THE ETHICS OF GENDER IN MILTON'S *PARADISE LOST*

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> How could any sensitive reader of *P.L.* suppose that the epic shows Milton's putative aversion to women?
> Thomas WHEELER, 87.

Resumo:
Existe uma acirrada discussão entre os estudiosos do clássico inglês Paradise Lost *(John Milton, 1674) sobre o suposto misogenismo do autor. A maioria dos estudiosos, inclusive mulheres sustentam que não. A análise da Eva Miltoniana apresentada abaixo deixa claro que não só Milton é de fato misogenista, mas seu misogenismo vai além da opinião comum de uma época que via a mulher como encarnação do mal. Milton, através de sua Eva, justifica esta visão da mulher, aprofundando e perpetuando com sua mitopoética a visão ética-teológica da mulher. Sua visão, longe de ser "moderna", representa a reafirmação do ethos paternalístico da tradição judaico-cristã.*

To indict Milton on a charge of unabashed misogyny is not an easy task. We nevertheless intend to assemble evidence for such an accusation, based on *Paradise Lost* (hereinafter *PL*). We will limit our case principally to the portrait of Eve in *PL*, where she represents Milton's idea of the archetypical woman. The reason for basing a study of Milton's misogyny on *PL* is that it is unclear when the most reasonable alternative,

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Samson Agonistes, was written. If it is an early work, Milton's portrait of Dalila might be a direct result of the matrimonial rejection to which his first wife subjected him, so that he might have been understandably embittered by this experience with love and women.

In any case, *PL* is a product of Milton's mature life, when he felt sufficiently wise, confident, and, as he might have said, moved by divine inspiration, to give the world his considered ethical, philosophical, and political views, of matters worldly and divine. His portrait of Eve reflect his mature thoughts on the nature of women with special reference to the question of good and evil.

The belief that women were the reason for the perdition of mankind, as suggested by Genesis, was a main ethical-theological view of Milton's age. As a matter of fact, the view is not even peculiar of Christianity; most peoples, the Greeks in particular, had also their own Eves. Nor is Milton's Eve new to the Christian tradition itself, reflecting, as she does, Lutheran and Calvinist ideas of the Fall. Although the Bible portrays women in a male chauvinistic mode, even Biblical writers refrain from making as direct an association between Eve and evil as Milton and certain Christian theologians do.

In recreating the Book of Genesis, which says little enough indeed about Adam's and Eve's prelapsarian existence, why did Milton go out of his way to portray Eve as the fatal beauty of Paradise? This beauty is almost fatal to Satan himself, whom Eve enchants with her "fairness" and "loveliness" on more than one occasion. If Milton augments Eve's image, giving innumerable insights into her personality and character, why does he portray Adam very much along traditional theological lines?

In defending Milton against the accusation of misogyny, K. G. HAMILTON (51) writes that "he was not altogether the male chauvinist he has sometimes been dubbed ... [H]e gave to women, in fact, a role in marriage which they did not generally achieve of his contemporaries in this matter," but he forgets that Milton's view of marriage was a product of Biblical learning and taken straight from Paul's Letters. As a true believer in the divine providence of Scripture, Milton dared not take a jot away from the sacred text.

The Biblical account of the Fall states simply, "and she ate." It can be deduced from her conversation with the serpent in Genesis 3: 1-6 that she sought knowledge of good and evil, believing it be the key to Godhead and immortality. It is not possible from this brief passage to infer what other motivations might Eve have had, though we might presume that her desire for knowledge and her aspiration to Godhead might have been rooted in a dissatisfaction with the hierarchy of Paradise.

There is, however, no indication in the Biblical narrative to suggest, as Milton proposes, that Eve's desire to knowledge was rooted in a selfish and egocentric desire to become a goddess and superior to Adam. When the Bible says, "and she it unto her husband," there is no suggestion that her action was based upon the "murderous" intention of a jealous wife, as Milton makes out in *PL.* Thus it might be assumed that Milton's description of Eve as "the fairest of creation", and "the most fascinating woman of literature" (HAMILTON 49) is "not so much to characterize Eve as to persuade the reader of her special state of being" (KNOTT 110), a state of being which "shows a promiscuous readiness to respond to Satan's invitation" (HAMILTON 119).

