

Milton's Eve in *Paradise Lost*

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As for Milton's Eve, some feminist critics, like Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, Christine Froula, and Marcia Landy, point out her subjection to Adam, saying that Eve is a patriarchal ideal of womanhood deprived of her autonomous identity and trained to be obedient to men by male power. Others, like Diane Kelsey McColley and William Shullenberger, attempt to re-evaluate Eve's feminine quality and reveal her individual virtue. When I read *Paradise Lost*, my first impression was close to that of the former critics; I felt quite uncomfortable about Milton's seemingly patriarchal ideas about Eve's secondariness, inequality, inferiority, and subjection to Adam. I also sympathized with Virginia Woolf's image of Milton's bogey. What repelled me the most is the following Miltonic passage:

Was she [Eve] thy [Adam] 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 above 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. (X, 145-156)

By implying Eve's inferiority to Adam, this passage, contrary to the God's original intention to create Adam's "fit help" (VIII, 450) according to Adam's demand for the harmonious fellowship with someone who is not "unequals" (VIII, 382), obviously debases Eve's dignity as one of the God's creatures. Furthermore, it places her on the same level with animals which are, like Eve, under Adam's government. In her

“Milton and the Sexes,” McColley excuses this passage by saying that these words are, not a general statement of the relationship between man and woman but only apply to Adam when he follows the fallen Eve’s opinion. However, no matter how eagerly McColley justifies this passage, I could not help, at first, doing “Milton an injustice” (McColley, 163), by not erasing my first impression of the patriarchy implied in this passage.

Thus, at first, getting frustrated with Eve’s obedience to the patriarchy, I was inclined to identify with Satan who attempted to destroy hierarchy in the heaven with boasting liberty. On that point, Gilbert and Gubar, in *Madwoman in the Attic*, mention that women readers of Milton are often fascinated by Satan’s apparent liberalism. However, Satan’s purpose for his rebellion is to build another patriarchal hierarchy in which he reigns as the god, and, as Gilbert and Gubar suggest, the closest the woman reader “could really get to being Satan was to be his creature, his tool, the witchlike daughter/mistress who sits at his right hand” (207). That is, for women readers as well as for Eve, to follow Satan is not to achieve liberty and equality with the male, but to be incorporated into another patriarchal hierarchy.

In contrast to Satan, however, Milton’s Eve in her prelapsarian life is not a demonic character who seeks liberty, nor is she a pale servile girl to patriarchal Adam. On the contrary, she, as the God’s creature, is intelligent, elegant, beautiful, and yet innocent. Fully attracted by Eve’s appearance, Adam praises her beauty. Such is her innocent beauty that “had the sons of God excuse to have been / Enamoured at that sight” (V, 447-48). Even Satan, who is trying to tempt Eve, is overwhelmed by her divine beauty and loses himself (IX, 457-66). There is no identification between innocent Eve and the rebellious sinful Satan. Eve’s divine virtue is not only free from Satanic rebelliousness but also has, although unconsciously, the power to remove the evil from Satan and make him “Stupidly good” (IX, 465) for a while. If she were subject to Adam’s patriarchy or her beauty were merely a patriarchal illusion, she could not conduct such autonomous power over Satan. However, Eve, as one of the God’s creatures, evades Satanic desire for rebellion or servility to the patriarchy.

When I notice the divinity of Milton’s Eve, a question occurs: is it necessary for Eve to seek freedom from and equality with Adam? After the Fall, Eve perceives her position as inferior to Adam’s, and the necessity to seek freedom by saying “for inferior who is free?” (IX, 825). Her words are ironical because they precisely show her fallen state: when she falls, she becomes Adam’s inferior, for Adam does not fall yet, and now, chained to the sin, she loses freedom. In this sense, the idea of

inferiority and freedom and even equality is the Satanic idea of the fallen person. Originally the words “equal” and “free” are Satanic terminology and when we read Book I, we find these words in Satan’s speech. What we should notice now is that Eve never used these words before the Fall. It does not mean that she was ignorant of her lack of freedom. On the contrary, since she is free, she does not have to seek freedom.

