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Reading Nature, Reading Eve: Reading Human Nature in John Milton's Paradise Lost

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READING NATURE, READING EVE: READING HUMAN NATURE IN JOHN
MILTON'S *PARADISE LOST*

By

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A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of
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for the Degree of Master of Arts
in English
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Mississippi State, Mississippi

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MILTON'S *PARADISE LOST*

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Renaissance England was a period of tremendous flux. Two particular areas of change, those of science and gender, intersect with the text examined here in their relationship to the key concept of nature. In John Milton's, *Paradise Lost*, nature appears in various forms over sixty times. By first examining the word nature in relation to the ideas in flux during the period and next examining Milton's use of the word in the epic, an overlooked yet significant aspect of his epic emerges. Milton uses the mutability of nature to further "justify the ways of God to man." How his use of nature develops an association between nature and Eve is of even greater significance. In a carnivalesque inversion of the convention of the period, Milton's development of nature in the poem and his development of the association of Eve with nature reveal an association of Eve with human nature.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this project to my husband and children for their infinite patience.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am most grateful to the members of my thesis committee; Dr. Richard Raymond, Dr. Thomas Anderson, and Dr. Lara Dodds. Many thanks are due for their patience and encouragement during this project. I am particularly grateful to my committee chairman, Dr. Dodds. I could not have accomplished this project without her guidance, time, and effort.

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

In 1667, the first edition of *Paradise Lost* was published; John Milton's epic reflects not only the Biblical account of the Fall, but also the issues of nature and gender shifting during the time. The seventeenth century features changes in understanding of the natural world and how to arrive at that understanding, and also changes in understanding of womankind. In Milton's retelling of the Fall, nature, even in Paradise, is something to be worked with rather than dominated as when Adam and Eve "led the Vine/To wed her Elm" (5.215-6). While it was not atypical for nature to be personified as feminine, in this poem nature and Eve become very closely associated through imagery, and, additionally, Eve becomes associated with human nature. Furthermore, Milton poses a challenge to the era's notions of knowledge as an exclusively male arena. Elaborating upon the Genesis story, he has Eve participate in the intellectual activity of naming the plants, which Eve reveals to the reader when she says of them, "From the first op'ning bud, and gave ye Names" (11.277). His epic contradicts the accepted notion of his day that only one great sex animates the world (Fletcher) and will show that "two great Sexes animate the World" (8.151).

The nature of gender differences was not the only idea in flux, and Milton's representation of Eve refutes the notion that woman equals less than human. In *Man and*

the Natural World: A History of the Modern Sensibility, Keith Thomas indicates that the very humanity of women was debated:

Women were also near the animal state. Over many centuries theologians had debated, half frivolously, half seriously, whether or not the female sex had souls, a discussion which closely paralleled the debate about animals and was sometimes echoed at a popular level. (43)

According to the sources Thomas cites, these ideas continued to be debated into the early seventeenth century. While Milton does associate Eve with nature in the poem, his poetic association lacks the base connotations typical of the culture from which he writes.

Because so many of the changes in human understanding of the natural world during the seventeenth century intersect with various meanings of the word *nature*, Milton's poetic use of the word has significance. He uses the word to bring together the images of Eve and nature, and does so without the derogatory connotations typical of his era. Diane McColley proposes that when Eve turns away from her own image in the pool, she may provide a positive model of human relation to nature: "Just as Eve's choice provides a model for a regenerate reading of the poem, Satan's survey of the Garden, which precedes and prepares for it, provides an image of a perverse reading" (76).

However, Karen Edwards remarks that "[w]hen Eve determines to know absolutely, to fix interpretation, she indeed reaches for death" (*Milton and the Natural World* 69). The reader must continually interpret the juxtaposition of perverse with regenerative, and the reader of the Book of Nature must always be on guard of reading perversely from a Fallen perspective. I argue that Milton uses poetic Eve to represent human nature particularly in respect to reading the Book of Nature from our fallen condition.

The fallen world from which the poem emerges serves as a “perverse parody” occurring for the reader before the unfallen world represented in the poem. Thus a work like Stanley Fish’s *Surprised by Sin* that emphasizes the fallen reader interacting with the poem responds to a natural pattern reflected throughout. Fish has demonstrated the “intangling” of the reader with the text and has illustrated that the reader’s fallen condition serves as a potential pitfall in reading the epic. While Fish cautions against attributing the Fall to Satan, he notes that in respect to Adam that “the effects of sin extend far beyond the person or control of the sinner who is punished, in part, by seeing his sin envelop those innocent of it” (151). However, Fish’s point regarding “the effects of sin” possesses a relevant quality not only for Adam, but also for Satan as presented in the epic.

