

AN ANALYSIS OF THE FEMINIST CONTRADICTIONS AND
HARMONIES IN MILTON'S *PARADISE LOST* AND THE
BIBLICAL "GENESIS"

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Enchanted by the daunting task of creating *the* English epic out of three short chapters of the Bible, John Milton understandably added much to the story in the development of his epic *Paradise Lost*, of which the plot and detail are largely Milton's invention, appended to either create intrigue or push his agenda. A man of bold opinions, political savvy, and keen intellect, those imaginative additions serve a purpose for Milton, not existing merely for dramatic effect or to sustain an interesting plot. Critics, though, have debated his agendas, for generations. For example: was Milton a proponent of his Satan? Does the piece glorify God or challenge him? What is Milton saying about personal freedom, and why does he use Satan as a possible protagonist—a rather bizarre angle? The issue that most concerns my writing and understanding of Milton is his feminist stance and its correlation to what we find in Genesis. We may discount the addition of dialogue, plot details, and physical description of nature as necessary to the creation of an intriguing story, but Milton's insertions of theological and political opinions are at first glance damagingly unbiblical, expressing a fierce degradation of Eve and by default the female gender entirely. Yet, no two readings give the same impression of Milton and his thoughts on women because Milton's characters constantly contradict themselves on this issue. With Adam, God, Satan, and the angels' perspectives, and Eve's behavior, a clear conclusion is difficult to draw as Eve is both praised and belittled, either independent or entirely subjected to Adam, sometimes an admirable intellect, other times disappointingly naive.

Paradise Lost retells this Judeo-Christian story of creation and the fall of man, but to say it does so with liberties would be an understatement as Milton has taken this short, three-chapter text and expanded it into a twelve-book epic. His account begins *in medias res* with Satan, once a high-ranking angel of God, chained in Hell, freshly expelled from Heaven and plotting his revenge against God, whom he calls “our grand Foe” (1.122). After long bouts of vengeful brooding, Satan decides to target God by attacking that which he loves most—his newest and best creation, humanity. Milton then spends a large portion of his epic focused on the pair, Adam and Eve, before the climactic moment of the first sin, punishment for all three involved (Adam, Eve, and Satan), and concluding with that first couple’s first steps into the unknown. Those intermediate moments (life after creation but before the fall), characterized by relational interactions, by all appearances are small, serving as plot filler and character development. Yet, they fashion the feminist debate in their contradictory nature to one another because Milton’s Eden is nothing if not relational. As my feminist questions concern the relationship of *Paradise Lost* to *Genesis*, we must decide how Milton meant to portray Eve to be certain of how or if his account disputes the scriptures.

To draw a sophisticated conclusion concerning Milton’s depiction of Genesis, we must first look carefully at that biblical source. In her essay “How Milton Read the Bible: the Case of *Paradise Regained*,” Mary Ann Radzinowicz explains that while Milton “read both Hebrew and Greek and used both the Junius-Tremellius Latin Bible and the *Biblia Sacra Polyglotta* of Brian Walton, he was not committed to a particular translation and did not signal the importance of Scripture to his poetry merely by echoing the language of the King James Version” (209-10). Because Milton likely drew from a thorough knowledge of the Hebrew language, I will use Robert Alter’s translation of *Genesis* to explicate the differences and similarities, in which he attempts “to represent a more precise understanding of the Hebrew than previous translations have shown” (xlix). Alter provides the modern English reader the ability to better understand the original text by pointing out literary devices such as puns, rhyme, and alliteration which are rarely found in translations, providing context which modern readers are mostly unaware of, and explaining pieces of text which simply do not translate in full to English, thus providing invaluable nuances to the language in a way most translations miss entirely, on which the meaning of a verse may rest.

