Resolving the "hateful siege/of contrarie": The Regeneration of Ideal Desire in Milton's Paradise Lost

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Abstract

Resolving the “hateful siege / of contraries”: The Regeneration of Ideal Desire in Milton’s Paradise Lost

The central event in Milton’s Paradise Lost is the Fall of Man and the expulsion from Paradise. However, the poem concerns itself with important issues both before and after the simple act of eating the forbidden fruit. Milton uses language to invite readers to imagine the Paradise that corresponds to the idealization of their deepest desires just before he shows it slipping away forever. And once Paradise is lost, Milton leads readers to confront the terrible gap between the Paradise that they have imagined and the reality that they know from experience.

This paper shall explore the argument that Milton indulges the desire for Paradise in order to show that readers can take part of Paradise back with them into the real world, if they can still live according to its ideals—especially the ideal of love. The primary method of supporting this argument will be a close reading of certain selections from Paradise Lost itself, focusing in particular on the love between Adam and Eve in Paradise and Satan’s reaction to that love, and on the ways in which Satan, Adam, and Eve, each respond to the loss of Paradise. Additional support will be gained from secondary sources such as critical materials and concordances.
The "myth" with which John Milton's *Paradise Lost* concerns itself is not unique to his poem or to the Judeo-Christian tradition. The desire to imagine a lost age of perfection recurs throughout human thought. Ovid's story of the "golden age" in the *Metamorphoses* is one example. Such a desire seems to be a "natural" human impulse. The human mind, which thinks through language, tends to organize its perceptions of the world into contrary categories because of the capacity of language to create negations and oppositions: sensations can be pleasurable or painful; forms, beautiful or ugly; beings, alive or dead; moral behavior, right or wrong; people, good or evil. The mind observes that each pair exists simultaneously in the world, although it naturally prefers the "good" to the "bad" in each case. Because our minds can imagine, we can conceive of having the good without the bad, and "paradise myths" serve to explain the difference between this ideal of perfection and objective reality. This analysis of "paradise myths," while simplified, nevertheless allows an important observation to be made: that "paradise myths" might be considered outlets for frustrated imaginative desire--the desire for pleasure without pain, life without death, and good without evil.

In its general idea, then, the "myth" recounted by Milton's poem is similar to other such "myths." But *Paradise Lost* is different in certain important ways. The central event in the poem is Adam and Eve's loss of Paradise through the eating of the forbidden fruit. However, the poem also concerns itself with important issues both before and after the Fall. Throughout his description of Paradise, Milton deliberately uses language to invite the reader to desire a state of good without bad. At the same time, he shows the reader Satan's reaction to Paradise, emphasizing the predicament of a fallen being contemplating Paradise, a predicament not unlike that of a fallen reader. After the Fall, Adam and Eve facing a similar predicament. Yet, by the end of the poem, Milton shows that Adam and Eve are able to resolve this conflict and accept the
reality of having good and bad together, in the same way that the poet/narrator himself and readers themselves must do when considering Paradise and its loss.

In the poem's description of Paradise before the Fall, Milton evokes an idealized place which corresponds to the perfection of human desire by creating an association in the reader's mind between the place of Eden and the delight that it produces. The name Eden itself, in seventeenth-century etymology, meant "pleasure" (Fowler 418). Throughout his description, Milton develops and embellishes this association. Harold Bloom identifies this strategy as Milton's "exaltation of unfallen pleasure, his appeal not so much to his reader's senses as to his reader's yearning for the expanded senses of Eden" (127). Milton does indeed use language to stimulate the reader's senses, according with his description of poetry in Of Education as being "more simple, sensuous, and passionate" than logic or rhetoric (Hughes, Major Prose 637). At the same time, as Bloom's observation suggests, Milton also uses language to invite the reader to desire a state that is the perfection of all the sensuous delights that the reader knows through experience.

To emphasize the difference between the delight which can be imagined and the reality of loss, Milton focuses much of the poem's view of Paradise before the Fall of Adam and Eve through the consciousness of Satan, as the reader seems to follow the fallen angel from Hell, through Chaos, and into Paradise on his mission to find Man. Satan's presence is important because Milton sets up an analogy between Satan's contemplation of Paradise and the reader's imagination of it. Satan is a fallen, imperfect being viewing the unfallen, perfect world of Paradise; similarly, the reader is a fallen, imperfect being imagining the unfallen, perfect world of Paradise. In the real world, as Frank Kermode argues, "we understand joy as men partially deprived of it," because of the difference between the imagined possibility of fulfillment and the
reality that not all desires can be fulfilled (105). A fallen being's attempt to imagine a state without pain or loss will always be complicated by the experience of pain and loss which is part of the condition of being fallen. Therefore, Satan's presence is one important way of reminding the reader that a fallen being's awareness of being fallen, including the experience of pain and loss, always interferes with the attempt to imagine Paradise.

