

# *Order and Disorder:*

## The Poem and its Contexts

The poem here published in full for the first time has many claims to our interest. It is one of the first long poems by an English woman writer. As a poem in which a woman tackles the most controversial themes of the book of Genesis, it forms part of a debate in which current feminist critics and theologians are much involved. It throws new light on Milton's *Paradise Lost*. It opens up a neglected area of political and cultural history, providing a particularly strong corrective to the conventional view that literature after 1660 became firmly royalist. Quite apart from these considerations, it rises at its best to exciting poetry that deserves to be heard.

The author of *Order and Disorder*, Lucy Hutchinson (1620–81), has long been familiar to students of seventeenth-century history. Her biography of her husband, Colonel John Hutchinson, has become a standard point of reference. What has not been recognized is that her major, lifelong interest as a writer was in poetry. The prose *Memoirs* represented a diversion, however personally necessary, from that commitment. In her earlier years she composed the first complete English translation of a major classical epic, Lucretius's *The Nature of the Universe* (*De rerum natura*); in *Order and Disorder* she turned to a Biblical epic as ambitious as *Paradise Lost*.

*Order and Disorder* is not quite unknown to literary history. Its first five cantos were published, anonymously, in 1679. The poem was ascribed by the antiquarian Anthony Wood to Sir Allen Apsley, Lucy Hutchinson's brother. Wood's information was often unreliable, however, and there is a large amount of internal and external evidence to establish as the real author not the royalist Apsley, but his fiercely

Puritan sister. Briefly, part of the poem was amongst the manuscripts of Lucy Hutchinson in the care of the family in the 1730s; there are close parallels with passages from her Lucretius translation, her treatise on religion, and other verse fragments; a comparison with a database of twenty-five Restoration poets finds very strong parallels between *Order and Disorder* and known writings of Hutchinson, and equally strong divergences from the other authors; and the poem's political and theological outlook matches Hutchinson precisely (Norbrook 1999b, 2000a; Burrows and Craig). The 'Elegy' printed in the Appendix, which is undoubtedly Hutchinson's, is strikingly close in theme and style to *Order and Disorder*.

If this identification has not forced itself on readers, it is because Hutchinson was not a writer to place her own personality to the fore. Where her contemporary Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, constantly drew attention to herself and presented her own writings as incitements to changes in women's position, Hutchinson was much more guarded. Writings like Cavendish's are easy to assimilate with some common modern assumptions about gender and writing: that women's writing will be personal, emotional, self-expressive. Hutchinson was very far from the qualities often associated with 'feminine' writing. She tended to see individuals in terms of abstract constitutional theories; she vigorously defended one of the most abstract, impersonal and punitive theologies ever devised; though she does write sympathetically about the concerns of her female characters, these are subordinated to an ideological framework that privileges the male. Hutchinson's writings are in a fundamental sense passionately personal, but the passion was informed by a complex and coherent set of political and religious ideas, and this introduction will try to show how they drive the poem forward.

The lack of an assertive female voice may nevertheless be seen as part of the poem's politics: Hutchinson is readier than some of her contemporaries to accept, and defend, a position of female subordination. That is part of the truth; which is why it has been possible for a critic assuming Apsley's authorship to attack the 1679 poem as far more patriarchal than *Paradise Lost* (Wittreich). In the context of national politics, however, insisting on the poem's conservatism is highly misleading. Why, when the poem was printed in 1679, did she not put her name proudly on the title-page, like her contemporaries Aphra Behn, Margaret Cavendish and Katherine Philips? All those women repeatedly affirmed their loyalty to Charles II and celebrated his 'happy return' in 1660,

after years of revolution, as a great turning-point in politics and in literary culture. Conservative readers who disliked seeing women in print were thus reassured that their writings were not going to shake the foundations of society. These women's political views were sincerely held (Barash ch. 2), but they did also serve as a counterweight to fears of female unruliness. For Hutchinson, such a course would have been unthinkable. At considerable personal risk, she remained loyal to the values of the Puritan Revolution and committed to paper her belief that the regime of Charles II was utterly illegitimate and would probably bring down divine retribution. She declared that her husband had been absolutely justified in signing the death warrant of Charles I. Such writings made her liable to the death penalty and their circulation had to be carefully guarded; they belonged to a republican 'underground' which has yet to be fully explored. The five cantos she did print, though less outspoken than the manuscript portions of *Order and Disorder*, still hint at her views. Had they appeared under the signature of a regicide's wife, she would have provoked the kind of public scrutiny, and perhaps searches of her papers, that she was anxious to avoid. She did not lack courage, but nor did she court martyrdom. She believed that her political time would come again; in the meantime, she lived in the shadows. As her third 'Elegy' reveals, however (see Appendix), she never acknowledged the legitimacy of the regal sun who had confined her to those shadows.

For the blind Milton, of course, the darkness of the Restoration world was literal enough, and his political views were close to Hutchinson's. Milton is often today seen as the arch-masculinist, identifying Eve's responsibility for the Fall with a general female propensity to irrationality in politics and religion. What would such a writer have made of a woman poet who took it on herself to write an epic on the same subject? The two had their theological and political differences, but they shared basic common principles and political aims. They had a mutual friend, the Earl of Anglesey, to whom each of them entrusted sensitive manuscripts. Whatever the precise chronological relationship between *Order and Disorder* and *Paradise Lost*, it is fascinating to set these two poems in dialogue. Does *Paradise Lost* reflect a Puritan disillusion with politics, a retreat into the private world after 1660? The last two books in particular are often seen as marking a weary quietism. Close comparison with *Order and Disorder*, which covers the same events at greater length, gives a new perspective on that question. Does Milton's epic express unorthodox views about the Trinity, and strongly anti-Calvinist

views about predestination? How can his views about divine kingship be squared with his republicanism? These questions, hotly debated in recent criticism, can be illuminated by comparison with this militantly Trinitarian and Calvinist epic. Does Milton overbalance the poem by the degree of imaginative investment in his Satan? Hutchinson's very different treatment of Satan offers a striking contrast. Is Milton unusually dismissive of women in his portrayal of Eve? Such issues have often been addressed by setting Milton's poetry against the discursive writings of the time; *Order and Disorder* offers the unique case of a woman poet who shared Milton's passionate engagement with the same concerns, and was ready to explore them in verse.

### Lucy Hutchinson

Lucy Hutchinson's later life was darkened by personal and political crises. During the 1640s and 1650s, England had been convulsed by a civil war that toppled the monarchy, followed by a decade of uncertainty as differing Puritan factions struggled for control. For many contemporaries, then, 1660, when Charles II returned to England, was a welcome return of civil order. For Lucy Hutchinson, it was the prelude to disaster. On a national level, she and her husband had been committed to a godly republic, where the old state church, corrupted in their view by ritual and idolatry, would give way to freely tolerated voluntary Protestant congregations, while political corruption was kept at bay by strict limitations on personal power. With the old royalist county oligarchy in eclipse, the Hutchinsons had gained considerable status in their county, and their estate at Owthorpe in Nottinghamshire became a significant centre. The portrait by Robert Walker, dating from the late 1640s or early 1650s, shows Lucy Hutchinson with a laurel wreath, emblem of poetic achievement, in her lap. It was paired with a portrait of her husband in armour: her pen and his sword had worked in concert. Though her husband's hostility to Oliver Cromwell led him to withdraw from Parliament during the Protectorate, the couple enjoyed a life of relative opulence.

The restoration of Charles II brought with it the return of a persecuting state church and a return – though within limits that were yet to be fully defined – to the pre-war monarchical system. The change came home painfully on a personal level. Her husband had joined the small band who signed Charles I's death warrant in 1649. In 1660, that act

placed his own life in peril. Many of the regicides were executed, and Milton's fate for a time hung in the balance. Lucy Hutchinson was confronted with agonizing choices. She intervened to try to save her husband's life, but faced his anger and guilt at having agreed to compromise his principles. In signing an undertaking to abstain from political action, he became deeply suspect to republicans without gaining the trust of royalists. For three years after his recantation, he lived in deep retirement, devoting himself to beautifying his estate and to intense study of the Scripture, which confirmed his belief in the justice of the Puritan 'good old cause'. It is possible that Lucy Hutchinson began *Order and Disorder* at this time. After her husband's death, she wrote nostalgically of Owthorpe as a kind of Eden ('Elegies' 7 and 12). The date on the only surviving manuscript of the poem is 1664. In the 1730s an excerpt from the poem with that date was circulating in the family, and Julius Hutchinson assumed that Eve's complaint after the Fall (5.401–42) was a personal lament by Lucy Hutchinson about her husband's imprisonment in the Tower.

If 1664 is the date of the entire poem, Hutchinson must have written very quickly, for she was probably working on Lucretius up until the late 1650s, and was busy bringing up her children; the last of the seven who survived was born in 1662. In 1663 John Hutchinson was arrested for alleged involvement in an armed rising against Charles II. Having dishonoured himself, in his own eyes, by his submission, he now suffered the consequences facing those who had been active. Though never formally tried, he was detained and died in prison. For the next few years, Lucy Hutchinson dedicated herself to writing a memoir that would safeguard his memory against such charges. *Memoirs of the Life of Colonel Hutchinson* is particularly remarkable given the agonizing circumstances under which it was written. With a characteristic intellectual toughness, Lucy Hutchinson produced not just a personal testimonial to the head of her family but a sociological analysis, which placed his life in a larger pattern of social change and providential intervention. She channelled her more personal responses into a series of impassioned elegies – though here again her own grief is never separated for long from her anger against, and fiery denunciations of, the Restoration regime.

Her life did not end with the *Memoirs*, however. Even as she faced the growing burden of her husband's debts, selling off one estate after another, she also prepared the way for a new life as a writer. In 1667–8 she engaged in a detailed study of Calvin's *Institutes*, to which she added

a statement of her own religious beliefs. The same manuscript contains fragments of verse which are very close in theme and wording to *Order and Disorder*. A treatise which she wrote after her daughter's marriage in 1668 contains close parallels with the poem (see note to 1.61–76 and elsewhere). Many other aspects of the poem seem to belong to a context considerably later than the early 1660s. There are several apparent parallels with *Paradise Lost*, implying a date after 1667, unless one writer had access to the other's manuscript – which, given their mutual friendship with Anglesey, is not wholly implausible. It is possible that the 1664 date on the manuscript has some other explanation, and that Eve's lament had been associated with 1664 because it was being read in isolation from the rest of the poem. *Order and Disorder* certainly reads like an entry into a new phase of writing, a dedication to a more explicitly Christian muse at a time when she was actively engaging herself in Biblical study.

