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"The last outback at the world's end": Bob Dylan and Franco Berardi in the Garden of Eden

No narrative motif has been more central to the birth and development of Western capitalism than that of the Garden of Eden. Karl Marx, for example, accused Adam Smith, Adolphe Thiers, and likeminded contemporaries of offering little more than a "history of economic original sin" when they claimed that wage labour and surplus capital were the unavoidable by-products of competition between "lazy rascals" and the "diligent, intelligent, and above all frugal élite."[1] "In actual history," Marx countered—a history written "in letters of blood and fire"—"methods of primitive accumulation are anything but idyllic," centred instead on "conquest, enslavement, robbery, [and] murder."[2] Roland Boer and Christina Petterson have likewise documented an extensive pattern of engagement with Genesis 1-3 by Hugo Grotius, John Locke, Thomas Malthus, and Smith as they sought "to justify private property and then labor, especially the use of labor by others, as parts of the divine will."[3] Classical economic theory, Boer and Petterson declare, "turns out to have been wrested from the Fall," and "strenuous efforts" were made by such figures "to negotiate the more troublesome aspects" of the story of Eden (for "it would hardly be appropriate if the cornerstones" of capitalist production "were the results of a divine curse").[4] Most recently, in *The Dawn of Everything* (2021), David Graeber and David Wengrow detail decades of anthropological studies that undermine Jean-Jacques Rousseau's Genesis-inspired claim that "social equality" existed only within humankind's supposedly idyllic,

Many thanks to Emmett Polanski and Patrick Whitmarsh for assisting me in developing these ideas, as well as to James Barry and Steven Rings for sharing their insights into Dylan's techniques as a composer.

[1] Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy Volume One*, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin, 1990), 873.

[2] Marx, *Capital*, 874-75.

[3] Roland Boer and Christina Petterson, *Idols of Nations: Biblical Myth at the Origins of Capitalism* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014), 168.

[4] Boer and Petterson, *Idols of Nations*, 167-68.

primordial state, and that social hierarchy represents the necessary by-product of "civilized" existence.[5] Graeber and Wengrow then offer a sharp rebuke to Jared Diamond, Francis Fukuyama, and other scholars who uncritically cite Rousseau's Edenic fantasy as a means to justify present-day political hierarchies, concluding that it is time for historians "to abandon the Garden of Eden" as a motif in favour of "a more accurate, and hopeful, picture of world history."[6]

When, however, we consider capitalism's present phase—that which Franco Berardi refers to as "semiocapitalism," a variant far more dependent than its predecessors upon the accumulation and exploitation of human "attention, memory, language, and imagination"[7]—the most consequential historical engagement with the Eden motif may, in fact, be the centuries-old obsession among Western political and literary figures (dating back as far as Dante's quest for a divine vernacular) to either revive the language spoken between God and his subjects in Eden or else construct its equivalent as a means to heal the "wound" that is our post-Babel *confusio linguarum*.[8] As Umberto Eco details in *The Search for the Perfect Language* (1993), a direct line can be drawn between the twentieth-century development of computer programming and artificial intelligence, and Leibniz's seventeenth-century attempt to construct a pure, "Adamic" language by way of calculus (which Leibniz described as a "true religion" that would transcend the "innumerable equivocations" inherent in human communication).[9] Eco's archival study allows us to identify the efforts of present-day technocapitalists to overcome the "laxity, ambiguity, and unnecessary complexity" they believe plagues "human judgement" (and to confine all social exchange within the "pure, almost mathematical environment" they claim their lucrative products provide) as merely the latest chapter in a centuries-long quest to recapture or reproduce the

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[5] David Graeber and David Wengrow, *The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2021), 1-11.

[6] Graeber and Wengrow, *The Dawn of Everything*, 8.

[7] Franco Berardi, *After the Future* (Edinburgh: AK, 2011), 107.

[8] Umberto Eco, *The Search for the Perfect Language* (1993), trans. James Fentress (Malden: Blackwell, 1997), 34-52, 351.

[9] Eco, *The Search for the Perfect Language*, 280-86. Eco presents this quotation from Leibniz's 1679 letter to the Duke of Hanover at the beginning of his book (*The Search for the Perfect Language*, n.p.).

purity of the mythical garden.[10] This quest, argues Berardi, "has created a closed reality which cannot be overcome with the techniques of politics, of conscious organized voluntary action, and of government, and "only an act of language," he adds, can give us back "the ability to see and to create a new human condition, where we now only see barbarianism and violence."[11]

None of these associations between the Eden motif and the development of Western capitalism are surprising, however, when we consider the historical origins of Genesis 1-3, as well as the manner in which the Eden motif, in particular, has been transmitted and repurposed throughout the centuries. In recent decades, scholars associated with the "minimalist" perspective of Near Eastern studies have presented substantial evidence that the Hebrew Bible's "Primary History" was conceived and initially constructed in the Hellenistic period by scribes drawing not only from the "common" African and Near Eastern "intellectual and cultural world" that had "dominated the region for millennia," but from comparatively recent Greek authors such as Sophocles, Aeschylus, and Pindar.[12] In particular, note Russell E. Gmirkin and Philippe Wajdenbaum, Plato's *Republic*, *Critias*, and late-period *Laws* not only served as the principal source of

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[10] Berardi, *After the Future*, 80; Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains* (New York: Norton, 2011), 152.

[11] Franco Berardi, *The Uprising: On Poetry and Finance* (South Pasadena: Semiotext(e), 2012), 157.