In their fall, Satan and the rebel angels lose the pure delight of Heaven, but not their desire for it; and this desire without the possibility of fulfillment is the essence of their punishment. Satan, however, boasts that the loss of the pure delight of Heaven cannot change him, for he "brings / a mind not to be changed by place or time" (I.252-3). He explains that "The mind is its own place, and in itself / Can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven" (254-5). He believes that the loss of absolute joy will not affect him, since his imagination can construct a Heaven for him, even in the midst of Hell. Not until he lands on Mount Niphates does Satan realizes the full measure of his loss; he finally admits that he has lost a priceless state of perfection through his own fault, and that this loss has changed him utterly. Instead of the Heaven which he had boasted that he could make for himself, his sense of his own loss and guilt create a Hell which he carries around with him and from which he cannot escape: "Which way I fly is hell; myself am hell" (IV.75). His only solution is to accept his damnation and thus exchange good for evil (110). By reversing the contrary terms and accepting "evil" as his "good," Satan vows to suppress all desire for the lost delight of Heaven, so that he may concentrate on his mission to take revenge against God. He fixes himself on the "bad" side of the contraries, believing that this stance will eliminate his desire for the "good."

The description of Paradise stimulates the reader's own desire for the good by considering the (fallen) human experience of Nature, its capacity both to stimulate and frustrate human desire,
and then imagining an alternative, idealized Nature which can only stimulate, not frustrate. As Joseph Summers observes, this ideal “is beyond our ordinary experience, but it is built directly on our experience” (94). Through the medium of language, Milton converts familiar concepts about Nature into Paradisal equivalents which correspond to the fulfillment of human desire. For example, this idealized Nature exists in a perfectly balanced environment. In reality, the difference between the equatorial and ecliptic planes causes variations and extremes of season and climate. But Milton’s prelapsarian vision adjusts this situation to human benefit, positing that this disparity does not exist until after the Fall (X.668-78). Therefore, the inhabitants of Eden enjoy the stability of “Eternal Spring” (IV.268). As Satan draws near to the Garden, “pure now purer air / Meets his approach, and to the heart inspires / Vernal delight and joy, able to drive / All sadness but despair” (IV.153-156). The pure springtime air of Paradise provides a physical refreshment that corresponds to a mental delight, and the pun on “inspires” makes the connection explicit.

Similarly, meteorological extremes which might impair delight are denied existence before the Fall. In Paradise, there are no harsh winds, but rather “cool zephyr[s]” and “gentle gales” (IV.329, 156). Nor is there any likelihood of dangerous storms; instead, Eve says that there are “soft showers” (646). Thus each of these climatological and meteorological concepts is imagined so as to imply perfect harmony with the human desire for comfort.

The state of eternal springtime has important consequences for the natural world of Eden. That the Garden exists in such a state implies that Eden is in a constant season of growth and birth where decay and death are unknown. In addition, trees bear “blossoms and fruits at once” (148). Instead of the familiar cycle of alternating birth, growth, ripeness, and decay, Eden possesses the fertility and growth of spring along with the ripeness of autumn (Fowler 199). This continual growth and fruitfulness results in a concentrated biological fecundity comparable to that of a
tropical rain forest. Once inside the Garden, Satan sees “To all delight of human sense exposed / In narrow room nature’s whole wealth, yea more, / A heaven on earth” (206-8). Similarly, the poet/narrator states that “nature here / Wantoned as in her prime, and played at will / Her virgin fancies, pouring forth more sweet, / Wild above rule or art; enormous bliss” (V.293-7). Nature in Eden is not only abundantly fertile, but also directly pleasant for Eden’s human inhabitants.

Some of this bliss is a result of the comfortable environment which un Fallen Nature provides for Adam and Eve. Again, Milton’s strategy is to transform familiar concepts about the real world into perfect Paradisal equivalents. A pattern of light versus shade works together with a similar pattern of warmth versus coolness: “Nature boon / poured forth profuse... / Both where the morning sun first warmly smote / The open field, and where the unpierced shade / Imbrowned the noontide bowers” (242-6). Similarly, when Raphael arrives in Eden, Adam is reposing in “his cool bower, while now the mounted sun / Shot down direct his fervid rays, to warm / Earth’s inmost womb, more warmth than Adam needs” (V.300-302). The warm light of the sun is offset by the cool shade of the trees, gaining the joys of both temperature ranges without the unpleasantness of either extreme.

The food produced by Nature also provides Adam and Eve with delight. The poet/narrator says that “Out of the fertile ground [God] caused to grow / All trees of noblest kind for sight, smell, taste” (IV.216-7). Adam observes to Raphael that the fruit of these trees exists “for food and for delight” (V.400). At the same time, this delight is qualified, though not negated, by the fact that Adam and Eve must perform work in the Garden to keep the burgeoning fertility of Paradise in order. Milton introduces just enough labor into the prelapsarian world to make

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"Imbrowned" refers to the use of the color brown to depict shade in contemporary visual art (Fowler 246).
"ease / More easy, wholesome thirst and appetite / more grateful" (IV.329-331). Adam and Eve are not forced into constant drudgery for their very survival; rather, their light gardening work connects them to the natural world of Eden which is their home, and is strenuous only to the point of making their free time all the more delightful.

