Warts and All

Paradise Lost: An Encyclopedia on Humanity

A Seminar Paper for the course “Milton's *Paradise Lost* and the English Epic”, submitted to Dr. Justin Begley

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Abstract

A question has been asked over the history of Milton Studies: who is responsible for the Fall in *Paradise Lost*, Adam or Eve? What are their respective flaws that contribute to it? Based on a close reading on Adam and Eve's story in Book Nine, combined with Milton's philosophical, political and religious agenda, I argue that what Adam and Eve represent is not two protagonists, but one, and their distinct personalities is a result of Milton's narrative design, which eventually aims to provide an encyclopedia on humanity, a parallel to *Paradise Lost*'s encyclopedic endeavor for worldly knowledge. That Eve is created from Adam's rib is not only literal but also symbolic of a monist human nature, with the difference among people being the result of different quantities of the same set of parameters, similar to the Galenic humoral theory. When Adam and Eve eat the fruit and fall, all their pre-existing attributes are enhanced, losing the subtle balance that keeps the tendency of wilderness at bay. The fall of humanity is thus comparable to healthy organisms being sick, revealed through an imbalance of previous materials.

Introduction

When Samuel Cooper gets the order from Oliver Cromwell to paint him with "warts and all," he probably doesn't know this anecdote will go down in history, even more so than the artist's name. As John Milton ventures into the political experiment with Cromwell's crew to build a new state structure that serves the common good, the short-lived republic is flawed enough to push the country back to the hierarchy before the Civil War. Cromwell's warts are not necessarily biological flaws, but the fact that artists at the time tended to leave them out if not ordered otherwise shows that they are not considered socially pleasing.

But Cromwell wants all the warts, not only artistically but also politically. He fights in civil wars, is involved in regicide, starts a commonwealth government, and ends up a military dictator whose idea itself opposes the cause of the war. Cromwell is not the only one in the parliamentarian squad who subscribes to the philosophy of flaws, so is Milton, who not only gets his hands dirty in the war and

regicide, but also creates an encyclopedic poem, *Paradise Lost*, not only of worldly and religious knowledge but also of human, their virtue and flaws. There have been debates on who, either Adam or Eve, is exactly to be blamed for Humanity's fall, such as Adam failing to assert his authoritarian power (Bower, 1969), Eve being the apparent first sinner who shouldn't be relieved of responsibility despite being inferior (Revard, 1973), and so on. But Adam and Eve are essentially one human being in their two representations, meaning one's virtue is their virtue, and the Fall is their Fall. Singling out one who is more to be blamed is precarious, because the plot develops with a dual-motor, within which the two motors influence each other's force consecutively. It is also uncertain which incident is the precipitant, since every one of them has the potential to substantially change the course of the narrative. Milton metes out human characters and flaws to the two protagonists, but eventually, he sees them as one figure possessing not only virtue but "warts and all" of all human beings.

As a dramatist, Milton has to categorize these flaws and mete them out with logic so that the story makes sense. To achieve this, he still has to create some dichotomies. Using one polarized dichotomy in stories is dangerous because it molds the characters into stereotypes: stories need repetition and variation to rivet readers, and without variation, they cannot both "teach and delight (Horace, 19 BC)." What Milton does to achieve this is amalgamate multiple pairs of dichotomies. These dichotomies are not always directly opposed to each other, but different and comparable, like two dots on a dimension. By creating a multi-dimensional characteristic space and putting Adam and Eve in it with their traits that either contrast or complement each other, Milton shows us two full-fledged human beings with all their merits and flaws. The bottom line is, they are eventually the same person, with different and sometimes opposing characteristics, just like the proverbial good and bad angel in one person's mind. What is unique in *PL* from this model is that neither complete goodness nor utter evil is present in either of them: only God is perfect; evil is the absence of goodness. A corollary is that the nature of the fall of humanity is not evil either: it is only a trip and a fall, and it hurts both themselves and their creator, but it can heal.

