular line as part of his defamation of God's character, Milton is able to suggest to the reader the answer to his opening statement. The reason why there is evil in the world is not because it is God's will, but because Satan misrepresents the nature of things and the gullible among us chose to exercise our free will and be led by Satan rather than be guided by the reason which God has given us to serve as our law.

Unlike Proba, whose use of intertextuality is intended to clarify the meaning of each part of the narrative individually, Milton's use of intertextuality has a much broader significance. The combined force of Milton's intertextual re-narration of the Genesis 3 narrative increases Satan's culpability. The serpent is given a deceptively pleasing experience, he is explicitly compared with other serpents that were not what they outwardly seemed to be, and he greatly exploits the idea of Eve being made 'like God'. In addition, Milton utilises the silence of the biblical text on certain key narratival elements (for example, the serpent's surprising ability to speak, or the reason why God has forbidden Adam and Eve to have knowledge of good and evil), as some of the most persuasive factors that influences Eve decision. With the increase in the serpent's persuasive force, there is a corresponding increase in the (misguided) rationality of Eve's decision to be led by the serpent into temptation. This is important for Milton as he believed that not only were Adam and Eve in no way tainted by sin before the Fall (hence his explicit declaration that Eve was 'yet

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[17] Cf. *Genesis B*, lines 506-508.
[18] In the *Aeneid* it is the apparent vengefulness of the gods that is the subject of amazement, but the points are very similar. Virgil, *Aen.*, 1.11.

sinless' in line 659), but that Eve had been granted the free will and the reason necessary to discern whether obeying the serpent and disobeying God was the right thing to do (see lines 631, 713-714).[19] By expanding the text in this way, Milton is able to place his theological convictions as an integral part of the biblical narrative. More importantly, Milton's use of intertextuality allows *Paradise Lost* to provide scripturally authoritative solutions to theological questions raised by the biblical text, without challenging the authority of the biblical text itself. Milton places the answers to the theological questions posed by the narrative of the Fall within that narrative in such a way that the biblical text and its Miltonian interpretation are inextricably intertwined. As a result, *Paradise Lost* is imbued with some of the scriptural authority of the biblical text.

Criterion Four: Semantic Intertextuality

The language of the English translation of the temptation of Eve is relatively limited. The *King James Version* of Genesis 3.1-6 reads as follows:

> 3.1 Now the **serpent** was more **subtill** then any **beast** of the fied, which the LORD God had made, and he saud vnto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of euery **tree** of the **garden**? 2. And the woman said vnto the **serpent**, Wee may eate of the **fruite** of the **trees** of the **garden**: 3. But of the **fruit** of the **tree**, which{is} in the midst of the **garden**, God hath said, Ye shal not eate of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. 4, And the **Serpent** said vnto the Woman, Ye shal not surely die. 5. For God doeth know, that in the day that ye eate thereof, then your eyes shalbee opened: and yee shall be as Gods, **knowing good and evil**. 6. And when the woman saw, that the **tree** {was} good for food, and that it {was} pleasant to the eyes, and a **tree** to be **desired** to make one **wise**, she tooke of the **fruit** thereof, and did eate […]

Milton makes extensive use of this repetition (see the line numbers given below), resulting in a text with a high level of semantic intertextuality. This high degree of semantic intertextuality gives *Paradise Lost* the sound and feel of the biblical text without limiting Milton's linguistic choices or confining Milton to the scope of the original narrative.[20] As a result, Milton is able to tell a story that diverges

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[19] For a more detailed explanation of Milton's distinction between evil desire (reprehensible but not sin) and evil action (sin) see the eleventh chapter of *De Doctrina Christiana*. Milton, *A Treatise on Christian Doctrine*, pp.639-649.

[20] Note, for example, that there are occasions when he uses 'snake' instead of 'serpent' (lines 613, 643) and 'apple' instead of 'fruit' (line 585). Serpent: lines 495, 504, 529, 560, 615, 647, 764. Subtle: line 560. Beast: lines 521, 543, 556, 560, 571, 592, 691, 768, 769. Tree: lines 576, 591, 617, 618, 644, 651, 657, 660, 661, 723, 727, 751. Garden: lines 657, 660, 662. Fruit: lines 577, 588, 616, 621, 648,

significantly from the biblical text whilst still allowing the reader to recognise that *Paradise Lost* is here re-telling the account of the Fall found in Genesis 3. Like Proba's *Cento*, *Paradise Lost* is dependent on its use of intertextuality for establishing its status as a subordinate scriptural text. Just as the *Cento* used contextual intertextuality as a means of embodying the relationship between its text and that of the Bible. So *Paradise Lost* uses semantic intertextuality as a means of indicating its relative scriptural status. The high degree of semantic intertextuality requires the reader to recognise that the words and phrases being used are those of the Genesis 3 narrative despite the divergence of the two narratives. Having recognised these words and phrases, the reader is then able to use the expanded text of *Paradise Lost* to shape their interpretation of the narratival complexities of the biblical text when they next encounter it.

Conclusion

In *Paradise Lost* Milton uses imprecise but prominent intertextuality, much like Proba did before him in her *Cento Vergilianus*. But whereas Proba used a low level of semantic and a high level of contextual intertextuality, Milton only uses contextual intertextuality to a limited degree and makes a significant use of semantic intertextuality. The difference in intertextual techniques results in the two epics having different characteristics and being able to serve different purposes. Proba's use of intertextuality to exemplify and elucidate individual narrative elements allowed her to mediate between the biblical text and the reader by providing them with interpretative tools taken from a wider body of literature with which they were more thoroughly familiar. In contrast, Milton is not interested in exegeting the narrative in order to make the story as it stands more comprehensible, but to explain the more surprising elements within the biblical narrative. By using a high degree of semantic intertextuality, Milton is able to expand on the gaps in the biblical narrative in a way that fits seamlessly with the biblical text.

For example, the biblical text offers no explanation as to how or why the serpent was able to speak, or even why Eve was not surprised at encountering a talking beast. This apparent lack of interest in a highly unusual phenomenon is one of the weak points in the biblical text.[21] The most common explanation of the serpent's

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656, 661, 686, 731, 735, 741, 745, 763, 776, 781. Knowledge of good and evil: lines 697, 709, 723, 752, 774. Desire: lines 584, 592, 741. Wise: lines 683, 759, 778.

[21] Thomas Browne offers a substantial list of reasons for why a reader should not perceive Eve's lack of surprise at conversing with a talking snake problematic. This suggests that some readers believed,

ability to talk was that Satan had taken control of the serpent's body. Milton uses this tradition (lines 494-495, 505-510, 529-530), but he also introduces Eve's amazement at the sight of a talking serpent and uses this as one of the factors which eventually persuades Eve to eat the forbidden fruit (lines 551-557, 748-749). By exploiting the silence of the biblical text, Milton is able to strengthen the potency of the narrative by turning the weaknesses of the biblical texts into strengths.[22]

The differences between Milton and Proba's aims are important. Both authors use the epyllic genres as a means of providing their readers with intertextual connections that allow them to interpret more easily the biblical narrative. However, Proba's choice of the epyllion is a result of her desire to mediate between her readers and a less familiar narrative (the biblical text) by means of intertextual connections with a body of literature with which her readers were far more familiar (the works of Virgil). Milton's use of the epyllion is designed to address the exegetical concerns of readers comfortable with the biblical text by filling in the gaps left by the biblical story. Unlike Proba, Milton is not telling the same story in different words. Milton is telling a more complete version of the biblical narrative, which includes details not present in the biblical text. As a result, the authorial apostolic succession is not quite the right model to justify the subordinate scriptural status of *Paradise Lost*. Instead, a model that revolves around the idea of interpretation as prophetic revelation is more appropriate in relation to Milton's text.

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or were believed to believe, that the lack of explanation for the existence of a talking serpent was an unconvincing and therefore problematic part of the biblical narrative. Thomas Browne, *Pseudodoxia Epidemica: Or Enquiries into Very many received Tenents. And commonly presumed Truths* (London: Thomas Harper, 1646), pp.1-2.

[22] Further examples of this would include the absence of God's motive for preventing Adam and Eve from having knowledge of good and evil (lines 695-730, 752-759), and the emptiness of God's death threat if they eat the forbidden fruit (lines 685-690, 760-768). Cf. Apoc. Mos. 18.1-4; Testim. Adam 3.2-3

Chapter 6 - Interpretation as Prophecy

At the time Proba was writing, Christians still believed that they were living in an age closely connected with the time of the apostles. There were people alive who knew someone, who had known someone, who had been related to someone, who had a friend, who knew an apostle. The connections between the apostles and these earliest generations of Christians were very strong. It was therefore unproblematic for the authorial apostolic successors to continue the authorial apostolic task as they were still living with the direct presence of the apostles (if only in a diluted form). By the seventeenth century, this notion of living in a quasi-apostolic age was no longer tenable. The apostolic ministry was confined to the work of the apostles whom Jesus himself had chosen during his earthly ministry, and it had come to an end with their deaths some fifteen hundred years previously. Instead of trying to identify themselves with apostles (whom they could never succeed in imitating), the Reformers took an interest in prophecy and prophetic identity as a ministry that was available to them. In so doing, they revived an idea that first began to be expressed in Second Temple Jewish texts. This was the belief in interpretation as a prophetic act in an age in which direct divine textual revelation had ceased.