In Book V, Raphael tells Adam and Eve about the God’s principle of creation:

God made thee perfect, not immutable;
 And good he made thee, but to persevere
 He left it in thy power, ordained thy will
 By nature free, not overruled by fate
 Inextricable, or strict necessity;
 Our voluntary service he requires,
 Not our necessitated, such with him
 Finds no acceptance, nor can find, for how
 Can hearts, not free, be tried whether they serve
 Willing or no, who will but what they must
 By destiny, and can no other choose? (V, 524-34)

Raphael’s words are the echo of the God’s own words in Book III, 98-106, when the God tells how he has created the angels. As we see in these passages (Book III, 98-106, and Book V, 524-34), when the God created men and angels, he made them as beings given their free will. As one of the God’s creatures, Eve is also provided with her own free will, and nobody deprives her of freedom in her prelapsarian life. Only Satan, by tempting her to betray the God, chains her to the sin. Boasting liberty, Satan actually deprives Eve’s freedom as he has deprives other fallen angels’ freedom by his ruling over them. In this sense, Satan represents not liberty and freedom but domination. His daughter Sin reveals his status: while the God’s daughter Eve is free, Satan’s daughter Sin has to stay at the gate of the Hell.

In *Milton’s Eve*, McColley exemplifies Eve’s free will in her sense of responsibility for gardening. She also suggests that Eve’s departure from narcissistic self-love and her choice to be Adam’s obedient wife are actions of her own free will. Contrary to McColley’s interpretation, in her “When Eve Reads Milton,” Froula indicates that throughout her prelapsarian life, Eve is educated to give up her own identity and to be a subject in the patriarchal Eden. As for the episode at the pool, Froula

mentions that the reflection on the pool is Eve herself and to abandon the reflection is to abandon her very self. However, what Froula says is contradictory to Miltonic passage which indicates the God's intention to create Eve. Instead of abandoning herself, Eve achieves self-knowledge when she compares her own image in the reflection on the pool with Adam's actual figure, and chooses to give her "soft embraces" (IV, 471) to Adam from her own free will. Eve knows that she is fairer, softer and milder than Adam. At the same time, she notices that Adam's grace and wisdom are greater than hers. The God does not tell her to give up herself; rather, He tells her to bear Adam's children who have the image of both Eve and Adam. (IV, 474)

Eve's autonomy is presented in Book IX just before her Fall. She insists on dividing the job of gardening in Eden between herself and Adam, and working by herself for a while. Even though Eve falls when she leaves Adam's side, her desire for brief separation should not be reproached, because her desire for separation from Adam is not the chief cause of her fall. It is only by chance that Eve is alone when she is deceived by Satan. As McColley suggests, "Eve's desire to work for a while in her own way had sprung from a healthy desire to dress the Garden in obedience to the commandment and to preserve the liberty on which their obedience and their mutual love depend" (*Milton's Eve*, 25). On the other hand, in "Kinship and the Role of Women in *Paradise Lost*," Landy suggests that the "possibility that Adam should perhaps have kept her by his side further intensifies the woman's inferiority. Later Eve, Adam, the poet, and the reader will agree [...] that Eve should have remained by Adam's side" (14): if Eve stays with Adam, the Fall might be avoidable. However, even though they were together, they would fall together. Who knows?

Adam tries to make Eve stay with him, but it is not because he regards her as his inferior who cannot resist Satan by herself. On the contrary, he just says that if they are together, it is easier to evade Satan's temptation. Adam says: "Hopeless to circumvent us joined, where each / To other speedy aid might lend at need" (IX, 259-60). Adam's words are far from a patriarchal power which would force his wife to obey him. He suggests that they should help each other.