Such study, of course, was hardly new to her. It was a normal feature of her household, and she had helped her husband's studies in his final imprisonment by bringing him commentaries on the Bible. Her own creative writings, however, had not been directly religious. As a young girl she had gained a reputation for love-songs (*M* 47). During the civil war she composed a vindication of her husband's political activities, which centred on struggles for power in Nottinghamshire. She had written a bitterly personal invective against the Cromwellian poet Edmund Waller (Hutchinson, Waller). Her translation of Lucretius had been a remarkable project for a Puritan, for she was bringing into the language a strongly atheistic or at least anti-superstitious text. Lucretius was being taken up by royalist exiles who admired his hostility to religious fanaticism (Barbour 1994). Hutchinson may in part have been motivated by a sense of emulation of a fellow-woman writer. Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, was a member of those royalist circles and was attracting attention with her atheistical, or at least highly sceptical, writings; her husband had been John Hutchinson's main royalist opponent during the civil war (Norbrook, forthcoming).

The preface to *Order and Disorder* strongly recants the Lucretius translation, self-consciously dedicating her to a new vocation as a divine poet. The preface is in itself a reworking of the dedication to Anglesey with which she had headed a new manuscript of her Lucretius translation in 1675. In both prefaces she laments having spent her earlier years in translating pagan poetry, and expresses her fears that if her Lucretius translation circulates further it will be guilty of corrupting her genera-

tion. She has written *Order and Disorder* as an antidote, to ‘wash out all ugly impressions’ of the fancies that had ‘filled my brain’. Even without the modern associations of brainwashing, this is powerful language, and there is no doubting its sincerity. This does not necessarily mean, however, that it lacks a conventional element. Hutchinson situates herself in the long Christian tradition in which poets apologize for earlier, sinful works – a tradition that always had the effect of reminding readers of how powerful those earlier writings must have been for their ill effects to occasion such penitence. Such language was required of those who joined a Dissenting congregation; recognition and hatred of sin was itself a sign of regeneracy. In so actively repudiating her Lucretius – which she was, after all, further circulating even as she disparaged such circulation – she was also affirming her regeneration both as a Christian and as a writer. Though the poem was published anonymously, the language of the preface implies that she is confident a number of readers in her circle will recognize her identity.

What was that circle? Not a wide one, certainly. Given the subversiveness of her opinions, Lucy Hutchinson had to be very guarded about those with whom she shared them. But she had a small number of friends she knew and trusted. Her family was mainly royalist in sentiment – after the Restoration she was, in effect, the republican black sheep. Her brother, Sir Allen Apsley, was treasurer to the Duke of York, the king’s brother, who was hated and feared by Puritans because he was a Catholic and also, in the absence of a legitimate heir, the successor to the throne. However, Apsley’s cousin – and, some gossip had it, his mistress – Anne Wilmot, Countess of Rochester, was in Hutchinson’s confidence, and possessed a manuscript of the poem. (Wilmot’s more public friendship with Apsley probably explains why the poem became ascribed to him.) Though herself a continuing aspirant to courtly favour, the Countess was responsive to strong religious views, and deeply disturbed by her son’s involvement in the licentious world of royal favourites. Lucy Hutchinson, republicanism apart, was a valuable counterweight to such tendencies.

We can more clearly understand Hutchinson’s ambivalence about her Lucretius translation when we remember that Rochester himself was something of a disciple of Lucretius, and was encouraging his young niece, Anne Wharton, to voice sceptical views in her verse (Wharton). Hutchinson’s parody of atheistic views in *Order and Disorder* could be a version of the kind of thing Rochester said:

Boasting they had attained to be wise  
 When they with manly courage could despise  
 Fictions of God and Hell that did control  
 A vulgar, weak, deluded, pious soul. (7.133–6)

Religion, on that view, was an instrument of social control; but for Hutchinson, such cynicism in fact colluded with tyranny, by undermining the major source of appeal against corrupt power. Losing sight of fixed, eternal principles, courtly atheists became playthings of fortune. They also, in Hutchinson's view, became liable to moral degeneracy, in which category she would have included Rochester's bisexuality; her account of the destruction of Sodom implies a bitter condemnation of love between men. When Rochester fell ill in 1680 and turned to religion, he became part of an ideological struggle in which opponents of the court eagerly claimed his recantation in their cause. His mother was in the forefront of those pressing him for a conversion. *Order and Disorder*, with its attacks on atheism and drunkenness, was the kind of weapon she might have deployed. The *Order and Disorder* preface hits at those who 'profess they think no poem can be good that shuts out drunkenness, and lasciviousness, and libelling satire, the themes of all their celebrated songs' – certainly the themes of Rochester's.

Another close friend of Hutchinson's was Arthur Annesley, Earl of Anglesey. Like the Countess, he did not share Hutchinson's political radicalism but respected her moral integrity and her dislike for many aspects of the Restoration regime. In his office as Lord Privy Seal, he tried to use his influence on behalf of the godly. An amateur historian himself, he is likely to have been confided with the *Memoirs*; presenting him with the Lucretius manuscript was itself a gesture of great trust, given her own strong ambivalence about the poem. Milton had consulted Anglesey over the publication of his *History of Britain*.

Anglesey's wife was a member of the congregation of the Congregationalist divine John Owen, and there is evidence that Hutchinson was close to Owen and attended his conventicle in London. This was something of a centre for Puritans nostalgic for the 'good old cause'. Owen had supported the regicide, and though he refrained from overt opposition to the Stuart monarchy, he devoted himself to challenging views that seemed likely to become its ideological foundations. In 1661 Owen published a stringent onslaught on the idea of a 'natural theology' that might provide a common ground for belief outside either Scripture or the traditions of the church. Such ideas appealed to the

'Latitudinarian' divines who were trying to effect some kind of compromise between different Protestant traditions; Owen was uncompromising in defending a high Calvinist position. Lucy Hutchinson translated part of this work from Latin, and the view of early Hebrew history in *Order and Disorder* is very close indeed to that presented by Owen. We do not need to see her as a disciple of Owen: everything in her writings makes it clear that she liked to think things out for herself – as she insists in the preface to *Order and Disorder*, 'I have not studied to utter anything that I have not really taken in'. Owen did, however, represent for her an admirable consistency, holding clearly through many political vicissitudes to a set of principles she could endorse.

Hutchinson published the first five cantos of *Order and Disorder* in 1679, at a time when cautious figures like Owen and Anglesey were finding themselves caught up in a large-scale movement of political opposition. The crisis which erupted in 1678, and was still in process at her death in October 1681, is normally described as the 'Exclusion Crisis' because the immediate issue was a campaign to exclude the Duke of York from the succession. Many of the key issues, however, revived those of the 1640s (Scott). The 'Cavalier Parliament', which had staggered on from 1661, was finally dissolved, and in 1679 the old censorship restrictions lapsed, permitting a new opening of the press. Anglesey and Owen became active in the coalition fighting York's succession. For the more radical republicans, it might seem that the 'last gasps of expiring monarchy' (*M* 61) were indeed at hand.

The family campaign to reform the Earl of Rochester formed part of this ideological revival. Under these new circumstances – and the pressure of illness – the young ironist may have been readier to respond sympathetically to the heavy moralism of his aunt's cousin. Lucy Hutchinson's voice was that of a generation whose experiences had been totally different, and in her post-Restoration writings she expresses her sense of alienation from this new world. She thought of herself as a spirit speaking from beyond the grave in her own lifetime: 'the evil I feared I now feel, if there be any sense in the dead; for however I appear alive in my actions I would not have you believe it possible I could survive your late fellow prisoner' (*M* 337). She records that after John Hutchinson's death the prison where he had been detained was haunted by 'a gentlewoman in mourning in such a habit as Mrs Hutchinson used to wear there' (*M* 336). Lucy Hutchinson was writing in her lifetime about her own ghost. She looked back to her youth as to a time of light and hope, thanking God that she was born

not in the midnight of popery, nor in the dawn of the gospel's restored day, when light and shades were blended and almost undistinguished, but when the Sun of truth was exalted in his progress and hastening towards a meridian glory. (*M* 7)

By the time she wrote *Order and Disorder*, she was living in an era of much more uncertain light, which she evoked in the transitional passage between cantos 5 and 6, between unfallen and fallen worlds:

When midnight is the blackest, day then breaks;  
 But then the infant dawning's pleasant streaks,  
 Charging through night's host, seem again put out  
 In the tumultuous flying shadows' rout,  
 Often pierced through with the encroaching light  
 While shades and it maintain a doubtful fight. (6.1–6)

Were the shadows of her own time those of dusk and dawn? For all her sense of belatedness, the political situation at the time of her death may have led her to hope, at times at least, for a new dawn. Until recently it has been thought that after completing the *Memoirs* Hutchinson lapsed into despairing obscurity. *Order and Disorder* presents a very different picture of the trajectory of her career, and more generally of the fortunes of republicanism after the Restoration.

### Reading the Bible

We have seen that Hutchinson could be deeply suspicious of the powers of poetry to corrupt. Had that been all, it would have been surprising to find her continuing to write. Her preface helps to explain why she nevertheless persevered: 'a great part of the Scripture was originally written in verse'. This was an aspect of the Bible that had been obscured by the medieval church's use of a standard Latin translation in prose. The Protestant Biblical scholarship which the Hutchinsons studied so intensely drew on humanist techniques of literary analysis. Early modern educationalists disparaged the abstract, logic-based educational system of the medieval universities and urged a heightened attention to the arts of language. When this approach was transferred from pagan to Scriptural texts, there were important consequences. Where medieval commentary often looked behind the words for more general, allegorical meanings, Protestant commentary emphasized the literal sense,

assuming that behind each text was a specific author with the aim of influencing an audience as strongly as possible. John Hutchinson returned again and again to the Psalms, the pre-eminently poetic book of the Bible. He also loved Paul's letters, especially the epistle to the Romans, the centre of Calvinist predestinarian faith. They move from a colloquial idiom to rich and knotty imagery, with abrupt shifts of tone and theme, and are in some ways closer to poetry than to straightforward discursive prose. Lucy Hutchinson tells us that her husband's means of overcoming the difficulty of interpretation was to try to catch a consistent voice and occasion behind the text: he would 'read an epistle entirely at once, or as near together as he could, and he advised us also to do so; for he said the coherence and connexion of the parts, one with another . . . gave great light to the understanding of the soul' (*M* 328).