That Milton subtly portrays Eve's decision as a possibility, rather than as an inevitability, becomes plain when we take a closer look at the totality of Eve's character and the events leading to her final decision. Believing in man's freedom to choose his destiny, Milton would not commit the gross error of making it obvious that Eve was "sin awaiting its opportunity", as appears to the case. Furthermore, if she was destined by God to fall from the beginning, the ultimate guilt would not descend upon her, but upon her Creator, Who made her a "crooked Rib," and thus, to employ the Augustinian phrase, *non posse non peccare.*

Thomas WHEELER (87) also praises Eve, saying Milton's recreations "are especially beneficial to Eve's image." He lauds Milton for being ahead of his contemporaries in attributing to Eve, among other qualities, fitness "to participate/All rational delights." Eve has "a mind of her own, out she perversely uses it to oppose him [Adam] and reject him" (WHEELER 96). Yet as Leonora Lett BRODWIN (62) asserts, "Eve is created inferior to Adam not in intelligence...but in character."

Milton's Eve's intelligence has earned him praise even from feminist writers such as Diane Kelsey McCOLLEY and Barbara K. LEWALSKI, who seem to forget that the idea that woman were beings capable of thinking was not introduced into Western literature by Milton, but dates back to Plato's *Republic*, where women can become philosopher-kings younger than men might.

Furthermore, for Augustinians, what made guilt guilt was the very fact that it was an act free choice, and that it is this very attribute of thinking that which made Eve's sin inexcusable. As Jonh Meredith spells out, a sin committed "by default of the Vertue Appetitiue; when we fall sinnes through error, and commit evil, because we thinke it to be good; being deceiued by the vayle of false opinion, which causeth in vs dennial of those sinnes" (cited in PHILLIPS 123). Rationalizing her dilemma—with a little help from her fiend, as it were—Eve chose evil instead of good, or, as Meredith put it, "Sometime by default of the will; when we commit sinnes of mere iniquity; knowing them, being able to resist them, and yet committing" (cited in CHAMBERS 123).

John A. PHILLIPS (36) says of Milton's Eve: "Every account of the lovliness, grace, intelligence, and perfection...serves but to set the stage for her undoing. That which makes her a female is what will enable the serpent to bring her down, or enables her to induce a righteous man to join her in her sin. Adam will be 'fondly overcome with Feminine charm'." Wheeler is willing to admit that "[i]t is possible to judge Eve by the standards of seventh-century courtesy books and to find that she fails as a wife in almost every important respect," but this fact is not irrelevant, as he makes out by cavalierly excusing both Eve and Milton with his next sentence, "Yet her charm is undeniable" (WHEELER 87).

If the Biblical judgment limits itself to condemning Eve of disobedience, Milton's Eve is guilty, not only under the cannons of courtesy literature, but also—worst luck—in terms of Christian doctrine, of almost all venail sins, and of six of the seven cardinal sins (sloth, lust, pride, gluttony, averice, covetousness, and wrath). It is interesting that the only deadly sin that Milton's Eve does not commit is sloth. The apparent reason is that since prelapsarian society was not oriented towards

labor, and since hard labor was introduced into the world only after the Fall, as a punishment, Eve could not possibly be guilty of this sin. There is, nevertheless, a slight suggestion of even this sin when Eve, being visited by Satan in her first dream, sleeps until late: "why sleep'st thou Eve / Now is the pleasant time..." (*PL*, IV, 38). In other passages as well, she is told by Adam to "Haste hither Eve," or to "go with speed." Considering the social structure of Paradise, she could not have been aware that many of the other sins to which she seems inclined, such as lust, jealousy, greed, and avarice, are directly related to a social order which depends on more complex social interaction and economic activity than that of Paradise.