The scriptural account, from which Milton derives his story, comes from the first three chapters of *Genesis* in the Hebrew Bible, or Old Testament in the Christian Bible. Chapter one is a poetic, chronological telling of creation, in which God’s performative speech acts generate matter over a period of six days—light, which he divided into day and night, on the first day; the “Heavens” (1.8) on the second day; dry land with vegetation, and separate seas on the third day; the sun, moon, and stars on the fourth day; birds and sea creatures on the fifth day; finally concluding with land animals and a

human on the sixth day. To the human, which in the Hebrew is at this point either gender neutral or gender encompassing, God gives charge over the rest of creation. Satisfied that God's creation is complete and "very good" (1.31), God "ceased from all the work" (2.3) and blessed the day.

Chapter two of Genesis gives, as Robert Alter explains, "a more vividly anthropomorphic account" of creation; in other words that it is "a plunge into the technological nitty-gritty and moral ambiguities of human origins" (7). While Milton does draw from both creation accounts, this more narrative-like structure seems to coincide closer with Milton's rendering in *Paradise Lost*, because here the writer of Genesis offers a craftsman-like God who builds with matter and uses his hands and breath, thus giving energy and legitimacy to Milton's monistic beliefs—beliefs that do not allow for separation of the material from the spiritual or Godly, because God created all things from himself. This version also allots room for separation of the sexes, making a single human definitely created first (to whom he warns not to eat "from the tree of knowledge, good and evil," (2.17)) and the another to be "built" (2.22) after, as a companion and help to the former. Upon meeting this new creation—a woman—the first human, only now understood to be male, so pleased to have a partner like himself, utters his first recorded words in beautiful, adoring verse:

This one at last, bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh,
This one shall be called Woman,
for from man was this one taken. (2.23)

The scripture tells us that the two live unapologetically and innocently naked in the garden, which God has created for them.

Unlike Milton's tale, which offers a detailed account of life in Eden, Genesis takes the characters straight from creation to fall. The accounts of married life, work, and self-discovery in *Paradise Lost* are constructed entirely by Milton's imagination, or rather inspired by the muse. *Genesis* Chapter 3 begins with a "cunning" (3.1) serpent's attempt to deceive the woman, and the woman's attempt to resist his duplicity with a rebuttal to his lie. The serpent tries to create an ambiguity in God's command, which he misquotes, exaggerating God's original words, which were to not eat of one particular tree, to not eat of any tree at all, as the serpent obscurely claims. The text implies that the woman recognizes his equivocation and interrupts him with her hyperbolic testimony that "from the fruit of the tree in the midst of the garden God has said, 'You shall not eat from it, and you shall not touch it, lest you die'" (3.3). Her addition to God's words, "you shall not touch it," although indicating a resolve to stand against the serpent's deception, may prove her vulnerable to persuasion and disobedience. The serpent, unfazed by her resistance, does not acknowledge her rebuttal but insists that God has been dishonest in his representation of the tree's power; that it will not kill, but instead give god-like knowledge. The text then reveals the woman's internal

conflict, as she is charmed by the sight of the tree and its “lust to the eyes” (3.6), eventually surrendering to temptation and taking the fruit. Eve subsequently gives the fruit to the man, but *Genesis* offers no indication of coercion, debate, or conflict in this correspondence; the man takes the fruit without question, and he and Eve suddenly see with fresh eyes that they are naked and attempt to cover themselves. Then, upon hearing God walking in the garden, they hide in fear. God calls to them, and they admit their crimes, but not without placing the highest blame on one another and the serpent. God punishes each individually (the serpent, the woman, and the man), then after clothing the couple banishes them from the garden to toil for their living as they are now mortal beings.

Consider the different relationships in Eden and the perceptions of Eve found in *Paradise Lost* by the different characters, starting with the divine characters, of which Satan is the first to weigh in who, by superficially looking only on the external (and from afar, no less), notices how Adam and Eve are “Not equal as their sex not equal seemed” (Milton 4.296). This remark, he makes after praise both Adam and Eve, saying that they “seemed lords of all” and “in their looks divine / The image of their glorious Maker shone” (4.290-2). His observation that both “not equal seemed,” does not fit with his previous rhetoric, yet from it stems further shrewdness about the two as individuals. Adam appears “for God only,” while Eve “for God in him” (4.299). Satan with his “fixed mind” (1.97) being the earliest judge of the couple we encounter may cause us as readers to assume, having only now heard such talk of women and it coming from the great deceiver, that this opinion merely reflects the evil nature of its speaker. Similar to later discourse from Adam, that Eve is “inferior in the mind” (8.541) and “[resembles] less his image” (8.543-44) which sounds like typical guy chatter about his wife, such as the popular “women can’t drive” mantra, this account we could easily dismiss until the unfallen angel Raphael confirms and takes farther such assumptions.