Interpretation as Prophecy in Second Temple Judaism

According to the earliest Jewish historians, the prophets provided a written record of God's divine revelations from the very beginning of history. They have written in one unbroken chain of succession, and this chain ensures the authority of both the text and its author. The most complete account of this unbroken chain of the succession of prophets and their writings is found in the book of Jubilees. The first author in the chain is Enoch, who

> was the first who learned writing and knowledge and wisdom, from (among) the sons of men, from (among) those who were born upon earth. And who wrote in a book the signs of the heaven according to the order of their months, so that the sons of man might know the (appointed) times of the years according to their order, with respect to each of their months. This one was the first (who) wrote a testimony and testified to the children of men throughout the generations of the earth (Jub. 4.17).[1]

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[1] The translation is by O. S. Wintermute and is taken from *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: Expansions of the 'Old Testament' and Legends, Wisdom ad Philosophical Literature, Prayers, Psalms and Odes,*

In this description of Enoch, it is important to note that Enoch is not described as the first person who was ever able to write, but simply the first human who was given this gift. This is significant both within the context of Jubilees (which relies heavily on the idea of heavenly scrolls and the existence of written revelation that has yet to be revealed to humanity on earth), and also to a wider understanding of the role of prophetic writing in early Jewish tradition.

After Enoch, Noah was the next person to be endowed with the gift of writing and the task of providing God's chosen people with a written record of God's revelations.

> Noah wrote everything in a book just as [the angels] taught him according to every kind of healing. And the evil spirits were restrained from following the sons of Noah. And he gave everything he wrote to Shem, his oldest son (Jub. 10.13-14).[2]

As was the case with Enoch, Noah's writings are intended to benefit future generations of God's people by preventing them from harm by teaching them how to live according to the salvation which God has decreed for them and made known to his prophets.

The efficacy of written texts for achieving this aim is demonstrated in the case of Abraham. Abraham's father (Terah), grandfather (Nahor), and great-grandfather (Serug) have all fallen into idolatry and turned away from God. But Abraham, because his father had taught him to write (Jub. 11.16) perceived the pollution of the land and that God's people had gone astray by worshipping idols. As a result, Abraham separated himself from his family so that he would not be defiled by their impious doings (Jub. 11.17). This rejection of idolatry resulted in an unexpected benefit for Abraham. On God's command an angel

> opened his mouth and his ears and his lips and [...] began to speak with him in Hebrew, in the tongue of creation. And he took his father's books [i.e. those which had been passed down from Enoch and Noah] - and they were written in Hebrew - and he copied them. And he began studying them thereafter.[3]

Despite the fact that nobody has been able to read them for generations, the books containing the testimonies of the former prophets had been preserved and passed down from father to son. As soon as a suitable pious individual was found, the gift

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Fragments of Lost Judeo-Hellenistic Works, ed. James H. Charlesworth, 2 vols (New York: Doubleday, 1983-1985), II, 62.

[2] *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, II, 76.

[3] *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, II, 82.

of literacy was once again bequeathed to humanity, and God's chosen people were able to read about how God had revealed himself to his people in the past, and would reveal himself to them in the present. Jacob, for example, saw an angel

> descending from heaven, and there were seven tablets in his hands. And he gave (them) to Jacob, and he read them, and he knew everything which was written in them, which would happen to him and to his sons during all the ages.[4]

The picture painted by Jubilees is that of a never-ending chain of books which contain everything that has happened, that is happening, and that will happen. Some of these books have been written by humans, and some have been written by angels. Some of the books are passed down from generation to generation on earth, and some are preserved safely in heaven. Regardless of the author or location of the text, what is important is that there is a continuous chain of writers who have recorded everything that has and will come to pass on the earth. The knowledge of these texts, and the ability and authority to add to them is passed on from father to son through each successive generation of God's chosen people.

In *Contra Apionem*, Josephus presents a slightly different account from that contained in Jubilees. Unlike Jubilees, Josephus believes that the task of prophetic writing began with Moses, the author to whom he ascribes the five books of the Pentateuch. Nevertheless, despite the differing details, the overarching narrative is very much the same. God has required his prophets to record his revelations in writing so that they narrate everything that has happened from the beginning of creation until the present day. Or in Josephus' words:

> δύο δὲ μόνα πρὸς τοῖς εἴκοσι βιβλία τοῦ παντὸς ἔχοντα χρόνου τὴν ἀναγραφήν, τὰ δικαίως πεπιστευμένα. καὶ τούτων πέντε μέν ἐστι τὰ Μωυσέως, ἃ τούς τε νόμους περιέχει καὶ τὴν ἀπ᾽ ἀνθρωπογονίας παράδοσιν μέχρι τῆς αὐτοῦ τελευτῆς· οὗτος ὁ χρόνος ἀπολείπει τρισχιλίων ὀλίγον ἐτῶν. ἀπὸ δὲ τῆς Μωυσέως τελευτῆς μέχρις Ἀρταξέρξου τοῦ μετὰ Ξέρξην Περσῶν βασιλέως οἱ μετὰ Μωυσῆν προφῆται τὰ κατ᾽ αὐτοὺς πραχθέντα συνέγραψαν ἐν τρισὶ καὶ δέκα βιβλίοις. αἱ δὲ λοιπαὶ τέσσαρες ὕμνους εἰς τὸν θεὸν καὶ τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ὑποθήκας τοῦ βίου περιέχουσιν. ἀπὸ δὲ Ἀρταξέρξου μέχρι τοῦ καθ᾽ ἡμᾶς χρόνου γέγραπται μὲν ἕκαστα, πίστεως δ᾽ οὐχ ὁμοίας ἠξίωται τοῖς πρὸ αὐτῶν διὰ τὸ μὴ γενέσθαι τὴν τῶν προφητῶν ἀκριβῆ διαδοχήν.[5]

The history of God's people is succinct. It is comprised of 22 prophetic books. Yet it contains a record of everything that has ever happened (τοῦ παντὸς ἔχοντα

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[4] *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, II, 118.

[5] Josephus, *C. Ap.* 1.1.8. Josephus, *The Life. Against Apion*, trans. and ed. H. St. J. Thackeray (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926), I, 178.

χρόνου τὴν ἀναγραφήν). The ability of these 22 books to contain the history of everything is a result of their prophetic origin. This collection of books begins with the great prophet Moses, who recounts what happened between the birth of man and his own death (τὴν ἀπ᾽ ἀνθρωπογονίας παράδοσιν μέχρι τῆς αὐτοῦ τελευτῆς). After Moses, the prophets (προφῆται) produced 13 books in which they recorded all the things which happened during their own time and in their own experience. However, according to Josephus, the line of prophets was broken after the reign of Artaxerxes I (ruler of the Achaemenid Empire from 465-424 BC). Although other authors have continued to record the history of God's chosen people, their works can never carry quite the same authority as the 22 proceeding from the previously unbroken chain of prophetic authors.

After the reign of Artaxerxes, it became increasingly clear that God no longer intended to speak to his people in the manner he had previously used. The line of the prophets had been broken. Their authority had been diluted, and much of it had been lost completely. Latter day prophets tried their best to fulfil their prophetic duties, but God was no longer asking of them the same things he had asked of their forebears. Post-Artaxerxian prophets were not required to hear and record new divine revelation. They were not worthy to do so as they did not participate in the unbroken chain of prophetic descent that had begun with Moses when God first adopted Israel as his people. However, this did not mean that the prophetic office ceased to exist. As Josephus remarks, despite the failure of a direct prophetic succession (διὰ τὸ μὴ γενέσθαι τὴν τῶν προφητῶν ἀκριβῆ διαδοχήν), prophetic writings were still being produced. They simply did not have quite the same level of authority as the prophetic texts which formed a part of the direct and complete prophetic succession (πίστεως δ᾽ οὐχ ὁμοίας ἠξίωται τοῖς πρὸ αὐτῶν).

This need for continuing revelation despite the existence of an authoritative body of texts is a point which is also raised in 4 Ezra 20-22.

> Let me speak in your presence, Lord. For behold, I will go, as you have commanded me, and I will reprove the people who are now living; but who will warn those who will be born hereafter? For the world lies in darkness, and its inhabitants are without light. For your Law has been burned, and so no one knows the things which have been done or will be done by you. If then I have found favor [sic.] before you, send the Holy Spirit to me [...] that men may be able to find the path, and that those who wish to live in the last days may live.[6]

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[6] The translation is by Metzger and is taken from *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, I, 554.

In this passage, Ezra makes a number of important points. Firstly, a prophet is required to warn God's people about the dangers of breaking God's law. Secondly, only a prophet is capable of completing this task, and without prophets the people of God would not be able to receive salvation. Thirdly, a written record of God's word is essential. The texts containing God's revelation are necessary for each successive generation of God's people because they not only explain what has happened, but provide a tool by means of which to interpret what is happening and what will eventually happen. Finally, the guidance of the Holy Spirit is needed to ensure that God's written revelation is correctly interpreted and understood.