The book of Genesis exercises a more directly poetic fascination. Early modern scholars did not fully understand how much of the book was interspersed with passages of Hebrew verse, but they responded to the remarkable range of its styles, from the concrete and grotesque to the ceremonial and abstract. Modern scholars ascribe this variety to the fact that the five books, the Pentateuch, traditionally ascribed to Moses, in fact combined narratives by very different authors from different periods. In the first strands to be isolated, two different names for the deity are used, Yahweh and Elohim, giving rise to the labels 'J' and 'E' for their hypothetical authors. Later scholarship located a Priestly (P) and Deuteronomist (D) version, and a further author-figure, the Redactor (R), who brought the materials into their final order. In the P version of the creation, man and woman are created together, while in the J version Eve is created from Adam's rib. There are three very similar stories in which first Abraham and then Isaac pretends that his wife is his sister. Sarah's expulsion of Hagar is recounted twice. God's promises to Abraham are repeated several times, and there are many other minor discrepancies. To modern commentators the earthy, sometimes sardonic, style of the J version (for a striking modern rendition, see Bloom) is obviously very different from the repetitive, hieratic discourse of the P narrative.

If humanists were so interested in specific authorial voices, why did they not notice such discrepancies? In fact, recent textual work is reacting against the confidence of the earlier process of disintegration. Harold Bloom notes a vein of 'idealist anti-Semitism' in the assumption that the more concrete aspects of the narrative belong to a primitive strain which was later refined to bring it closer to a Christian narrative of

progress from flesh to spirit (Bloom 21). Other scholars point out that the attempt to isolate so many distinct voices rests on nineteenth-century assumptions about literary realism and individualism that may not have held good for older forms of writing and interpretation; more subtle forms of unity can be found behind many alleged discrepancies (Fokkelman). Renaissance humanists, for all their interest in individual voices, were acutely aware of the need to change style and register for different rhetorical purposes, and they had less difficulty than the nineteenth century with the idea that Moses might have varied his styles in this way. In any period, indeed, literary scholars determined to prove that a given text is unified have been able to rise to the challenge.

It remains true, however, that in Hutchinson's own time there were early stirrings of a movement towards a historicist fragmentation of the Pentateuch. Hobbes's *Leviathan* (1651) had raised questions about Moses's authorship. In 1655 Isaac de la Peyrère had noted the discrepancy between the Priestly and Yahwist accounts of the creation and suggested that there were humans before Adam and Eve; he was also struck by incongruities over Sarah and Rebecca (Lods 30). Such questionings had reached Hutchinson's relatives; the Earl of Rochester was struck by the 'Incoherence of Style in the Scriptures, the odd Transitions, the seeming Contradictions' (Farley-Hills 65). Such an analysis was in accord with humanist principles of textual criticism which had long been applied to the transmission of classical texts, and with which Hutchinson had had to grapple in her own work on Lucretius. The problem for Hutchinson would have been that it was urged most vigorously by Catholic polemicists who wished to undermine the authority of Scripture as a ground for faith. Her associate John Owen, who was formidably learned in Hebrew and contemporary Biblical scholarship, vigorously defended that authority and attacked the new textual criticism (Bennett and Mandelbrote 182–3). For Owen and for Hutchinson, the book of Genesis was the work of one author, Moses.

An important qualification could be made, however: Moses had been inspired by the Holy Spirit, who had placed elements in the text which prophesied future events beyond his own awareness. Christians always had a strong investment in pushing away from a wholly literal reading of the Old Testament, since they wished to superimpose on that narrative a systematic foreshadowing of the story of Jesus: the historical events were also types of the future (15.227; cf. Bunyan xxxviii–xli). Puritans were especially fond of allegorizations of the love-poetry of the Song of Songs as foreshadowing Christ's love for the true church. *Order and*

*Disorder* is informed by such typological readings (e.g. 3.467–502). Hutchinson often describes types as ‘emblems’, referring to the contemporary literary genre in which visual images were accompanied by verbal explanations. She strongly believed that the ‘covenant of grace’, given by God at Genesis 3.14–15, concealed in types the full core of the Christian message, the coming of Christ whose grace alone could redeem humanity from the old ‘covenant of works’ (R 38, 52–5). There was, then, no clear-cut distinction between Old and New Testaments: the events of Genesis were quite as relevant for the believer as those of the time of Christ.

Allegorization, however, for Hutchinson could only be pushed so far. Owen saw himself as engaged in a twofold struggle: against Catholics who claimed that the Scripture’s truth was not self-evident because of textual corruption and therefore needed the authority of the church, and also against the more radical Protestant sects like the Quakers, who claimed that the truth of Scripture was open to all through the impulse of the Holy Spirit. Religious radicals engaged in more and more subjective allegorizations and interpretations of Scripture. Though Owen resisted tendencies towards a rational religion, by the standards of mid-century Puritanism he was himself a strongly rationalistic figure, resistant to outbursts of enthusiasm. He tried with some difficulty to steer the line between his own Independent belief in the Spirit and a belief that some kind of objective consensus on interpretation was possible (Nuttall 10–14). Hutchinson often steers a similar course to Owen. She reads certain key events typologically, as foreshadowing the apocalyptic events she believes to be about to take place in her own time. At other points, however, she tries to follow the literal sense closely and to provide explanations of the human motivation of her characters. She rationalizes the repeated events, such as the disguised wives. She shows a sharp interest in the political implications of the events she narrates, offering a kind of moralizing sociological history in her account of the growing complexity of courtly societies and the struggles of the godly to return to simplicity. For modern readers, the interest will lie as much in the difficulties she has in reconciling discordant texts as in the means by which she resolves them. Hutchinson was writing at a time when the meaning and even the divine authority of Genesis could by no means be taken for granted; defending her own version of the text was part of a political as well as a religious struggle.

## Biblical Verse

Hutchinson subtitled the first cantos of her poem 'Meditations upon the Creation and Fall, as it is recorded in the beginning of Genesis'. 'Meditations' implies a secondary form of writing, one whose main aim is not to tell a story but to summarize it and suspend the action to discourse on its meaning. Meditative poetry would normally adopt a plain, conversational idiom, and in her preface Hutchinson baldly declares that the poem lacks fancy and elevation of style. 'Fancy' is a word she normally uses with suspicion: fancy had led pagan poets and idolatrous Christians to confuse images with reality, signs with what they signified. Her guilt over her translation of Lucretius, and her decision to translate Owen's attacks on the pagan poets' corruption of pagan truth, testify to her genuine anxieties about the imagination. The most such a radical suspicion of the 'fancy' might seem to sanction is a bald paraphrase or stock moralizing.

Hutchinson's humility before her text, however, was not absolute. She trembled 'to think of turning Scripture into a romance', and attacked other divine poets who added to the text. She may have been hitting at Milton; the first critic to have commented on *Order and Disorder* regarded the poem as 'both an imitation of *Paradise Lost* and a veiled rebuke of Milton' (Moore 321; cf. Shawcross 251, Wittreich). For all her criticisms of 'invention', however, the preface dismissed with equal force those who attacked poetry altogether as partial witnesses, 'their genius not lying that way'. She made it clear that she thought her own genius did lie that way, and that such a genius was consonant with the Bible. Whether or not she began composing after *Paradise Lost*, she had ample precedents for composing divine poetry, and even for using pagan poetry in doing so. The creation was the greatest of all subjects, and Renaissance poets found it appropriate to adapt some of the devices pagan poets had used in their highest kind of poetry, the epic. There was a long tradition of poetic narratives of the six days of creation (hexameral epic). The most celebrated example was the *Divine Weeks and Works* (1578–84) of the French Protestant poet Guillaume de Saluste, Sieur du Bartas, whose translation by Josuah Sylvester became immensely popular in England, and was certainly read by Milton and Hutchinson. Sylvester's 'Second Week' includes all the Genesis material covered by Hutchinson. Du Bartas's highly mannered style adapted the elaborate verbal patterning of courtly verse-forms for a sacred subject.

Hutchinson is closer to Du Bartas than to the more allusive Milton in the degree of her reference to classical genres. Her extensive classical reading can, however, be traced in *Order and Disorder*. She imitated a passage from Virgil (10.71–8). She had shown especial interest in pagan poems whose subject-matter was in some ways closest to the creation story: Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and, of course, Lucretius's *De rerum natura*. She carries over some Latinisms, such as 'fragor' and 'congression', from Lucretius to *Order and Disorder*, though her style is less Latinate than Milton's, it has somewhat more 'elevations of style' than she claims in the preface. At 14.47–85 she recycles a lengthy passage from her own translation of Ovid, where the classical conventions are very conspicuous. The poem's recurrent visions of the world's final doom draw in equal measure on Biblical apocalypse and on Lucretius's descriptions of the destruction of the world. When she encounters a military episode in canto 11, she writes a mini-epic with a series of extended similes; and epic similes become increasingly common in the later parts of the poem. In dealing with the courtship of Jacob and Rachel, she turns to the conventions of pastoral.

Despite such classicizing touches, however, Scripture is at the core of the poem. Even the apparently secondary role of a commentary would have seemed much more positive in circles where knowledge of the Bible was second nature. Protestant Biblicism ultimately undermined the distinction between primary text and secondary commentary. The thorough – and often politicized – annotations of the Geneva Bible (1560), the Puritans' favourite English version, were a main factor for its popularity. Today the differences between Geneva and the 1611 Authorized Version are assessed in terms of relative literary merit, but in this period less attention was often paid to which version was used than to the annotations (Norton I.213; Hutchinson's wording seems to be closer to the Authorized Version, but she may have used one of the mid-century editions which included the Geneva annotations). During the 1640s and 1650s plans were made for a wholly new Bible translation that would come closer to the Hebrew wording, though the project lapsed (Bennett and Mandelbrote 174). In such a milieu, it is not surprising that the prophetess Anna Trapnel, a woman of humble background and education, was able to discourse for hours at a time, rendering her own meditations and paraphrases of Scripture in verse. Hutchinson's approach to prophecy is much more guarded, but she relies on a readership who will pick up her allusions.