In the following part, I will analyze some compelling dichotomies. However, in any case, they are both essentially a side of one person. Milton is neither a feminist nor a misogynist but a humanist, and he wants to show us an encyclopedic report on human beings, especially the flaws, since they are human specialties. Every wrongdoing in Adam is in Eve, and vice versa, just as Eve comes out of Adam's body, and their children come out of Eve's body.

At the end of the day, Milton himself is not a perfectionist, because he abandons the sanctified career of ministry and chooses to join Cromwell's inchoate government. Milton knows life in *this* world is impossible to be perfect, so he'd rather face the dark side, jump into the mud, and try to make it a better place. In a sense, Milton and Cromwell together leave a historical legacy with "warts and all" in both political and literary fields.

I will focus my analysis on Book Nine, where paradise is lost, partly because of the limited space of this seminar paper, but mostly because how characters face conflict reveals their personalities more dramatically than when times are good.

Planned Labour: the contemplative and the active

The first dichotomy that I would dig into centers around the opinions on the idea of work. What is the nature of work? Is it worthwhile to continuously improve the ability to work? The reason *for* labour is the command from God. Besides, Barbara Kiefer Lewalski in her *Innocence and Experience in Milton's Eden* (1969) gives some additional symbolic interpretation to labour in Eden. She argues that the garden has a "surprising tendency to excess and disorder," so Adam and Eve's goal is to add upon it a "creative force" to keep that chaotic impetus under control. But the reason to labour here doesn't explain the worthiness of bettering the labour, the vagueness of which gives space for Adam and Eve to interpret this task according to their characteristics.

The section on work comes immediately after God's creation, where Adam and Eve come into being and join the worship of God. The topic of labour is hence their first talk in *Paradise Lost,* which is initiated by Eve. She thinks that their current labour plan, which is working in a leisurely way, doesn't work very well and will not make a difference to the garden in the long term, so she proposes to work separately to achieve higher efficiency. She separates the work, proposing both the division of their physical workplace and that of labour and leisure, to draft a somewhat more streamlined cooperative process.

However, God articulates neither the means nor the end for the task, as a current-day macromanager. The command is implied from a line describing Adam and Eve's discussion on their duty: "Then cómmune how that day they best may ply / Their growing work" (201-202). And the object of growth is "plant, herb and flow'r" (206). Creatures like Adam and Eve can't create something ex nihilo as God does, so whatever they need to do is not a creation process, but a creative one.

By proposing Adam to "wind / The woodbine round this arbor or direct / The clasping ivy where to climb (215-217)" and she could "In yonder spring of roses intermixed / With myrtle find what to redress till noon (217-219)," Eve in effect drafts the establishment of an organization out of their current social group, with an improved granularity concerning their scopes of work. However, these scopes still preserve and encourage autonomy on both sides, with the distinction in that the new organization enables these two to act as one legal person, reducing repetitive work and controlling idleness in working hours.

Why should Eve do that if her work doesn't seem to have extra meaning despite "doing it" being ordered by God? Especially, why would she actively improve the working procedure if work is the end instead of the means? Eve, in this scenario, adopts a spirit of entrepreneurship in the way that she doesn't only follow the "job description," but also tries out what else she can do. This spirit is what historical figures, who are often considered great, generally have: Alexander the Great doesn't just rule his kingdom of Macedon like his father did, but tries to unite a landscape that has not yet been done by anyone else, and he achieves it.

Like Eve, Alexander doesn't know the consequences of his work when he sets out to do it, which is that the place ends up too big to govern and falls apart quickly. But he and Eve both know that some things can be done, which is a better version of what they are expected to do.

This kind of ordained adventurousness can also be found in Aeneas, who toils piously to fulfill a duty that is cast on him and which he does not yet fully understand. Similarly, Eve has a hunch that she needs to make an effort in the task that God commissions, though whatever comes out of it is not yet clear. This shows Eve's faith in an omniscient and omnipotent God, because she is willing to suspend her presumption on the meaning of the work, and follow God's order due to her unwavering trust.