According to Raphael, Eve’s greatest potential is like a stumbling block for Adam. He warns Adam not to let his physical attraction to Eve (the only thing she has going for her) overpower him, or cause him to submit to what he calls a “[thing] / Less excellent” (8.565-66). He gives Adam pointers on how to make Eve “acknowledge thee her head,” (8.574) because though “Fair no doubt,” (8.568) she is not worthy of Adam’s “subjection” (8.570). Because this demeaning account of woman has now come from such high authority, it begins to look more and more valid, as if in Eve, Milton has created a truly inferior character in mind and body.

Adam and the rather opinionated Narrator (which can be read aligned with the authorial voice) in many ways echo these celestial voices and their demeanor toward Eve. Like many first time readers, my impression of their attitudes concerning Eve were entirely antifeminist and understandably so as the Narrator gives little personal input on Eve except to essentially blame her

for the fall, allotting Adam no agency apart from him being, “not deceived, / But fondly overcome with female charm,” (9.998-99) initially making Eve seem less the villain, yet creating in Adam a victim with Eve’s beauty and charm as the assailant. Adam, before the fall, has already made clear this vulnerability to Eve’s looks, that only “Against the charm of beauty’s powerful glance” (8.533) is he weak. In fact, he tells us, “All higher knowledge in her presence falls / Degraded,” (8.551-2) rendering the great intellect that is supposedly Adam, dumbfounded, causing Eve to appear “wisest, virtuous, discreet, best,” (8.550) which the text seems to claim she is not. In spite of this power she has over him, Adam does not relent Eve’s “[inferiority] in the mind / And inward faculties,” (8.541-2) also emphasizing the importance of outward appearance that she “[resembles] less / His image who made both” (8.543-4). She does not look like God. And although he regards her highly, “delight[ing] / both of her beauty, and submissive charms” (4.497-8), when discussing her apparent wit, Adam remarks that Eve seems “As one intended first, not after made / Occasionally” (8.555-6). Eve is merely an afterthought meant for Adam’s pleasure and nothing else; Adam should not fall for such trickery as outward beauty.

This opinion of Eve, in relation to Adam, reflects a traditionalist point of view. As Diane Kelsey McColley observes of Eve, “so great is the weight of misogynous tradition, in fact, that few readers of *Paradise Lost* have made bold to say with Adam that God has done his part” (2). In the first chapter of her book, *Milton’s Eve*, McColley explains the pictorial and literary tradition surrounding the Genesis creation story at the time Milton was writing, and how she believes it is “a dualistic habit of mind that [Milton] strove in all his works to reform” (3)—that is, that matter, nature, the body, passions, etc. are separate from and oppose all that is good and spiritual. Woman, in this scenario “the primordial temptress, represents the dark and dangerous (or rebellious and thrilling) side of each antithesis” (3) because “matter, flesh, sexuality, and woman have something intrinsically wrong with them” (11). While “many scholars have perceived traces of [this idea] in *Paradise Lost*” (13), McColley highlights that Milton’s Eve lacks the sly, sexually manipulative or the inverse shy and shameful natures universally associated with her character. She argues that his seventeenth-century audience would never have expected the reason and grace Milton attributes to her, partially because they were so accustomed to “lavishing its greatest imaginative power on the moment of disobedience” (6) and rarely considered life and especially righteousness before the fall. This idea rests on the separation of the virtuous, spiritual word from the natural material, a popular Protestant belief contrary to Milton’s monistic dogmas that the two (spiritual and material) are essentially mutually dependent. In *Paradise Lost*, angels are said to eat, sleep, and have sex – bodily necessities and desires, yet for Milton, who believed God created all things out of Chaos (the, as Dennis Richard Danielson puts it, “not yet creation proper,” the original Godly matter from which God’s essence

has been removed and “rendered external to him” (46)), all material things and beings are inherently linked to the spiritual and vice versa. Therefore, this idea of the female representing vulgarity and that of the flesh more than any other being, and that those qualities are innately bad would not sit well with Milton’s theodicy, or his belief and argument for a benevolent God.