The way in which Josephus describes the distinction between the 22 prophetic books and subsequent writings is very similar to the way in which the early church described the authorial apostolic succession. In the centre of the scriptural world were a collection of books written by a chosen group of individuals (prophets and/or apostles) who participated in a direct line of succession. At a specific point in time (the reign of Artaxerxes and the death of the final apostle respectively), the direct succession was broken. Yet God did not cease to communicate with his people, or to provide them with new revelations.[7] Instead, the method of revelation changed, and the manner in which people were able to serve as God's mouthpiece was altered accordingly. Due to the loss of 'pure' prophetic (or later apostolic) authority caused by the break in the succession, it was no longer appropriate for God to offer new revelation as there was nobody available who was worthy to speak it. Moreover, God had already spoken authoritatively to his people, and they had a written record of what he had said. Therefore, in this post-prophetic age all God needed to do was to explain how his authoritative prophetic writings applied to the

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[7] There has been a steadily increasing interest in the cessation or alteration of prophecy in both early Jewish and early Christian studies. Notable examples include: *Ancient Readers and their Scriptures: Engaging the Hebrew Bible in Early Judaism and Christianity*, ed. Garrick V. Allen and John Anthony Dunne (Leiden: Brill, 2019); Hindy Najman, *Losing the Temple and Recovering the Future: An Analysis of 4 Ezra* (Cambridge: CUP, 2014); *Rewritten Bible after Fifty Years: Texts, Terms or Techniques? A Last Dialogue with Geza Vermes*, ed. József Zsengellér (Leiden: Brill, 2014); Moshe J. Bernstein, *Reading and Re-Reading Scripture at Qumran*, 2 vols (Leiden: Brill, 2013); Lesleigh Cushing Stahlberg, *Sustaining Fictions: Intertextuality, Midrash, Translation, and the Literary Afterlife of the Bible* (New York: T.&T. Clark, 2008); George J. Brooke, 'Prophecy and Prophets in the Dead Sea Scrolls', in *Prophets, Prophecy, and Prophetic Texts in Second Temple Judaism*, ed. Michael H. Floyd and Robert D. Haak (London: T&T Clark, 2006), pp.151-165; David M. Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart: Origins of Scripture and Literature* (Oxford: OUP, 2005); Lester L. Grabbe, 'Poets, Scribes or Preachers? The Reality of Prophecy in the Second Temple Period', in *Knowing the End from the Beginning: The Prophetic, the Apocalyptic and Their Relationships*, ed. Lester L. Grabbe and Robert D. Haak (London: T&T Clark, 2003), pp.195-215; *The Function of Scripture in Early Jewish and Christian Tradition*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Sanders (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998); Barton, *Oracles of God: Perceptions of Ancient Prophecy in Israel after the Exile* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1986); J. Weingreen, *From Bible to Mishna: The Continuity of Tradition* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1976).

present day. In order to achieve this, it was necessary to have prophets who were able to mediate between the prophetic texts and later generations of God's people. And it was this prophetic rather than apostolic terminology which the Reformers appropriated when they themselves were forced to wrestle with the issue of how God communicated with his people in a post-biblical age.

Luther and Prophecy

The resurrection of the idea that contemporary prophecy involved the interpretation of biblical text was a result of two separate issues for emerging Protestantism. On the one hand, there was the practical problem of distinguishing the respectable, law-abiding reformers from their radical (and often heretical) counterparts. In light of the claims of Anabaptists and individuals such as Thomas Müntzer and the Zwickau prophets to have heard the voice of God and to have been appointed by God as contemporary prophets, the subject of prophecy proved to be a particularly important issue for the leading reformers. In order to rebut these claims to direct revelation without also rejecting the role of the prophet, Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin all sought to redefine prophecy by distinguishing between prophecy in biblical times and prophecy in the post-biblical age. Whilst never rejecting the idea that prophecy can include direct revelation, these theologians all found ways of reframing prophecy so that its predominant expression in the present day was that of correct exegesis rather than the disclosure of new divine revelation.[8]

The other issue that sparked a renewed interest in the idea that prophecy involved interpretation of the biblical text was a theological one. 'How', St Paul writes, 'shall they believe in him of whom the have not heard, and how shall they hear without a preacher?' (Rom 10.14, KJV). Writing at a time in which the most effective means of mass communication was the spoken word, it is hardly surprising that Paul emphasises the necessity of *hearing* Christ preached in order to be saved. Yet the very fact that we are able to cite Paul's words suggests that there was, even then, another means of preaching Christ. Although writing retained an oral element long after Romans was written, the preacher remains the author of the written text rather than the person who read out the letter. As such the emphasis in Romans 10.14 is

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[8] See G. Sujin Pak, *The Reformation of Prophecy: Early Modern Interpretations of the Prophet & Old Testament Prophecy* (New York: OUP, 2018), pp.105-168.

less on the necessity of hearing and more on the necessity of having preachers who can proclaim Christ to each successive generation of Christians.

When humanist scholars began to investigate the Greek and Hebrew texts that lay behind the Vulgate, they began to undermine the medieval four-fold (or sometimes three-fold) levels of interpretation. The interest which these scholars showed in the texts they were handling led them to place an ever-greater emphasis on the literal level of meaning. Although the literal level had always been understood to be the foundational level of meaning, the attention it gained in humanist scholarship raised it to a height which it had never before reached. This unprecedented interest in the literal level was adopted by the reformers as the basis of their doctrine of *sola scriptura*. Indeed, one could argue that it was the humanist interest in the literal level which opened the way for the reformers to denigrate and sometimes openly rejected the higher, spiritual levels of interpretation. From the very earliest days of Christianity a hermeneutical framework was needed by means of which the spiritual levels of meaning could be correctly discerned and adjudicated. For the medieval Church, this framework was the *regula fidei*, an oral tradition begun by Christ and passed on to his apostles and through them to the subsequent leaders of the Church. As such, the key to the correct interpretation of the Bible lay in the hands of the Church, as it was only by applying the *regula fidei* that could result in the true exposition of God's Word. Without the rule, it would be possible to force any desired meaning onto the biblical text through the use of spiritual interpretation.

By placing the emphasis firmly on the literal level of interpretation, the reformers were able to remove the need for the *regula fidei* as the literal level was simple and could be interpreted by all without the need for an external aid as the internal testimony of the Spirit would provide all the help necessary. This removal of the *regula fidei* is often characterised as a preference for the written words of the Bible over oral tradition. However, not only does this contradict the high regard in which oral phenomena were held by the reformers, it also fails to observe that what was at issue was the correct hermeneutical framework to apply to the Bible, not the authority of the *regula fidei*.

For the reformers, the importance of proclaiming Christ rather than simply speaking about Christ was a direct result of the hermeneutical framework which they used to interpret the Bible. The rejection of the *regula fidei* and its replacement with *sola scriptura* was not a spurning of the oral in favour of the written (the reformers were certainly not averse to orality), but a denial of the utility of an

external framework for the correct interpretation of the Bible. To borrow a term from Calvin, the Bible was αὐτόπιστος; it did not need anything else to make it or its interpretation truthful and trustworthy (other than faith, that is, which was something that only God could supply). The truthfulness and trustworthiness of the Bible was indicated to each believer by means of the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit, testified to those who encountered the biblical text the texts authority and also its correct interpretation. Therefore, nothing was needed to interpret the Bible but the Bible itself and the ministrations of the Spirit on a person's soul. If the Bible were the key to interpreting itself, then the question that the reformers needed to answer was what was the Bible about. The answer was emphatic: the Bible was about the revelation of Christ. As a result, the only hermeneutical framework necessary to understand the Bible was a knowledge of Christ. If an interpretation of the Bible revealed Christ then it was correct; if not, then however much it might agree with the *regula fidei* or the desires of church and state, it was heretical.

However, not satisfied with understanding the entire Bible to be a revelation of Christ, the reformers also understood the Bible to be a paradigm for God's contemporary actions in relation to his people. As a result, they understood typological interpretation to be part of the literal level. This belief meant that simply using Christ to interpret the Bible was not enough. Using Christ to interpret the Bible resulted in the dead Word of God, because it only revealed how and in what circumstances that Word had been revealed in the past. In order for the living Word of God to be revealed, it was necessary to interpret the text typologically and relate the Bible to the present day.

The centrality of the application of Christ to the vitality of the Word of God arose as a direct result of the hermeneutical framework which the reformers used to interpret the Bible. Drawing on the work of their humanist predecessors, the reformers emphasised the literal level of meaning to the detriment, if not total exclusion, of the higher, spiritual levels which had gained so much attention from medieval theologians. The interest which humanist scholars showed in the texts they were handling, combined with the exegetical techniques they used on non-biblical texts, led them to place an ever-greater emphasis on the literal level of meaning. This interest in the literal level was then taken up by the reformers, who argued that it was in the literal level, comprising as it does the grammatical basis and historical context for the content of the Bible, that the preaching of Christ was to be found.