In the face of all this delight, Satan is "undelighted" (IV.286). Satan's reaction to Paradise shows that he is still troubled by desires which he cannot fulfill, even while those desires intensify his passion for revenge. The delight of Paradise reminds Satan of the Heaven that he has lost (IX.99). Since Satan has proclaimed evil as his only good, the pleasant goodness of Eden only compounds his torment, as he discovers when he addresses Paradise itself:

> With what delight could I have walked thee round,
> If I could joy in aught, sweet interchange
> Of hill, and valley, rivers, woods and plains,
> Now land, now sea, and shores with forest crowned,
> Rocks, dens, and caves; but I in none of these
> Find place or refuge; and the more I see
> Pleasures about me, so much more I feel
> Torment within me, as from the hateful siege
> Of contraries; all good to me becomes
> Bane. (IX.114-123, italics mine)

Satan is caught between the possibility of delight that Paradise offers to him and his own sense of the lost delight of Heaven. As this passage shows, Satan momentarily entertains the thought of enjoying the delights of the Garden, since Earth is, after all, reminiscent of Heaven. But the possibilities of pain and despair which Satan has come to know since his Fall remind him that he
has lost the perfect joy he possessed in Heaven. The only way to escape this "hateful siege / Of contraries" is to destroy the Paradise which stimulates his desire: "For only in destroying I find ease / To my relentless thoughts" (129-30). Satan allows himself to believe that destroying Paradise will make his desire for ideal delight go away, reducing his torment; but in reality, as long as he remembers the lost delight of Heaven, he will always be torn between longing and loss.

In contrast to Satan's jealous torment, the most delightful aspect of living in Paradise for the two principal inhabitants of Eden is the love that they share for each other. The most important feature of this love is its mutuality, although the fact that the poem is product of a patriarchal tradition and culture means that the poem's view of this mutuality is centered mostly in Adam's perspective. Milton stresses that neither Adam nor Eve is capable of enjoying Paradise alone. After naming the animals, Adam considers the abundance of delight which God has provided for him in Paradise; yet he asks God, "In solitude / What happiness, who can enjoy alone, / Or all enjoying, what contentment find?" (VIII.364-6). Adam argues that all of the delights of Paradise cannot truly be enjoyed unless he has someone with whom to enjoy them; as God Himself says, Adam "wilt taste / No pleasure, though in pleasure, solitary" (401-2). Adam tells God specifically what he is looking for: "of fellowship I speak / Such as I seek, fit to participate / All rational delight" (VIII.389-91). He also recognizes that a mate is needed for procreation (422-4). Thus, in his discussion with God, Adam shows that delight, pleasure, fellowship, and procreation are all reasons for having a mate.

Eve also requires a mate in order to enjoy the delights of Paradise fully. In her narration of her creation, Eve relates how she unknowingly discovers her reflection in a lake. She starts back at first, as does the reflection, but then she describes what happens next: "pleased I soon returned, / Pleased it returned as soon with answering looks / Of sympathy and love" (IV. 462-5).
The pleasure she feels derives not only from her interest in what she believes to be another living being, but also the fact that this "other being" is physically beautiful, as Eve reveals when she explains that she finds Adam "less fair" (478). The image also seems to supply her with the emotional fulfillment, the "sympathy and love," which she desires. But in her narration of this event, Eve recognizes that this image would never have been able to satisfy either her physical or emotional desires. Had not the voice of God warned her, she says, "there I had fixed / Mine eyes till now, and pined with vain desire" (465-66). She would have spent her life gazing at an image of something desired, while never making the physical or emotional contact necessary to fulfill her desire. When God brings her to Adam, she turns away at first, because he seems to her to be "less fair" than the image in the water (478). Eve finds that falling in love with a real person is more complicated than falling in love with an image; but since he is a real person, Adam can fulfill her desire in ways that the reflection never could.

Adam and Eve complete each other's Paradise because each can fulfill the other's desires. When Eve begins to turn away from Adam at their first meeting, Adam exclaims, "Part of my soul I seek thee, and thee claim / My other half" (487-88). In his first speech in the epic, Adam addresses Eve as "Sole partner and sole part of all these joys, / Dearer thyself than all" (IV.411-412). As Fowler notes, the first "sole" means "only," while the second means "unrivalled." Thus Eve is the only person who shares the joys of Paradise with Adam, and, at the same time, she herself is the most precious of those joys (219-220). Similarly, Eve finds in Adam the completion of all that is pleasant in Paradise. She says to Adam, "With thee conversing I forget all time, / All seasons and their change, all please alike" (IV.639-640). Eve proceeds to describe the pleasures of different times of day, explaining this particular use of "seasons," but adds that none of the pleasures are sweet without Adam (IV.641-656; Fowler 232). These examples show that sharing
common postlapsarian impulse to “conceal” nakedness, because they represent the capacity for lust. But in Milton’s unfallen Paradise, lust is nonexistent, and therefore the genitals are simply a part of the whole beauty of the human body. The “guilty shame” which seeks to conceal is “dishonest” because it hides this true beauty, distorting “nature’s works.” In postlapsarian reality, a conflict exists between the beauty that stimulates natural desire and the shame at the possibility of lust. The poet/narrator expresses the pathos of the difference between the unfallen ideal of pure desire and the fallen reality of desire mixed with shame, lamenting that shame has “banished from man’s life his happiest life, / Simplicity and spotless innocence” (317-8). When Adam and Eve retire to their Bower, the poet/narrator contrasts this innocence to fallen reality, saying that the couple “eased the putting off / These troublesome disguises which we wear” (IV.739-740). That is, Adam and Eve do not need to remove clothes, since they do not wear clothes at all; the simple act of removing clothing, which the fallen reader might well take for granted, becomes a tedious complication that reflects humanity’s fallen state. Clothes themselves, which most people do indeed take for granted, become “troublesome disguises” which hide the delightful beauty of the human body.