[12] Thomas L. Thompson, *The Messiah Myth: The Near Eastern Roots of Jesus and David* (London: Basic Books, 2005), 25. For an overview of developments associated with the "minimalist" tradition, see Niels Peter Lemche's *Back to Reason: Minimalism in Biblical Studies* (Sheffield: Equinox, 2022); Ingrid Hjelm, "History of Palestine verses History of Israel? The Minimalist-Maximalist Debate," in Ingrid Hjelm, Hamdan Taha, Ilan Pappe, and Thomas L. Thompson, eds., *A New Critical Approach to the History of Palestine* (Routledge, 2019), 60-79; and Philippe Wajdenbaum, *Argonauts of the Desert: Structural Analysis of the Hebrew Bible* (Sheffield: Equinox, 2011), 22-38. For an overview of recent critical developments regarding the Hellenistic origins of the Hebrew Bible, see Russell E. Gmirkin, *Plato's Timaeus and the Biblical Creation Accounts: Cosmic Monotheism and Terrestrial Polytheism in the Primordial History* (London: Routledge, 2022), 14-18. As Philippe Wajdenbaum bluntly but correctly notes, "There is no physical evidence for the Hebrew Bible before the Dead Sea Scrolls, and the spread of Hellenism in the Levant after Alexander's conquest provides the best context for its creation." Philippe Wajdenbaum, "The Book of Proverbs and Hesiod's *Works and Days*," in Lukasz Niesiolowski-Spanò and Emanuel Pfoh, eds., *Biblical Narratives, Archaeology, and Historicity: Essays in Honour of Thomas L. Thompson* (London: T&T Clark, 2020), 248.

the Hebrew Bible's political and legal concepts (including that of the division into twelve tribes), but provided its authors with a strategic blueprint for the production of state-sponsored narratives intended to "systematically [program] the beliefs and emotions of the citizenry" and invest state law with "an aura of antiquity, divine authority and unchangeability."[13] As a result, adds Gmirkin, the Hebrew Bible should be viewed as a Platonic form of "national literature," one whose construction was directly associated with the radical "transformation of Jewish national life" that occurred in the Hellenistic era (a period which witnessed "reimagined" festivals "in line with the Torah's new Mosaic foundation story," "a new monotheism […] superimposed on the old polytheism of El, Yahweh, and other ancient Canaanite gods," and a new theocratic form of government).[14]

In regard to the construction of Genesis 1-3, Gmirkin and Wajdenbaum argue that the authors of the Hebrew Bible followed closely Plato's suggestion that such national literatures include "mythical preambles" intended to promote "piety and obedience" among the subjects of the state and to "illustrate how the god rewards obedience and punishes disobedience."[15] To such ends, the authors of the Hebrew Bible drew from Berossus's *Babyloniaca*, Hesiod's *Theogony* and *Works and Days*, and a variety of Plato's dialogues (especially *Timaeus*) to produce two primary creation myths—Genesis 1-2:3 and Genesis 2:4-3:24—along with a variety of other origin stories (e.g. the post-flood covenant, the Tower of Babel narrative, and Abraham's journey), all of which depict humankind's innately curious or otherwise anti-authoritarian nature as antithetical to the will of God.[16] As Reuven Kimelman observes, the text of Genesis 2:4-3:24 strategically depicts Eve as reinterpreting God's commands in a manner that significantly reduces God's authority *prior* to any encouragement from the serpent, suggesting that its authors considered humankind's propensity for independence of thought to be part

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[13] Russell E. Gmirkin, *Plato and the Creation of the Hebrew Bible* (London: Routledge, 2016), 254, 262. See, also, Wajdenbaum, *Argonauts of the Desert*.

[14] Gmirkin, *Plato and the Creation of the Hebrew Bible*, 261-62.

[15] Philippe Wajdenbaum, "From Plato to Moses: Genesis-Kings as a Platonic Epic," in Ingrid Hjelm and Thomas L. Thompson, eds., *Biblical Interpretation Beyond Historicity: Changing Perspectives 7* (London: Routledge, 2016), 79; Gmirkin, *Plato and the Creation of the Hebrew Bible*, 254.

[16] See Wajdenbaum, *Argonauts of the Desert*, 92-95.

of our nature.[17] In other words, unlike Prometheus, the serpent of Genesis does not bestow upon humankind gifts or attributes not present at their creation, rather it merely encourages Eve to embrace that which God endowed her with. Its punishment for doing so, and hers for daring to be as her maker intended, is a lifetime of social alienation and physical pain, exposing this particular "preamble" as a warning to readers to bury their very humanity beneath their devotion to God (or, as Plato hoped, to the "aristocratic ruling class of philosophers" who claim to speak for God).[18]

Just as consequential to the development of Western colonialism and capitalism, however, was the manner in which the Eden motif was repurposed within the narratives of the proto-Christian movement of the first and second centuries CE, whose leaders were well-versed in Near Eastern literary traditions, urban-oriented, and highly protective of "newfound wealth, powers, and vitality."[19] In addition to the development of "a network of trained leaders […] who could ensure brand consistency" and the implementation of "systematic guards against defection" (including threats of violence), St. Paul and his followers constructed narratives whose primary purpose was to encourage the conversion and pacification of rural Palestine's increasingly militant population.[20] To such ends, the authors of the Gospels depicted rural Palestine as the *antithesis* of Eden—a postlapsarian "wilderness" teeming with "demons, Satan, wild beasts," and bandits—and then posited the fictional ministry of Jesus within that realm as a means to offer its inhabitants liberation in the divine kingdom to come, on the condition they remain

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[17] Reuven Kimelman, "The Seduction of Eve and Feminist Readings of the Garden of Eden," *Women in Judaism* 1, no. 2, (1998): 1-39, https://wjudaism.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/wjudaism/article/view/170.