However, for Luther and his fellow reformers, a mere knowledge of the words of the biblical text was not enough to ensure salvation. Important though a familiarity with the biblical text was as a preparatory step to encountering God's living Word, an ability to reiterate the contents of the Bible without understanding it and its relation to the lives of the faithful in the present generation of God's people was not sufficient for salvation. As a result, whilst the literal level of interpretation, when confined to the historical and/or grammatical, resulted in an exposure to the Word of God, this Word occurred in a fossilised, non-efficacious form as it served as a record of how Christ had been preached, and the living Word experienced in the past, but it did not preach Christ or allow the Word to live in the present.[9]

The concept of application is important as it occurs repeatedly in the reformers' discourses on sermons. The fact that sermons were valued precisely because they contained the living Word is one of the reasons why scholars have understood orality to be an important, if not fundamental, part of what allows the Word to live. However, it is the application of the Word of God which the reformers themselves understand to be the source of animation, not the medium in which that application is conveyed.[10]

For Luther, it was not the orality of preaching which was significant, but the aspect of preaching which relates Christ to the contemporary experiences of the current generation of God's people and so allows the Word of God to live and act upon the hearers. Consequently, in an age in which texts were becoming an increasingly important method of communication (rather than simply serving as a written record of events, which was Luther's primary objection to writing,[11] there is no reason why written texts could not also fulfil this role. If the Word of God is spoken in the present day, and Luther certainly believed it was,[12] then it is possible that it could occur in written as well as oral form.[13]

According to Luther, the Word of God was Christ preached.[14] As such, any text which contains Christ preached is scripture,[15] and the Bible is the primary and most

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[9] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann, 55 vols (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957-1986), XIV (1958), 98-99.

[10] Luther, *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe: Briefwechsel*, 18 vols (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1930-1985), XI, 17-31.

[11] Luther, *Luther's Works*, XXX, 18; XXXV, 362.

[12] Luther, *Luther's Works*, IV, 362. Cf. II, 271-272; V, 71.

[13] John Whitgift, *The Works of John Whitgift*, ed. John Ayre (Cambridge: CUP, 1851-1853), III (1853), 40-43.

[14] Luther, *Luther's Works*, XXXV, 396.

[15] Luther, *Luther's Works*, XXXV, 396.

authoritative collection of scriptural texts, but by no means the only one.[16] In an age in which texts were becoming an increasingly important method of communication (rather than simply serving as a written record of events, which was Luther's primary objection to writing,[17] there is no reason why written texts could not also preach Christ in the present as well as serve as a record for how Christ had been preached in the past. If the Word of God is spoken in the present day, and Luther certainly believed it was,[18] then it is possible that it could occur in written as well as in oral form.[19]

In order for the Word to be preached truly in the present day it was necessary to do more than simply repeat the words of the biblical text. Instead, a proclamation of the living Word required the application of the biblical narratives to the circumstances and events that were occurring in the present day. The role of the preacher (and prophet) was to interpret correctly the biblical text so that the typological parallels between the past and the present would be made clear to the less discerning reader. The living Word was the applied word, not the word of the biblical text itself. However, the thing that gave the Word its animation was not its orality but its applicability. Therefore, it was also possible for texts to convey the living Word. Any text that mediated between the biblical text and a present-day reader by proffering them an interpretation of the biblical story which applied it to contemporary circumstances contained the living Word. Therefore, just as prophets in biblical times had been tasked with serving as God's mouthpiece on earth and proclaiming his Word to his people, so sixteenth century prophets were required to proclaim God's living word. The only difference in the two prophetic tasks was that whereas the biblical prophets were offered fresh, new divine revelation to convey to God's people, sixteenth century prophets were entrusted with the task of correctly interpreting existing revelation and applying it to the present day.

Calvin and Prophecy

Like Luther, Calvin's belief in the importance of contemporary prophecy lay in his ability to see biblical events as ante-types for contemporary happenings. In the Bible God's chosen people are repeatedly chastised for their idolatry by means of

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[16] Luther, *Luther's Works*, XXXV, 232, 339, 550. Cf. XXXIII,.110; XXXV, 409.
[17] Luther, *Luther's Works*, XXX, 18; XXXV, 362.
[18] Luther, *Luther's Works*, IV, 362. Cf. II, 271-272; V, 71.
[19] Whitgift, *The Works of John Whitgift*, III, 40-43.

persecution and exile (Exod. 32; Jer. 20-22; Dan. 1). In the sixteenth century, Protestants had no difficult in regarding themselves as exiles being punished by heathen rulers for their faith. The migration of English Protestants during the reign of Mary I and Calvin's own flight from France are but two examples of Protestants reading themselves into biblical ante-types. As was the case in the Bible, these later generations of exiles had to fight to defend their allegiance to God despite the hostile religious and secular authorities under which they found themselves. Yet, as in biblical times, God's people were not left to do this on their own. God raised up prophets to succour the faithful and punish the reprobate in the sixteenth century just as he had done in biblical times.[20] The work of the prophets remained the same. They were required to interpret the law and apply it to the people and situations in which they found themselves in order to lead as many of God's people as possible into his salvation.

In the preface to his commentary on Isaiah, Calvin defines the duty of a prophet in the following way. A prophet is someone 'who conveyed the doctrine of the Law in such a manner as to draw from it advices, reproofs, threatenings, and consolations, which they applied to the present condition of the people'. In other words, a prophet is someone who mediates between the Bible and the present generation of God's people by interpreting the biblical text in a way that applies it to current events. That this prophetic act is based upon interpretation rather than new revelation is made clear when Calvin says that 'although we do not daily receive a revelation of what we are to utter as a prediction, yet it is of high importance to us to compare the behaviour of the men of our own age with the behaviour of that ancient people; and from their histories and examples we ought to make known the judgments of God; such as, that what he formerly punished he will also punish with equal severity in our own day'.[21]

For Calvin, prophecy in this sense was an integral part of the duties of the pastor.[22] Contemporary pastors, like the biblical prophets, were called to preach God's Word, to reform God's people, and to turn them away from idolatry. This was achieved, according to Calvin, through the correct interpretation of God's Word, which

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[20] This is a favourite point of Calvin's. See his comments on Is. 1.30; 2.8; 16.12; 19.1; 20.2; 37.35; 45.20; 57.1-4 in John Calvin, *Opera Omnia*, XXXVI, 57, 69-70, 309-310, 328-329, 351-353, 639-641; XXXVII, 146-147, 305-308.

[21] Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Isaiah*, trans. William Pringle, 3 vols (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society 1850-1853), I (1850), xxx.

[22] Pak, *The Reformation of Prophecy*, pp.149-168. Cf. Jon Balserak, *John Calvin as Sixteenth-Century Prophet* (New York: OUP, 2014), pp.66-100 (n.b. pp.76-79).

formed the primary task of prophets past and present. In the dedicatory epistle to King Gustavus which precedes his commentary on the twelve minor prophets, Calvin states that:

> If God has endued me with any aptness for the interpretation of Scripture, I am fully persuaded that I have faithfully and carefully endeavoured to exclude from it all barren refinements, however plausible and fitted to please the ear, and to preserve genuine simplicity, adapted solidly to edify the children of God, who, being not content with the shell, wish to penetrate to the kernel.[23]

From this we can deduce several key points. Firstly, like the gift of predictive prophecy, interpretative prophecy is bestowed upon a person by God. Although a person can improve and perfect their skill, the original ability is given to them by God rather than something they can develop on their own. Secondly, the prophet's task is not to mollycoddle listeners by providing them with comfortable and easily acceptable interpretations of the biblical text, but to offer up the inhospitable and unpalatable truth. By doing so, the prophet is fulfilling their obligation to rebuke the reprobate and lead the elect into salvation by warning them of the dire consequences of their actions and the vengeance which God will take. Thirdly, it is necessary for the prophet to prophesy in such a way that their audience is edified by listening to them. If they present their interpretation, however correct it may be, in a manner that leaves their auditors confused and unable to understand, then the prophet has failed in their prophetic task. Finally, a prophet is required to break open the shell of the biblical text in order to enable those not strong enough to do so themselves to gain the benefit of the fruit within. They must mediate between the hard and bitter exterior of the biblical text so that the less competent interpreters might also taste the delights of understanding it by offering them an interpretation in a way that is intelligible to them.[24]

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[23] Calvin, *Commentaries on the Twelve Minor Prophets*, trans. John Owen, 5 vols (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1846-1849), I (1846), xix. Cf. Calvin, *Opera Omnia*, XLII, 198.

[24] This point is also made in his commentary on Jer 9.13-14 when he states that '[w]hen, therefore, Moses is quoted, and the prophets are added as interpreters, there is no ground for us to evade, or to make the excuse, that the truth is too hidden or profound'. As Calvin himself explains, the prophets (biblical and contemporary) have been provided so that the impenetrable parts of the biblical text can be understood by even the simplest of God's people. Consequently, no one can make the excuse that the Bible is too difficult to understand and so they have broken God's law in ignorance because the primary duty of a prophet is to interpret the law for each generation of God's people. As long as there are prophets, ignorance can never be an excuse for sin. Calvin, *Commentaries on the Prophet Jeremiah*, trans. by John Owen (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1850), I, 482. Cf. Calvin, *Com. Jer.* on 9.13-14 in *Opera Omnia*, XXXVIII, 41. Likewise, in the commentary on Zechariah 7.11-12 Calvin argues that 'as men for the most seek to extenuate their sings by the plea, that they had not been clearly or seasonably taught, the Prophet declares that there was not any excuse of this kind.' Calvin, *Commentaries on the Twelve Minor Prophets* V, 181. Cf. Calvin, *Com. Zech.* on 7.11-12 in *Opera Omnia*, XLIV, 228.