In the same way, the perfect physical relationship shared by Adam and Eve contrasts with the reality of the fallen world. They take pleasure in each other’s bodies, but the poet/narrator consistently reminds the reader that this pleasure is completely free of lust, since it is not separated from love and procreation. For example, after the narrative of her creation, Eve “half embracing leaned / On our first father, half her swelling breast / Naked met his under the flowing gold / Of her loose tresses hid: he . . . pressed her matron lip / With kisses pure” (IV.494-7, 501-2). The lines certainly give a sense of the pleasant intimacy of the lovers; but the word “matron” reminds the reader of the fact that their love will produce children. Desire, then, is not an end in
itsell: the pursuit of pleasure for its own sake. Instead, it is a natural physical expression of their love which will lead to reproduction. C. S. Lewis objects that it is impossible for the reader to identify completely with this scene of unfallen delight, since the reader, being fallen, is susceptible to lust: "Milton seems . . . to hope that we shall be able, without further assistance, to supply for Adam an experience both very like and totally unlike anything that a fallen man could possibly feel" (124). Despite his objection, Lewis has identified the point exactly; the reader, who lives in a fallen state of love mixed with lust, must try to imagine a prelapsarian state of love without lust. The danger, for Lewis, is that what the reader tries to imagine as idealized desire is likely to become confused with the lustful desire with which the reader is already familiar. But for Milton, such confusion is hardly worse than the mixed state of love and lust in which the reader already lives. If he can lead the reader to want to imagine ideal desire, then any confusion which may result is inconsequential.

Milton is, of course, quite aware of the difficulty of having a fallen being attempt to imagine an unfallen state of desire, a difficulty which is the same for sexual desire as for the desire for the delights of Eden. Just as the poem shows Satan confronting the joys of the Garden, the poem also shows Satan reacting to the love of Adam and Eve. Like the reader, Satan observes the embrace in the scene mentioned above; but Satan's reaction shows that his contemplation of ideal desire only intensifies the "hateful siege / Of contraries":

Sight hateful, sight tormenting! Thus these two
Imparadised in one another's arms
The happier Eden, shall enjoy their fill
Of bliss on bliss, while I to hell am thrust,
Where neither joy nor love, but fierce desire,
Among our other torments not the least,

Still unfulfilled with pain of longing pines. (IV.505-11)

His observation of Adam and Eve "Imparadised" only intensifies his desire to destroy their Paradise. Similarly, when Satan comes upon Eve alone in the Garden just before the Fall, he is momentarily overawed by her beauty. A simile comparing Satan to a citydweller visiting the countryside who happens to see a "fair virgin" pass causes the reader to identify momentarily with Satan (IX.445-457; Summers 101). The antithesis between Hell and Paradise is compared to a contrast between the city and the country, a contrast with which the reader can presumably identify more easily; but this easier identification means that the reader is forced to admit some similarity to Satan, insofar as Satan is a fallen being confronted by the "countryside" of Paradise and the perfect beauty of Eve. In the end, though, perfect beauty leaves Satan unmoved. He recalls that his purpose is not to enjoy pleasure, but "all pleasure to destroy" (IX.477). Satan's "resolution" of the siege of contraries, then, is not to seek what joy he is still able to find despite his loss, but instead to end the conflict by destroying the source of joy itself.