He does not have the right to violate Eve's autonomy to go alone and to force her to stay with him against her will. Therefore, he finally concedes to her separation by saying: "thy stay, not free, absents thee more" (IX, 372). His words are the echo of Raphael who presented the God's principle of free will for his creation. Adam shows his respect for Eve's autonomy as well as for the God, by exercising the God's

principle by himself. If he forces her to stay with him against her will, he makes her a lifeless rib who does not have any free will, and to deny her free will means to go against the God who created Eve as an autonomous being.

We perceive Adam and Eve as being unequal for the first time when Satan looks at them in Book IV:

[...] though both
Not equal, as their sex not equal seemed;
For contemplation he and valour formed,
For softness she and sweet attractive grace,
He for God only, she for God in him: (IV, 295-99)

Both McColley and Joseph Wittreich say this perception of inequality of prelapsarian Adam and Eve is the Satanic view, because, for unfallen Adam and Eve, whether they are equal or not is not the question as long as both of them are equally free. Although they are different, it does not mean a superior-inferior relationship. Adam and Eve appear unequal to Satan only because they have different virtues. While Adam's virtues are his wisdom and leadership, Eve's are modesty and obedience, and it is not adequate to say that wisdom and leadership are superior to modesty and obedience.

Adam and Eve are created by the God to have different virtues so that they can help each other, compensating for each other's weaknesses with each other's virtues. Before Eve is created, Adam is dissatisfied with his interaction with the animals which are inferior to him, and seeks for "rational delight" (VIII, 391) in a relationship with someone who is equal to him. He knows that as long as he is alone, he is not as perfect as the God, and that he needs "conversation with his like to help, / Or solace his defects" (VIII, 418-19). The God created Eve so as to comply with Adam's wishes: she is "Thy likeness, thy fit help, thy other self, / Thy wish exactly to thy heart's desire" (VIII, 450-51). In response to this speech of the God's, Wittreich, in *Feminist Milton*, suggests that "Adam has been given exactly what he asked for, *his equal*" (90). If Eve is created to be inferior to Adam, how can she help him? On the contrary, being not only equal to Adam, she is able to solace Adam's defects: she is made so that "with honour thou [Adam] mayst love / Thy mate [Eve], who sees when thou art seen least wise" (VIII, 577-78).

However, Eve's subordination, which is one of her virtues, instills into Adam's mind the illusion of Eve's inferiority. He tells Raphael that Eve is inferior to him in

the mind and the inward faculties because she does not try to lead other creatures. He is so fascinated with Eve's beautiful appearance that he fails to notice her true virtues of obedience and modesty which are different from Adam's virtues of wisdom and leadership, and which he has to learn from her. Thus his opinion of Eve's inferiority has to be immediately rebuked by Raphael: Raphael tells him not to praise Eve's apparent beauty but to evaluate her inner virtues. Froula suggests that while Adam has the spiritual virtue, Eve only has physical beauty, and that the spiritual things are always superior to the external things. Here, Froula makes the same mistake as Adam does, for she fails to see Eve's invisible inward value. When Eve says: "God is thy law, thou mine: to know no more / Is woman's happiest knowledge and her praise" (IV, 637-38), her words do not indicate ignorance nor indifference to knowledge, nor do they imply that knowledge is unavailable to Eve. Since she has the most important wisdom—that she should be obedient to the God in Adam—she does not need any other knowledge. Eve's attitude toward the desire for knowledge besides that of the obedience to the God is the expression of her modesty which Adam should learn from her. While Raphael is visiting the couple, Eve keeps silent. Her silence does not show an inability to participate in the conversation between Adam and Raphael nor does it evidence her lack of understanding of their discussion. Instead of breaking into the conversation, she quietly listens to them. However, she is not alienated from them; quietly listening to them, she actually participates in their conversation in her own way. Her attitude shows her exercise of modesty. So satisfied with the most important knowledge of how to be subordinate to the God that she does not indulge herself with vulgar curiosity.