The richness of the effect emerges in a very small sample from the

first few lines of the poem. The first gloss, denouncing man for rebelling against God's will, may seem a politically conservative statement. The gloss, however, refers us to Isaiah 10.5–7, where God, having lamented the injustice of rulers, denounces the idolatrous King Sennacherib and declares that he will be cut down. Throughout the poem, the word 'rebellion' will apply to the defenders of kingly power. The next gloss refers us to Ecclesiastes 6.10: 'That which hath been is named already, and it is known that it is man: neither may he contend with him that is mightier than he'. We can thus recognize Hutchinson's 'They must be broken who with power contend' as a direct reworking of the text, reminding us that all humans, from kings to the humblest, are small in the sight of God. We then return to Isaiah (27.4), with another declaration of the immense power God may, even if he does not, deploy: 'Fury is not in me: who would set the briars and thorns against me in battle? I would go through them, I would burn them together.' We are then referred to Genesis 45.4–5, where Jacob reproaches his brothers for selling him into Egypt. Hutchinson's circle would have recognized the Egyptian captivity as a standard parallel to the return of Charles II. We then turn to the New Testament, to Acts 2.23: 'Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain'. This comes from the gathering of the apostles shortly after Christ's death, when the Holy Spirit rushes on them and they are able miraculously to speak in all languages. Peter is delivering the central message of the crucifixion; in stressing that it was predetermined, he is also offering support for those, like Hutchinson, who affirmed the doctrine of predestination. To round off this group of citations we return to Genesis and to its final chapter (50.20), where Joseph receives and acts on Jacob's dying command that he forgive his brothers the wrong they did him: 'ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good'.

These annotations comment on a long verse paragraph where Hutchinson stresses that man rebels against God but that all such attempts are ultimately futile and serve the divine end. The annotations form a series of counterpoints. They give a sharp political resonance to the more abstract generalizations of the verse; here as often throughout the printed text, Hutchinson introduces subversive elements in the margins. The annotations also bring home the recurrent theme of predestination. The second Genesis quotation balances the beginning of this Genesis poem by looking forward to the end; and it hints at an attitude to the unregenerate royalists that is conciliatory but at the same

time contemptuous, implying that in the long term their attempts to imprison the godly will never prevail. The Acts quotation introduces the theme of Pentecost, of language and prophecy, at the moment where the poet is expressing her own desire to prophesy:

my weak sense with the too glorious rays  
Is struck with such confusion that I find  
Only the world's first Chaos in my mind,  
Where light and beauty lie wrapped up in seed  
And cannot be from the dark prison freed  
Except that Power by whom the world was made  
My soul in her imperfect strugglings aid,  
Her rude conceptions into forms dispose,  
And words impart which may those forms disclose. (1.22–30)

It thus becomes hard to separate the text from the margin, what is inside the poem from what is outside: Hutchinson has internalized Scripture so deeply that in one sense all that she writes is quotation, while in another sense she shows herself well aware that quotation is a pointed, deliberate art. Despite the humility expected of an invocation, the fact that the poem continues indicates her belief that the Spirit has indeed touched her, has enabled her to interpret Scripture and to communicate its power in language. The parallel between spiritual order and what we would today term aesthetic qualities recurs again and again in the first five cantos. In the description of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit is associated with 'universal Beauty' (1.122). Owen recalled that the Greek word for the world was *kósmos*, an adorned thing, and associated the Holy Spirit with the process of adorning that completed the world (2.72 and note). The poem's title thus indicates an aspiration to evoke the divine order through beauty of form.

The idea that nature is God's art, that there is a harmony between the natural universe and artistic creation, was a Renaissance commonplace. Given her acute awareness of the corruptions and distortions of the Fall, however, Hutchinson is much less confident that such a harmony has been maintained. Beyond Scripture, it is in the natural world that she finds the clearest images of the divine order, and *Order and Disorder* frequently vindicates nature against art:

Scorn, princes, your embroidered canopies  
And painted roofs: the poor whom you despise  
With far more ravishing delight are fed

While various clouds sail o'er th'unhousèd head,  
 And their heaved eyes with nobler scenes present  
 Than your poetic courtiers can invent. (2.21–6)

The extravagant masques of the Stuart court had regularly culminated in scenes where the courtiers descended on cloud-machines from a painted heaven. Hutchinson prefers real clouds. The

peacock's gaudy train  
 More beautifully is by nature dressed  
 Than art can make it on the gallant's crest. (2.312–14)

Such sharp antitheses, however, simplify the issues: Hutchinson's poem is far from artless, and it benefits from her long training in writing verse. Even when she declares in the preface that 'I would rather breathe forth grace cordially than words artificially', she shows herself able to parody the style she rejects, using a careful antithesis capped by the figure of homoioteleuton (rhyme). It remains true that like Milton and some other mid-century Puritan republicans (Norbrook 1999a), she does favour a poetics of the sublime, of the open and various, as opposed to a fixed beauty that is associated with the court. Milton had brought out the political connotations of this sublimity by declaring that his blank verse had freed English poetry from the bondage of rhyme. He thus gave an ideological charge to his resistance to the metrical form that was becoming dominant in the mid-century, the closed iambic pentameter couplet, with each two-line unit offering a single idea or syntactic unit. Hutchinson does use pentameter couplets, but they tend not to be closed. Her metre is a little more irregular than was becoming the norm, with a number of shorter, tetrameter lines; some of the corrections made in the manuscript were rather fussy attempts to make the verse flow more smoothly. There are indications that Hutchinson, like Milton, could give political resonances to metre: her line-by-line parody of Waller's panegyric to Cromwell associates his smooth verse with political servility and calls for the English to resist the 'paper Crowne' (Hutchinson, Waller 85). 'Wit', a quality that was increasingly associated with the play of the heroic couplet, is condemned again and again in the poem. *Order and Disorder* does not have quite the openness of Milton's long verse paragraphs, but Hutchinson often aims at comparable effects. She is fond of anaphora, the repetition of a phrase at the beginning of a line or couplet, to allow her to carry on a theme over

many clauses. Her syntax can seem very loose, though normally the long sentences do find a syntactic closure.

Against this pressure to openness, however, Hutchinson's verse does show a countervailing interest in epigrammatic concision. (Though perhaps these qualities are not so different when seen as developing different aspects of parallelism in Biblical style; see Kugel.) In *Order and Disorder*, as in the *Memoirs*, she reveals a gift for the sharp satirical maxim. Such distilled malice was common in the period's verse, where wit was increasingly identified as the gift of expressing sharp contrasts through skilful deployment of balance in the couplet. In Hutchinson's case, however, the verbal skill is invested with such confidence in echoing a divine judgement that it can be disconcerting. Both tendencies can be found in such set-pieces as her description of the Flood. Here Hutchinson is at once appalled and energized by the vision of a complete dissolution of form, a reversion to a primal chaos: 'Thought cannot reach this universal rack' (7.485); 'All turned to sea, sea bounded with no shore' (7.510). The long panoramas of formlessness alternate with moments of epigrammatic compression which come to imply a strong, predestined divine pattern behind the apparent chaos: 'They that bore all else down kept up that boat' (7.440); 'With spirits sinking as the waters swelled' (7.446). The waters 'At once both death and sepulture bestow' (7.452). The sinners become locked in their closed minds; God does not so much impose an external punishment as allow them to rush into claustrophobic confinement of their own making:

Some unto Heaven would have raised their cries  
But only Hell and Death rolled in their eyes. (7.469–70)

In this harsh presentation of divine wrath, Hutchinson reserves compassion for the animals:

The wet birds flew about but no rest found,  
Their food, their groves, their nests, their perches  
drowned. (7.481–2)

Here the rhetorical figure of zeugma brings home their remorselessly narrowing options. Another version of the same figure moves us back from pathos to judgement:

The gallants' scarves and feathers, soldiers' tents,  
The poor man's rags and princes' ornaments,

The silken curtains and the women's veils,  
 Themselves too borne up with light robes like sails,  
 Banded in sport awhile, at last did all  
 Equally lost into the hazard fall. (7.491–6)

The delayed main verb springs the trap waiting for vanity. In this destructive moment the birds' feathers are no more useful than the gallants', but as at many points in the poem, the contrast between birds' simplicity and humans' vainglory retains force, here as the contrast between pathos and bathos.

Yet human artifice can be redeemed. The moment when the floodwaters recede prompts one of the poem's most remarkable similes:

As women, with their proud fantastic care  
 Ne'er satisfied, set and unset their hair  
 A thousand times ere they themselves can please:  
 So played the soft gales on the varied seas,  
 Now crisped, now marbled the successive streams,  
 Now weaved them into bredes with glittering beams  
 Whose penetrations changed their sullen hue  
 While gold appeared through the transparent blue.  
 What will full Restoration be, if this  
 But the first daybreak of God's favour is? (8.19–28)

Here female cosmetics form part of the divine *kósmos*, the process of restoring the lost image of God. Redeemed only in part, as 'proud fantastic' reminds us; but the movement of the poetry brings us away from that stock moralism. The hair-setting becomes an image of redemption insofar as it is a process, not a static product; it thus images the divine sublimity that transcends a merely vainglorious or courtly beauty.

### The Divine Narrative

Hutchinson finds in Genesis a story of

Infinite wisdom plotting with free grace,  
 Even by man's fall, th'advance of human race. (5.71–2)

God's repeated interventions in history always look forward to the future, insisting that however unclear it may seem, it will follow a

coherent pattern. The poem may prefer the open air to the closed rooms of palaces, but its title reveals a deep longing for a coherent order in the universe. To this extent the poem is a conscious reversal of what she found in Lucretius. In the dedication to her translation Hutchinson repeatedly counterposes the divine order to the oscillations she found in contemporary philosophy, where the absence of a governing divine principle left a Nature reduced either to a blindly regular mechanism or to sheer randomness:

They that make the incorruptible God part of a corruptible world, and chaine up his absolute freedom of will to a fatall Necessity; That make nature, which only is the Order God hath sett in his workes, to be God himselfe . . . deniing that determinate wise Councell and Order of things they could not dive into . . . reviving the foppish casuall dance of attons, and deniing the Sovereigne Wisedome of God in the greate Designe of the whole Universe and every creature in it, and his eternall Omnipotence, exerting it selfe in the production of all things, according to his most wise and fixed purpose, and his most gracious, ever active Providence, upholding, ordering and governing the whole Creation, and conducting all that appears most casuall to us and our narrow comprehensions, to the accomplishment of those just ends for which they were made. (*L* 24)

It is very important for Hutchinson that ‘Whatever doth to mortal men befall / Not casual is’ (5.676–7), that God ‘orders all our human accidents’ (8.404, cf. 12.295–6).