Satan's negative response to the delight of Paradise and to the love of Adam and Eve shows that he is incapable of truly resolving this siege of contraries caused by his fall. Haunted as he is by his memories of Heaven, he still desires delight, but the destruction which he has chosen to pursue will never satisfy his ideal desire. Once he causes Adam and Eve to fall, they face the same conflict between contraries; like him, and like the fallen reader, they must now live with both good and evil, rather than simply having good alone. If they are to resolve this conflict, they must find a way to renew their desire for delight even though they must live with delight and its opposite.
After the Fall, the first example of this new situation shows that pure love, in which the will always controls desire, has been replaced by love contaminated with lust, in which desire tends to control the will. Previously, the human appetite has been considered an integral part of the delight of paradise, as long as the will controls it. But at the moment of the Fall, since Eve believes that the forbidden fruit can make her divine, her appetite for Godhead flows with subtlety into a gluttonous appetite for the fruit itself (IX.790-1). And even though Adam is not initially deceived into thinking that the fruit can bestow divinity (998), once he has eaten, the poet/narrator says that both “feel /Divinity within them breeding wings” (1009-1010). Adam claims that “this delightful fruit” has given them “true relish,” and he congratulates Eve for her good “taste” (1017, 1023-4). Of course, the fruit itself is not any more delightful than any of the other fruits in Eden. Adam unwittingly reveals the truth when he considers that “if such pleasure be / In things to us forbidden, it might be wished, / For this one tree had been forbidden ten” (1024-5). Adam and Eve fuse their delight in the fruit with their delight in disobedience. Having done something they have been told not to do, they believe that they have tested and confirmed their freedom to act, and this confirmation of their free will intensifies their appetites to the point of intoxication (1008); as Summers observes, “They rejoice in their illusion of freedom and at the same time in their total dependence upon appetite” (106). Having pushed the limits of free will, they have paradoxically given their desires free reign over themselves.

This lack of restraint is central to the contrast between their previous state of pure love and their current state of love contaminated by lust. Their intoxication produces a surge of uncontrolled sexual desire: “in lust they burn” (1013, 1015). Eve’s physical beauty has remained constant, but Adam suddenly finds her more physically attractive than ever before: “never did thy beauty since the day / I saw thee first and wedded thee . . . so inflame my sense / With ardor to
enjoy thee” (1029-32). Adam’s “ardor to enjoy thee” reveals why lust is dangerous; as Lewis notes, “Eve is becoming to him a thing. And she does not mind” (128). Indeed, she does not mind, since she now wants to enjoy him; her “eye dart[s] contagious fire” (1036). Summers states that “Each of the lovers has been reduced for the other merely to an object for self-gratification” (106). The point is well taken, yet the reader must be careful not to expect too sharp a contrast between the earlier scenes of love and the present scene of love mixed with lust. In the poem, lust is a debased form of love, but it is still a form of love. Therefore, Milton carefully crafts this scene in order to show that the predicament of fallen humanity is a mixed state of love tainted by lust.

Milton thus draws, not a simple contrast, but a simultaneous comparison and contrast. As Kermode argues, Milton creates such explicit links between the earlier love scenes and the present “lust” scene that the reader cannot help but think of them together (128). Adam “seizes” Eve’s hand, as he does in Eve’s narration of their first meeting (IV.488-9). But earlier his “gentle hand” had “Seized” hers to make her his soulmate, whereas now he wishes to “play” (IV.487-9, IX.1027). The location of their tryst, “a shady bank, / Thick overhead with verdant roof embowered”, easily brings to mind the “blissful bower” of earlier scenes. But as Fowler observes, the indefinite article in the phrase “a shady bower” suggests that this is simply any convenient place to copulate, rather than the special site mentioned earlier.

Perhaps most striking of all is the catalogue of flowers. Earlier, a vast assortment of flowers adorned the bower and “decked” the “nuptial bed.” Here, the list is shorter, and flowers form a more casual “couch” rather than a marriage bed. But “violets” and “hyacinth” are mentioned in both catalogues, creating an explicit connection between the two passages beyond the mere fact that they are both lists of flowers. Lewis expects a clear and simple contrast
between love and lust, and feels that the flowers do not help Milton make the necessary distinction: "His Homeric catalogue of flowers is wide of the mark" (128). On the other hand, Summers claims that the catalogue shows that everything has changed about their love except for the flowers, and that this contrast serves to draw the clear distinction (105). The difficulty is that Milton's contrast is less simple than either critic makes it out to be. Lewis identifies the problem when he says that Milton "has made the unfallen already so voluptuous and kept the fallen still so poetical that the contrast is not so sharp as it ought to have been" (70). Lewis obviously wants the contrast to be "sharp." But although Milton believes lust to be a perversion of love, he refuses to separate the two completely, at least in the case of Adam and Eve. James Grantham Turner argues that the verbal similarities, such as the catalogues of flowers and the use of the word "seized," make it clear that lust is not something completely new and different from love, but simply a corrupted and imperfect version of it (303). After all, Adam and Eve still love each other. They are not strangers indulging in the "Casual fruition" of a one night stand (IV.767), nor do they fit any other example of plain lust wholly without love. The basic sense of pleasure and delight is the same in both cases, since pleasure is not evil in itself. For Jean Hagstrum, this insistence on pleasure makes it impossible to separate love and lust absolutely: "Miltonic love, unprotected as it is by ascetic prohibition, Stoic indifference, or Platonic denigration, is precisely the kind that might easily drive on toward lust"—that is, once control has been lost by the Fall (41). The difference, which is fundamental if not absolute, is that pleasure has taken over; they are temporarily allowing their appetites to control them, instead of vice versa, with the result that they forget their mutual love and respect for one another, and concern themselves with pleasure alone. Their love has become "tainted" by lust.
The contamination of love by lust leads in turn to the next contamination, that of nakedness by shame. Earlier, Milton had gone out of his way to emphasize that Adam and Eve were naked without the possibility of shame. But after they awaken from their exhausted sleep, they realize that they have let their bodily desires take control of them, so that the body of each becomes an obvious and inescapable sign of their wrong. As with the pleasure of love, the basic delight of the naked human body has not immediately changed for Adam and Eve, but the awareness of their overindulgence now darkens their view of that delight. In her meeting with Raphael, Eve needed no veil, being “virtue-proof” (V.383). Now, paradoxically, the “veil” of innocence is gone, and both Eve and Adam are desperately in need of veils for their bodies, since they are “naked left / To guilty shame” (IX.1054-8). Since ridding themselves of their bodies is yet unthinkable, Adam proposes that they “devise / What best may for the present serve to hide / The parts of each from other, that seem most / To shame obnoxious” (1091-4). The poet/narrator laments the drastic and irreversible change in the perception of the human form: “O how unlike / To that first naked glory,” with a negative echo of the “naked majesty” of the couple’s first appearance in Book IV (IX.1114-5, IV.290). From this point on, any delight that the human body gives will always be mixed with a sense of shame, now that such delight can arouse uncontrolled desire.