Calvin then goes on to say that although

> these Commentaries may not, perhaps, answer the wishes and expectations of all; and I myself could have wished that I had been able to give something more excellent and more perfect, or at least what would have come nearer to the Prophetic Spirit. But this, I trust, will be the issue, - that experience will prove to upright and impartial readers, and those endued with sound judgment, provided they read with well-disposed minds, and not fastidiously, what I have written for their benefit, that more light has been thrown on the Twelve Prophets than modesty will allow me to affirm.[25]

These comments add some significant nuances to the description of prophecy given above. As was the case with the biblical prophets, the aim of prophecy is to enlighten, but only those who approach it in the correct manner and with the correct intentions will benefit from it. There will be some who hear Calvin's prophecy and reject it as incompetent and unsatisfactory. This rejection is part of the prophet's lot and is only to be expected. The reprobate have not been given the ability to appreciate the prophetic message and so, of necessity, scorn what they are unable to understand. More importantly, Calvin acknowledges a distance between himself and the 'Prophetic Spirit'. Just as the late antique authors lower down the apostolic chain of succession recognised that their apostolicity was not of the same quality as that of their apostolic forebears, so Calvin admits that although he is prophesying in the same way as the biblical prophets, he is not doing so with the same amount of 'Prophetic Spirit' as inhabited the biblical prophets.[26] The original biblical authors are distinct from all later authors because of the extent with which they were filled with the Holy Spirit. Although their authorial authority filters down through the generations and is still accessible to later authors, it is only present in a diluted form. As a result, their prophetic utterances occur at a greater distance from the 'Prophetic Spirit' than those of their biblical predecessors.

Despite the distance between later prophets and the 'Prophetic Spirit', it remains true that God speaks through the prophets so that his people may hear his Word. As Calvin remarks in his commentary on Zechariah,

> [b]y saying that God spoke by his Prophets, he [Zechariah] meets an objection by which hypocrites are wont to cover themselves, when they reject the truth. For they object and say, that they would be willingly submissive to God, but that they cannot bear the authority of men, as though God's word changed its

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[25] Calvin, *Commentaries on the Twelve Minor Prophets*, I, xix.

[26] Nevertheless, Calvin does appear to suggest that, were God to so desire, it would be possible for someone in these latter days to speak with exactly the same level of authority as the biblical prophets. But as God does not desire this, prophecy in these latter times occurs at a subordinate level.

nature by coming through the mouth of man. But as hypocrites and profane men are wont to lessen the authority of the word, the Prophet here shows, having the pretext in view, that God designed to be heard, though he employed ministers. Hence by this kind of concession it is implied, that Prophets are middle persons, and yet that God so speaks by their mouth.[27]

And just as Zechariah was a prophet and so God's minister, so too is Calvin and all those who minister in later times by fulfilling the prophetic role of acting as God's mouthpiece on earth by mediating between the law and the people so that they have no excuse for not understanding God's Word but their own wilful ignorance.

The most detailed explanation of Calvin's belief in the continuing office of, and the continuing need for, prophets is found in his commentary on Malachi 4.4.

> [The prophetic office must] not be separated from the law, for all the prophecies which followed the law were as it were its appendages; so that they included nothing new, but were given that the people might be more fully retained in their obedience to the law. Hence as the Prophets were the interpreters of Moses, it is no wonder that their doctrine was subjected, or as they commonly say, subordinated to the law. The object of the Prophet [Malachi] was to make the Jews attentive to that doctrine which had been delivered to them from above by Moses and the Prophets, so as not to depart from it even in the least degree.[28]

Therefore, as long as the law (in this case the entire Bible) exists, so too will there be prophets, as it is necessary for God to keep interpreting his Word for each generation of his people.

As a result of his belief in the parallel vocations of biblical prophets and present day pastors, Calvin shaped his own life and ministry according to the prophetic model. Of the various duties that this entailed (rebuking authorities, chastising the reprobate, nourishing the faithful), the most important was that of acting as God's mouthpiece on earth. In order to achieve this, it was necessary for Calvin to mediate between the Bible and the present generation of God's people by correctly interpreting the biblical text and applying it to the present day. Through the sublimation of his own life and ministry to that of the prophetic model, Calvin was able to identify himself as a prophet, claiming the same divine authority for his work and ministry as that of his biblical forebears.[29] But Calvin did not believe that

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[27] Calvin, *Commentaries on the Twelve Minor Prophets* V, 183. Cf. Calvin, *Com. Zech.* on 7.11-12 in *Opera Omnia*, XLIV, 228.

[28] Calvin, *Commentaries on the Twelve Minor Prophets* V, 624-625. Cf. Calvin, *Com. Mal.* on 4.4 in *Opera Omnia*, XLIV, 493.

[29] This latter point is made most pointedly in sermons on 1 Tim 4.1-2, and Dan 5. *Opera Omnia*, LIII, 251; XLI, 335. See also Calvin, *Com. Amos* on 7.10-13, in *Opera Omnia*, XLIII, 131-132; *Com. Mic.* on

contemporary prophecy was his duty alone. He believed that all of God's ministers were called to be prophets. Therefore, it was necessary to find a way to educate these prophets so that they could preach the Word of God and so fulfil their prophetic identity.

Prophesying in England

The Protestant emphasis on interpretation as prophecy was to find its fulfilment in the prophetic schools established in Wittenberg, Strasbourg, Geneva, and most notably Zurich.[30] The Zurich order of 'Prophezei' was established in order to limit the title of 'prophet' to those ministers who were able to read Hebrew and Greek, and who had been taught how to interpret the Bible correctly. As Zwingli himself explains:

> [The office of prophet] in the large churches is to interpret the meaning of Scripture, foremost the Old Testament, whenever people gather to study Scripture. This calling is not too common as yet, but should, God willing, begin with us here in Zurich in the not too distant future. [...] one cannot be a prophet [...] unless he is able to interpret the languages.[31]

3.11-12, in *Opera Omnia*, XLIII, 333-334. For a detailed discussion of the way in which Calvin's ministry paralleled that of the biblical prophets and how this allowed Calvin to appropriate a prophetic identity see Balserak, *Calvin as Prophet*, pp.80-100. An interesting comparison can here be made with the role of prophecy in the Scottish Reformation. In Scotland, revelatory prophecy was far more widely accepted than in other Reformed territories with John Knox having a particularly influential reputation as a prophet gifted with divine foreknowledge. A useful introduction to the subject can be found in Dale Johnson, 'Serving two masters: John Knox, Scripture and prophecy', in *Religion and Superstition in Reformation Europe,* ed. Helen Parish and William Naphy (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), pp.135-142. Cf. Alec Ryrie, 'Hearing God's Voice in the English and Scottish Reformations', *Reformation*, 17 (2012), 49-74.

[30] There has been a great deal of interest in prophecy, prophetic identity, and interpretation as the new prophetic mode in recent decades. Notably discussions include: Pak, 'Three Early Female Protestant Reformers' Appropriation of Prophecy as Interpretation of Scripture', *Church History*, 84.1 (2015), 90-123; Erik de Boer, *The Genevan School of the Prophets: The congregations of the Company of Pastors and their Influence in 16th Century Europe* (Geneva: Librarie Droz, 2012); Peter Opitz, 'Von prophetischer Existenz zur Prophetie als Pädagogik: Zu Bullingers Lehre vom munus propheticum,' in *Heinrich Bullinger: Life-Thought-Influence*, ed. Emidio Campi and Peter Opitz (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag Zurich, 2007), II, 493-513; Rodney L. Petersen, 'Bullinger's Prophets of the "Restitutio"', in *Biblical Hermeneutics in Historical Perspective: Studies in Honor of Karlfried Froehlich on his Sixtieth Birthday*, ed. Mark S. Burrows and Paul Rorem (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1991), pp.245-260. For detailed discussions of the Prophezei see Pak, *The Reformation of Prophecy*, pp.114-116, Robert Bast, 'Constructing Protestant Identity: The Pastor as Prophet in Reformation Zurich', in *Frömmigkeit, Theologie, Frömmigkeitstheologie: Contributions to European Church History. Festschrift für Berndt Hamm zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. Gudrun Litz, Heidrun Munzert and Roland Liebenberg (Leiden: Brill, 2005), pp.351-362 (pp.358-359).

[31] Huldrych Zwingli, *The Preaching Office*, in *Huldrych Zwingli Writings*, trans. and ed. Edward J. Furcha and H. Wayne Pipkin (Allison Park: Pickwick Publications, 1984), II, 147-185 (p.158). Zwingli makes a similar remark in his commentary on 1 Corinthians, when he states that prophets are people 'who are most skilled in languages' and so can 'open up the sense of the Scriptures before the church'. Zwingli, *In Priorem ad Corinthios Annotationes*, ed. Melchiore Schulero and Io. Schulthessio (Turici: Ex officina Schulthessiana, 1838), II, 177.

Zwingli here makes two important points. Firstly, prophecy in the Early Modern world does not revolve around pronouncing new revelations from God. Instead, it is focussed on interpreting those revelations which have already been received and which are recorded in the Bible. Secondly, in order to become a prophet, it is necessary not only to interpret the text but to do it correctly. This requires both training in the art of biblical interpretation and competency in the biblical languages of Hebrew and Greek.