[18] Gmirkin, *Plato's Timaeus and the Biblical Creation Accounts*, 266.

[19] Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power, Volume 1* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 309, 322.

[20] K. L. Noll, "Investigating Earliest Christianity without Jesus," in Thomas L. Thompson and Thomas S. Verenna, eds., *"Is this not the Carpenter?": The Question of the Historicity of the Figure of Jesus* (Durham: Acumen, 2013), 236-59. For the political situation in first-century Palestine, see Richard A. Horsley and John S. Hanson, *Bandits, Prophets, and Messiahs: Popular Movements in the Time of Jesus* (Harrisburg: Trinity, 1999), 48-87.

willingly enslaved or otherwise subservient in the meantime.[21] The canonical Gospels were later coupled with the narrative of Revelation, whose author(s) repurposed Eden as a model for the post-apocalyptic reward that awaits the humble and the devout (with special exemptions carved out for "the kings of the earth" and "those who conquer"), and who depicted Satan as being twice conscripted into God's service for the purpose of deceiving humankind once again and ushering in the violent transition from one historical epoch to another.[22]

According to Michael Mann, the organizational and literary strategies developed by these proto- or early Christian leaders (which represented a form of "normative pacification" in which fear of "exclusion from the community" regulates dissent) provided the blueprint from which later missionaries were able to "convert, reorganize, and even create the continent of 'Europe.'"[23] Over time, Mann adds, Christendom became the "major regulatory agency" and "the most extensive interaction network" of pre-capitalist Europe, representing a commercial and ideological "infrastructure" without which "neither markets, nor property ownership […] would have flowered so within these territories."[24] Such tactics were similarly deployed centuries later by Spanish and English conquistadors, whose plunder, note Alexander Anievas and Kerem Nişancıoğlu, "lubricated the

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[21] Roland Boer and Christina Petterson, *Time of Troubles: A New Economic Framework for Early Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2017), 162. For an overview of the evidence in support of identifying "Jesus" as a literary construction, see Thompson, *The Messiah Myth*; and Thompson and Verenna, eds., *"Is this not the Carpenter?"*.

[22] Rev. 21:22-25; Rev. 21:7. In the first conscription, the angels of heaven release a defeated, embittered Satan onto earth in the hope that he will wreak havoc among humankind ("because he knows that his time is short"). Satan proceeds to pursue "the woman who had given birth" to the child "who is to rule all the nations," then uses his beast to seduce "the whole earth" before being captured by the angels and bound in a "bottomless pit." In the second conscription, the angels yet again determine that Satan "must be let out for a little while" to "deceive the nations" of earth, after which Satan makes another attempt to seduce humankind before yet again being captured and tossed into the lake of fire to be "tormented day and night forever and ever." See Rev. 12:7-13:4 and Rev. 20:2-10. All biblical quotations are drawn from *The New Oxford Annotated Bible: New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha*, ed. Michael D. Coogan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

[23] Mann, *The Sources of Social Power*, 381, 506.

[24] Mann, *The Sources of Social Power*, 377, 379, 506.

circuits of capital accumulation in Europe."[25] Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra writes that these conquistadors depicted the Americas as akin to the pre-Jesus Palestine of the Gospels—as a "false paradise" firmly controlled by Satan, whom they believed had "fled to the New World" in the wake of the Christian colonization of Europe—and then declared that the territory and its myriad cultures "needed to be destroyed by Christian heroes" in order "to be saved" (an act the settlers viewed as "spiritual gardening").[26] When we circle back to Marx, it is apparent that the relationship between Eden and Western capitalist development runs far deeper than the claims of Smith, Thiers, and their bourgeois peers that the dispossessed masses are little more than lazy Cains. Each and every one of "the chief moments of primitive accumulation" identified by Marx in *Capital*—"the discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the indigenous population of that continent, the beginnings of the conquest and plunder of India," and the Atlantic slave trade—has been either directly associated with, or explicitly justified by, the Eden motif, as are the forms of cognitive accumulation that fuel the semiocapitalist system of our present day.[27]

For Berardi, however, the solution is not to "abandon the Garden of Eden" (as Graeber and Wengrow suggest), but rather for the dispossessed masses and their allies to recapture and reclaim the mythical garden as an imaginative space (especially the post-apocalyptic Eden depicted in Revelation—that which represents the world that will "emerge from the wreckage" of our present state).[28] "An apocalyptic model," Berardi argues, "seems the best suited for describing the surrounding landscape," for "the apocalypse" is "the moment in which a hidden possibility comes to be revealed," one wherein we can commence not a second coming of Christ, but a "second coming of Communism."[29] To such ends, Berardi calls for a "poetic revitalization of language," by which he means the production of poetry and song designed to reoccupy "the space of communication" with

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[25] Alexander Anievas and Kerem Nişancıoğlu, *How the West Came to Rule: The Geopolitical Origins of Capitalism* (London: Pluto, 2015), 145.

[26] Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, *Puritan Conquistadors: Iberianizing the Atlantic, 1550-1700* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 158, 184, 121, 178.

[27] Marx, *Capital*, 915.

[28] Franco Berardi, *The Second Coming* (Cambridge: Polity, 2019), 115.

[29] Berardi, *The Second Coming*, 121, 140.