Caught between love and lust, and between nakedness and shame, Adam shows that he feels the Satanic “Hateful siege / of contraries” when he contemplates the difference between the purely delightful past and the problematic present: “O miserable of happy! . . . O fleeting joys / of Paradise, dear bought with lasting woes!” (X.720, 741-2). His ambivalence toward his desire is complicated even further by the fact that any offspring he produces will be cursed as well (728-9). He knows his desire will not go away, but the curse he will transmit to his offspring gives him
more reason to hate his desire than his own shame alone can. Unable to solve the contraries, he
tries to flee them by questioning his own creation (743-6). Once he accepts his guilt, he sees
death not only as the appropriate punishment, but also the only way to end his internal conflict
(778-82). The contemplation of death leads him to imagine what his fallen world might be like:
“But say / That death be not one stroke, as I supposed, / Bereaving sense, but endless misery /
From this day onward” (808-11). Adam does not yet realize that he must live in a world of
delight and woe mixed together; for the moment, he assumes the worst, believing that the absence
of pure delight can only mean constant suffering.

Eve also feels the conflict between delight and woe; in fact, she at first understands the
difficulty of their predicament even more than Adam, which leads her to a more drastically
realized solution to their “extremes” (X.976). Like Adam, she is horrified at the thought that they
will pass on their curse to posterity (979-86). She suggests that they abstain from their desires to
prevent reproduction (986-9). Nevertheless, she knows how difficult it will be to fight their
desires, and so she proposes an alternative solution:

But if thou judge it hard and difficult,

Conversing, looking, loving, to abstain

From love’s due rites, nuptial embraces sweet,

And with desire to languish without hope,

Before the present object languishing

With like desire, which would be misery

And torment less than none of what we dread,

Then both ourselves and seed at once to free

From what we fear for both, let us make short,
Let us seek Death, or he not found, supply
With our own hands his office on ourselves. (992-1002)

Eve fears the Satanic predicament of "with desire to languish without hope." Like Satan, she reasons that the only way to escape such a predicament is to destroy the desire. The similarity of Eve's plan to the destructiveness of Satan is reinforced by the fact that her suggestion of abstinence recalls the poet/narrator's earlier question from the scene of un fallen love: "Our maker bids us increase, who bids abstain / but our destroyer" (IV.748-9). The difference is that Satan's course is to destroy that which stimulates his desire (Adam, Eve, and their Paradise), while Eve's intended course is to destroy herself in order to avoid feeling the desire. Adam has wished for death just as Eve does, but Eve's explicit plan for suicide forces Adam to realize the error of such a wish. He recognizes that the source of the siege of contraries is "anguish and regret / For loss of life and pleasure overloved" (1018-9, italics mine). To seek self-destruction because one's desires cannot be fulfilled is weakness, not strength, since one is still being controlled by those desires. And if desire controls the will, the result is Satanic hopelessness: "No more be mentioned then of violence / Against ourselves, and willful barrenness, / That cuts us off from hope" (1041-3).

Therefore, Adam must discover a way to renew both Eve's desires and his own, integrating them with an overall desire for life instead of letting them predominate over all else. As Adam observes, the prophecy that Eve's "seed shall bruise / The serpent's head" provides redemption for their cursed offspring (1031-2). At the same time, Adam finds a way to renew their desire directly. Remembering that God's judgment had promised Eve pain in childbearing, Adam tells Eve to balance against the pains the joy that will come with the new child (1051-2). Of course, Adam does not yet have any sense of the magnitude of suffering that he and Eve (or
their descendants) will have to undergo. Nevertheless, he establishes a precedent which is critical for resolving the siege of contraries: When one is faced with an ideal mixed with its corruption, one must preserve the desire for the ideal while withstanding the corruption, as Eve will desire the joy of childbirth while bearing the pain that it will bring.