Regarding lust, which appears on more than one occasion, it is hard to understand how Eve, who had never seen another man besides Adam, would wish to be courted by one. In this desire Eve is quite Freudian, because, again not knowing any other man, she dreams of them: "Close at mine ear one called me forth to walk / With gentle voice, I thought it thine" (*PL*, V, 36-37).

Lust is made a clear motivation for the Fall, as in Book IX when the Serpent flatters Eve with the words, "thy celestial Beauty adore...With *ravishment* beheld, there best beheld... (*PL*, 541-542), adding, "Who sees thy? (And what is one?)" (*PL*, 546). The serpent is also always described with male imagery: "pleasing was his shape, / And lovely, never since of serpent kind / Lovelier" (*PL*, IX, 503-5). The implication is that Eve is not a modest, honest wife, satisfied with the love and admiration of her husband, but a brazen hussy seeking admirers. It is also hard not to notice the flying images of her first dream: "Forthwith up to the Clouds / With him I flew" (*PL*, V, 86-7); "wond'ring at my flight and change. / To this high exaltation" (*PL*, IV, 89-90). That her first dream had this particular subject is also relevant; the dream "may be seen as going beyond the invitation to simple sensuousness or self-pride, to suggest something like sexual excitement" (HAMILTON 56).

The sin of pride is divided in two different kinds, vanity and ambition, the latter of which seems to be Eve's principal motivation. On the one hand, it is the basis for her condemnation, as well as for the

"tendency to stress and elaborate upon [her] special guilt" (PHILLIPS 36). It is, on the other hand, the basis for Adam's excuse, for his motivation was a love that could be accepted within Christianity. It seems that Milton wants to make a parallel between Adam and Jesus: that Christ died for love is the very basis of the Gospels. While Eve, like a good pagan, risks her life and soul for lust and ambition; Adam, like a good Christian, did it for love.

From this single cardinal sin, certain venial sins of Milton's Eve, such as selfishness, jealousy and narcissism, spring. The first impression that we have of Eve is undoubtedly that of an extreme vanity. Her first moments of consciousness, right after her creation, are towards herself, as "her sensuous response to beauty—in this case her own—as she catches sight of her reflection in a pool, involves her in a parallel to the Narcissus story and provides an indication of her tendency to sleflove, to self-pride, on which Satan is later to work his wiles" (HAMILTON 55). As it is illustrated by her apparently innocent question, "But wherefore all night long shine these, for whom / This glorious sight, when sleep hath all eyes" (*PL*, IV, 657-58), a sign of immense vanity; as she sees herself as the referencial center of the universe.

Her beauty has, even for herself, a bewitching power from which she has to be freed by the Creator, who hurries her up towards meeting Adam.

> I laid me down
> On the green lake bank, to look into the clear
> Smooth Lake...
> As I bent down to look, just opposite,
> A shape within the wat'ry gleam appear'd
> Bending to look on me, I started back,
> It started back, but pleased I soon returned,
> Pleas'd it returned as soon with answering looks
> Of sympathy and love; there I had fixt
> Mine eyes till now, and pin'd with vain desire (*PL*, IV, 456-67)

She is so impressed with her own beauty that she does not like Adam, regarding his physical attributes inferior to hers: "Till I espi'd thee, fair indeed and tall, / Under a Platan, yet methought less fair," (*PL*, IV, 477-78). This vanity, and this manifestation of pride, will be skillfully played by Satan, who does not waste any time in flattering her at all times, even by calling her, "Fairest resemblance of thy Maker fair" (*PL*, IX, 339).

While Adam's treatment of Eve always emphasizes his superiority: "O Woman, best are all things as the will / Of God Ordained them" (*PL*, IX, 343-44); Satan is both flattering and deferential. Satan gives Eve the illusion of superiority in relation to him, calling her "sovereign mistress, "sole wonder," "sovereign of creatures, universal dame," goddess humane," "goddess among gods, adored and served by angels numberless." "Already preoccupied with herself to a dangerous degree, she was 'influenced', 'fired' by Satan's flattering terms...while his promise of divinity proved 'an argument suitable to her humor'" (PHILLIPS 36).