"words which escape the order of exchangeability" and to encourage humankind "to see and to actualize the hidden possibility" of our present apocalyptic moment (as well as to see and to actualize a communist alternative).[30] "Only poetry," Berardi declares, "will help us through the apocalypse."[31] Only poetry can take us "beyond the limits of conventional meaning" and reactivate our innate desire for "social solidarity."[32] And only "the total linguistification of our fate," adds Boris Groys, which "only Communism" can bring about, will reignite our "instinctive," Eve-like ability to detect beneath capitalism's "smooth surfaces" all the contradictions, ambiguities, and paradoxes its proponents aim to conceal.[33]

Therefore, Berardi warns, "I suggest you predispose your mind to the second coming."[34]

Bob Dylan in the Garden of Eden

In order to recognize the relationship between Berardi's calls for a "poetic revitalization of language" and the writings of Bob Dylan, as well as to recognize the radically subversive nature of Dylan's six-decade engagement with the Eden motif, we must first identify and reject two unsustainable critical frameworks commonly employed by Dylan scholars.

Firstly, there is a tendency among scholars to depict Dylan as having "depoliticized his career" in the mid-1960s, leaving behind supposedly naïve flirtations with political activism in favour of a more mature perspective grounded in "socially-disengaged individualism."[35] Even scholars who suggest a less

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[30] Berardi, *The Uprising*, 8, 22; Berardi, *The Second Coming*, 121.

[31] Franco Berardi, *Breathing: Chaos and Poetry* (South Pasadena: Semiotext(e), 2018), 10.

[32] Franco Berardi, *And: Phenomenology of the End* (South Pasadena: Semiotext(e), 2015), 149; Berardi, *The Uprising*, 20.

[33] Boris Groys, *The Communist Postscript*, trans. Thomas H. Ford (London: Verso, 2009), xviii, 10.

[34] Berardi, *The Second Coming*, 141.

[35] Chad Israelson and Jeff Taylor, *The Political World of Bob Dylan: Freedom and Justice, Power and Sin* (New York: Palgrave, 2015), 162; David Holloway, "Politics, Modernism, and Bob Dylan's Search for a Usable Past in the Rolling Thunder Revue," *Symbiosis: A Journal of Transatlantic Literary Relations* 20, no. 1 (2016): 1.

restrictive understanding of Dylan's relationship to politics nonetheless situate his music firmly within the Western Liberal tradition, positioning Dylan as a mere critic of social ills (racism, corporate greed, etc.), rather than as an artist whose songs reject the legitimacy of the Western political "project" as a whole (and encourage listeners to do the same).[36] As David Holloway rightly notes, such claims are "grounded in a very narrow definition of political activity and art," one that fails to acknowledge the political dimensions of "the forms and styles that narratives take," as well as "the historical and social contexts in which writers, texts and audiences are conditioned or 'constructed'" (dimensions and contexts which exist regardless of authorial intent).[37] Additionally, such claims indicate a failure among Dylan scholars to incorporate into their analysis the seismic developments that occurred in the decades following the Second World War in regards to the nature of political power in the West. According to Berardi, the transition from the pre-Second World War Fordist economy to the semiocapitalist system of the present age was accompanied by a transition from forms of "formal domination" (i.e. the "brutal strength" traditionally associated with the state that compels "individuals to accept exploitation") to "real domination" (wherein "command is embodied in the machines and the act of subjugation is automated").[38] Within the realm of Dylan studies, however, the critical conversation is typically confined to instances in which Dylan explicitly references a political figure or subject (instances which did, in fact, decline in

[36] See, for example, Richard Brown, "Bob Dylan's Critique of Judgement: Thinkin' About the Law," in David Boucher and Gary Browning, eds., *The Political Art of Bob Dylan* (Exeter: Imprint, 2009), 50-74; Kevin J. H. Dettmar, "Introduction," in Kevin J.H. Dettmar, ed., *Cambridge Companion to Bob Dylan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 4; Mike Marqusee, *Wicked Messenger: Bob Dylan and the 1960s* (New York: Seven Stories, 2003); and Lawrence Wilde, "The Cry of Humanity: Dylan's Expressionist Period," in Boucher and Browning, eds., *The Political Art of Bob Dylan*, 104-135. My employment of the phrase "Western political 'project" is derived from Édouard Glissant's observation that "the West is not in the West. It is a project, not a place." Édouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, trans. J. Michael Dash (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1992), 2.

[37] Holloway, "Politics, Modernism, and Bob Dylan's Search for a Usable Past," 1-2.

[38] Franco Berardi, *Futurability: The Age of Impotence and the Horizon of Possibility* (London: Verso, 2017), 124.

frequency after 1964), thus erasing Dylan's sixty-year engagement with more impersonal and ethereal forms of political power.

Secondly, it is common among Dylan scholars to embrace a suspiciously narrow conception of the practice of "intertextuality," one that stands at odds with the "interdisciplinary interpretive environment" long dominant within the humanities.[39] In this environment, artistic productions of all manner and form are seen "as teeming crossroads populated" not merely by identifiable, pre-existing works, but by a multitude of traditional motifs, all of which are engaged in "an intertextual, as well as socioeconomic, set of conversations" that transgress geographic, chronological, and linguistic barriers (and occur independent of authorial intent).[40] Within the realm of Dylan studies, however, examinations of Dylan's intertextual practices are generally confined to instances wherein he directly and intentionally borrows from an identifiable source, with each new album sparking a mad dash among online figures to be the first to identify such citations.[41] I describe this tendency as "suspiciously narrow" in part because it recalls the "fearful" reaction among "conservative-minded" scholars to the emergence of post-structural and post-colonial perspectives in the 1960s (perspectives which embraced politically and methodologically progressive notions of intertextuality), and in part because it rather conveniently reinforces the myopic, often reactionary understanding of "politics" discussed in the previous paragraph.[42] In the case of Richard F. Thomas, for example, such a narrow

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[39] Jerrold E. Hogle, "The Environments of *Frankenstein*," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 83, no. 4 (2020): 654.