This resolution to the siege of contraries gives Adam a renewed hope for life in spite of the threat of death that was the proclaimed penalty of the Fall. After their prayers of repentance, Adam still holds to the promise that Eve's seed shall bruise the serpent's head: “his promise... yet now / Assures me that the bitterness of death / is past, and we shall live” (XI.155-7). He addresses his wife with a title that recalls Raphael’s earlier2 greeting of her: “hail to thee, / Eve rightly called, Mother of all Mankind” (157-8). And just as the poet/narrator had earlier associated Raphael's salutation with the angel’s visitation of Mary, this salutation also links Eve’s fertility to that of Mary, “second Eve,” who will produce the prophesied seed (Kermode 89-90, 120). The desire for the fulfillment of God’s promise has become one with the desire for life and procreation. Although Adam is perhaps being too hasty in his triumphant dismissal of death (Fowler 572), he has nonetheless succeeded in regenerating his (and Eve’s) desire for life and fulfillment. Even though death lies ahead for Adam and Eve (and for the whole human race), they will prevent the knowledge of death from overwhelming their desire for life through this same regeneration.

This regeneration of desire solidifies the love between Adam and Eve and will help them to endure the loss of Paradise which must take place at the end of the poem. This loss becomes meaningful through the changes caused by the Fall, which cause the Paradisal world described earlier in the poem to become more like the real world that the reader knows. Whereas the

2 “Hail mother of mankind, whose fruitful womb / shall fill the world... with thy sons (V.388-91; Fowler 572)
abundant fertility of unfallen Nature easily supplied Adam and Eve with that which they desired, fallen Nature is more problematic. The most obvious and immediate sign of change is the alteration in the physical environment of the earth. The sun’s course is changed, so as to “affect the earth with cold and heat / Scarce tolerable, and from the north to call / Decrepit winter, from the south to bring / Solstitial summer’s heat” (X.653-6). The perfect temperate mixture of Paradise gives way to ever-changing extremes of “pinching cold” and “scorching heat” (691), as the “Eternal Spring” of Book IV turns into the cycle of spring, summer, fall, and winter. The poet/narrator glances once more at the fading of the eternal spring, emphasizing the misfortune of the change: “else had the spring / Perpetual smiled on earth with vernant flowers” (678-9). Springtime will still exist, and with it, the capacity to fulfill the desire for nourishment and delight which the fruit supplied before the fall. But now, spring will be offset by winter, and humanity will have to learn how to cope with the dearth that will frustrate their desire for the easy fulfillment of eternal spring.

Similarly, the astronomical and climatic changes spread chaos throughout the elements on earth, producing such effects as “Vapor,” “mist,” “exhalation hot,” “ice,” “snow,” “hail,” and “stormy gust” (X.694-8). These disturbances penetrate even within Paradise itself. Night in Eden is no longer “Wholesome and cool” (847). Now, Adam lies “on the ground. . . on the cold ground,” the phrase being repeated to emphasize “cold” (850-851, italics mine). Adam realizes that he and Eve (and their descendants) must learn to adapt to these changes; without the easy balances of light and shade and warmth and coolness which existed before the Fall, they will have to learn to enjoy such balances when they can get them, but also to put up with extremes. He trusts that God will teach them “by what means to shun / The inclement seasons, rain, ice, hail and snow” (1062-3). They may even require fire to escape the cold (1068-78). Since Nature will no
longer simply provide them with the comfort they desire, they must take part of the responsibility for survival and fulfillment on themselves, with God’s help.

In the same way, since Nature is affected by winter and death, it can no longer automatically provide them with food. Thus, Adam and Eve must expand their prelapsarian labor activities in order to live in the postlapsarian world. In His judgment, God tells Adam, “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread” (X.205). He will no longer simply work enough to make “ease more easy” (Low 321). Instead, Adam is now condemned to work for his very survival.

Yet, perhaps because of the satisfying experience of prelapsarian labor, which he shared with Eve and which helped connect him to his natural environment, Adam accepts his predicament. He says to Eve: “with labor I must earn / my bread; what harm? Idleness had been worse; / My labor will sustain me” (X.1054-56). Adam does not yet realize how difficult postlapsarian labor may be. Nevertheless, his rejection of idleness suggests that the one of the results of labor will still be to make “ease more easy.” Even though they must work more and harder than before, their labor will still help them to appreciate the moments when their desires can be fulfilled, especially since their fulfillment is now largely dependent on that work.