Not to disagree with Fish, Satan is certainly not the cause of the Fall, but his character serves as both a reference point in the poem and a point of comparison. As a reference point, the poem shows Satan’s disobedience as the first sin, and the poem slowly unfolds the extension of “the effects of sin.” As a point of comparison, the poem repeatedly uses Satan to create a pattern of structural parody. After the epic voice, Satan is the first character represented in the poem, a poetic choice significant to a prevalent pattern in the poem. The poem reminds the fallen reader that Satan is the first will to disobey, and through the poetic imagery, the poem reveals “the effects of sin” radiating out to affect others from Satan forward. The poem, through parody, associates with Satan the tendency to misread both nature and Eve. Diane McColley refers to a pattern of parody in the poem; she refers to Sin’s account of her birth as “the proleptic parody of Eve’s” (84):

...Milton is again using here a technique he also used in describing the birth of Sin before the creation of Eve; that is, he presents to us the perverse parody of an episode before the episode itself, and thus challenges us to make careful distinctions. (100)

This technique echoes the relationship between the fallen world and the poem; the post-lapsarian world precedes the poem as a perverse parody of the pre-lapsarian world created in the poem. The first character represented in the poem, Satan, provides the parody for reading the poem in such a way as to allow something new to come about.

The use of parody with Satan and Sin challenges the traditional view of Eve as the first to sin or as the entrance of sin into the world. The parody holds the view of Eve as temptress up for scrutiny for the purpose of correcting the reading of Eve and redeeming the understanding of human nature. In the poem, parody is one of many elements of the carnivalesque significant to reading and interpreting the poem. Under the heading “Dialogic Criticism,” M. H. Abrams offers a brief explanation of the carnivalesque:

In *Rabelais and His World* (trans., 1984), Bakhtin proposes his widely cited concept of the **carnavalesque** in certain literary works. This literary mode parallels the flouting of authority and temporary inversion of social hierarchies that, in many cultures, are permitted in a season of carnival. It does so by introducing a mingling of voices from diverse social levels that are free to mock and subvert authority, to flout social norms by ribaldry, and to exhibit various ways of profaning what is ordinarily regarded as sacrosanct. (63)

Mikhail Bakhtin's carnivalesque includes, significantly, the element of parody. The parody of the carnivalesque differs from modern parody in that it is, according to Bakhtin, positive; it is parody to bring about something new. Parody in *Paradise Lost* functions in this way, offering the possibility for a regenerative reading of the book of nature and of Eve. Both Eve and nature are integral in supporting the poem's theodicy; the carnivalesque allows the positive quality in the association between Eve and nature to emerge.

The scholarship on John Milton's *Paradise Lost* reflects a history of debate over how to read Eve in the poem. Karen Edwards identifies how the critical debate has developed. She finds that feminist scholarship has "harden[ed] into [...] an adversarial debate between 'prosecutorial' and 'apologetic' critics" ("Resisting Representation" 231). The reader faces a challenge in reading Eve in a positive light; her act of disobedience begins our "woe." Sandra Gilbert argues that Milton's Eve is aligned with Satan in the epic: "Eve is gradually reduced from an angelic being to a monstrous and serpentine creature" ("Patriarchal Poetry and Women Readers" 372). Christine Froula finds in the epic evidence of "Milton's silencing and voiding of female creativity [...]" ("When Eve Reads Milton" 338). However, perhaps this challenge is tainted by society's patriarchal perspective. The reader knows the story. But Milton makes some very interesting choices in his retelling of this story. Barbara Lewalski identifies positive elements of Eve's portrayal which are significant in the context of seventeenth-century England. Lewalski acknowledges a hierarchy, but she illustrates that Eve is a partner and a participant in life in Eden ("Milton on Women"). Anne Ferry evaluates the differences between the biblical text and the epic in order to isolate Milton's choices in his work.

She finds evidence of a sympathy on Milton's part towards Eve and a relationship between marriage in *Paradise Lost* and Milton's description in his divorce tracts ("Milton's Creation of Eve"). Ferry's article suggests that Milton is not necessarily maintaining the seventeenth-century status quo in respect to gender.