For Hutchinson, a crucial part of that order is the Calvinist doctrine of double predestination. In his preference for the reprobate Esau, Isaac,

governed by a partial blind affection,  
Stuck to that choice which was not God’s election,  
Who in their birth, without a reason shown,  
To make his boundless will and free grace known,  
Declared love to the one, to th’other hate;  
Well pleased in this, makes that a reprobate;  
Before the children had done good or ill  
Reveals the intent of his free-moving will,  
And manifests his great prerogative  
O’er all the creatures who their being derive  
From his vast power which, bounded by no laws,  
Acts freely without any second cause[.] (18.77–88)

This formulation is so uncompromising that it may remind some read-

ers of Robert Burns's *reductio ad absurdum* of Calvinism in 'Holy Willie's Prayer'. Calvin had used the story of Jacob and Esau in precisely this way. On this view, God's covenant of grace, proclaimed at Genesis 3.15, made a sharp distinction: the seed of the woman, the elect, would be saved; the seed of the serpent, the reprobate, would be damned.

That doctrine did indeed offer reassurance against a world of complete accident. It was also, for Protestants hostile to the traditional rituals and church hierarchies, a bedrock of certainty against merely human traditions, a point from which they could be contested. The price was a heavy one, however. If, as Milton put it, God was the 'author' of the universe (*PL* 3.374), in Calvinist terms the divine narrative was one with a clear plot but lacking any clear connection between plot and character. In his *Christian Doctrine* (*CPW* VI.168–202) Milton challenged the Calvinist reading of Jacob and Esau, questioning the justice of a God who could act so arbitrarily. The Calvinist God resembled an absolutist king, acting out of pure, arbitrary will, choosing his favourites without any apparent reference to their qualities of character. The God of Hutchinson's poem certainly lives up to that paradigm (cf. *Order and Disorder* 1.249, 3.241, 4.148, 5.391, 18.252). Her 'They must be broken who with power contend' (1.17) places God's power before his goodness. To justify God's goodness, Milton structures his narrative in *Paradise Lost* to show an enormously complex series of connections between human actions and divine judgement. Given that the Fall is the central explanation of why humanity becomes blinded and closed to divine grace, it is striking how little attention Hutchinson pays to its process: it is narrated in a few lines, and attention passes to the minority who thereafter are chosen to find their way beyond the limitations it imposes on human understanding and will. Hutchinson insists again and again that fallen humanity is blinded, and lays stress on the physical blinding of Lot's assailants and on the failing eyesight of Isaac. God, it may seem, has blinded humanity and blamed them for their blindness. The blind Milton, struggling with his concerns about divine justice, was less ready to use the metaphor of blindness in such a wholly negative way (cf. *PL* 3.35).

Yet Hutchinson's divine narrative offers its own, distinct interest. Genesis was an intriguing text for a Calvinist imagination precisely because of its instabilities in characterization. The differing processes of composition outlined above had left its leading figures as perplexing enigmas, raising more questions about the connections between their actions and their divine favour than the text clearly answered. Hutchinson

is fascinated by the way characters' Hebrew names prophesy their destiny, but often in an unexpected or ironic manner. It is at the point where Milton reduces his Genesis narration to condensed summary, in Book 11, that Hutchinson becomes most closely involved in the story. In the end, even if we 'can but make a wild uncertain guess' about motivations (5.261), Hutchinson is convinced that God's actions can be justified. Her characters come at moments of truth to a recognition, however imperfect, of a link between their own nature and divine judgement. The Flood's victims reach a painful flash of self-knowledge; the elect, like the animals entering the ark,

Are wholly led by God yet unconstrained;  
Nor wrought like stocks, by his sure fixed decree,  
But by his free grace set at liberty  
From Hell's mists, which benight the natural mind,  
And lust's strong fetters, which the free will bind,  
And are, as here, by soft impulses led . . . (7.350–5)

The consolation offered here is a limited one: the will is free only because God allows it to become so, and the comparison with animals – even in a poem as sympathetic to the animal world as *Order and Disorder* – is not particularly good for human self-esteem. Hutchinson's focus here, as so often, is on the consequences not for humanity but for the understanding of God. He is both fixed and boundless, offering at once a sublime openness and an utter certainty. The poem finds an imaginative power in God's remoteness. Where Milton allows the reader to soar beyond human confines and see the cosmos from the divine point of view, Hutchinson remains on the ground and is fascinated by the rare moments when the mists part, when the monochrome world of the fallen vision is touched by the divine image.

These contrasts between the two poets may not have been so evident in their time as they are today. Hutchinson would probably not have known of Milton's *Christian Doctrine*, which remained in manuscript. There he attacked traditional doctrines of the Trinity, which Hutchinson was so keen to uphold that she extended discussion in revision (1.85–122). In *Paradise Lost*, however, a particular position on the Trinity and on predestination is harder to pin down with complete certainty, and recent scholars have raised some questions about his authorship of *Christian Doctrine*. The question can be put in a new light by setting the discussion of predestination by Milton's God (*PL* 3.80–343) against comparable passages in Hutchinson. It is hard to imagine Hutchinson's

God suggesting even in a subordinate phrase that his predestination could not overrule man's will (*PL* 3.114–15). But Milton may have been at least partly drawn towards the idea of a predestined elect by its power to offer the confidence and assurance of belonging to a spiritual elite (Fallon). For Hutchinson, holding on to predestination was to hold on to one of the central platforms of the original Puritan coalition that had led the struggle against Charles I (Tyacke). Hutchinson would have hoped herself to earn the comment made by a royalist after the Restoration that her husband was 'the most unchanged person of the party' (*M* 289, 299, 312), and her theology was a powerful support. With the same political defiance, whatever the differences in theological emphasis, Milton declared that 'I sing . . . unchanged' (*PL* 7.24).

### Politics and Religion

The title, *Order and Disorder*, may arouse expectations of a strongly conservative politics. We should remember that it may not have been Hutchinson's preferred title for the poem as a whole. The 1679 subtitle is *Or, the World made and Undone. Being Meditations upon the Creation and the Fall, as it is recorded in the beginning of Genesis*. The manuscript, which takes the story long beyond the Fall, is headed merely 'Genesis Chap. 1<sup>st</sup>. Canto 1<sup>st</sup>.', and we cannot be sure that Hutchinson would have retained *Order and Disorder* as the overall title. It is, however, appropriate on many different levels. As has been seen, it evokes the activity of the Spirit in creating the universe. In more philosophical terms, it takes up the concerns of the Lucretius dedication, stressing that nature is God's order in his works. That order, however, is by no means easy to detect: men and women have been created in the image of God, but the Fall has darkened the image. Hutchinson uses a series of characteristic terms – masks, veils, shadows – to indicate her belief that true knowledge has been lost. The universe, once a mirror of divine order, had become a distorting mirror; fallen humanity turned the reflections into idols and lost sight of what they reflected. Hutchinson firmly rejected the natural theologians' view that true religion could be derived from rational knowledge of the universe: while the natural world did reveal enough of God to make idolatry and atheism 'unexcusable' (*R* 11; cf. Romans 1.20), divine grace alone produced salvation. In the treatise she translated, Owen traced the fall and restoration of theology from Adam through Cain to Noah, Abraham and Moses, consistently

stressing the human propensity to idolatry unless divine grace intervenes (*T*; Owen, *Works* XVI).

Hutchinson's emphasis on the blindness of fallen humanity gives her poem its political bite. Again and again she suggests that the existing political order is very far from reflecting the divine order. On the contrary, God works in history by breaking down the idols of false orders and elevating the humble who seem to their enemies to be themselves forces of disorder. The poem was printed, as has been seen, in a period of intensifying ideological conflict, and the title may perhaps have reassured the licenser, the fiercely conservative Sir Roger L'Estrange, that the poem was on the right side. Even in the more guarded first part, however, there are clear indications that all is not well with the existing social order. Already in line 11 a note is sounded that will recur throughout the poem: God condemns rebellion, but, as will emerge more and more strongly, the true rebels are not the republicans and Dissenters with whom figures like L'Estrange would have identified the word, but the royalists and churchmen who are persecuting them. The Sabbath was ordained

That kings, hence taught, might in their realms maintain  
Fair order, serving those whom they command  
As guardians, not as owners of the land,  
Not being set there to pluck up and destroy  
Those plants whose culture should their cares employ. (3.634–8)

The sentiments here are parallel to the treatise to her daughter:

Who gave him these lands, these ancestors, but God the greate proprietor of heaven and earth, and all things in them? Shall he, then, lift up himselfe before the Lord, usurping to himselfe a propriety in what God hath only committed to his stewardship . . . ? (*R* 106)

After the Fall, in a strikingly provocative phrase, 'Hell's gloomy princes' are 'the World's rulers made' (5.101); amongst the glosses is Psalm 2, in which the kings of the earth set themselves against the heavenly king. Such corrupt kings are the puppets of the fallen angels, of whom at least it can be said that 'An order too there is in their dire state', that they seek a 'common interest . . . Lest civil wars should make their empire fall' (4.85–94). The emphasis on 'common interest' is characteristically republican: Lucy Hutchinson believed that the 'prouder great ones' despised 'the common interest', whose triumph would ultimately lead

to a 'free commonwealth' (*M* 33, 61). The sentiment here is very close to Milton's

Oh shame to men! Devil with devil damned  
Firm concord hold, men only disagree  
Of creatures rational . . . (*PL* 2.496–8)

Milton presents the fallen angels as becoming more and more king-like; but he also repeatedly describes God and the Son as kings, and this has generated much debate about the possible incongruities with his republican ideology. Milton, strongly distinguishing his God from a Calvinist deity whom he associates with absolutism, tries to make him give the reasons for his actions as clearly as possible. Hutchinson's God is a more mysterious and remote figure; this may make his actions seem more arbitrary, but it also lessens concrete associations with worldly rulers. Hutchinson lays the emphasis on God's following constitutional forms. Before he creates Adam he calls a 'sacred council' in himself (3.4), to magnify the event but also with the implication that constitutional forms are important. Before he passes judgement he refuses to punish sinners without hearing them, as an example to future rulers (5.7–12). Adam is God's 'viceroy'; he is termed a king, but only in relation to his domination over other creatures, not over humans, and he is accountable when he exercises his charge badly.