In England, the situation was similar. Although it was acknowledged that God could use prophets to make known new information if he so desired, this was not the primary function or duty of the prophet in the present age.[32] Instead, prophets were intended to interpret the Bible for the common people, and in order to prepare themselves for this ministry, many ministers gathered together to hold prophesying meetings. These meetings gained widespread support from senior clergy in the Church of England, including Edmund Grindal (Archbishop of Canterbury from 1576-1583). As one early biography explains, Grindal

> well perceived the ignorance of the clergy, and the great need there was of more frequent preaching for the instruction of the people in the grounds of truth and religion. In order to which he encouraged a practice that was taken up in divers places of the nation, and particularly in Northamptonshire, and allowed by many bishops in their dioceses: the manner whereof was, that the ministers of such a division, at a set time, met together in some church belonging to a market or other large town; and there each in their order explained, according to their ability, some particular portion of scripture allotted them before. And after all of them had done, a moderator, who was one of the gravest and best learned among them, made his observations upon what the rest had said, and

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[32] For example: 'It is possible that God may make new revelations to particular persons about their particular duties, events, or matters of fact, in subordination to the Scripture, either by inspiration, vision, or apparition, or voice; for he hath not told us that he will never do such a thing.' Richard Baxter, *The Practical Works of Richard Baxter: with a Life of the Author and a Critical Examination of his Writings by William Orme*, 10 vols (London: J. Duncan, 1830) V, 556. Probably the most brazen self-identification as a prophet in the revelatory mode is the following paragraph by John Knox. 'For considering myselfe rather cald of my God to instruct the ignorant, comfort the sorrowfull, confirme the weake, and rebuke the proud by tong and liuelye voyce in these most corrupt dayes, thā to compose bokes for the age to come, seeing that so much is written (and that by men of most singuler cōdition) and yet so little well obserued: I decreed to containe myselfe within the bondes of that vocation, wherevnto I founde myselfe especially called. I dare not denie (lest that in so doing I should be iniurious to the giuer) but that God hath reuealed vnto me secretes vnknowen to the worlde, and also that hehath made my tong a trumpet to forwarne realmes and nations, yea certain great personages, of mutations and chaunges, when no such thinges were feared, nor yet was appearing, a portion wherof cannot the world denie (be it neuer so blind) to be fulfilled'. John Knox, *The Works of John Knox*, ed. David Laing, 6 vols (Edinburgh: James Thin, 1864), VI, 229.

determined the true sense of the place. [...] And these were commonly called *exercises* or *prophesyings*.[33]

As a result of these meetings,

> ministers and curates were forced to read authors, and consult expositors and commentators, and to follow their studies, that they might speak to purpose when they were to appear in public: and hereby they considerably profited themselves in the knowledge of the scripture.[34]

Although he is not using the term in the same specific sense as Grindal, the necessity of prophesying for good preaching is nevertheless emphasised in the title of William Perkins' treatise on the art of preaching. Entitled *The arte of prophecying, or, A treatise concerning the sacred and onely true manner and methode of preaching*, Perkins' work explores the connection between prophesying and preaching in great detail and at great length. He opens with an introductory epistle to the 'faithfull ministers of the Gospell' which begins as follows:

> That common place of diuinitie, which concerneth the framing of Sermons, is both weightie and difficult [...] For the matter, which it is to explicate and treate on, is *Prophecie*; an excellent gift indeede.[35]

He then explains that:

> The Arte or facultie of *Prophecying* is a sacred doctrine of exercising *Prophecie* rightly. Prophecie (or Proophecying) is a publique and solemne speech of the Prophet, pertaining to the worship of God, and to the saluation of our neighbour.[36]

When a prophet preaches, they speak with 'the voyce of God'.[37] In order to prepare themselves for this great honour it is necessary to prepare oneself to preaching using the following method.

> First, diligently imprint both in thy mind and memory the substance of Diuinitie described with definitions, diuisions, and explications of the properties. Secondly, proceede to the reading of the Scriptures in this order. Vsing a grammaticall, rheotircall, and logicall analysis, and the helpe of the rest of the

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[33] Edmund Grindal, *The Remains of Edmund Grindal, D.D., Successively Bishop of London, and Archbishop of York and Canterbury*, ed. William Nicholson (Cambridge: CUP, 1843), p.372. The excerpt is taken from John Strype, *The History of the Life and Acts of the Most Reverend Father in God, Edmund Grindal* (London, 1710), pp.325ff.

[34] Grindal, *The Remains of Edmund Grindal*, pp.372-373. Cf. John Parkhurst, *The Letter Book of John Parkhurst, Bishop of Norwich, Compiled During the Years 1571-5*, ed. R. A. Houlbrooke (Norfolk Record Society, 1975), pp.46-47, 242.

[35] William Perkins, *The arte of prophecying, or, A treatise concerning the sacred and onely true manner and methode of preaching*, trans. Thomas Tuke (London: Felix Kyngston, 1607), sig. A4r.

[36] Perkins, *The arte of prophecying*, p.1.

[37] Perkins, *The arte of prophecying*, p.3.

arts [...] Thirdly, out of orthodoxall writings, we must get aid not onely from the latter, but also from the more ancient Church.[38]

According to this method, the first step in becoming a good preacher and so a prophetic instrument through which God can speak is a thorough grounding in the nature and content of the biblical books. Next, it is necessary to analyse the text for oneself from a linguistic perspective. Finally, one should turn to the commentaries of learned theologians past and present in order to ensure that one's own interpretation is correct and not heretical. The emphasis here is very much on the skilled interpretation of the text in such a way that it conforms with previous interpretations. The aim of prophecy in this context is not to say something new, but to interpret the Bible according to orthodox principles in order to convey this interpretation to one's auditors in order to lead them to their salvation.

In order to prevent the heretical (and even lay) appropriation of the sacred office of prophet, Edmund Grindal brought in certain measures that were designed to control the prophesyings and ensure that they served their intended purpose. In his *Orders for reformation of abuses about the learned exercises and conferences amongst the ministers of the church* Grindal states that prophesyings can only take place with the diocesan bishop's explicit permission, and only then if an archdeacon or 'some one other grave learned graduate' be present to moderate the sessions. Furthermore, only those ministers 'which are known to be able to speak aptly, and to the profit and edifying of the hearers' will be permitted to speak, and 'no lay person [will] be suffered to speak publicly'.[39]

The measures which Grindal put in place were never given a chance to make the prophesyings a success. On 8 May 1577, Queen Elizabeth wrote a letter to the bishops 'for the purpose of suppressing the exercise called prophesying'. In her letter Elizabeth describes the prophesyings as 'unlawful assemblies of a great number of our people out of their ordinary parishes, and from place far distant [... who gather in order] to be hearers of their disputations, and new devised opinions, upon points of divinity, far and unmeet of unlearned people; which manner of invasions they in some places term *prophesyings*'. The hearers are 'schismatically divided among themselves into [a] variety of dangerous opinions [...] and manifestly thereby encouraged to the violation of our laws, and to the breach of common order, and finally to the offence of all our quiet subjects, the desire to serve God

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[38] Perkins, *The arte of prophecying*, p.27.
[39] Grindal, *The Remains of Edmund Grindal*, p.374.

according to the uniform orders established in the church.'[40] Elizabeth's concern is primarily to do with the order and good governance of her realm rather than the orthodoxy of her people. Nevertheless, it is orthodoxy that is seen to be the key for that stability, and the proclamations of false prophets prove as much of a risk to Elizabeth as they had done to the kings and rulers of ancient Israel.

Despite the failure of the prophesyings, their institution and continuing popularity amongst the ministers of the Church of England despite the problems they caused demonstrates how uncontroversial the definition of prophecy as interpretation was in Reformation England. Prophets were ministers skilled in biblical interpretation. They were people who were able to read and analyse the biblical text and interpret it in orthodox ways. Moreover, they were then skilled enough to proclaim the fruits of their labour to those not skilled in the prophetic task. By means of sermons, prophets were able to preach the Gospel in such a way that the biblical text was conveyed to the people in terms that they could understand. The prophetic task was a mediatorial one. It took the undiluted doctrine of the biblical text and translated it into a language and medium which enabled it to serve as the 'instrument of the salvation of mankind'.[41]

Prophecy in (Post-)Reformation England

By far the most prominent examples of interpretation as prophecy in Reformation England are to be found in those texts that make use of the genre of the exegetical paraphrase. After the English Bible and the *Book of Common Prayer*, two of the most widely disseminated books in Elizabethan England were the *Paraphrases* of Erasmus and the *Whole Booke of Psalmes*. Both of these texts make use of the exegetical paraphrase in order to allow biblical authors to continue to speak in the present day and to address the situations and concerns of the average English, Elizabethan reader.[42] Their mediatorial role is very similar to that of Proba's *Cento Vergilianus* and Milton's *Paradise Lost*. However, whereas the epics are intended to re-narrate a biblical story in such a way that the later plot expands upon the earlier, the

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[40] Grindal, *The Remains of Edmund Grindal*, p.467.

[41] Grindal, *The Remains of Edmund Grindal*, p.379.

[42] Note that the term 'paraphrase' in Reformation England did not denote a loose translation as it does today. Instead, it indicated a type of commentary in which the commentary and the text were so closely intertwined that they could not be easily distinguished (either visually or by means of the content). The precise definition of the term will be discussed in more detail in the following paragraphs.

paraphrases are interested in expanding on the biblical text without offering an alternative narration.