Concerning ambition, the other manifestation of pride, Eve's ambition has two different aspects, intellectual and political. That Eve is not satisfied with the intellectual attributes that she received from the Creator is evident in many passages of *PL*, of which this following commentary, made right after eating the fruit, is the most significant because of its striking clarity: "to add what wants / In female Sex, the more to draw his Love, / And render me more equal, and perhaps, / A thing not undesirable, sometime / Superior: for inferior who is free?" (*PL* 821-25).

The relevance of Eve's particular ambition for knowledge is that, aside from the various warning that Raphael gives against the pursuit of it, Eve's motivation to obtain it was based in her dissatisfaction with her place in the Chain of Being. The possession of knowledge, particularly knowledge of good and evil, would not only enable her to change her own place in the Chain of Being, but more importantly, it would upset God's domestic arrangement (in this, Eve parallels Satan). For the source of Adam's power and supremacy is his intellectual capacity, which is

the basis for his moral superiority and freedom, as Raphael tells Adam: "Of these skills, the more thou know'st, / The more she will acknowledge thee her Head" (*PL*, VIII, 573-74).

The classical theme of ambition for knowledge would not be considered evil, were Eve in a greek paradise, where Plato had made the sweetness of philosophy just as easily available to women. For Christianity, howerer, this desire to know too much constitutes a major insolence of human beings, especially women—whom He had made naturally and unchangeably so inferior that their purpose in creation was not even to worship Him, but "God in him"—that is in the man as the image of the image of God. The desire to obtain knowledge in order to achieve godhead is an unforgivable sin, representing at the same time insubordination, greed, and envy both of Adam and God.

The political aspect of this sin is the implications of the domestic changes that the equality of intellect would bring to Paradise, because of its hierarchical power structure where Adam answers to God, and Eve to Adam. The perfect harmony of Paradise depends upon each party's acceptance of his place in the Chain of Being: "Nothing lovelier can be found / In women, than to study household goods, / And good works on her husband to promote" (*PL*, IX, 232-33); and: "Unargu'd I obey; so God ordains. / God is thy law, thou mine: to know no more / Is womans happiest knowledge and her praise" (*PL*, VIII, 232-233). Note well that ambition, envy, and dissatisfaction with God's hierarchical order, were the causes of the rebellion of one third of Heaven's angels lead by Satan.

Also interesting to note is that the confrontation between Satan and Eve is preceded by a domestic quarrel, and Satan approaches her when she is alone. The implication both political and ethical is that Eve needs Adam—"not capable her ear / Of what is hight," and "her th' inferior, in mind / And inward Faculties" (because "All higher knowledge in her presence falls / Degraded")—to prevent her from giving in to her feminine weaknesses.

Out of Adam's reach, Eve "conspires against the man. She and the serpent are in league by the time Adam eats the fruit...The cunning that the serpent represents is really within Eve herself...[S]he is attracted

to the snake and the fruit because she lacks the moral discipline and reasoning skill to keep her from being victimized by her senses. She has no intellect to hold her passions in check. She is the less rational, the more sensual of the pair" (PHILLIPS, 1984, p.61). Satan is, of course, well aware of Eve's inferiority—both intellectual and moral—and of her incapacity to stand by herself, dependent as she is on her "head" and "guide." He awaits until Eve is alone to approach her:

> Then let me not pass Occasion which now smiles, behold alone The Woman... Her husband... Whose higher intellectual more I shun, And strength, of courage haughty, and of limb Heroic built, though of terrestrial mould, Foe not informidable, exempt from wound, I not (*PL*, IX, 479-487)

Eve resembles Faustus in that they both sold themselves to the Devil in return for superhuman knowledge (HAMILTON 58).