However, Adam at first doesn't budge on this matter. He compliments Eve for a great proposal, but it serves to mitigate his later opposition, "Sole Eve, associate soul, to me beyond / Compare above all living creatures dear, Well hast thou motioned, well thy thoughts employed…(227-229)." Then he argues back: "Yet not so strictly hath our Lord imposed / Labor as to debar us when we need / Refreshment, whether food or talk between (235-237)." He argues that labour is not the priority that should stand in the way of their "refreshment," which consists of both nutrition for the body, the food, and for the soul, "the sweet intercourse." Adam here uses rhetoric to divert the topic to whether the improvement of labour is worth doing. In this context, Eve proposes to do what they should do in a better way, and what Adam could have said is to negotiate a better way to improve efficiency without sacrificing too much joy. But instead, he dismisses Eve's initiative without proposing another plan. Later, Adam argues their separation could expose a weak spot for Satan to tempt one of them, which is a valid point, but still, Adam does not propose an alternative plan to upgrade the working process.

Adam takes labour as an end in itself and wants to spend minimal energy in its maintenance, because he thinks there are matters higher than labour. So his objection is to the possibility of development through human creative force. Teresa Michals argues Eve and Adam subscribe respectively to achieved rank and

ascribed rank, parallel to the struggling dichotomy in Milton's England (1995). She goes on to argue that this is a conflict between meritocracy and hierarchy. Indeed, Adam is a protector of the established hierarchy and does not want the advent of a new organization to destabilize it. What's more, there is Adam's inherent nonchalance to the matter at hand, because not only is Adam against Eve's efficiency plan, but he is *indifferent* to the task that they are discussing. Essentially, he thinks labour is not as worthy as contemplation.

This duality of labour and contemplation and of institution and autonomy is also seen in Milton's own life as the politician and the poet. Through Milton's education, he establishes the ambition to be a great poet, but has to suspend it when the civil war breaks out during his travels in Italy. He makes a difficult decision to get his hands dirty and join politics to fight for the ideas that the philosophical aspect of him has since crafted. This dichotomy of thinker and doer has been discussed at least since Aristotle in the intellectual discourse. In Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, he posits the contemplative life and the active life as two worthy pursuits. Adam subscribes to the former while Eve to the latter, and Milton both, but in different periods. There is incompatibility between the two causes, the former being pure and perfectionist, while the latter is compromised; thus, Milton can only adopt one of them in a single period of his life. By embodying the two personalities, Adam and Eve embody Milton, which proceeds to embody mankind.

The active life wants institution, and the pensive wants autonomy. That is why Eve wants to start establishing a proto–specialisation, which Adam does not care about as much. On the contrary, a contemplative creature needs a maximal level of physical and cognitive independence. A pensive life like Adam's craves for the freedom to converse upon his liking to anyone, as he says to Raphael, who "largely hast allayed / The thirst (he) had of knowledge (VIII, 7-8)."

The Fall: between Super-human and Sub-human

The sweet but intense debate ends with Eve's argument winning over Adam's, leading to the decisive event, the Fall, the eating of the fruit, with which the

symbolic verb “eat” seems to mark the unredeemable human evil of greediness. Eve is incessantly blamed by critics for her gullibility, which is interpreted as a spectrum spanning from harmless innocence to debauched avarice.

The text, however, doesn’t support either of the extremes. Eve is no more than a human, nor less so. In other words, she is neither super-human nor sub-human, but a human being proper. Eve’s last line with Adam before she “from her husband’s hand her hand / Soft she withdrew (IX 385-386),” is to claim that such a “proud foe” will never seek the weaker one between the two to lure: “nor much expect / A foe so proud will first the weaker seek (IX 382-383).” Eve remarks as such because she is using her limited experience to measure others’ psychology, and the only proud being she knows is God. Eve here forms a theory based on inductive logic, and her fault lies in the law of small numbers: human beings’ cognitive bias to believe that a property of small data is representative of that of the population. But in the environment of Eden, before evil is introduced, Eve doesn’t have any exposure to the behavior of a corrupted spirit, thus, it is natural to predict an evil being’s characteristics based on beings who share some similar traits. In this case, Eve compares a strong and proud foe to the only strong and proud being she knows, God.