While the "adversarial debate" serves as an integral part in understanding Eve in the poem, the new directions in scholarship on Eve offer ever richer interpretation of the epic.

Elisabeth Liebert asserts that "the text is complex enough to respond [...] to both feminist and patriarchal readings," and she looks to a "middle ground" ("Rendering 'More Equal'" 152). In a more recent work, *Destabilizing Milton: "Paradise Lost" and the Poetics of Incertitude*, Peter C. Herman challenges the "certainty" of traditional readings of the poem. Herman contends that the critical "adversarial debate" over the poem's gender lines responds to a legitimate element of the poem: "the friction between praise and blame is the whole point" (127). Herman claims that Milton criticizes misogyny:

[Mary] Nyquist et al. correctly find in *Paradise Lost* a toxic patriarchy deeply hostile to the interests of Eve and women in general, and [Diane] McColley et al. rightly argue that Milton is not a misogynist, that he is in fact highly critical of misogyny. The presence of contradictory discourses results from Milton's intention of using the latter position to critique the former. (127)

Herman's reading suggests that Milton's God and Adam are the misogynists in the poem and that Eve's fall is caused by the intellectual inferiority which she is made to feel (139).

However, this reading expresses a twenty-first century perspective on gender. The poem may in fact critique misogyny, but it does so in order to reinforce the poem's theodicy. The poem critiques ideas of woman that impugn her Creator. The poem not only shows nature as created good but mutable, it also represents woman as created good but mutable. Equally important, the carnivalesque temporary inversion of social hierarchies offers new insight into how the debate regarding Eve in the poem has developed.

Paradise Lost recognizes the seventeenth-century tendency to impugn the creator by blaming sin on Eve. Works such as those of Anthony Fletcher (*Gender, Sex and Subordination*) and Keith Thomas (*Man and the Natural World*) expose the seventeenth-century tendency of male perspective to misread the book of nature in much the same way as Adam does:

O why did God,
Creator wise, that peopl'd highest Heav'n
With Spirits Masculine, create at last
This noveltie on Earth, this fair defect
Of Nature, and not fill the World at once
With Men as Angels without Feminine,
Or find some other way to generate
Mankind? (10.888-95)

The poem demonstrates Eve to be no defect of nature and illustrates her integral role in the redemption of human nature. The poem accomplishes this through the carnivalesque, temporarily inverting the seventeenth-century social order in order to bring about something new. The poem elucidates a philosophy of nature that affirms nature as

created good by God. Although created good, nature is capable of change. Eve is closely associated with nature, emphasizing her as a part of God's good creation.

Eve represents essential evidence in the poem's theodicy. Dennis Danielson explains theodicy as "a defense of God's justice," which requires addressing the problem of evil in the world if "God is all powerful (or omnipotent)," and "God is wholly good," and "There is evil in the world" (144). Milton's theodicy depends upon the "Free Will Defence;" essentially, God "created angels and human beings with freedom either to obey or disobey his commands" (148). In the poem, God relates to the Son that man will fall of his own fault: "I made him just and right, / Sufficient to have stood, through free to fall" (3.98-99). Because Eve falls before Adam, she too must be "sufficient to have stood," and indeed, Eve is created sufficient to stand. When she leaves Raphael and Adam to their conversation, a point which Herman finds to reinforce her feeling of inferiority, Eve demonstrates that she can be away from Adam's side and work with no harmful consequences. The scene affirms Eve's sufficiency rather than inferiority. The poem does not remove blame from Eve but rather corrects a seventeenth-century perspective that places all blame for the Fall upon her. If Eve is the bait, temptress, weak link of typical seventeenth-century misogyny, then because she is created by God, the poem sets out upon a futile goal of justifying what cannot be justified.

On the contrary, the poem successfully accomplishes the intended theodicy, and nature and Eve are necessary to the successful justification. The poem's engagement with nature and Eve has received attention; however, the connection between reading the book of nature and reading the book of Eve has not. The poem uses the book of nature to respond to what Diane McColley refers to as seventeenth-century "dualistic tendencies,"

which ascribe deity like status to nature. Due to the seventeenth-century tendency to attribute all cause and blame in the Fall to Eve as an imperfect creation, or snare, her representation holds a key position in the poem's thesis, "to justify the ways of God to men." Through the carnivalesque, Eve's association with nature and her reproductive connection to humanity's renewal are both positive. The somewhat carnivalesque inversion of Eve's hierarchical status in the prelapsarian garden functions to reveal Eve as created good by God. The inversion that elevates Eve from such a negative tradition is only temporary, thus the poem responds to multiple arguments regarding Eve. Exploring the carnivalesque aspect of Eve's representation in the poem offers new insight into the poem and suggests how the poem responds to such opposed readings.