Milton also displays to his readers a true righteousness in the married life of Adam and Eve by complicating the tradition of a guilty, ruinous, carnal Eve. But, as McColley rightly observes, “the feature of Milton’s treatment of Eve that is most unpalatable to modern readers is her subordination to Adam” (34). But McColley begs us to consider that our modern progressive mentalities misguidedly link subordination and inferiority, just as the early reader would struggle with Milton’s monism. *Paradise Lost*, before the fall, introduces its readers to a world in which service to one another “is a means of promotion by unprecedented merit” (56). Adam and Eve gladly serve one another as their particular talents permit them, “so that Eve has particular pleasure in helping and learning from a husband she admires, and Adam has particular pleasure in attending to the peace and liberty of a wife he cherishes” (35). Eve’s service and subordination, in particular, McColley believes, Milton likens to that of God the Son to God the Father. In Protestant theology, God designed marriage as an earthly reproduction of the God’s marriage to the church, but it also compares considerably to the unity of the Trinity. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, though separate entities are so unified that they are in fact one – a single God. Likewise, *Genesis* tells us that in marriage the two “become one flesh” (2.25). In the Godly union The Son, though equal to the Father, “[does] not consider equality with God a thing to be grasped” and “humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death” (ESV Philippians 2:6,8). If McColley’s assertion is correct, Eve’s subordination to Adam raises her status greatly rather than diminish it. Her claims that “subordination is not demeaning, but is a means of promotion by unprecedented merit” and that “the idea that service means loss of power, freedom, dignity, and opportunity is the central distortion of the Satanic mind” (56) may not sit well with a twenty-first century audience, but Milton’s readers, who are familiar with the traditional interpretation of marriage (that which links Christ with the husband, and the church with the wife) might find Milton giving Eve such stature as comparing her to Christ bold and unsettling.

Milton’s Adam, though believing, as most, that Eve is his subservient and lesser in all traits of value, senses such noble qualities in Eve, which cause him to question what he thinks he knows about her. In his discourse with the angel Raphael, he describes the passionate love he feels toward Eve but fears that it weakens him. Adam wonders if “nature failed in me and left some part / Not proof enough such object to sustain” (8.534-5). If Eve truly was only an afterthought, Adam ought to be more resilient to her beauty and charms than he is, implying that perhaps God failed Adam as a creator. He consents that,

“For well I understand in the prime end / Of nature her th’
inferior,” (8.540-1) [. . .] Yet when I approach Her
loveliness so absolute she seems And in herself complete so
well to know Her own that what she wills to do or say Seems
wisest, virtouousest, discreetest, best (8.546 - 50).

Adam, who the text claims to be full of wisdom and intellect, cannot help but notice those same qualities in his wife. In fact, in this same conversation with Raphael, we learn that Adam does not want to be a superior. He tells the story of how he asked God for an equal, for “Among unequals what society / Can sort” (8.383-4)? He pleads to God, [. . .] Of fellowship I speak Such as I seek, fit to participate All rational delight wherein the brute cannot be human consort (8.389 -92),

Wanting an equal in the mind, with whom he can converse and truly relate. While Raphael disputes any claims against God’s provision, he agrees that God made Eve to obey Adam, and Adam must stay in control. He even reproaches him for the passion (particularly the sexual) which Adam feels for Eve, Raphael asserts, reflects mere “carnal pleasure,” (8.593) which he believes debases divine love which “hath his seat / in reason and is judicious” (8.590-1). But to this Adam amorously answers,

Neither her outside formed so fair nor aught In procreation
common to all kinds . . . So much delights me as those
graceful acts, Those thousand decencies that daily flow
From all her words and actions mixed with love” (8.596-7,
600-02).