From the vantage point of following an omniscient narrator, Eve’s fault is her negligence of the difference between beings using power for goodness versus those using power to purge goodness. But Eve is neither ignorant nor irrational; she knows someone with similar power, and uses that knowledge for a rational induction and comes up with a conclusion based on her assessment of the level of danger. The negligence is due to factors she cannot control.

Besides, Eve being alone is not a contingency taken advantage of by Satan, but a condition actively sought by Satan. “He sought them both but wished his hap might find Eve separate (421-422).” Satan wishes Eve to be alone, because he thinks Adam has “higher intellectual,” “strength of courage haughty,” and “limb heroic built (483-485).” Note that Satan as a corrupted figure, his evaluation of Eve and Adam (or anything in the possible worlds) is unreliable, and his active seeking of Eve being alone cannot be avoided by forcing Adam and Eve to stick

together, which violates Adam and Eve's agency in Eden. If Eve were not alone when Satan finds her, he could've waited longer for a time when she were alone, which does not fundamentally change the course of the events.

Even though Eve is a thinking creature, her humanness enables her to move others to a better self. Satan, seeing her labouring in the garden, is moved so deeply that he forgets his evilness for a moment. "That space the evil one abstracted stood / From his own evil and for the time remained / Stupidly good, of enmity disarmed, / Of guile, of hate, of envy, of revenge (462-466)." Even though Satan quickly recollects his thoughts and returns to his wicked state, turning an utterly evil being into forgetting his agenda is no mean feat, and cannot be achieved by anything without a human touch. Just as Sir Philip Sydney posits that poetry has an irreplaceable capacity to move people to goodness, Eve does so as well. Her capacity to evoke goodness is due to her ability to make mistakes, in other words, her humanness. As opposed to the Renaissance idea of women that "scholastics deduc(ing) diminished mental powers (especially reason) in the female (Maclean, 1980)," Eve here not only has competent mental power, but at the same time evokes passion from others.

Why does she eat the fruit? There are several motivations. As a human being, Eve wants to be closer to God and to know more, especially evil, the underexposure of which limits her prediction of the future. As a thinking creature, she sees the serpent not dead after claiming to have eaten the fruit, reasoning to the conclusion that the concept of death might be symbolic. And as a consequence of her economic reform, she is hungry after half a day's work: "Meanwhile the hour of noon drew on and waked / An eager appetite raised by the small / So savory of that fruit (739-741)." Besides, she is susceptible to flattery and rhetoric. The list can go on, but none of them is inherently evil, because they are all daily behaviors people wouldn't blame in other contexts. If what Eve does is not inherently evil by a modern-day judgement, then it shouldn't be in prelapsarian Eden as well. As what Millicent Bell refers to as "the fallacy of the fall," he argues Milton's does not strive to create for Adam and Eve an infallible state before the Fall, on the contrary, "Milton's Adam and Eve, like the universe at large, are never purely Good, but fallen and capable of redemption from the start (1953)."

After Eve has eaten the fruit, she falls and her character changes. Her human flaws are enhanced, and she wants Adam to share her fate, whatever that is. After a brief lamentation of Eve's disobedience, Adam decides that he cannot live alone if Eve dies. He acknowledges the possibility that God could replace Eve with another one of his ribs, but he decides to die with this Eve, instead of living with the next.

> Should God create another Eve and I
> Another rib afford, yet loss of thee
> Would never from my heart. No! No! I feel
> The link of nature draw me, flesh of flesh,
> Bone of my bone thou art and from thy state
> Mine never shall be parted, bliss or woe. (911-916)

C. S. Lewis believes what Adam does wrong is his uxoriousness (1941), and it looks rightly so. Other critics have constructed multiple possible worlds where Adam could have done something else, like divorcing Eve (Burden, 1967), "risked himself to redeem Eve (Samuel, 1957)" and so on. Michael Bryson, in his paper in 2017, has a good account of many such assumptions, and he comments on some of them as Adam being "less than human," and I add on his comment with others being superhuman.