For Hutchinson, God's unfailing will is not a worrying parallel with absolutism but a source of strength in her criticism of corrupt secular orders. If everything were subject to chance, there would be nowhere to appeal to against tyranny; but she writes with an unshakeable faith in a God whose transcendence can question any secular power. Again and again God's predestination is set in opposition to expected successions in a worldly hierarchy. History is a drama of salvation and damnation in which those who gain power and glory in the short term may very well be those marked for the deepest damnation. Hutchinson's use of Genesis parallels here is very close to her republican contemporary Edmund Ludlow, who invoked figures like Cain, Hagar and Esau as prefiguring the evils of the Restoration regime (Ludlow 1193, 1205, 1214–15).

Cain's murder of Abel is the first of a series of events which establish a sharp discrepancy between human and divine orders. Eve, promised that her seed will redeem the Fall, hopes that her first-born son will be the redeemer and names him accordingly. On the contrary, her son will in fact be the first great human enemy of redemption. The first-born

son slays his younger brother, in an episode that Hutchinson associates with the predatory domination of the nobles over the commons:

alas, from whence  
Doth vain nobility raise its pretence[.] (6.61–2)

His arrogance is also associated with religious ritualism: Cain's 'pompous hecatombs' are empty 'formal', while Abel's simpler observance is sincere. Cain becomes an image of the 'formal hypocrite' who dominates in today's church (6.331). The split between external form and inner truth has become extreme: Cain has been exiled by God, but in his own terms he flourishes, and establishes the first great city, the capital of the Worldly State. Adam begets a new son, Seth, who founds a rival Holy State. It is notable that at this early stage of history, when there are no magistrates (6.246), there is no clear distinction between church and state: the antithesis between Worldly State and Holy State is also that between 'The little Church and the World's larger State' (5.89). Religious observances take place with no formal organization or place of worship, and the visible church is effectively made up of the followers of the leading patriarchs.

Despite the poem's suspicion of ecclesiastical organizations, a notable difference from Milton is the recurrent interest in the godly as a church. Hutchinson, though opposed to a coercive state church, was more sympathetic than Milton to worship in existing public congregations. She sees all such groupings, however, as vulnerable once they grow in worldly glory: the Holy State remains pure only so long as it shuns cities, arts and sensual pleasures (6.443), and is steadily corrupted by Satan. That corruption manifests itself in increased atheism: even though God sustains the natural order, a constant reminder of his providence, the atheists 'miscalled his high help accident' (7.154). Only a tiny number remain immune: Enoch, who is elevated directly to heaven, and Noah and his family, who survive the Flood with which God punishes the rest of the world.

Even when the Flood recedes and the poem has a moment of relish for the beauties of the natural world, the political edge remains. The poem looks forward to the final restoration of God's image at the millennium, the return of a true vision of the cosmic order as the blindness of sin is banished to Hell and the elect are redeemed:

What will full Restoration be, if this  
But the first daybreak of God's favour is? (8.27–8)

Hutchinson lyrically evokes the beauty of this restoration; but her Calvinist sense of damnation is never absent:

But while you think his threatened day far off,  
 Like the old world you these predictions scoff,  
 With blindness cursed; not to recover sight  
 Till your own dreadful flames be your first light. (8.59–62)

The mountains showing first from the waters are compared to princes and noblemen, and in a provocative challenge to the Restoration political order, she warns that ‘Your new-restored glory shall expire’ unless they rule well (8.51). Here Hutchinson plays on different senses of ‘restoration’. For royalists, of course, the word mainly referred to Charles II’s return in 1660; but Puritan republicans appealed to Isaiah 1.26, ‘I will restore thy judges as at the first’, as well as to Machiavelli’s more secular theory, to present reform as an act of restoration, a return to first principles. Hence the provocative inscription on the republic’s Great Seal: ‘In the First Year of Freedom by God’s Blessing Restored’. Lucy Hutchinson declared that her husband had worn his sword ‘not to destroy but to restore’ (‘Elegies’ 4.10). Those who aspire to regal and aristocratic glory are ultimately doomed. The poem then moves to the church, with an extended allegory of the church-ark as infested by hypocrites, the creatures of Cain’s Worldly State, punishing the godly saints – a clear reference to the treatment of Dissenters in the Restoration world. To the raven is counterposed the peaceful dove of the Gospel. It is at this pivotal moment of the poem, where the references to divine and political ‘restoration’ are clustered most closely (see also 8.108, 249, 401), that the narrator’s voice comes to the fore again for a moment in an address to the dove (8.189–94). As long as rebels defy God’s order, however, harsher tones than the dove’s are needed, and the canto ends with sharp defiance against the powers that be: those

whom God did institute to curb  
 The world’s disorders, did the world disturb,  
 To murder and to slaughter led whole hosts  
 Till searèd conscience made their crimes their boast[.] (8.321–4)

The ensuing canto challenges one of the mainsprings of monarchist ideology. Noah’s survival as sole source of political authority after the Flood had been taken by the absolutist Sir Robert Filmer as evidence that God approved kingship above all other forms of government (Filmer

7–8). The episode in which Ham laughed at his drunkenness, and was punished with a curse on his descendants, was normally taken as a warning against irreverent subjects who pried into the mysteries of state. The embarrassing fact that the royal paragon had laid himself open to this treatment was normally glossed over. Hutchinson begins her narration as if she were in line with royalist traditions, with an extended praise of the good effects of wine that might be expected to extenuate Noah's intemperance; but this adds to the shocking effect when she proceeds to attack excessive drinking in terms that link it with the general ideological deformities she found in Restoration culture, notably atheism (9.163–4), and graphically declares that 'Noah, the new world's monarch, here lies drunk' (9.187). The curse of Ham is, then, not primarily an attack on democracy – though, like Milton, she does open the way to reading it as a curse of peoples considered inferior, a potential validation of slavery (Jablonski).

In discussing Noah's judgement of Ham, Hutchinson draws a parallel with David's treatment of his son Absalom, who had killed his half-brother Amnon for murdering his sister, was indulged by his father and subsequently rebelled against him (2 Samuel 13–19). This comparison, rather indirect in relation to Noah, applied closely to Charles II. His illegitimate son James, Duke of Monmouth, was involved in a murderous debauch in 1671 and escaped punishment, his father having prepared a remarkable document pardoning him from 'all Murders, Homicides, & Felonies, whatsoever' (Fea 49); Dryden compared this event to the murder of Amnon in his *Absalom and Achitophel* (1681). It is instructive to compare Hutchinson's ideological stance with Dryden's (though she would almost certainly have been writing before the publication of his satire). Dryden, defending Charles, suggests that the blame resides with the son for ingratitude to paternal indulgence. Hutchinson takes a much harsher line: a debauched sovereign must punish a sinful child to avoid favouritism; yet in the end he must take the main responsibility for setting such a bad example: 'Who sentences his sons his own sins dooms' (9.236). Though rebellion against kings is here condemned, no credit redounds on the monarch.

The onslaught on monarchy continues in canto 10, where we are forcefully reminded that

the first mighty monarchs of the earth  
From Noah's graceless son derived their birth. (10.19–20)

Nimrod, the first tyrant, was descended from Ham. Still more than Noah in his drunkenness, he was an embarrassing figure for royalists, and republicans often invoked him as typifying the real spirit of monarchy. Milton denounced him for ending 'fair equality, fraternal state' (*PL* 12.26), leading a contemporary reader to conclude that he 'holds to his old [republican] Principle' (Norbrook 1999a 467); Hutchinson's portrayal is more explicit, though not without subtlety in its reworking of a Virgilian simile (10.71–8). Though Hutchinson is faithful enough to Genesis to admit the occasional figure of a virtuous monarch, kingship is normally associated with the corrupt rule of the Worldly State, which receives its due punishment in the spectacular episode of the destruction of Sodom (canto 13).

To such tyrants the poem counterposes the figure of Abraham, the divinely appointed ancestor of Christ. He shows his allegiance to the Holy State by his lack of pomp and ceremony. Filmer claimed that Abraham was a king, noting that he had led troops in battle (Genesis 14). Republicans retorted that he had fought not as a political leader but as a leader of volunteers, and noted that he treated his nephew Lot as an equal rather than a subject (Sidney 24–5, Locke 236–40, Ludlow 1194). *Order and Disorder* fully accords with that interpretation. Though Abraham's military exploits are related, the poem emphasizes that he fought only to help his kinsman Lot (11.359–62), and relishes the lack of pretension in those early days (12.239–42). The contrast between holy simplicity and worldly artifice recurs in Abraham's religion. He establishes not a temple but a simple grove as a place of worship. There was a contemporary parallel: the Restoration anti-Dissenting legislation had forced unauthorized religious meetings to take place in the open air. Hutchinson contrasts such simplicity with the idolatrous pomp that tries to confine the boundless God in local places (15.27–38). This will one day be the site of the great temple at Jerusalem; Hutchinson looks forward less to its days of glory than to its destruction (15.197–200). Once Christ's sacrifice has been made, the truest temples will be in believers' hearts. Once again the concept of divine restoration is played against the ethos of the English Restoration: God had no need to 'restore' the physical temple (15.261). In making this the point of the poem where Christ is most explicitly foreseen, Hutchinson emphasizes how God's order may cut violently across the dynastic order of succession and primogeniture: 'religion changes styles of things' (15.131).

Such a challenge to primogeniture follows in the story of Jacob and Esau. In the revolutionary period some radicals challenged the tradi-

tional priority of the eldest son in English inheritance, claiming equal treatment for sons (though not for daughters); they often invoked the divine preference for Jacob over Esau (Hill 1993 203–15). As in the Cain-Abel story, it is the younger brother who is righteous. Hutchinson develops the political and religious aspects of this story well beyond the commentaries. Esau aligns himself with the Worldly State, falling in love with a woman from an idolatrous court. Though the Biblical Esau smells pungently of the fields, Hutchinson gives him a more aristocratic perfume. His speech in which he insists on his right to love freely (17.484–500) might have come from one of the Restoration heroic plays in which libertines attacked social convention (his loved one's name, Aholibamah, happens to have the polysyllabic ring beloved of heroic dramatists). Esau's courtships of idolators – and his hypocritical attempts to nullify their effects by marrying a saint – manifest his predestined reprobation, which cuts right across his father's expectations of the lawful inheritance. Hutchinson uses an epic simile drawn from civil war to describe his emotions when he finds that he has blessed the younger son (18.111–21). The war between the elect and the reprobate is an eternal civil war, running right through families as well as states, and the right side may not be the obvious one. Though Jacob will have the inheritance, however, he sets off with no material goods and will earn his living, and his marriages, by menial labours; such simplicity is superior to the troubles of princes (19.9–12), whose blindness is contrasted with his 'penetrating sight' (19.71). The poem breaks off before Jacob's full story can be told.