On the other hand, Adam asks Raphael many questions. Although not all of his questions are from vulgar curiosity, Raphael rebukes Adam's strong desire for knowledge. Raphael says to Adam as follows:

Solicit not thy thoughts with matters hid,
Leave them to God above, him serve and fear;
Of other creatures, as him pleases best,
Wherever placed, let him dispose: joy thou
In what he gives to thee, this Paradise
And thy fair Eve; heaven is for thee too high
To know what passes there; be lowly wise: (VIII, 167- 73)

What Raphael says about being "lowly wise" is exactly what Eve already perceives

and is exercising. To have a lot of knowledge is not always a virtue. Too much desire for knowledge is sometimes as demonic as Marlowe's Dr. Faustus is. Adam should learn to be "lowly wise" and satisfied with the most important knowledge, that is, like Eve, to be obedient to the God.

Although Eve is not inferior to Adam, she still has to be subordinate to Adam. However, subordination is different from subjection; it is on the contrary, another of her virtues. Subordination, like obedience, is the ideal human attitude toward the God. In the relationship between the God and human, it is enough if human knows that he or she should be subordinate to the God. In Book V, Raphael indicates to Adam and Eve that if they continue to be obedient to the God, their bodies will be spiritualized and they will be permitted to enter heaven.

Eve has to be subordinate to Adam because he is her "author." It is a biblical fact that Eve is created from Adam's Rib. So Eve is sometimes called "Daughter of God and man." In this sense, their relationship is comparable to the relationship between the God and the Son. In the prelapsarian Eden, Eve's subordination to Adam indicates less that of the wife's to her husband than that of the daughter's to her parent. As the Son is subordinate to his Father God, Eve is subordinate to her author Adam, and through Adam to the God; yet as the Son is equal to the God, Eve is equal to Adam. Female subordination to the male is not generally applied to every couple, but only to this particular couple who are the daughter and the parent as well as the wife and the husband.

In the relationship between the God and the Son, the God generally plays the role of the teacher. He teaches his son how he created the angels and people as autonomous beings, how Satan and his followers fell, and how people will fall and yet will be saved. He also teaches him justice with which the fallen people should be punished: "He [Adam] with his whole posterity must die, / Die he or justice must; unless for him / Some other able, and as willing, pay / The rigid satisfaction, death for death" (III, 209-12). Through the God's teaching, the Son learns the importance of free will and justice.

On the other hand, the God is sometimes taught by the Son. When the Son insists that he will sacrifice himself for man's atonement, the Son teaches the God the greatness of selfless love and mercy. Learning mercy from the Son's proposal of self-sacrifice for the human beings, the God decides to send his Son to the fallen Adam and Eve to bring together mercy and justice, because now he knows through his Son that mercy is as valuable as justice. However, when the Son comes to Adam

and Eve in Book X, he shows much more mercy to them than the God commanded: he provides fallen Adam and Eve with the beast-skin coats to cover their outward nakedness and “his robe of righteousness” (X, 222) to cover their inward nakedness. He does not mind serving Adam and Eve, his inferiors, because he knows that service to those who are inferior comes from merciful hearts. While evaluating the Son’s virtues such as his selfless love and mercy, the God accepts all of the Son’s requests which come from the Son’s virtues, when the Son asks him to listen to the men’s prayers and to let him pay for the human fall with his own death (Book, XI).

In the relationship between Adam and Eve, as well as in the relationship between the God and the Son, each educates the other, although generally Adam, like the God, plays the role of the teacher. Adam gives Eve several lessons in which he teaches her to praise the God and to make her “reason” always vigilant. On the other hand, although Eve does not give lessons as Adam does, she teaches him by means of her own behavior. As I have already mentioned, Adam learns modesty, obedience, and subordination from Eve. When Eve says to Adam: “My author and disposer, what thou bid’st / Unargued I obey” (IV, 635-36), Adam learns that he should be obedient to his author, the God, just as Eve is obedient to Adam, her author. In this sense, Eve always sets the good example of obedience for Adam.