[40] Jerrold E. Hogle, "The Progress of Theory and the Study of the American Gothic," in Charles L. Crow, ed., *A Companion to American Gothic* (West Sussex: Wiley & Sons, 2014), 12.

[41] Leading proponents of this notion of intertextuality include, on the one hand, online influencer Scott Warmuth and, on the other, Christopher Rollason and Richard F. Thomas, both members of the editorial board of the *Dylan Review* (the only peer-reviewed journal devoted to Dylan's writings, one whose primary function thus far has been to institutionalize long-standing practices and presumptions, rather than produce anything innovative in nature).

[42] Graham Allen, *Intertextuality: Third edition* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2022), 229. Additional evidence of reactionary tendencies within the realm of Dylan studies includes "postcritical" remarks by several leading scholars (most notably, Anne-Marie Mai's suggestion, inspired by Rita Felski, that Dylan scholars de-emphasize critical theory in favour of descriptions of the ways in which we are "emotionally engaged in Dylan's

conception of intertextuality (of which he is a prominent proponent) lends support to his efforts to situate Dylan within a uniquely Western cultural "spring" that "starts out in Greece and Rome" and runs straight through the founding of America.[43] By removing from his historiographical framework any reference to the broader Near Eastern and African "intellectual and cultural world" within which ancient Greek and Roman authors were situated (a world that was "created," notes Thomas L. Thompson, "by Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Syrian, Persian, and Greek writers" alike), Thomas is free to present so-called "Classical" literature as representing "the essence of what it means to be human."[44] Then, by limiting his analysis of Dylan's intertextual practices to instances in which Dylan directly borrows from Homer, Ovid, and Virgil, and by highlighting occasions in which Dylan has expressed a personal interest in Greek and Roman culture, Thomas is able to shift the responsibility for his own erasure of "Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Syrian, [and] Persian" traditions onto Dylan.[45]

When we reject these two untenable critical approaches, we find ourselves far better equipped to identify a sustained, sixty-year engagement on Dylan's part not merely with the motif of Eden and its many identifiable variants (from John Milton's paradise to Mary Shelley's Adamic "monster"), but with an entire "intellectually coherent cluster of motifs" common within narratives produced across the entire ancient Near East, including the Hebrew Bible (motifs such as include "the barren desert […] contrasted with the cultivated garden," the "well-

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songs"), as well as the collective realm's uncritical embrace of veteran scholars such as Thomas, Christopher Ricks, and Sean Wilentz, as well as pop-scientist Cass Sunstein—all of whom have waged battles in opposition to progressive critical developments within their respective fields and yet have been free to reproduce within the field of Dylan studies questionable or outdated presumptions and practices with no fear of resistance. See Anne-Marie Mai's "Bob Dylan as a Challenge to Literary Studies," *Dylan Review* 3, no. 1 (Summer 2021), https://thedylanreview.org/2021/07/25/bob-dylan-as-a-challenge-to-literary-studies/. For a thorough account of how dangerous the Felski-Mai approach to literature can be, see Robert Tally Jr., *For a Ruthless Critique of All that Exists* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2022).

[43] Richard F. Thomas, *Why Bob Dylan Matters* (New York: Dey St., 2018), 2-3.

[44] Thompson, *The Messiah Myth*, 25; Thomas, *Why Bob Dylan Matters*, 17.

[45] Thompson, *The Messiah Myth*, 25. Thomas uses chapters 3 and 4 of *Why Bob Dylan Matters* to provide an overview of instances in which Dylan has seemingly indicated a personal interest in ancient Greek and Roman literature or history.

watered, fruitful tree" set against "dried chaff and wilderness bush," and the "way of God" set apart from "the way of men").[46] More to the point, we are able to identify the myriad ways in which Dylan's employment of such motifs confronts, subverts, and *unsettles* (in Sylvia Wynter's revolutionary conception of that term) the centuries-long association between Genesis 1-3 and Western capitalist development.[47]

In 1963's "Talkin' World War III Blues," for example, Dylan satirizes Cold War paranoia by depicting a woman as unwilling to "play Adam and Eve" with him out of a fear that such hanky panky might result in nuclear Armageddon.[48] In the early 1970s, Dylan offered a series of narrators who attempt to flee the confines of modern, urban civilization (and leave behind memories of political unrest, perhaps) for the idyllic woodlands of rural America, yet realize upon their arrival that they no longer "have much to say," are "lazy" and "lost in a dream," and are unable to reconcile their pastoral fantasies with the storm clouds gathering overhead and the swarm of locusts droning on the horizon.[49] A few years later, at the dawning of the Reagan era, Dylan took centre aim at Lockean property rights (which Locke derived from Genesis 1:28), warning listeners that the natural world was being "raped" by capitalist development (that "Eden is burning," in fact), and that we must either radically reimagine our perceptions or "get ready" for the rising of an unimaginatively violent "new age."[50] Most recently, Dylan offered

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[46] Thomas L. Thompson, *The Mythic Past: Biblical Archaeology and The Myth of Israel* (London: Basic Books, 1999), 244-45.

[47] Sylvia Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 3 (2003): 268.

[48] Bob Dylan, "Talkin' World War III Blues," track 10 on *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*, Columbia, 1963, LP.