The answer to the question of how to read Eve in the epic is intertwined with reading nature in the poem. Finally, in an inversion of seventeenth-century thought, Eve more closely represents human nature. However, the inversion, true to the nature of the carnivalesque, is reversed by the end of the poem. The biblical base for the story forces the inversion back into tradition. While the hierarchy is re-established, the poem leaves traces that unsettle the tradition and make Milton's Eve a natural subject for debate.

In chapter two, I will show the significance of nature in the poem and how the flux of ideas regarding nature in the seventeenth century suggests a conscious effort to elucidate a philosophy of nature in order to accomplish the poem's theodicy. In chapter three, I argue that Eve's association with nature in the poem is also intersecting with seventeenth-century ideas in flux, ideas that make Eve integral to supporting the theodicy. In chapter four, I apply Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque to the images

surrounding Eve to reveal how these images are positive and contribute, along with carnivalesque parodic contrasts, to Eve's representation of human nature in the poem.

CHAPTER II

READING THE BOOK OF NATURE

Examining the word *nature* in *Paradise Lost* reveals a natural philosophy that reinforces the theodicy of the poem. Through nature the poem reveals God's providence and corrects an error of the fallen perspective through interpreting God's other great book, the Book of Nature. Milton's uses of *nature* in the poem reflect the full range of meanings of the word as well as extend the word's meaning in a way that accounts for evil in the world. In addition, *nature* holds a structural significance in the poem. The poem opens with the character of Satan, who possesses a connection with the reader as fallen. As the first will to disobey, Satan's corruptive influence radiates throughout God's creation. The reader's potential to misread in the fallen state is brought forward, and the poem emphasizes the beginnings of evil in such a way that God is demonstrated to be a creator of good, and only through his generous gift of free will does evil emerge via disobedience to God. The poem not only treats the fallen potential for misreading the source of evil but also addresses the fallen potential for misreading the Book of Nature and God's other member of the "two great sexes," Eve. The parallels between nature and Eve function to facilitate reading Eve in the poem. The significance of her character serves as a key factor in defining God's providence against a backdrop of male misreading that essentially impugns God for creating a means for Adam's fall. Through

the poem's defining of *nature* and redefining of Eve, a corrective to perverse reading of God's other great book surfaces in the poem, a corrective which celebrates both sexes and reaffirms the poem's theodicy.

Scholars have noted the significance of nature and the element of mutability in the poem. In William G. Madsen's article, "The Idea of Nature in Milton's Poetry," the author explores nature "as a controlling and organizing principle in the poetry itself" (183). He identifies Milton's subordination of "Nature as the work of God" (226). Madsen identifies the essence of nature in Milton's epic, which is that "Nature ... is innocent but capable of falling" (282). Stanley Fish, in *Surprised by Sin*, also observes this mutable quality: "Innocence, Raphael tells Adam and Eve, far from being static, includes large possibilities for growth as well as the possibility of declining to grow" (226). Nature, in Milton's epic, like man and the angels, is something created good but mutable.

While both Madsen and Fish have identified a mutable aspect of God's creation portrayed in the poem, neither focuses on how this aspect of the poem's theodicy connects to Eve. Fish's focus on the reader of the poem reflects the significance of the relationship between the reader and the poem. Madsen identifies the significance of nature in the poem but treats the feminine gender of nature as convention. The gender of nature in *Paradise Lost* reflects carefully drawn parallels between Eve and nature in the text. These parallels are deliberately drawn to be open to perverse as well as regenerative reading. The perverse reading of nature by Satan and the other fallen angels contrasts with the regenerative reading of nature by unfallen Adam and Eve. Tracing the meanings

of *nature* and the image of nature created by these meanings reinforces the theodicy of the poem.