Throughout the text, Eve is always accompanied, as notes Hamilton, with "fallen images." "She as veil down to the slender waist / Her unadorned golden tresses wore / Dishevelled, but in wonton ringlest waved" (*PL*, IV, 304-6). "The epithet 'wonton'," HAMILTON (52) reminds us, "while retaining its primary meaning of disordered luxuriance,...inevitably introduces more disturbing connotations." Milton describes Eve with subtly suggestive phrases, such as "darts of desire," "peculiar graces," "feminine charm," "with Tresses discomposed," "yet Innocent," "common," "not obtrusive," "pure of sinful thought."

She is often associated with destructive woman women who use their "feminine charm" to manipule men)—Pandora, Hera, Helen, Venus, Diana, Proserpina, and most importantly, Circe, who represented, particularly in Milton's time, a symbol of spiritual degradation (See BRODWIN 22). She is also associated with Dalila. To the readers of *Samson Agonistes*, it will not pass unnoticed that such comparison equals "calling Eve a 'whore'" (KNOTT 124).

The association between Eve and Circe is so dramatic that even Satan, the "tempter of tempters," is tempted by her:

> Shee busied heard the sound Of rustling Leaves, but minded not, as us'd To such disport before her through the Field, From every Beast, more duteous at her call, Than at Circean call the herd disguis'd". (*PL*, IX, 518-22)

At her sight, Satan "remain'd stupidly good." Eve's power were such that not only she could corrupt the good, rational Adam, but evil itself was overpowered by it. As a sorceress, she could turn good to evil and, if not evil to good, at least immobilize it temporarily.

We know from Wheeler's remarks that Eve's intelligence and attributes were "perverted," howerer, Phillips goes even further in stating that ambition and lust are, in both the religious and the secular senses, peculiar marks of witches whom he defines as: "women who manifest these vices to a highter degree and have methods to gain control over men." Commenting on Milton's Eve he says, "Witchcraft depends on a perverse political logic expressed in a less perverse form by Milton in his depiction of the paradisiacal relationship between Adam, Eve, and God...[T]he woman's purpose is to work out her salvation by serving and loving man" (WHEELER 72). With regard to the special way in which Milton's Eve relates to the serpent, he adds, "Had Adam 'eliminated' the woman (on Milton's terms by divorce...) Satan would not have had power over him" (WHEELER 72). While Adam's fault is only his uxoriousness; "in an act that Milton would have us believe is tragically heroic, Adam risks damnation out of love for his wife" (PHILLIPS 104).

Eve's gluttony is perhaps difficult to identify, if only because images of food are all too abundant in *PL*. There are, howerer, some references to Eve's appetite for the forbidden fruit, which appeals as much to the eye as to the tongue. One of them is the dream episode.

> So saying, he drew night, and to me held,
> Even to my mouth of that same fruit held part

> Which he had pluckt; the pleasant savory smell
> So quick'n'd appetite, that I methought,
> Could not but taste. (*PL*, V, 82-86)

Eve wished for the fruit prior to the sight of it and, upon seeing it, she desires it intensely. Gluttony is obvious as the sight of the forbidden fruit excited her appetite, which is symbolic of her desire for knowledge as well. Explicit signs of gluttony also appear prior to the Fall; Eve succumbs because her desire for the fruit is so strong that it weakens her already weak reasoning.

> An eager appetite, rais'd by the smell
> So savory of that Fruit, which with desire,
> Inclinable now grown to touch or taste,
> Solicited her longing eyes, (*PL*, IX, 740-43)

Again, the critical act of disobedience to the rule is described with gluttonous imagery:

> ...for Eve
> Intent now wholly on her taste, naught else
> Regarded, such delight till then, as seem'd,
> In Fruit she never tasted, whether true
> Or fancied so, through expectation high
> Of knowledge, nor was God-head from her thought.
> Greedily she ingorg'd without restrain,
> Satiated at length,...satiated at length,
> And hight'n'd as with Wine, (*PL*, IX, 785-92)

Since there was no material wealth or property in Paradise, the only wealth and property she could wish for was the possession of knowledge, and Milton's Eve wishes this wealth at all cost, and does want to keep it to herself: "Shall I to him make known \ As yet my change, and give him to partake / Full happiness with me, or rather not / But keep the odds of knowledge in my power / Without Copartener?" (*PL*, IX, 816-21).