Adam loves Eve for more than her beauty and erotic passions, but adores the small acts and words of their daily lives together; Adam values Eve for who she is as a person, not an object of desire and subordination. And in a bold retort, he questions the veracity of Raphael’s stance on sexual love asking,

To love thou blam’st me not for love thou say’st
Leads up to Heav’n, is both the way and guide.
Bear with me then if lawful what I ask:
Love not the Heav’nly spirits? And how their love
Express they? By looks only or do they mix
Irradiance? Virtual or immediate touch? (8.612-17)

In this passage Adam brazenly defends Eve, and proves quite the rhetorician because truthfully Milton’s angels have sex and apparently really good sex at that. The confrontation leaves Raphael dumbfounded, with no choice but to answer in the affirmative, and as “the parting sun” (8.630) his “signal to depart” (8.632) conveniently gives an excuse to leave, he does so with haste. This proves again that angels are not infallible, as Satan and his followers have demonstrated their ability to get it wrong. For even unfallen Raphael’s

words demeaning passionate and sexual love, contradict an alternative viewpoint expressed by the Narrator, explicated in Book Four:

Whatever hypocrites austerely talk
Of purity and place and innocence,
Defaming as impure what God declares
Pure and commands to some, leaves free to all.
Our Maker bids increase. Who bids abstain
But our destroyer, foe to God and Man?
Hail wedded love, mysterious law, true source
Of human offspring, sole propriety
In Paradise, of all things common else! (4.744-52)

Raphael assuredly does not speak for Milton, nor for Milton's understanding of God and his will, but protective Adam's protest does, thus leaving some hope for the modern feminist reader and Eve.

But when we look at the Eve character herself, we find conflicting characteristics which at times seem to support the idea that the men in the poem have unfairly represented her, but often do not. First, she constantly praises Adam like a God, as if he is her maker and sustainer:

To whom thus Eve replied, O thou for whom
And from whom I was formed flesh of thy flesh,
And without whom am to no end, my guide
And head (4.440-43).

Without realizing it, Eve here expresses her inferiority to Adam, who was made for God, whose guide and head is God. And if she praises him like God, what sort of lowly creature does that make her? She also proves the inadequacy of her mind when she abandons the boring conversation between Adam and Raphael (in which Adam is utterly consumed), preferring to hear the heavenly news from Adam (a secondary source) who "would intermix / Grateful digressions, and solve high dispute / with conjugal caresses, from his lip" (8.54-6). Eve here appears, for lack of a better word, ditsy, and even more striking, she proves that she has no identity outside of Adam, preferring to see and gain knowledge through his filter. Eve only finds wholeness and legitimacy in the context of her husband, whom she calls "author and disposer," (4.635) and her "law" (4.637). And according to Eve, man "Is woman's happiest knowledge and her praise," (4.638). Eventually, she acknowledges "what wants / In female sex" (9.821-22).

But this, my first and disappointed impression of Milton's Eve, may not reflect the complexity of her character fairly. Both Joseph Wittreich, in his book *Feminist Milton*, and Diane McColley, in her article "Eve and the Arts of Eden," caution modern readers of *Paradise Lost* who can, as McColley warns, "use the spear of criticism to free the text, or ... pour venom,

distempers, phantasms, and high conceits into it”, particularly concerning Eve, who “whenever there is a rape of the text gets the worst of it” (101). Similarly, Wittreich advises “it now requires a special effort to read *Paradise Lost*, an effort that should be made by Miltonists and feminists alike to read across the grain of the accustomed experience” (32). The modern reader may be surprised to learn that the eighteenth-century female readership of Milton found him to be “a figure through whom they can advance and whom they can use to benefit their polemical positions” (54). It seems that in another time, in a different context, women recognized qualities in Eve that can be clouded in our time by such words as *obey*, *submission*, and *subordination*, as they recall images of denigration, restraint, abuse, and disregard. To grasp a deeper understanding of Milton’s drastically deviant account of Eve, we must observe Wittreich’s counsel that “the representation of this or that idea does not necessarily signify a lack of resistance to it” (10).