At first, Eve also accepts their new responsibilities, since she believes that they will still inhabit the familiar, though altered, world of Paradise: “while here we dwell, / What can be toilsome in these pleasant walks? / Here let us live, though in fallen state, content” (XI.178-180). She shows that she is trying to preserve something of the happy mutuality of labor they possessed before the Fall, as she echoes one of Adam’s prelapsarian calls3 to love and labor: “the field / To labor calls us now with sweat imposed / Though after sleepless night” (XI.171-3). Like Adam, Eve is trying to renew her desire, embracing their new labor because it allows them to work

3 “Awake / My fairest, my espoused, my latest found . . . the fresh field / Calls us” (V.17-18, 20-21).
together, as did their prelapsarian labor. The earlier passage, as Diane McColley notes, fused pleasure with responsibility (92). Here, Eve is trying to recover something of the same fusion, although she implies that the labor will now be more difficult. She is adapting their prelapsarian labor experience to their postlapsarian situation. According to Anthony Low, the prelapsarian labor scenes have the effect of narrowing the gap between the unfallen and fallen worlds (319). Eve’s adaptation suggests that she is exploring this possibility. But their adaptation must involve more than simply accepting their new responsibility, for Michael soon informs them that they must dwell elsewhere (259-262): Eve’s subsequent lament contains language which is reminiscent of earlier descriptions of Paradise: “Must I leave thee Paradise? thus leave / Thee native soil, these happy walks and shades, / Fit haunt of gods?” (269-271). Recalling the flowers she has tended, the “nuptial bower,” and the “pure air” of Paradise, she finds the thought of leaving unbearable (273-285). Adam explains why the departure will be so painful to them both, describing Eden as “our sweet / Recess, and only consolation left / Familiar to our eyes, all places else / In hospitable appear and desolate” (303-6). Fear of the unknown compounds the suffering that they must face.

The solution is that Adam and Eve must rely on each other’s love in order to make up for the loss of Paradise. Michael hints at this in his response to Eve’s lament, when he tells her that she should consider where her husband goes to be her “native soil” (292). After Adam has witnessed the prophecy of future events that will unfold God’s plan of good from evil, Michael summarizes the virtues that will be needed to live in the fallen world, ending with love, “the soul of all the rest” (XII.584-5). In the end, Eve reconciles her desire to stay in Paradise with the necessity of their expulsion by reaffirming the love that she and Adam have for each other:

but now lead on,

In me is no delay; with thee to go,
Is to stay here; without thee here to stay, 
Is to go hence unwilling; thou to me 
Art all things under heaven, all places thou... (XII.614-618)

Isabel MacCaffrey emphasizes the continuity between Eve’s prelapsarian lovesong, in which she proclaimed that nothing in Paradise is sweet without Adam, to the present passage, saying that “for Eve, Adam is Paradise” (77); in the same way, Eve was earlier the “sole partner and sole part of all these joys.” Thus, the Paradise of place and the Paradise of love merge together even as the Paradise of Eden is lost. Turner states that they “must learn to conduct their married life ‘as much as may be’ by the memory of lost Paradise, to locate Eden within their marriage” (308). If Adam and Eve can take the memory of Paradise with them, then as long as they remain together, they will have their Paradise of love, which will help them to face the hardships of postlapsarian life wherever they may go. The closing lines of the poem reflect these lingering contraries which Adam and Eve feel even as they depart from Paradise:

Some natural tears they dropped, but wiped them soon;
The world was all before them, where to choose
Their place of rest, and providence their guide:
They hand in hand with wandering steps and slow,
Through Eden took their solitary way (XII.645-649).

Their tears, and their wandering slow steps, still express their sense of “anguish and regret” for the pure delight which they, like Satan, have lost. But instead of dwelling on the difference between the joy they had and the diminished joy that is now possible, they have learned to seek what joy they still can find in life. Relying both on Providence and on each other (“hand in hand”), they will establish “a paradise within” themselves (587). They have regenerated not only
their desire for joy but also their desire for life itself. In doing so, they set an example for the reader. For Peter Lindenbaum, the function of the “Edenic portions” of the poem is “not to indulge in dreams of what might have been or even to point to the wretchedness of man’s present life by contrasting it with a better time, but to teach us about our present existence” (301). Adam and Eve, in their integration of unfallen experience into their fallen lives, show how the reader might also be inspired by the contemplation of Paradise to regenerate his or her own desire for the delight still possible in life.

That Adam and Eve, or readers of *Paradise Lost* themselves, can thus take something of Paradise with them into the reality of what Milton would call the fallen world is not to say that Milton considers the loss of Paradise inconsequential. As a Christian, Milton truly believes that the world as it is now is not only qualitatively different, but worse, than the Paradise which he imagines as existing before the Fall; and he believes that Paradise will not truly be regained until the transcendence of the Last Judgment. But Milton’s poem serves as a reminder that we should not let our desire for the ideal delight of Paradise interfere with our desire for life in this world.

The way to confront the frustration of ideal desire is not to divide our experience into the possibility of fulfillment that we can imagine and the reality of loss that we know, as Satan does, because this only perpetuates the “hateful siege / Of contraries.” Rather, we must accept the reality of loss while maintaining our desire for the delight which is still possible, following the example of Adam and Eve, and of Milton the poet/narrator himself. Milton shows us Paradise and its loss, but not in order to make us desire that lost Paradise at the expense of this world. Instead, he urges us to desire the same things in the real world that we desire in Paradise, so that in a limited but important way, Paradise may still be within our reach.
Bibliography


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