*Order and Disorder*, then, shows a continued disrespect for monarchical order; it shares in the radical inheritance of the English Revolution. Hutchinson's is in many ways a levelling imagination, undercutting human hierarchies. Her sympathy for the oppressed extends to animals. The early modern period saw a new emphasis on humanity's role as steward of the natural order, which led to a more humanitarian view of relations with animals, and a suspicion of hawking and hunting (Thomas 154–62). In line with these developments, Hutchinson insists that God's providence extends to animals as well as man (7.541–2), presents hunting as a mark of the Fall, and takes a lead in attacking cock-fighting (variant at 5.346) – a sport which had been banned in 1654 but was reintroduced at the Restoration. The topic of birds always tempts her into digression.

The human victims of the Flood, however, receive no such compassion. In its severe Calvinism, the poem is marked as much by a harsh

withholding of sympathy as by its enlargement. The levelling is often largely negative, in calling for divine judgement on sinners in all levels of society:

Down every channel ran a mixed flood,  
With streams of royal and of common blood.  
The princes were with vulgar prisoners chained,  
Lords with their slaves one servitude sustained. (15.197–200)

The poet is concerned with the reduction of princes to slaves rather than with the evils of slavery; and it is not hard to see how the idea of a cursed seed, here deployed against the nobility, might be used to justify the enslavement of subject peoples. On the verge of an age of colonization, Hutchinson's narrative of the expansion of the chosen people through the world and their suppression of their enemies has harsh resonances. She can unsettle worldly hierarchies in speaking of 'vulgar angels' (1.267), but can also dismiss the rebellious impulses of 'vulgar breasts' (12.83). We shall not, then, be surprised to find similar tensions in her treatment of the status of women.

### **Eve's Version? Genesis, Women and the Woman Writer**

Genesis contains texts which have become standard declarations of female subordination, and have received extensive critique and analysis from feminist scholars (Bach; Brenner; Jeansonne; Nyquist). It also contains some of the Bible's most striking portrayals of independent-minded women – leading Harold Bloom provocatively if unpersuasively to suggest that the J-text, often regarded as the most misogynistic, must have been the work of a woman. In *Order and Disorder* we do have a telling of the story by a woman, and it is particularly interesting to see how she steers her narrative.

For women readers, the first two chapters of Genesis have stood as an obstacle fronting the whole Bible. At Genesis 1.26–7 God declares, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness . . . So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them'. At 2.18–25 he announces that he will give Adam a helper; Adam names the other creatures but none of them is suitable; God sends him to sleep and creates Eve out of one of his ribs.

From these narratives, Paul formed the view that women must learn in silence with subjection but should not teach or usurp authority over men (1 Corinthians 11.7–9, 1 Timothy 2.11–14).

Medieval and Renaissance women writers had often tried to reinterpret the Genesis story to counter its misogynistic use (Gössman), and in England such reinterpretations can be found in figures like Aemilia Lanyer and Rachel Speght (Lewalski 1993 165–9, 231–2). In Lucy Hutchinson's time Quaker women were continuing the challenge, setting the spirit above the authority of Scripture. Hutchinson did not go this far, however; for her and her husband, Paul's letters were the key to the deepest meanings of Scripture, and she would have been wholly resistant to questioning their literal authority. And yet, if his injunctions are interpreted in their narrowest form, writing *Order and Disorder* at all – even in order to versify them – was itself a challenge to Pauline authority. In finding a space for her own voice and for the voices of other women, Hutchinson proceeds by a more indirect path than the Quakers. If on one level Paul insists on rigid hierarchy, on another level he presents the true faith as a challenge to all traditions; faith cuts across any received value, and he supports this belief with repeated examples from Genesis (e.g. Galatians 4.22–4, Isaac and Ishmael; Hebrews 11 – then thought to be by Paul). As has been seen, in political terms this commitment to faith enables Hutchinson to contest the traditions of kingship. It is less easy to establish how far the same commitment allows her to contest traditions of female subordination.

Hutchinson's treatment of Genesis necessarily encounters complexities that Paul's brief allusions avoided. Modern scholarship recognizes that chapters 1 and 2 represent very different, 'Priestly' and 'Yahwist', accounts of the creation. In the first version, man and woman are created at the same time; and most early modern commentators rejected Paul's implication that man alone was made in God's image. If that was true, it was so not at the level of the soul but only within the sphere of the household, where the man should hold authority. The Yahwist narrative gives Adam the priority, in his ability to name the creatures and in Eve's being formed from his body. From the Renaissance to the present day, commentators seeking to emphasize female subordination have tended to read the Yahwist into the Priestly account, while their opponents have tried to privilege the Priestly account (Nyquist). Tensions between the two emphases can be found within Genesis 1.27 in the shift from 'him' to 'them'.

In her treatise to her daughter, Hutchinson deploys aspects of each version. She inverts the order of the shift from singular to plural: ‘God created man, male and female, in his own image and likeness . . . happie in the favour of God . . . who had made him Lord of all the other creatures’ (R 28). She thus implies that ‘him’ from now on applies to both sexes (as was indeed the case in Hebrew: ‘*Adam* was the common name of man & woman’, Ainsworth at Genesis 5.1). She omits the story of the rib. In describing the Fall, she places less emphasis on Eve in particular than on the couple’s common culpability: ‘The chiefe of these [devils] seduced Eve, and she her husband . . . and this they committed willingly’ (R 33–4). In the explication of the ‘sinne of Adam’, no further mention is made of Eve.

In her poem, Hutchinson is committed to following the details of the Genesis narrative, and the pressure of the Yahwist story leads her to revise her recounting of the earlier version, leaving woman for a later appearance:

‘Let us’, said God, ‘with sovereign power endued,  
Make man after our own similitude,  
Let him our sacred impressed image bear,  
Ruling o’er all in earth and sea and air.’ (3.9–12)

The poem proceeds with a long discussion of Adam as king of the created world. Hutchinson follows the Yahwist narrative as Adam names the creatures and God puts him to sleep and takes Eve from his rib to be his companion. Her commentary, however, draws an unusual conclusion. The creation from the rib, rather than illustrating inferiority (Adam has asked for an ‘equal mate’, 3.233), is used to show mankind’s dependency: as she was formed in his sleep, so human actions are helpless without divine grace. In declaring that ‘Our choicest mercies out of dead wombs flow’ (3.466), Hutchinson gives a new twist to the Biblical imagery of male birth. The poem proceeds by splicing together Priestly and Yahwist narratives. Genesis 1.29–30, in which dominion is offered to both Adam and Eve, is paraphrased at 3.417–28; the passage then jumps to Genesis 2.16–17, a warning given to Adam before Eve’s creation. We then move back to Eve in a further allegorization: Adam and Eve figure Christ and the Gospel Church, deploying the symbolism of the Song of Songs. In a poem where female beauty is often associated with illusion and temptation, this introduction of the naked Eve as a revelation of divine truth offers a counterweight. It is Adam

who is described in terms of his physical beauty, in strikingly androgynous terms (3.111–22). The narrative now jumps back to the Priestly version of the end of the sixth day (1.21, 2.1), but this time Eve has dropped out of the picture: Adam alone is viceroy of God (3.503–24).

These inconsistencies suggest that Hutchinson was having some difficulty in finding a place for Eve, under the dual pressure of Pauline interpretation and her inhibitions about going beyond the Biblical text; but the experiment is interesting. Eve comes into focus only with the temptation scene, and here Paul is very much in evidence: her fault springs from her failure to listen to her husband. The marginal note refers us to 2 Timothy 3.6, which warns against reprobates who ‘creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts’. This passage was quoted by Hutchinson in her treatise to her daughter, as a warning that women were especially liable to be misled by ‘fancies’; and she admitted that she had herself been guilty of lapses (R 6). The concerns of her Lucretius preface emerge here: Eve is motivated by ‘unbelief quenching religious dread’ (4.205). The godly household is a bastion against atheism. So concerned is Hutchinson with the present that she even observes that ‘unexperience might excuse Eve’s fault’ (4.179); the women of today should be able to benefit from their pious reading.

This orthodoxy then makes it all the more striking to encounter the narrator’s response to God’s judgement in making Eve’s husband her ruler. However just it is that women should be subordinated to their husbands, marriage may feel like fetters, even though golden ones; women may well ‘despise the rule / Of an unmanly, fickle, froward fool’ (5.145–6). Though the margin quotes Peter on the evils of women’s golden ornaments, the text reminds us that the ornaments may be chains imposed by the husband; and other notes look forward to the stories of Rebecca and Rachel, who will be presented sympathetically later in the poem. In this speech, for the first time in the poem, the narrator identifies herself with a female ‘we’. When she writes that ‘we shall trample on the serpent’s head’ (5.252), the ‘we’ unites male and female (cf. 5.64–6, 104). It is Eve who is given the first human utterance in the poem that breaks away from the Biblical text to dramatize an individualized voice. The intensity of Hutchinson’s own feelings of guilt emerges here; and Adam’s long reply is a palimpsest of her husband’s favourite Biblical texts, with Romans especially prominent. In cramming the margins with those texts, she was reduplicating the gesture in which she had copied out in the *Memoirs* manuscript the

texts he had noted in his own Bible. Even though she presented herself as following her husband's lead in his Biblical researches, however, her own intense familiarity with Scripture had enabled her to internalize those texts to the point where the language spoke through them both. It is noteworthy that Adam does not cite any of Paul's censures of women, and near the end he re-emphasizes the union of man and woman in a recurring 'we shall trample on the monster's head' (5.574), and in the birth imagery of 5.580. In a remarkable moment Hutchinson emphasizes this reciprocity by breaking the poem's frame:

Ah! can I this in Adam's person say,  
While fruitless tears melt my poor life away? (5.599–600)

If Adam's voice represents male rationality consoling female emotion, she is herself the creator of that voice.