Consider pre-*Paradise Lost* accounts of Eve in art and literature. As stated earlier, McColley explains the two primary illustrations of Eve: the sexually manipulative temptress, and the shameful, embarrassed sinner, struggling to cover her nakedness. In contrast, Milton fashions in Eve a believable human being, and gives her qualities that make her admirable. For by acknowledging the modern reader’s tendency toward cynicism regarding works in a patriarchal tradition such as the one in which Milton wrote, and sidelining that inclination to better recognize cultural context, readers find an Eve of surprisingly equal stature (both human and spiritual), and equal intellect (both in intelligence and creativity), in whom Milton has placed attributes of himself, creating in her a poet and crusader for free will. In fact, after the fall, Eve, begging Adam’s forgiveness and empathy, echoes famous lines of Milton’s treatise “*Areopagitica*.” She proclaims: “And what is faith, love, virtue unassayed, Alone, without exterior help sustained? Let us not then suspect our happy state Left so imperfect by the Maker wise As not secure to single or combined. Frail is our happiness if this be so And Eden were no Eden thus exposed!” (9.335-341). Similarly, in “*Areopagitica*” Milton writes, “Many there be that complain of divine providence for suffering Adam to transgress. Foolish tongues! When God gave him reason, he gave him freedom to choose, for reason is but choosing, he had been else a mere artificial Adam” (356)...For God sure esteems the growth and completing of one virtuous person more than the restraint of ten vicious” (357). Also, he confesses...

I cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue, unexercised
and unbreathed, that never sallies out and sees her adversary,
but slinks out of the race where that immortal garland is to
be run for, not without dust and heat (350).

Both Milton and Eve here profess that God has given humanity free will, so that obedience to and love of God is a choice that when chosen is given freely. Both believe that without the freedom to choose and without a challenge to

that choice, love and obedience are the mere fabrication of false beings. That Milton imparted his voice and firm beliefs onto Eve, signifies respect that no artist or writer before had granted her, except perhaps the writer of Genesis. Perhaps then, any statements or actions by Eve that demonstrate inferior stature and abilities are merely reflections based on the misguided opinions of imperfect beings, which have always accounted her less.

I had hoped so, until Book Ten when God speaks – God who has not been fooled; who knew of Satan’s planning and escape from Hell as it was happening; and who knew and planned a counter act to the fall before it happened. God has proven omniscient throughout the poem and had no higher view of Eve than Adam, Raphael, or even Satan. In a small but powerful series of lines God, in scolding Adam, reduces Eve more than all those before him, not only because his words carry more weight, but the words he uses is particularly heartbreaking for a woman to hear:

Was she thy God, that her thou didst obey
Before His voice? Or was she made thy guide
Superior, or but equal, that to her
Thou didst resign thy manhood and the place
Wherein God set thee ’bove her made of thee
And for thee, whose perfection far excelled
Hers in all real dignity? Adorned
She was indeed and lovely to attract
Thy love, not thy subjection, and her gifts
Were such as under government well seemed,
Unseemly to bear rule, which was thy part
And person hadst thou known thyself aright (10.145-56).

Here God first presents a series of rhetorical questions to which we can assume the answers are no, leaving the opposite to be yes. If he approves the assumption that Adam is Eve’s guide by understanding that God, in saying “was she made thy guide,” implies that in fact Adam was made Eve’s guide, then we should also assume that the binary “was she thy God” must be understood as the opposite as well, that Adam was essentially Eve’s god, thus entitled to worship and obedience. Additionally, God’s seemingly sarcastic question, “was she made.../ Superior, or but equal,” extinguishes all hopes that Eve and Adam might at least be peers. Ultimately, he avows her lack in dignity compared to Adam, and that though she has her looks, they are not enough to increase her marital or governing rank.