[49] Bob Dylan, "Time Passes Slowly," track 3 on *New Morning*, Columbia, 1970, LP; Bob Dylan, "Winterlude," track 5 on *New Morning*; Bob Dylan, "Watching the River Flow," track 1 on *Bob Dylan's Greatest Hits Vol. II*, Columbia, 1971, LP. This sentence also references "Day of the Locusts" and "The Man in Me," tracks 2 and 10 on *New Morning*.

[50] Bob Dylan, "License to Kill," track 4 on *Infidels*, Columbia, 1983, LP; Bob Dylan, "Where Are You Tonight (Journey Through Dark Heat)?," track 9 on *Street-Legal*, Columbia, 1978; Bob Dylan, "Changing of the Guards," track 1 on *Street-Legal*; Bob Dylan, "The Groom's Still Waiting at the Alter," track 6 on *Shot of Love*, Columbia, 1981, LP.

"My Own Version of You," an unconcealed retelling of *Frankenstein* (1818) that updates Shelley's critique of the politicization of the physiological sciences to target instead the technocratic practitioners of twenty-first-century "scientism" (e.g. Malcolm Gladwell, Steven Pinker, Cass Sunstein), whose ruthless reduction of science from "an experimental way of knowing" to "a source of certainty" has been vital to the normalization of semiocapitalism.[51] As with Victor Frankenstein, the narrator of "My Own Version of You" believes his master plan to be free of "insignificant details," and considers himself immune to the vulgar passions of the lowly masses, yet he is unable to resist indulging in sadistic fantasies wherein his adversaries are being tortured in hell, and he frequently lets slip the imperious urges that linger beneath the surface of his calculations and his spreadsheets ("I pick a number between one and two / and I ask myself what would Julius Caesar do").[52]

Accompanying Dylan's six-decade engagement with the Eden motif has been his production of songs that answer Berardi's call for a "poetic revitalization of language," one marked by "words that escape the order of exchangeability" and which encourage us "to think outside the sphere of measurability."[53] In particular, Dylan's Rimbaud-inspired mid-1960s output offers listeners a feast of images that shed "a light of nonconventional meaning on the existing world," from Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot bickering on a sinking Titanic, to a balding Jack the Ripper sitting "at the head of the chamber of commerce," to King Kong dancing "Valentino-type

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[51] Jackson Lears, "Material Issue," *Baffler*, September 2016, https://thebaffler.com/-salvos/material-issue-lears.

[52] Bob Dylan, "My Own Version of You," track 3 on *Rough and Rowdy Ways*, Columbia, 2020, LP. Additionally, Dylan selected Eden as a central motif of 2004's *Chronicles* (whose title refers to a key text from the Hebrew Bible that traces the genealogy of "Biblical Israel" back to Eden), describing the Greenwich Village folk scene he discovered in his youth as "a paradise" that was "just too perfect" (and which, "like Adam," he realized he "had to leave"), while also including three key library scenes that echo the "tree of knowledge" motif in Genesis. Bob Dylan, *Chronicles, Vol. 1* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004), 292-293. The library scenes are found in pages 18-22, 36-46, 83-86.

[53] Berardi, *The Uprising*, 8, 22; Berardi, *Breathing*, 22.

tangos" on the rooftops above.[54] Additionally, the work of this period features songs seemingly designed to guide listeners safely through the unsettlingly ephemeral landscape of the semiocapitalist age, including "Mr. Tambourine Man," whose narrator follows a Virgil-like guide down through "the foggy ruins of time" to a "windy beach" in the hope that the Lethe-like waters will wipe his nightmares clean.[55] Lastly (and unsurprisingly), Dylan situated several of these expressions of "semiotic excess" within overtly Edenic or otherwise pastoral frames, most notably 1965's "Gates of Eden," wherein Dylan associates the boundaries of the mythic garden with the limits of the semiotic process:[56]

> At dawn my lover comes to me
> And tells me of her dreams
> With no attempts to shovel the glimpse
> Into the ditch of what each one means
> At times I think there are no words
> But these to tell what's true
> And there are no truths outside the Gates of Eden.[57]

To identify such attributes in Dylan's music is to transform Dylan from an artist who "depoliticized" his career to one who recognized (in a manner that his Greenwich Village peers did not) that the nature of political power in the 1960s was rapidly changing—that "government [was] no longer in the government," and that the bourgeois elites were no longer tethered "to the territory and to

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[54] Berardi, *And*, 149; Bob Dylan, "Desolation Row," track 9 on *Highway 61 Revisited*, Columbia, 1965, LP; Bob Dylan, "Tombstone Blues," track 2 on *Highway 61 Revisited*; Bob Dylan, "Farwell Angelina," on *The Bootleg Series Vol. 1-3*, Columbia, 1991, CD.

[55] Bob Dylan, "Mr. Tambourine Man," on *Bringing It All Back Home*, Columbia, 1965, LP.

[56] Berardi, *And*, 149.