Nature in John Milton's epic poem, *Paradise Lost*, reflects changing ideas about the natural world during seventeenth-century England. At the very same time that the concept of the natural world is being "revolutionized," Milton places the word *nature* into poetic play and engages in the discourse of reading the Book of Nature. The significance of the seventeenth-century's changing conceptualization of the natural world has a direct relationship with Milton's epic. In Karen Edwards book, *Milton and the Natural World: Science and Poetry in Paradise Lost*, the author illustrates the connections between disciplines during this period:

[I]t is artificial and misleading to separate poetry from other disciplines. Exploring the implications of this intellectual seamlessness for Milton's poetry means looking at *Paradise Lost* in its relationship to seventeenth-century natural history and the work of such contemporaries as Thomas Browne, Robert Boyle, John Evelyn, and Robert Hooke. (9)

Edwards has detailed Milton's engagement of science in his poetry. Additionally, she has recognized that his epic has a reflective relationship connecting the epic to seventeenth-century changes in natural philosophy:

It is a text which perfectly reflects its historical moment, the middle decades of the seventeenth century, when the mature development of Milton's experimental reading of the Bible coincided with the new experimental philosophy's dramatic and excited opening of "wide vistas" on the natural world. (69)

Edwards focuses on the new science and elucidates how the epic reflects it. However, tracing the word *nature* and how it is used in the poem reveals a new facet confirming the poem's theodicy and revealing a deviation from tradition in respect to gender.

The most effective evidence of the significance of nature in the poem lies in the complex and varied uses of the word within the poem. Studying how *nature* functions in the poem reveals a natural philosophy that reinforces the poem's theodicy. The word *nature* appears in various forms (i.e. upper case, lower case, and possessive) more than sixty times in *Paradise Lost*. That it is in the text is obvious; however, what it means within the text and to the work as a whole is perhaps less obvious. Exploring the range of meanings for *nature* found within Milton's text reveals implications for the text as a whole.

The word *nature* is rich in meanings and connotations, and the full range of meanings is found within *Paradise Lost*. According to the OED, *nature* not only refers to the natural world, but is also “[t]he general inherent character or disposition of mankind” (2.b). According to Raymond Williams in his useful text, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*,

Nature is perhaps the most complex word in the language. It is relatively easy to distinguish three areas of meaning: (i) the essential quality and character of something; (ii) the inherent force which directs either the world or human beings or both; (iii) the material world itself, taken as including or not including human beings. [...] Its earliest sense, as in OF and L, was (i) the essential character and quality of something. [...] In English sense (i) is from C13, sense (ii) from C14, sense (iii) from C17,

though there was an essential continuity and in senses (ii) and (iii) considerable overlap from C16. [...] The common phrase **human nature**, for example, which is often crucial in important kinds of argument, can contain, without clearly demonstrating it, any of the three main senses and indeed the main variations and alternatives. (184-5)

Williams' etymology of the word *nature* establishes the potential of the word's meanings by the seventeenth century. All three areas of meaning are found in *Paradise Lost*.

Milton uses the word, *nature*, in the sense (i) in the poem when God justifies not intervening on man's behalf which would compromise man's freedom:

I form'd them free, and free they must remain,
Till they enthrall themselves: I else must change
Thir nature, and revoke the high Decree
Unchangeable, Eternal, which ordain'd
Thir freedom, they themselves ordain'd thir fall. (3. 124-28)

Free will is an unchangeable high decree and while God has the power to change man's nature, it would compromise an eternal decree. The lines imply that the decree may be unchangeable; however, human nature is not. God's intervention would compromise free will, but nature, specifically man's nature in sense (i) "the essential quality and character of something" in being created free, possesses a mutable quality. In order for free will to exist, a possibility for change must exist as well.

Nature is also used in sense (i) after the Son has offered himself as a sacrifice for mankind, and God, in response, says "therefore [...] / Thir Nature also to thy Nature joyn" (3. 282). Simultaneously, this use of *nature* carries implications upon the material world,

sense (iii) in that the Son's angelic nature is eventually through Eve's seed to become man's nature, as in a material body, again notably suggesting nature to be something changeable. In addition, the use of *nature* in these instances referring to natures that are innate or created by God in these beings suggests the word's Latin root "to be born" (Williams 184). The animals are named by Adam knowing their natures: Raphael says to Adam, "And thou thir Natures know'st, and gav'st them Names" (7. 493). Because their natures are created good, God has done his part. Free will provides the source for mutability. To be truly free, the inherent nature must possess the possibility for change.