William Empson, in the chapter entitled “Eve” of his book *Milton’s God*, fervently agrees with this interpretation of God’s behavior toward Eve. He claims that “Ever since the development of monotheism Eve has been blamed for wanting to become a God, and Milton accepts that accusation against her from the text of Genesis” (154). He treats the relationship between God and Man, and particularly God and Eve, with a bitter contempt, rashly

assuming that Eve shares this contempt. To Empson, God is a “tyrant” (149) who in effect willed the fall, and, Empson theorizes, this God in *Paradise Lost* reveals Milton’s beliefs regarding women. As Richard Corum (who, in his essay “White Ink: *Paradise Lost* and Milton’s Ideas of Women,” concurs with Empson) states, “We can start at the top of Milton’s corporate enterprise and examine his idea of woman by investigating his God’s idea of woman” (121-2). Empson’s interpretation of Milton’s God is that of “a bullfighter” who “of course does praise a bull if it is brave, but he means to kill it anyhow” (158-9). “Adam and Eve would not have fallen unless God had sent Raphael to talk to them” (147), essentially causing the fall by introducing the thought (even if it be one to fear) of a conceivable fall. And as a bullfighter, God hoped that man would fall, so in essence, Eve’s sin was the will of God, which Empson professes Eve sensed – “she presumes that God will love her for eating the apple” (163). Although “one expects the morality of a god to be archaic,” such duplicity, for Empson makes this God, “wickedder than any recorded society” (161), this, the God whom Milton worships and, Empson believes, exemplifies. Corum agrees with these assertions about Milton’s God, but understands Milton to be emotionally aligned with Adam’s favorable thoughts of Eve, yet deems such thought sinful, because he doctrinally aligns with his God. According to Corum, “Milton had not wanted *Paradise Lost* to be a sinful mirror projecting itself out from the side of his mortal head” because he shamefully supposed “that he had ideas of women which were not divine” (134).

Both Empson and Corum’s arguments of Milton’s tyrannical God and bitter Eve contain holes, which must be confronted. McColley’s, in her essay “Milton and the Sexes,” provides an opposing view of God in the Judeo-Christian culture, by providing insight into a different ancient account of the creation of woman: In Hesiod’s *Theogony*, Zeus creates Woman in revenge for Man’s acquisition of forbidden knowledge from Prometheus; her name is Pandora, and she comes equipped with a box of evils. The Hebrew book of origins differs from the Greek in radical ways: instead of gods of both sexes who are a part of nature, and hence unreliable and sometimes hostile to humankind, it represents a transcendent maker of nature who ‘created man in his own image. . . male and female created he them’ (Gen. 1:27), pronounced this whole creation good, and blessed it; and instead of providing Woman as punishment, it represents her as meet help: that is, as a fitting aid and companion in the care of the world and the procreation commended in the callings to dress and keep the garden and to increase and multiply. (150)

The God presented here is far more complex than Empson imagines. And likewise, his declaration that “it is all God’s fault really because he assigned them the serpent by ‘doom express’”(168) falls short of Milton’s adamant belief in free will. In fact in his treatise “The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce,” rebutting Jesuit accusations that Milton is responsible for “making God the author of sin” (208), Milton avows “that man’s own free will

self-corrupted is the adequate and sufficient cause of his disobedience *besides Fate*" (281). Author of *Milton's Good God*, Dennis Richard Danielson reports that this affirmation "was something he did not go back on" (102) as he remains consistent throughout his prose. As I mentioned earlier *Paradise Lost*, like Milton's many treatises, especially "Areopagitica," bleed language of God-given free will and the essentiality for human choice ("When God gave him reason, he gave him freedom to choose, for reason is but choosing, he had been else a mere artificial Adam" (356)). Surely Milton would contest with Empson's claim that Milton's God "knows he has created [Adam and Eve] badly" and resents them for it (175). For it was Milton's God, who created them "Sufficient to have stood though free to fall" (3.99), and even in anticipation the fall, knowing its inevitability, promised mercy; "Yet not of will in him but grace in me / Freely vouchsafed" (3.174-5).