[57] Bob Dylan, "Gates of Eden," track 9 on *Bringing It All Back Home*, Columbia, 1965, LP. Other examples include the postlapsarian slave labour depicted in 1965's "Maggie's Farm" and the contrast Dylan offers between the subversive realm of "Desolation Row" and "Noah's great rainbow" (a symbol used by the authors of the Hebrew Bible to represent a renewal of the covenant of Eden).

community"—and who adjusted his critical lens accordingly.[58] The remainder of this study will consider Berardi's theories on apocalyptic poetry in relation to Dylan's 2006 album *Modern Times*, a work whose title cites Chaplin's anti-capitalist masterpiece, and whose songs include a reference to 9/11, a post-Katrina warning about collapsing levees, and an overtly Marxist paean to America's dispossessed laborers, as well as echoes of the Eden motif in at least five of its ten compositions. Berardi, it should be noted, has similarly invoked Chaplin's 1936 film, describing the dawning of the semiocapitalist epoch as "the end of modern times" and symbolically marking the collapse of the Fordist system by the death of Chaplin in 1977 (the very moment when Dylan was declaring that "Eden" was "burning," and that we must "either get ready for elimination" or for violent revolution).[59] Dylan's *Modern Times*, in other words, represents not merely his most extensive exploration of the Eden motif, but the coming together of Berardi's and Dylan's respective concerns about the relationship between language, poetry, and political power in the post-war West.

Dylan and Berardi "at the world's end"

In open defiance of the authors of Genesis (who sought to inspire "piety and obedience" among readers), Dylan's employment of the Eden motif on *Modern Times* vehemently contests the notion that humankind must resign itself to any predetermined status or fate.

In "Spirit on the Water," whose opening lines mirror Genesis 1:2, the unrepentant narrator, exiled from "paradise" for murder (unfairly, he argues), longs for the love he left behind and threatens that unless they are reunited he will toss his spirit into the "deep blue sea" upon which God roams.[60] In "Rollin' and Tumblin'," Dylan's Adamic narrator awakens from a restless sleep to find his world irrevocably changed ("the warm weather's coming," he declares, and "the buds are on the vine," but "I must have bet my money wrong").[61] Yet, after initially

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[58] The Invisible Committee, *To Our Friends*, trans. Robert Hurley (South Pasadena: Semiotext(e), 2015), 85; Franco Berardi, *Heroes: Mass Murder and Suicide* (London: Verso, 2015), 78.

[59] Berardi, *The Uprising*, 94; Dylan, "Changing of the Guards."

[60] Bob Dylan, "Spirit on the Water," track 2 on *Modern Times*, Columbia, 2006, LP.

[61] Bob Dylan, "Rollin and Tumblin'," track 3 on *Modern Times*.

blaming the "young lazy slut" with whom he shares this paradise, he ultimately suggests they "go down to the greenwood glen" to forgive each other (although no evidence is presented that she committed any wrong), to plot their next, post-exilic move, and to "put old matters to an end." In "Beyond the Horizon," Dylan offers a veritable flood of pastoral imagery, depicting a world wherein "the bells of St. Mary's" sweetly chime "at the end of the rainbow" and "love waits forever" beneath "the stardust above."[62] The sheer magnitude of such images, however, renders the song's pastoralism too tranquil to trust, suggesting instead an Eden just prior to an inevitable (but unexpected) fall, or an Edenic destination far too distant to reach. Most tenderly, we find the narrator of "When the Deal Goes Down" strolling through a rose garden, pondering the twin mysteries of heaven and nature (where "the winding stream" becomes a "deafening noise" and the faint glow of the moon reminds him that existence is "transient" at best).[63] This act of recognizing his own mortality, however, inspires not a renewed devotion to his god (as the authors of Genesis intended), but to his Eve, and in his last hour of need Dylan's narrator turns not to heaven above, but to his partner on earth for forgiveness and redemption.

Coursing through *Modern Times* alongside such Edenic expressions are unconcealed anxieties of an undeniably semiotic nature, expressed by narrators struggling to perceive the flood of signs (both natural and supernatural) that threaten to overwhelm them. In "Nettie Moore," Dylan's narrator gazes upon a landscape that is "out of whack" and "has gone black before my eyes," a landscape wherein the most damning of scriptural prophesies are beginning to come true, then concludes that his best chance of survival is to embrace the darkness (to "wish to God that it were night").[64] Similarly, the narrator of "The Levee's Gonna Break" tries to make sense of a chaotic scene sparked by a storm that no one but the authors of Genesis saw coming (although no one heeded their call), and he searches the frenzied crowd for a familiar face ("I look in your eyes," he declares, but "I see nobody other than me") before the world as he knows it is washed away.[65] Lastly, in "Thunder On the Mountain," Dylan presents us not with a

[62] Bob Dylan, "Beyond the Horizon," track 7 on *Modern Times*.

[63] Bob Dylan, "When the Deal Goes Down," track 4 on *Modern Times*.

[64] Bob Dylan, "Nettie Moore," track 8 on *Modern Times*.

[65] Bob Dylan, "The Levee's Gonna Break," track 9 on *Modern Times*.

victim of a prophecy misread, but with a prophet himself, one who claims to be able to read the signs offered by God (from "fires on the moon" to social unrest in the streets), and who even boasts that he can see in advance the hijacking of United Flight 93 ("looks like something bad gonna happen," he warns those on board, "better roll your airplane down"). His message, however, is poorly received by the gathering, maddening crowd ("you brought me here," he complains, "now you're trying to run me away"), and in response he plots not only his escape "up north," but also his revenge upon those who dare deny him ("Gonna raise me an army, some tough sons of bitches / I'll recruit my army from the orphanages").[66]