What prevents her from keeping the odds of knowledge to herself is only a conjunction of other venail sins, such as jealousy ("...but what if God have seen, / And Death issue? Then I shall be no more, / And Adam wedded to another Eve, shall live with her enjoying, I extinct; / A death to think," [*PL*, IX, 826-30]); selfishness, as she does not want to suffer alone the consequences of her act ("Adam shall share with me in bliss or woe" [831]); murderousness and hypocrisy, ("So dear I Love bim, that with him all deaths / I could endure, without him live no life" [832-33]). In order to avoid facing the punishment alone, she lies, "appeals to his marital faith, impugns his courage, whines, scolds, 'moves his heart with sudden sweetness,' reasons, pleads, is sentimental" (PHILLIPS 74), until she finally drags Adam down with her.

Envy is a constant of Eve's character. First of all, she envies Raphael and the sort of things that is available to him as part of his hierarchical place (avarice). She wants to show Raphael that "...here on earth / God has dispenst his bounties as in Heaven" (*PL*, V, 339-30). Though she is impressed with her own beauty and to certain extent conscious of its power (as the quarrel scene illustrates), she knows that beauty is an inferior merchandise in Paradise, and, "How beauty is exell'd by manly grace / And wisdom, which alone is truely fair" (*PL*, IV, 490-1). One cannot avoid seeing in this remark a measure of envy, jealousy, and resentment. Her preoccupation in proving to Adam that she is "fit to rational delight" is constant, as is her resentment for having been left out of table conversations with superior guests: "What next I bring shall please thee, be assur'd, / Thy likeness, thy fit help, thy other self, / Thy wish, exactly to thy heart's desire (*PL*, VIII, 449-51). She also overheard ("as in a shady nook" she stood behind) Raphael's advice to Adam, that "nothing profits more than self-esteem."

At this point Eve seems to be tired of Adam's paternalistic attitude towards her, attitudes that she knows come from his position on the top of the hierarchy of Paradise. In wishing for knowledge, she is envious not only of Adam and his position, but also of the angels. Her desire is more to achieve angelhood than godhood; she really wants the privileges that the higher beings enjoy. And she cannot accept that she is not equal to Adam, but inferior to him, just "a crooked and lifeless Rib."

The sin of wrath is, to traditional Christianity, as serious as ambition and lust. In *PL*, Eve manifests three types of wrath: wish of genocide, suicide, and blasphemy. She commits blasphemy when, having eaten the fruit and knowing perfectly well that the tree is just one of God's creatures, she turns to worship it.

> O Sovran, virtuous of all Trees
> In Paradise, of operation blest
> To Sapient, hitherto obscur'd, infam'd,
> And thy fair Fruit let hang, as to no end
> Created; but henceforth my early care,
> Not without Song, each Morning, and due praise
> Shall tend thee, (*PL*, IX, 795-801)

Genocidal intent is implicit in her suggestion of abstaining from sex, which means would prevent the race of man from coming about. Here Eve is demonstrating an intense wrath against herself, Adam, and God, whose will she is trying to confront and whose plans for Creation she, like Satan, wants to obstruct. She is also denying the providence of God and his omnipotence, because he is the only being through whom life emanates. This denial represents a second temptation to Adam, who comes out the champion of God, as he refuses Eve's desperate suggestion, telling her not to despair, and to be humble for the moment, because she will, in some future phase, have a better role in the drama of mankind.