Now, having examined Milton's God and Eve, let us unearth those characters reported by the ancient writer of Genesis, still using Alter's *Genesis Translation and Commentary*, and consider how they compare. The first notable difference in the Alter translation is that rather than saying that God created man, "God said, 'Let us make a human'" (1.26). In his commentary Alter explains that the Hebrew word "*adam*" used here "is a generic term for human beings, not a proper noun" and "does not automatically suggest maleness" (5). Susan Niditch, in her contribution to *The Women's Bible Commentary*, refers to a feminist reading of Genesis saying "no more interesting and telegraphic comment exists on the nature of being human and on the nature of God. The male aspect and the female aspect implicitly are part of the first human and a reflection of the Creator" (13). This first suggests that perhaps God's first created human was gender neutral or as some suggest encompassing both Genders until the separation of the two at Eve's creation, but at the very least stresses the unimportance of the first human's gender. Also, that *Genesis* chapter 1 says, "And God created the human in his image / in the image of God He created him / male and female He created them" (1.27) directly contrasts the assumptions in *Paradise Lost* that God only created Adam in his image. Scripture clearly states that both are made in the image of God. And as God, throughout the entirety of The Bible is described with both male and female qualities, it is when the two are together in humans that they most accurately reflect his image.

Concerning the creation of Eve, where most versions will call her a helper to Adam, in Alter's translation, God creates in Eve, "a sustainer beside him" (2.19). Reading the commentary, we learn that the word "'Help' is too weak because it suggests a merely auxiliary function" (9) which was not intended by the original Hebrew. This word has military connotations in other verses, giving Eve a more vital role in their marriage and in the care of the garden. Also that she was made beside him is of value. That Eve was taken and built from the rib implies equality in rank that would not be present if she

was built from a piece of skull or the foot. They are peers, working side by side toward the same goal.

On the subject of authority, the God of *Genesis* does not discriminate having “said to them... ‘Fill the earth and conquer it, and hold sway over” (1.28) it, addressing the pair, not simply the man. They together have dominion over the earth, not over each other. The later passage of God speaking to Eve of Adam that “he shall rule over you,” (3.16) which so often is used to subjugate wives to their husbands, happens after the fall as a consequence, because of sin. The simple fact that God chooses male rule as a penalty implies that hierarchy between the two did not exist before the fall. God’s original creation was not meant to sweat for food, or to experience pain in childbirth, just as God’s original creation was meant to be equal. Previous to this moment, no hint of hierarchy between humans existed. Similarly, *Genesis* mentions nothing of Eve’s physical appearance, intellect, or tempting nature, nor does it suggest that Adam was deceived, overpowered, or even conflicted in his decision to taste the fruit. In fact all language of sexism, hierarchy, and most of the plot, Milton added to either create intrigue or further his agenda. So, what objective did Milton have which would cause him to portray God’s affections toward Eve in a way that contradicts what he knows to be true of Scripture, and diminishes so cruelly Eve’s character whom Milton has painstakingly written with the highest regard?

Such diction, although contrary to the heart of scripture, nonetheless reproduces struggles present in its interpretation. Like Milton’s Adam, who labors to rectify a clearer understanding of Eve’s place with him in the garden, those whose faith rests in the Judeo-Christian account of creation and the Fall have fought for centuries to categorize women and likewise to break free from such limiting categories, based largely on this central Genesis text. Therefore, on the issue of equality, Genesis cannot be overlooked for its vital role in both human history and Western consciousness. Milton’s choice to expand this text and his particular focus on Eve is by the same token monumental. For if Milton’s representation of Eve at times seems unjust (and it most certainly does), it exists primarily to reflect this ancient struggle and call to attention the injustice he sees in the world around him. Because although Eve in many ways does not coincide with our modern understanding of a strong female character, Milton gave her a voice, which no one had before, “to create poetically such an Eve as a just and provident God must be supposed to have created actually” (McColley 3). In Eve, Milton penned a genuine person, equal in mind and spirit to her husband, morally conflicted, who wants and strains to become greater than they tell her she is, even if it that desire leads her downfall. In doing so, he fashioned a previously unheard of sympathy toward Eve, the mother of mankind and predicated curse to our sinful existence.

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