These two threads—the Edenic and the semiotic—are brought together in spectacular fashion in the album's closing track, "Ain't Talkin'," a nearly nine-minute epic whose apocalyptic rhetoric suggests that the revolution at hand must be waged as much in our minds as in our already-bloodied streets. Dylan sets the opening and closing verses of "Ain't Talkin'" in a "mystic garden," one that reads like a twisted inversion of the Eden of *Paradise Lost*, with Dylan transforming Milton's "humid flowers" softly exhaling incense as they roll "down the slope" towards a "chrystal mirror" into "wounded flowers […] dangling on the vine" amid a stifling heat and a decimating plague.[67] Dylan's presentation of the song's long-suffering, long-wandering narrator is similarly reminiscent of Milton's sympathetic treatment of Satan, with both characters bound within merciless systems designed to supress their hopes and ambitions. "It's bright in the heavens and the wheels are flying," Dylan's narrator declares (echoing the words uttered by Milton's protagonist as he stares at Eden for the first time), yet "heavenly aid" is nowhere to be found, leaving those with "wealth and power" free to "crush" the wretched of the earth.[68] In response, he has chosen to withdraw, to wander the world in a silent, self-imposed exile, remaining devoted in his heart to a different, perhaps pre-Christian set of values ("I practice a faith that's been long abandoned," one that requires "no altars"), and waiting patiently for an

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[66] Bob Dylan, "Thunder on the Mountain," track 1 on *Modern Times*.

[67] Milton, *Paradise Lost* 4.257-63 and 9.193-94, in *The Major Works*, ed. Stephen Orgel and Jonathan Goldberg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 427, 528; Bob Dylan, "Ain't Talkin'," track 10 on *Modern Times*.

[68] Milton, *Paradise Lost* 4.32-57, in *The Major Works*, 421-22. This passage from "Ain't Talkin'" also echoes Ezekiel 1:1-21.

opportunity to turn the tide ("If I catch my opponents ever sleeping," he declares, "I'll just slaughter them where they lie").[69]

One verse in "Ain't Talkin'," however, transports us from the gardens of Milton to the pristine realm of semiocapitalism:

> The whole world is filled with speculation
> The whole wide world which people say is round
> They will tear your mind away from contemplation
> They will jump on your misfortune when you're down[.]

These lines suggest that Dylan's narrator is fully aware that his thoughts and desires (when expressed in language) represent the very fuel of the system he struggles against, and that silence itself (if strategic in nature) can serve as a potent weapon. Berardi has described such a gesture as a form of "radical passivity," a tactical disruption of "the constant emanation of information flows" necessary to sustain semiocapitalist development ("an insurrection of slowness" and "exhaustion").[70] "Let's withdraw our intelligence from the race of capitalist growth and national identity," Berardi declares, "and let's withdraw our creativity and our time from productive competition," and "let's inaugurate a period of passive sabotage."[71] Quite similarly, The Invisible Committee suggests that we rethink strategies designed to physically oppose or reclaim the prevailing capitalist order, and consider instead an approach which "neutralizes" capitalism, "empties it of its substance, then steps to the side and watches it expire" (that we focus less on attacking the government, and more on making "ourselves ungovernable").[72]

However, neither Berardi nor The Invisible Committee believes that the mere refusal of our expressions and our desires (however damaging it may be to capitalism in the short term, and however comforting it may be to our spirits) is sufficient to bring such a revolutionary process to completion. Only when the "general intellect [is] able to reconstitute its social and erotic body," Berardi

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[69] Dylan, "Ain't Talkin'."

[70] Berardi, *After the Future*, 177; Berardi, *Heroes*, 24; Berardi, *The Uprising*, 68.

[71] Berardi, *After the Future*, 120.

[72] The Invisible Committee, *Now*, trans. Robert Hurley (South Pasadena: Semiotext(e), 2017), 81.

declares, and only when we re-embrace the "gratuitous, pleasurable, and erotic" nature of communication will "capitalist rule" at last "become obsolete."[73] Such is "the promise of communism," adds The Invisible Committee, the possibility "of *creating pathways* between the fragments, of placing them in *contact*, of organizing their encounter, of opening up the roads that lead from one friendly piece of the world to another without passing through hostile territory."[74] Communism, for Berardi and The Invisible Committee, represents "a considerable intensification of life, a deepening of perceptions, a proliferation of friendships, enmities, experiences, horizons, contacts, distances," all of which "trigger revolutionary becomings," "knock historical time off its hinges," and "punch a hole in the hopeless continuum of submissions, the senseless succession of days, the dreary struggle of each one to go on living."[75]

To such ends, the final verse of "Ain't Talkin'" finds Dylan's long-wandering, long-silent narrator returning to the "mystic garden" (depicted in a near-apocalyptic state as "the last outback at the world's end") with an eye like the unbound Satan of Revelation to "make the most of one last extra hour" and avenge the wrongdoings of the past.[76] When he finds a woman there, he makes the momentous decision to break his silence, and with a gentlemanly air (reminiscent of the devils of Milton and Hawthorne) he begs for her pardon, then remarks that they are all alone, that "the gardener" who rules that realm is nowhere to be found. It is a moment that reads as a seduction, as an invitation for the woman to engage in something knowingly forbidden, and, with the world quite literally crumbling around them, the stakes of this temptation could not be higher. Dylan does not depict in words the woman's response, yet he nonetheless concludes the recording of "Ain't Talkin'" with a spectacular non-verbal gesture—a "Picardy third," in which a predominately minor key composition is unexpectedly resolved on a major chord—suggesting that whatever transpired between those two characters represented a profound change in circumstance, be it salvation itself, or something else Dylan believed a different kind of language was required to describe.

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[73] Franco Berardi, *The Soul at Work: From Alienation to Autonomy* (South Pasadena: Semiotext(e), 2018), 87; Berardi, *The Uprising*, 142.

[74] The Invisible Committee, *Now*, 44-45 (italics original).

[75] The Invisible Committee, *Now*, 44; The Invisible Committee, *To Our Friends*, 45, 200.

[76] Dylan, "Ain't Talkin'."