In the later part of the poem, Hutchinson is concerned with the endless struggle between the Holy State and the Worldly State. As has been seen, her ideology is strongly anti-courtly; and in the early modern period, critics of monarchical corruption often identified tyranny with effeminacy. Equitable rule was identified with the dominance of reason over the passions, and women were held to find it harder to control their passions. The ideal state was one where public interests prevailed over private concerns; monarchy tended inexorably towards the private interests of the prince and his favourites, subsuming the whole nation under a single household. Hutchinson joined Milton and others who attacked Charles I because he allowed himself to be unduly swayed by his Catholic queen, Henrietta Maria, allowing his personal sentiments to overcome his sense of the public good. Charles's court had been a centre for female literary and, to some extent, political patronage. Hutchinson agreed with the republicans who wanted such malign female influence to be purged. She viewed even the rule of Queen Elizabeth favourably only because of her 'submission to her masculine and wise counsellors' (*M*70). *Order and Disorder* reveals similar sentiments. Satan's first strategy after the Fall is to tempt the holy seed with women, re-enacting Eve's role (6.473). The 'female empire' parodies and reinforces the structures of monarchy, in a vainglorious struggle for personal honour. Wars, which should serve only the public good, are 'undertaken at a whore's command'. The artifice of seductive cosmetics is another form of shutting out the divine order, as court ladies

Their curls in well-becoming order set;  
 Nature's defects, and time's wastes to repair[.] (6.520–1)

The poem's dominant contrast between divine *kósmos* and the fallen world here works against the female. The virtuous women of Genesis are no pattern for the learned lady of Hutchinson's time; the closest they come to linguistic activity is in their involvement in naming their children – notably in the elaborate word-fight between Leah and Rachel (19.391–480).

If Hutchinson had adhered quite rigidly to the notion that women should confine themselves to a public sphere, however, her poem would never have been written. Puritan republicans attacked monarchs who turned states into households; conversely, they tended to view households as effectively mini-states. The households of Genesis, units which are broadly autonomous of a larger state structure, and whose heads take charge of religious as well as civil functions, can be seen as an idealized version of the experience of Puritan households like that of John Hutchinson, who would lead prayers with his kin and with his servants. This religious function of the household gave wives an important ideological role. If John Hutchinson encouraged his wife in her reading and writing, it was partly because she could thus become an informed educator. It is clear that the Hutchinson household was a centre of vigorous debate about the meaning of Scripture, and in this period such debate inevitably raised 'public' issues about the state. Strong political activity centred on the household unit was characteristic of the seventeenth-century radicals (Hughes). Though the male was the prime mediator with the public world, wives would be expected to be capable of such mediation in exceptional circumstances – as Lucy Hutchinson had to do when her husband was in prison. Though the Genesis narrative primarily sees its women as instruments of succession, Hutchinson makes Abraham share her own concern for education:

And since that both the parents' godliness  
 To children's education is required,  
 He for his son a virtuous wife desired,  
 And lest his unexperienced youth should be  
 Betrayed by fond love to idolatry,  
 The father's harsh prerogative doth use,  
 Nor leaves it in his young son's power to choose[.] (16.10–16)

Abraham's patriarchal authority is unchallenged, but it does imply a dependence on unusual women.

There are some signs that Hutchinson viewed the restriction of her role with ambivalence. Perhaps the most remarkable female figure in the poem is Divine Vengeance, the instrument of God's judgement against Sodom. As she and another female, Death, wield their divine powers against Sodom, the words 'blaze' and 'blazing' recur (13.185–250), recalling references elsewhere to 'blazing females' (6.479), the courtly ladies who are 'blazing stars' to corrupt the state (16.67). If this passage is of later date, it is possible that Hutchinson was glancing at Margaret Cavendish's absolutist *The Blazing World* (1666), where an empress – at a time when Charles was at war with the Dutch – uses her 'fire-stones' to destroy the enemy fleet (Cavendish 203–16). Hutchinson would have had a different view of Charles's wars, and of the role of women at court in general. Yet her Vengeance is in her own way a blazing female. Her triumph, however, immediately succeeds the punishment of Lot's wife for female curiosity (13.173–6).

A certain ambivalence was likely to emerge given Hutchinson's Calvinist contempt for all unregenerate institutions, male or female. Hutchinson presented herself as her husband's 'mirror' or 'shadow' (Keeble 1990), accepting the idea that within the household woman was less in the image of God than man. But there was an important qualification: she worried that in her love for her husband she might have delighted 'more than I ought to have done in the mirror that reflected the Creator's excellence'; it was God's grace alone that changed 'that wretched fallen nature . . . into such a blessed image of his own glory' (*M* 17). The poem has hard words for manliness as well as effeminacy. Atheists believe themselves to be showing 'manly courage' in shutting themselves off from God (7.134); debauched rakes jeer at 'unmanly shame' (9.27); the corrupt Sodomites engage in 'manly exercises' (13.8). True humanity in male and female shows itself closest to the image of God when furthest from the vainglorious impositions that block out the divine order.

The tension between Pauline restrictions on women and a strongly Pauline predestinarianism emerges in Hutchinson's portraits of the women of Genesis. As has been seen, the very lack of a clear link between moral virtue and divine providence intrigued commentators on Genesis; and in the case of the women, there were persistent problems for traditional moralists (see Whately). Women are, after all, 'the kink in the works of a patrilineal descent system' (Schwartz 84). The narra-

tive sources, especially J, often adopt a comic tone, delighting in the ingenuity with which these female tricksters can get their way. Reworking the texts to make them part of her providential narrative, Hutchinson sometimes presents the women as a diversion of patriarchal purposes; but on occasion she can relish their trickery as part of the divine purpose. She is less consistently critical than Calvin of Sarah and of Rachel, both of whom repay closer study than is possible here. It is Rebecca, however, who engages Hutchinson most – and she had few parallels in contemporary divine poetry to work from. As first seen, Rebecca conforms to the mould of the submissive, industrious, austere woman as contrasted with the courtly sinner (16.61–8). Her parents ‘freely . . . resign her’ (16.154; Genesis 24.58), a point taken by some Biblical commentators as evidence that children should always submit to their parents’ decisions. Rebecca, however, turns her obedience to the parental will into something more complex. She will go right away lest her ‘virtuous courage’ relent, she must choose the ‘occasion’ (16.188, 194), for

Tedious consideration checks the bold;  
 Whilst cautious men deliberating be,  
 They oftener lose the opportunity  
 Which daring minds embrace than with their wise  
 Foresight escape the threatened precipice.  
 Where choice is offered we may use the scales  
 Of prudence, but where destiny prevails,  
 Consideration then is out of date  
 Where courage is required to meet our fate. (16.216–24)

The language here is that of Machiavelli, for whom the statesman of manly energy, of *virtù*, should seize the *occasione*, should master the female Fortune. This was the language conventionally used of action in the public world. The non-Machiavellian concept here is ‘destiny’; Rebecca sees that this marriage involves obeying not just her parents but the will of God.

Her insight extends to her understanding of her children. Genesis 26.34–5 briefly discusses Esau’s wives, but Hutchinson brings in material from later chapters to emphasize his love of idolatrous, courtly women. Rebecca and Isaac have significantly different responses. Rebecca, having tried in vain to educate her daughters-in-law in divine worship, favours Jacob over Esau, while Isaac still prefers the elder son. The end of canto 17 states categorically that Rachel is right, ‘Con-

firmed with powerful reason' (17.541). Hutchinson thus introduces the story of the blessing with the readers already predisposed in Rebecca's favour. She leaves no doubt that Rebecca takes the lead in deceiving her husband: it is her 'plot' (18.17). Isaac is slowly brought to realize that he has 'doted' (18.155), that he has failed to allow grace to modify his 'natural inclination' (18.159). When Rebecca's 'spies' find out Esau's anger, she urges the 'prudent', 'politic' course (18.210–11). Lacking this context, the narratorial comment might seem straightforwardly misogynistic:

What power like that of subtle women when  
They exercise their skill to manage men,  
Their weak force recompensed with wily arts!  
While men rule kingdoms, women rule their hearts. (18.219–22)

Many commentators condemned Rebecca for her artifice, some of them seeing it as distinctly and negatively female. Indeed, not so long ago a commentator could still take the Elohist's 'shifting the blame from Jacob to Rebekah' as evidence of a 'heightening of moral sensitivity' (Interpreter's I.679). For Hutchinson, however, there is no doubt that Rebecca is at this point more open to the divine image than Isaac.

It is then not quite unexpected, but still surprising, that as her favourite son continues on his journey, he should be described in a strikingly androgynous simile:

Night's chariot hasted on, by swift Hours drawn,  
And the next day brought on his early dawn,  
When with like diligence as dames that feel  
The spur of urging need rise to the wheel,  
Rake by the cinders, and rush-candles light,  
Calling their drowsy maids up while 'tis night,  
Then ply their tasks and labour hard to gain  
An honest maintenance for their small train,  
The son of Isaac from his hard bed rose,  
The stone on which he did that night repose  
Erects and consecrates unto the Lord,  
And like a pillar sets it to record  
The memorable vision . . . (19.101–13)

A disparity between the world of a simile and the world it evokes was a feature of epic poetry, and has often been noticed in *Paradise Lost* – including, interestingly, another simile evoking Jacob's ladder (3.511–

15). In this case, however, the disparity between the vigorous young male and the ageing women is so great that it seems to need a further term. Women had traditionally been supposed to turn to the spinning wheel instead of the pen. In her Lucretius dedication, Hutchinson had tried to integrate the different spheres of activity by declaring that she had numbered the syllables of her translation by the threads of the canvas she was working on (*L* 23–4). Jacob is seeking to immortalize his dream with his stone; the spinning of the dames hints at Hutchinson's poetic labours. She was indeed experiencing 'the spur of urging need' in her later years, having sold off the family estates and being involved in endless lawsuits. Her decision to begin publishing *Order and Disorder* in 1679 may have been spurred by such need as well as by the political opening. This may be the closest we come to a self-portrait of the artist in later years: clinging to a little gentility; trying to care for a family she can barely support; finding in her work an improbable strength beyond merely natural expectations – and beyond conventional distinctions between male and female; writing on.