Another aspect of this sin is that, failing to convince Adam to prevent mankind from coming into being, Eve now tries to persuade him to take his own life, which, again, represents wrath against oneself and God, as well as an arrogant desire to escape the judgment of God, thus avoiding the humiliation of the submission to the punishment. Furthermore, suicide results from a vain hope (itself resulting from despair) which is a complete lost of faith that God might not be able to execute his will, and that she could ultimately design for them a destiny outside God's reach and power. The implication is that Eve, like a goddess, has power over life, a power with which she challenges God:

> Let us seek Death, or he not found, supply With our own hands his Office on our selfves; Why stand we longer shivering under fears, That show no end but Death, and have the power, Of many ways to die. (*PL*, X, 1001-05)

Since suicide has these implications, it is to traditional Christianity one of the gravest sins, so unforgivable that suicides were denied, and are yet in Catholicism, proper burial.

That this suggestion should come out of Eve's mouth indicates that Milton not only found Eve unredeemably guilty, but she was also the prototype of a heretic, an anti-Christian of the worst type. He is using her systematically as a foil for Adam who, in this specific episode comes out as a true Christian hero, who now, like God, knowing good and evil, and, again been maliciously tempted by the woman, chooses good instead of evil, thus triumphing dramatically over both abstract evil and evil as concretely incarnate in woman:

> No more be mention'd then of violence
> Against ourselves, and willful barreness,
> That cuts off from hope, and savors only
> Rancor and pride, impatience and dispite,
> Reluctance agoinst God and his just yoke
> Laid on our Necks. (*PL*, X, 1041-45)

Before concluding, we should point out another peculiar way in which Milton stresses the relationship between Eve and Satan, a relationship drawn so strongly that even people who have never read Genesis will easily see that she is *non posse non peccare.* Satan is the father of Death and Sin, whom he bore through an incestuous relationship with a fallen angel. Now since it was through Eve that Death and Sin, Satan's children, came into the world, in a way Eve becomes the "mother" of Satan's children. After realizing that the fruit did not operate the expected wonder, Adam, disappointed, blames Eve.

> Out of my sight, *thou Serpent*, that name best
> legu'd, thyself as false
> And hateful; nothing wants, but that *thy shape*, *like his*
> ...may show
> Thy inward fraud (*PL*, X, 867-71)

Confirming what Eve already suspected all along, Adam calls her: "a Rib crooked by nature," and a "fair defect of Nature."

Milton's views on women reaffirm "the paternalistic ethos of Judeo-Christian tradition" (LEWALSKI 4); he perpetuates, through the mythopoetic process, the ethical-theological view of woman. "[N]ot quite as much the image of God as he [man], she becomes through her weaker nature the instrument of evil. She initiates the fall of humanity from paradisiacal communion with God and earth into a world of toil, alienation, sex, and death" (PHILLIPS 170).

Not being able to find in Milton's Eve a trace of goodness and decency, we disagree even with the only writer, among those consulted in this work, most sympathetic to our view, Marcia LANDY (12), who though critical of Milton's Eve nevertheless asserts, erroneously, that "in spite of his historical circumstances he attempted to transcend certain stereotyped presentations of women and to elevate women as thinking and attractive beings."

With respect to the "fitness to rational delights" that Miltons Eve displays (and who knows what Milton meant by that?). Landy should thank Plato, of whom Milton was a dedicated student. Regarding her attractiveness, we see no special reason for celebration, once part of this attractiveness is due to her "female charm" and has been, since the cavemen, overwhelmingly praised and acknowledged. The most important part of a being is its moral substance.

It is our belief that Milton's Eve is not only unattractive, but quite ugly, the perfect portrait of a fatal woman. She displays no signs of spirituality. She is the stereotype of the woman which men have always portrayed. While Adam never faces Satan, Milton's Eve is almost always seen with him or under his influence. She is the vehicle through which

Adam meets evil...She is the bad wife, the self-centered, malignant woman, an Antichrist of a witch. Thus the sentence given to her by the Son, with its ethical, theological and political implications, is justified; "To thy Husband's will / Thine shall submit, he over thee shall rule" (195-6).

After this close analysis of the text, we ask how can any sensitive reader of *PL* suppose that the epic shows anything but Milton's putative aversion to women?

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