Having compared the alternative responses of Adam, the uxoriousness according to Lewis is now a justified response from the perspective of Adam, who is neither sub-human nor super-human, but a human proper as Eve is. As a human being, he is unable to bear the loss of a loved one, nor can he see her suffer alone without vicarious pain. The only plausible human response to this situation is to choose to suffer along with Eve. If Adam chose an alternative plan, for example, to divorce Eve and let her suffer the consequence, he would be playing God for a judgment that is not his to make, because one that involves life, death, and punishment is not within the capacity of a human being.

Adam, here, as opposed to Eve's reasoning, shows his passion, sympathy, and a bit of irrationality. "How can I live without thee (908)," Adam laments profusely, a rhetorical question that is fumed by passion. If Adam were a superhuman, a demigod, he would have known that this feeling is going to pass, and life is going to come back to normal once he allows some time to lapse. Adam either does not know or does not want to admit it; either way, he chooses to think and act as he does. As opposed to Eve being tempted to eat the fruit, Adam voluntarily does so by a combination of instinct and wilful thinking: "Nor can I think that God, creator wise, / Though threat'ning, will in earnest so destroy / Us His prime creatures (938-941)." All flustered, he amusingly comforts Eve and himself that God would have wasted his labour if he destroyed them: "so God shall uncreate, / Be frustrate, do, undo, and labour lose (943-944)." This seems like Adam using logic, but he is abusing logic to make Eve feel better, because as the patriarch of mankind, he knows he is not granted the ability to think in God's position.

> However, I with thee have fixed my lot
> Certain to undergo like doom. If death
> Consort with thee death is to me as life,
> So forcible within my heart I feel
> The bond of nature draw me to my own,
> My own in thee, for what thou art is mine.
> Our state cannot be severed. We are one,
> One flesh: to lose thee were to lose myself. (952-959)

This eight-line excerpt borrows some structures from the sonnet, whose first sestet consists of a narrative, and the final cuplet a statement and coda. The melodramatic bard Adam now takes on the feature of Eden, an excessively growing force that reveals itself through fecundity or sentimentality, expanding lawlessly and pushing the artificial endeavor of order aside.

Adam falls with Eve, and nature in Eden cannot hold its delicately maintained balance anymore, with the wilderness pouring out from its latent power, "Earth trembled from her entrails as again / In pangs and Nature gave a second groan (1000-1001)."

The Fallen Couple: Humanity Augmented

Eve falls first. After her first bite, “That all was lost (784).” A bite of the apple should have sufficed in gaining the knowledge of the good and evil, but Eve cannot stop; she devours the fruit: “Greedily she engorged without restraint (791).” Not only that, she for the first time forgets God: “nor was godhead from her thought (790).”

Eating in Paradise Lost is usually not meagrely depicted, so much so that Leigh Hunt comments that “the poet in our own country who has written with the greatest gusto on the subject of eating is Milton (1854).” After the fall, eating, which used to be normal and laudable, loses its positive connotation and becomes symbolic of greed. Eve praises the tree as “sovereign (795)” and deems it “of operation blest / To sapience (797).” Sapience in Latin (sapientia) has another meaning of “the sense of taste,” as in “sapor.” Eve effectively worships a tree and praises its growth as a feast to both the brain and the senses. The praise of such that used to be offered to the creator is diverted to a creature, which means that despite the penetration of corruption, every formal behavior stays the same, but their added layer of symbolic meaning becomes crooked.

That explains why the speeches and behaviors of Adam and Eve after their fall seem reasonably normal, and some lines even convey street wisdom that would be good candidates for life mottos if grabbed out of context. To the tree, Eve says: “by thee I grow mature / In knowledge as the gods who all things know.” The proverbial godliness in human nature is nicely illustrated by Hamlet’s monologue: “In action how like an Angel, In apprehension how like a god.” Yet the corruption contaminates the pragmatics of language, loading it with negative values, and dragging it to a justification of a false cause. “Shall I to him make known / As yet my change and give him to partake / Full happiness with me? (817-819).” If in a prelapsarian world, who would have blamed Eve for wanting to share happiness with Adam?