Erasmus' *Paraphrases* were first translated into English during the reign of Edward VI. In 1548 the London printer Edward Whitchurch published *The first tome of volume of the Paraphrase of Erasmus upon the newe testamante*. This contained Erasmus' paraphrases on the four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles. The following year, a second volume was published containing a translation of Erasmus' paraphrases on the remaining New Testament texts.[43] However, despite not being translated into English until 1548, the Royal Injunctions of 1547 had stated that in every parish church in England a copy of Erasmus' *Paraphrases* in English must be 'se up in some convenient place [... so that] the parishioners may most commodiously resort unto the same and read the same'.[44] This is significant for several reasons. Firstly, the *Paraphrases* were felt to be so important for English Protestantism that it became a legal requirement for each parish church to possess an English translation of the paraphrases *before* any such translation had been published.[45] Secondly, the Injunctions ensured both the widespread dissemination of Erasmus' *Paraphrase*, and their accessibility to any parishioner able to read. Although we are unable to determine how widely the *Paraphrases* were used by parishioners, or even how it was intended to be used (the Injunctions state simply that every church must own a copy without specifying the purpose of this purchase), surviving parish and diocesan records provide us with an ample indication of their availability in the greater proportion of English churches.[46] Perhaps most importantly, the 23rd article of the Royal Injunctions of 1547 orders that an English Bible be placed in every parish church and made available to any person who cared to peruse it.[47] The fact that the requirement to place the *Paraphrases* in every parish church is found alongside the obligation for each parish to provide a copy of the Bible in English offers an indication of the high status of the *Paraphrases* and their importance as an

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[43] Erasmus, *The seconde tome or volume of the paraphrase of Erasmus vpon the newe testament* (London: Edward Whitchurch, 1549).

[44] Article 23. *Tudor Royal Proclamations*, ed. Paul L. Hughes and James Francis Larkin, 3 vols (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964-1969), I (1964), 395.

[45] For more detailed discussions of this issue see: Gregory D. Dodd, *Exploiting Erasmus: The Erasmian Legacy and Religious Change in Early Modern England* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009); John Craig, 'Forming a Protestant Consciousness? Erasmus' *Paraphrases* in English Parishes, 1547-1666', in *Holy Scripture Speaks*, pp.313-360.

[46] See E. J. Devereux, 'Sixteenth-Century Translations of Erasmus' New Testament Commentaries in English', in *New Testament Scholarship: Paraphrases on Romans and Galatians*, ed. Robert D. Sider (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), xxx-xxxiv (xxxiv)

[47] This was repeated in the Royal Injunctions that followed Elizabeth's accession to the throne in 1559. See Article 6 in *Tudor Royal Proclamations,* II, 119.

accompaniment to the biblical text. As was the case with biblical epics, the *Paraphrases* serve as a mediator between the biblical text and its readers by inhabiting a peripheral scriptural location.

In order to discern how exegetical paraphrases presented themselves as prophetic interpretation, it is first necessary to understand precisely what was meant by the term 'paraphrase'. In the dedicatory epistle to his *Paraphrase on the Gospel of Matthew*, Erasmus states that a paraphrase is a subgenre of commentary (paraphrasis commentarii genus est).[48] For Erasmus, a paraphrase was an interpretational genre. It was similar to a commentary, but it contained a number of features which distinguished it from this more widely accepted genre. These features are explained in more detail in a letter from Erasmus to the Spanish philosopher and theologian Louis Coronel dated 21 April 1522. In this letter Erasmus states that '[e] st enim paraphrasis non translatio, sed liberius quoddam commentarii perpetui genus, non commutatis personis').[49] In expanding on his earlier definition of a paraphrase as a kind of commentary, Erasmus declares that a paraphrase is not a translation but a subgenre of commentary in which the text and its interpretation transition seamlessly from one to the other.[50]

For example, the opening lines of Erasmus' version of the Lord's Prayer reads as follows:[51]

<u>paraphrase</u>

And the maner of prayer is after this sorte.
Our father which hast regenerat vs to heauē, who were once vnluckely borne of Adā, + hast prepared for vs (forsakinge erthly thinges) a kindom + inheritāce euerlasting:
which arte sayde to be in heauen because thou dost replenishe all, and hast no maner of drosse or erthly infirmittie:
graunte that thy name may be honorable and gloriouse amonge men thorough vs, whiche by thy benefit, be perfect and pure.

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[48] Erasmus, *Paraphrases in Euangelium Matthei* (Strasbourg: Johan Knobloch 1523), sig. A2r-A3v.
[49] Erasmus, Epistle 1274, lines 38-39.
[50] See also: Erasmus, *Responsio ad epistolam paraeneticam* (Basel, 1529), p.57; *Euangelium Matthei*, sig. D3r; Alberto Pio, *expostulationem responsio* (Paris: Josse Bade 1529), fo. 11v-12r.
[51] Erasmus, *The first tome or volume of the Paraphrase of Erasmus upon the newe testamente* (London: Edward Whitchurch, 1548), fo. 44v.

biblical text

After this maner therfore praye ye.
Our father whiche art in heauen,
halowed be thy name.

In this example, the biblical text is seamlessly interwoven with its interpretation, sometimes even forming part of the same sentence. Crucially, this transition is achieved 'non cummutatis personis'. In classical Latin, a 'persona' refers to the mask worn by actors on stage. In that case, the character speaking does not change, even though the individual through whom their voice is heard appears to be different. The concept here is similar to that of the role of the Spirit in the production of a biblical text. Each prophet is a different mask which the Spirit wears at different points in time. However, in the case of a paraphrase it is not just the Spirit who is wearing a mask but the Spirit-filled prophet, as it is the voice of the Spirit-filled prophet as well as the Spirit that continues to speak through the exegete in a paraphrase.[52] The interpretation of the biblical text which the paraphrast adds is simply what the biblical author would have said if they had had greater time when they (originally) wrote it.

Edwardian England witnessed the emergence of the exegetical paraphrase as an important scriptural genre. However, it was not until the reign of Elizabeth I that the genre became firmly established as an acceptable mode in which English Protestant authors could write. Like the *Paraphrases*, the *Whole Booke of Psalmes* saw an impressively wide dissemination in Reformation England.[53] Between its first publication in 1562 and the start of the seventeenth century, at least 108 editions had been published. By 1640, this number had risen to 482. According to Ian Green's estimation, this would have resulted in hundreds of thousands of copies of

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[52] Cf. R. A. B. Mynors' translation of the phrase in *The Correspondence of Erasmus: Letters 1252-1355 (1522-1523),* trans. R. A. B. Mynors (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1989), pp.61-64 (p.63). Mynors understands the use of 'persona' to imply that although the person using the mask may change, the mask itself remains the same. Hence his translation: 'for a paraphrase is not a translation but something looser, a kind of continuous commentary, in which the writer and his author retain separate roles'. However, as Erasmus explicitly defends his use of the voice of the biblical author in his response to Alberto Pio, Mynors' interpretation is contradicted by Erasmus himself. 'Sed offendit te persona, quam aliter in paraphrasi loquentē facio, q[ui] loquitur in ope refuo.' Erasmus, *Responsio*, p.60.

[53] The critical edition of the *Whole Booke of Psalmes* edited by Quitslund and Nicholas Temperley includes a detailed study of its publication history. *The Whole Booke of Psalmes Collected into English Metre by Thomas Sternhold, John Hopkins, and Others: A Critical Edition of the Texts and Tunes*, ed. Beth Quitslund and Nicholas Temperley, 2 vols (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2018). See also Beth Quitslund, *The Reformation in Rhyme: Sternhold, Hopkins and the English Metrical Psalter, 1547-1603* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2010).

the *Whole Booke of Psalmes* being in circulation.[54] Even for those unable either to afford a copy of their own or to read one if it were available, the musical nature of the *Whole Booke of Psalmes* enabled even the poorest and most illiterate members of society to become familiar with its texts.

That the *Whole Booke of Psalmes* was intended to accompany the biblical psalter is evidenced in a striking way by the format in which it was printed. The *Whole Booke of Psalmes* uses many of the prose arguments, marginal glosses, and verse numbers from the Geneva Bible. These features would give the *Whole Booke of Psalmes* the appearance of the biblical text. By imitating the most striking features of biblical printing practice, the *Whole Booke of Psalmes* was able to suggest to its readers that it should be interpreted as partaking in the same essence as the biblical text. To be more precise, the *Whole Booke of Psalmes* indicates its scriptural status by utilising formal features that had heretofore been limited to the printing of Bibles. More significantly, the two most popular editions of the *Whole Booke of Psalmes* were a two column, black letter quarto, and a two column, roman octavo. These specifications correspond to those of the best-selling editions of the Bible (first the Geneva Bible, then the King James Version), stand-alone New Testaments, and the *Book of Common Prayer*. Moreover, whenever a new size or form of one of these texts was published and sold well, a corresponding reprint of the *Whole Booke of Psalmes* according to the new specifications would take place.[55] From this evidence, it is clear that the *Whole Booke of Psalmes* was intended to look like and sit alongside the psalter as found in the Bible and the Prayer Book. In many cases (almost 60% of the copies in the Bodleian Library's collection, for example), the *Whole Booke of Psalmes* was even bound together with a Bible (or New Testament), Prayer Book, or both.[56]

By claiming the persona of a biblical author, the writers of exegetical paraphrases possessed a powerful means of prophecy. By taking on the identity of their biblical ante-type, paraphrasts were able to strengthen their own prophetic identity and so compose works which could identify themselves as continuations of the prophetic (and also apostolic) texts contained in the Bible. Although the appropriation of prophetic identity was available to any author who interpreted the Bible, the

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[54] These figures are taken from Ian Green, *Print and Protestantism in Early Modern England* (Oxford: OUP, 2000), p.509.