Some critics like Shullenberger distinguish Eve’s virtues from Adam’s, and regard hers as feminine and maternal virtues. However, there is no means of dividing their virtues into feminine ones and masculine ones. Adam should learn the so-called feminine virtues such as modesty and subordination from Eve just as Eve should learn the so-called masculine virtues such as wisdom. These virtues should never be gender-based. Adam is bestowed with the virtues of contemplation not because he is the male but because the God created him as he is. Eve is bestowed with the virtues of modesty and subordination not because she is the female but because the God created her as she is. Each being given different virtues by the God, Adam and Eve can help each other by teaching the different virtues to each other. As Eve is the “fit help” to Adam, Adam is the “fit help” to Eve.

In *Paradise Lost*, only Adam establishes the authorship in Eden. Adam’s authorship becomes explicit when Eve calls him “My author and disposer” (IV, 635). Through naming the animals on the earth, Adam exercises his authorship. As for Adam’s authorship, Landy says, “The male ‘disposes’ and ‘authors’; the female is identified with the ‘creation’ and the ‘work’” (7). She also identifies Adam’s authorship as “the masculine creative principle” (7), and his naming the animals as

“the masculine priority over language” (7). However, Landy forgets that Eve named the flowers in Eden. If the act of naming is the expression of authorship, Eve, as well as Adam, reinforces her authorship by naming the flowers. Eve's act of naming implies that she also can be an author.

While Adam is called “our first father” (IV, 495), Eve is called “our general mother” (IV, 492). The title “mother” as well as “father” implies the creative authority, for only father alone cannot make children. Before Eve is created, Adam already knows that he needs Eve to carry out his creative power. In Book VIII, he says to the God that he has to “beget / Like of his like, his image multiplied, / In unity defective, which requires/ Collateral love, and dearest amity” (VIII, 423-6). However, when Eve and Adam have children, their children have not only Adam's image but also Eve's image as well. This is indicated by the God when he says to Eve: “to him [Adam] shalt bear / Multitudes like thyself [Eve]” (IV, 473-4).

In contrast to Adam, the God the Father can carry out his creative power without a female partner. However, Adam's words “Best with thy [God] self accompanied” (VIII, 428) implies that to carry out his creative power, the God still needs his inner femininity. In this sense, possessing both masculinity and femininity, the God is androgynous. Neither Adam nor Eve has children by him/herself. Only when their marriage ties their masculinity and femininity together and make them an androgynous couple, they both carry out their creative power and authorship.

As long as I examined Milton's Eve in her prelapsarian life, I did not perceive Milton's patriarchy nor his misogyny. Eve's virtues are not inferior to Adam's, and Adam still has to learn her virtues as she has to learn his. Milton does not distinguish their virtues between female and male—they are just human, and both Adam and Eve should teach them to each other. Since Adam is, in one level, Eve's “author,” she should be subordinate to him as the Son is subordinate to his Father God. Nevertheless, her subordination to Adam does not indicate that the female should be subordinate to the male. Eve should be subordinate to Adam just because Adam is her parent. In this sense, the passage that I quoted in the beginning of this paper (X, 145-56) just presents the relationship between Adam and Eve as the parent and the daughter. Although the passage makes feminist readers sick on the first reading, if we regard Adam and Eve's relationship as that of between the daughter and the parent, the passage just implies the child's subordination to the parent. Yet, however, subordination is not a disgrace for Eve at all. It is, on the contrary, her virtue. Moreover, the authorship is not the male privilege, for the male alone cannot carry out his

authorship. When Eve is called “general mother,” she is bestowed with the maternity which, as well as Adam’s paternity, implies the creative power and authorship.

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