And Adam eats the fruit, too, after which he has sex with Eve. The sex scene is not the first appearance of its kind in Paradise Lost, and here, although loaded with

erotic lexicon, Eve and Adam's sex is still not bestial. Their "Carnal desire inflaming (1013)," Adam's "amorous intent (1035)," and Eve's "contagious fire (1036)," if read in the context of an account of two playful couples, can be translated as an affectionate expression of sexual desire. After all, as a lawful couple, Adam and Eve are granted the right to consummate and enjoy conjugal pleasure. The change of the couple after the fall is surely considerable if compared to their initial innocence, but from a bigger picture, taking all other beings into account, they are still more than sub-human and less than super-human, rightly human as always. Whatever feature they used to have would be considered corrupted when they are augmented, and this subtlety is strong enough to convert human beings to a fallen state, but not bad enough to render them unredeemable.

Conclusion

With a grand ambition to incorporate all things knowable into his Christian epic, Milton also devotes himself to generating an encyclopedia of mankind. Denis Saurat believes Milton is not interested in any particular person, but mankind in general (1946), which motivates him to employ Adam and Eve to create two human prototypes, the combination of which reflects every aspect of humanity. Oneness develops into duality, and the Fall is a consequence of them acting together, because eventually they are two instances of the same kind. By plotting the Fall, instead of redesigning humanity, Milton simply enhances the existing human features of Adam and Eve, creating an imbalance of human nature and natural environments, both of which reveal sickness. Human beings, represented by Adam and Eve, are imbued with a delicate layer of extra meaning in everything they say and do; nature, in its anthropomorphic form, loses its hard-won balance and grows into chaos and anarchy, losing control to its tendency toward wilderness.

Labour plays a critical part in *Paradise Lost* because it triggers Adam and Eve's quarrel, which leads to a vulnerable point that facilitates Satan's temptation. The different understanding of labour not only exposes Adam and Eve's different

theological, philosophical, practical, and political ideas, but also exhibits two Aristotelian lives, the contemplative and the active; the complement of each needs the sacrifice of the other, which is the fundamental reason for their disagreement. In Milton's poems *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso,* he also juxtaposes two personalities, the pastoral man and the thinker, which although is not the exact fit of Adam and Eve's perception of action, is a good fit for their characteristics: Eve being carefree in a pastoral environment, and Adam being somewhat ruminative with philosophical meditation.

The dichotomy of Eve and Adam also manifests reason and passion, with Eve carefully predicting the future with the evidence at hand, whilst Adam lets his passion fly, oftentimes gratuitously creating love poems for Eve and permitting his passion to drive his reasoning faculty. Reasoning, albeit a powerful tool, can lead to wrong conclusions based on partial information, which expedites the success of the temptation. Without Eve's false judgment of the situation, Satan's plan would've been postponed, but the chain of events would've hardly been different, due to the agency that God gives to the protagonists in Eden.

Where does Milton fit in this picture? Denis Saurat argues that "there was deeply rooted in Milton a tendency to look upon himself, not as an exception in the romantic manner, but as a normal representative of human nature (1946)." It is not a far-fetched hypothesis that Milton looks into himself to see all his virtues and flaws, both the features of him that show the *imago Dei*, and those that are troublesome, incompatible, but explainable. Being a man with contemplative pursuits since he was young, but when time dictates, he jumps into the active field and sacrifices the purity of his thoughts, getting his hands dirty in the practical work, and blood in his biography. Milton is one of those whose life experience cannot be reduced to a stereotypical stock figure that carries only certain human traits; everything in human nature reveals to some extent in him, and he uses the same strategy in creating the mother and father of mankind, Eve and Adam.

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