[55] Green, *Print and Protestantism*, pp.515-516.

[56] The figure comes from Ian Green's analysis of the Bodleian's 188 copies of the *Whole Booke of Psalmes* dating from 1566-1640. Green states that 30 of those 188 copies are bound with a Prayer Book, and at least 78 are bound with a Bible or New Testament. This means that 57.45% of the manuscripts in this sample were bound with either a Bible or a Prayer Book. Green, *Print and Protestantism*, p.516.

sublimation of later authorial identity to that of a biblical author allowed a text to be placed closer to the scriptural heartland. In the case of *Paradise Lost*, Milton himself does not claim to be speaking with a prophetic voice. However, the way in which he transitions seamlessly between the biblical text and its interpretation, presenting the exegesis in the same voice as the biblical narrative, bears a strong resemblance to the authorial task of the paraphrasts. As a result, Milton's work presents itself as a prophetic continuation of the Genesis text and tradition that deserves a place alongside its fellow scriptural texts near the biblical heartland.

That Milton saw his work as a scripturally authoritative companion to the biblical text is impossible to prove, and it is a thoroughly objectionable notion to most scholars. Nevertheless, there is a distinct possibility that this is the case. In *Paradise Lost* Milton frequently claims to have been writing under divine influence (*Paradise Lost*, 1.6-13, 17-25; 3.27-55; 7.1-31; 9.20-24). This in itself is not conclusive evidence, and could in fact be dismissed as merely conforming to the use of the epic genre and the classical claim to be inspired by the Muses. The significance of this divine inspiration is revealed when read in conjunction with Milton's theological treatise posthumously published under the title of *De doctrina christiana*. In this treatise Milton explains that '[u]nder the gospel we possess, as it were, a twofold Scripture; one external, which is the written word, and the other internal, which is the Holy Spirit, written in the hearts of believers, according to the promise of God, and with the intent that it should by no means be neglected' (*De doct. christ.* 1.30).[57] If, therefore, we possess a 'scripture' within us and choose to write it down then does not this inner scripture continue to be scriptural once it has been externalised? Milton himself does not address this issue. What Milton does discuss is the necessity of this inner 'scripture' for a pure and correct interpretation of the biblical text (*De doct. chris.* 1.30).[58] When taken together, these statements make a highly plausible

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[57] Milton's distinction between the 'dead letter' and the 'inner light' is paralleled in many of the more radical Protestant movements, including the Quakers. This understanding of the internal and external forms of scripture is based on the idea that 'scripture' is subjective and individual. It is therefore not entirely clear that objectifying the internal scripture by preserving it in writing would lead to the resultant text being recognised as scriptural by its later readers. However, the fact that Milton's work was very quickly became the subject of interpretative commentaries suggests that the authoritative status of *Paradise Lost* was recognised by its readers.

[58] 'Hence, although the external ground which we possess for our belief at the present day in the written word is highly important, and, in most instances at least, prior in point of reception, that which is internal, and the peculiar possession of each believer, is far superior to all [...] For the external Scripture, or written word, particularly of the New Testament [...] has been liable to frequent corruption, and in some instances has been corrupted, through the number and occasionally the bad faith of those by whom it has been handed down [...] It is difficult to conjecture the purpose of Providence in committing the writings of the New Testament to such uncertain and variable guardianship, unless it were to teach us by this very circumstance that the Spirit which is given to us

argument for the continuing scriptural authority of the externalised 'inner scripture' (designed as it was to mediate the biblical text to a new generation of readers in such a way that they could interpret it correctly) in Milton's thought.[59]

is a more certain guide than Scripture.' Milton, *A Treatise on Christian Doctrine, Compiled from the Holy Scriptures* Alone, trans. Charles R. Sumner (Cambridge: CUP, 1825), pp.476-477.

[59] Jeffrey Shoulson reaches a similar conclusion by different means. Shoulson's study of Milton's possible interactions with rabbinic texts leads him to argue that *Paradise Lost* is intended to function in the same way as the rabbinic midrash. After the widely recognised cessation of prophecy, and the subsequent closing of the biblical canon another method of experiencing God's continuing revelation was necessary (see Josephus, *C. Ap.* 1.8.38-41). For the rabbis, the interpretation and application of the biblical texts for use in the present day filled that gap. Both the midrash and *Paradise Lost*, Shoulson convincingly argues, are serving as stand-ins for further biblical texts which can no longer be revealed as God has ceased communicating with his people in that way and so the biblical canon has been closed. God's new method of communication is through the inspiring later authors to re-narrate the biblical narratives in relation to contemporary happenings. Shoulson, *Milton and the Rabbis: Hebraism, Hellenism, and Christianity* (New York: Columbia, 2001), pp.189-239. Cf. '*Paradise Lost* is a Scripture because Milton is an agent of the Word, creating by the word an explication of the Word, following his own dark path into himself and the world that he and we may emerge like Adam and Eve from the darkness, to find a new world and a new poem all before us.' If we ignore the flamboyant language of the literary scholarly and the emphasis on the Word rather than the Holy Spirit, Thomas Maresca's conclusion (based solely upon Milton's invocations of divine inspiration within *Paradise Lost*) also supports this position. Thomas E. Maresca, *Three English Epics: Studies of "Troilus and Criseyde", "The Faerie Queene", and "Paradise Lost"* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1979), p.142.

Conclusion

Biblical epics have been a stable and important part of Christian literary practice for over fifteen hundred years. From the earliest writings of Juvencus and Proba in the fourth century, through the anonymous Old English texts, to the efforts of Renaissance Humanists and later Protestant writers, biblical epics have maintained a continuous appeal and interest for Christian authors and readers alike. Yet the existence of these epics has often been treated as an ancillary phenomenon. Their existence has been understood to be of purely literary value, and their importance for the development of Christian doctrine, practice, and identity has been deemed to be minimal. However, within both early Jewish and early Christian studies there has been an increasing interest in the breadth and diversity of authoritative scripture before the closing of the canon.[1] Recent scholarship has also placed a greater emphasis on the role of interpretation as authoritative (prophetic) revelation.[2] This has resulted in a re-evaluation both of the way in which texts formerly labelled as 're-written Bible' are understood to relate to canonical texts, and of the status with which these texts were endowed in late antiquity.

My thesis contributes to these debates by challenging the idea that the multiplicity of scriptural texts was restricted by the formation of a Christian biblical canon. Instead, it suggests that the corpus of scriptural texts continued to expand after the closing of the canon. In the Early Church this scriptural writing was linked to the continuing presence of apostolic authority in later generations of Christians. By the seventeenth century the possibility of a direct apostolic connection was believed to be impossible (due to the centuries of Catholicism's corrupting influence). However, the prophetic identity and ministry remained accessible. By continuing the prophetic task of interpreting authoritative texts by re-narrating the stories these texts contained, authors such as Milton were able to continue to produce scriptural works centuries after the closing of the canon. By doing so, this thesis has opened up questions in relation to the integral role of biblical epics in Christian practice by incorporating the existence of biblical epics into our understanding of the nature and function of scripture.

By using the fourfold criteria of intertextuality set out in chapter two, I have been able to demonstrate how and why Proba's *Cento Vergilianus* and Milton's *Paradise Lost* interact with the biblical text. Proba uses external narratives in order to shape the way in which a reader

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[1] *Connecting Gospels*; Stroumsa, *The Scriptural Universe of Ancient Christianity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016).

[2] Eva Mroczek, *The Literary Imagination in Jewish Antiquity* (New York: OUP, 2016); Najman, *Past Renewals: Interpretative Authority, Renewed Revelation, and the Quest for Perfection in Jewish Antiquity* (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

will re-read and re-interpret the biblical story. Milton exploits gaps in the biblical narrative by finding parallel features in other literature and using them to supply solutions to the aspects of the narrative on which the biblical text is silent. Both authors draw out contemporary applications of the text and locate them within the biblical narrative itself. Neither Proba nor Milton are intending to over-write the biblical narrative. They are intending to present a story that will serve as a companion to the version found in the biblical text. The epics are intended to accompany the biblical text. They are intended as a temporal (rather than linguistic) translation, which explains to later generations of Christian readers in words and images that they understand what the original biblical version of the story is trying to communicate. Proba and Milton use material with which their readers were already (more) familiar in order to tell a less familiar story in an intelligible manner.

Biblical epics, and other re-narrations of biblical stories, are not designed to replace the biblical text. Were humanity to be spotless and pure, the biblical text would fulfil all their scriptural needs. However, humanity has fallen and continues to sin against God. As a result, their defiled status prohibits them from correctly understanding the undiluted prophetic or apostolic essence of the biblical text. Biblical epics serve as a means of mediating between the needs of later generations of Christians and the undiluted prophetic/apostolic Word by merging what later generations already understand with the prophetic/apostolic Word. This is achieved through their use of intertextuality. By combining biblical texts with other literary stories, imageries, and vocabulary, biblical epics are able both to perform and embody the mediation which later generations of Christians require. Their intertextuality is therefore integral to their scriptural identity, as it is their mixed and diluted prophetic/apostolic identity which grants them their minor scriptural status.

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