Equally important, Milton uses *nature* in sense (ii), the inherent force, when Adam speaks to Eve about the need for their bodies to rest: "Mean while, as Nature wills, Night bids us rest" (4. 633). This sense of directive force is linked to God within Raphael's narrative as Abdiel speaks to Satan:

Unjustly thou depriv'st it with the name
Of *Servitude* to serve whom God ordains,
Or Nature; God and Nature bid the same,
When he who rules is worthiest, and excells
Them whom he governs. (6. 174-78)

This use carries with it a sense that Nature is potentially mutable; when someone unworthy rules, God and Nature may not bid the same. For example, sense (ii) appears again when Adam faces Eve and must choose between obedience or her and states, "[...] I feel/The Link of Nature draw me" (9. 913-4). Adam is not forced to disobey, but he responds to his human social nature and desire to remain with Eve. In this instance, Nature is not bidding the same as God.

In addition, Milton uses *nature* in the sense (iii), “the material world itself”, “...where Nature multiplies/Her fertil growth” (5. 318-9). A sense of valuing and proper use of this material world appears when the epic voice states that after Adam and Eve finish eating and drinking with Raphael, they had “Not burd’nd Nature” (5. 452). Their use of nature contrasts with Satan’s and the other fallen angels. The implications upon the text as a whole include, significantly, the abuse of nature by the fallen angels and the sense of nature as mutable.

Absent from book one, *nature* first appears in book two, in lower case, used by Belial during the fallen angels’ debate, to suggest that the nature of the fallen angels may perhaps be mutable and thus allow them to adjust to their punishment: “In temper and in nature, will receive/Familiar the fierce heat, and void of pain” (218-19). There is logic in the concept of nature presented here, in spite of the fact that the speech act is made by Belial. Their natures were created good by God but proved mutable by their rebellion. Belial suggests that if their natures were once capable of mutability, then perhaps their natures will once again change and adapt or become comfortable with their new circumstances. Unlike Adam, Eve, and Raphael who do not burden nature, Satan and the fallen angels not only burden, but also abuse nature.

Significantly, Satan is the first character represented in the epic. As the first will to disobey God, his is the first sin to ripple outward with its corrupting influence. By representing Satan first, Milton reminds the reader of his fallen perspective, a reminder which serves as a challenge to see and contemplate “Things unattempted yet in Prose or Rhime” (1. 16). The reader begins with an image of Satan’s character and works from there to the prelapsarian image of Adam and Eve. The poem offers parallels between

Satan's abuse of nature and his exploitation of Eve, and in addition, Satan's relationship to nature contrasts with Adam and Eve's relationship to nature.

The fallen reader follows Satan through the epic as he penetrates Nature, both when he comes upon "[a] glimmering dawn" where "Nature first begins" (2. 1037) and later when he moves through the animals, altering their dispositions (4. 395-408). The reader's first glimpse of Adam and Eve is joined with Satan's, "...where the Fiend/Saw undelighted all delight..." (4. 285-86), and following that image of the couple, the epic voice reminds the reader of his fallen state:

Then was not guiltie shame, dishonest shame
Of natures works, honor dishonorable,
Sin-bred, how have ye troubl'd all mankind
With shews instead, meer shews of seeming pure,
And banisht from mans life his happiest life,
Simplicitee and spotless innocence. (4. 313-318)

The lines imply that the shame of nature's works is dishonest or unmerited and derives from the mentality of the times, the fallen mentality. That mentality impacts the view of Eve.

The reader's fallen condition creates a distortion in understanding, which allows man to attempt to excuse himself by blaming Eve, a distortion that the theodicy of the poem corrects. While not the cause of the Fall because Adam and Eve could obey God in spite of Satan, Satan provides a corrupting influence presented in the poem in such a way that mediates the traditional "blame it all on Eve" position, not excusing but instead,

explaining evil and representing Eve in a new way. Adam, Eve, Satan and the fallen angels all disobey God, but they are contrasted in their interactions with nature.

Satan, or at least a member of his crew, Mammon, is shown abusing nature in the sense of “mother Earth”:

[...] and with impious hands
Rifl'd the bowels of thir mother Earth
For Treasures better hid. Soon had his crew
Op'nd into the Hill a spacious wound
And dig'd out ribs of Gold. (1. 686-90)

The exploitation of nature parallels with the exploitation of Eve when Satan uses false information to tempt her. Satan and his crew's abuse of nature contrasts greatly with the idealized pre-lapsarian image of the first parents working with nature, gently leading the vine along the elm. Milton depicts humans working with nature in a relationship producing harmony. Eve understands the nature of the foods that they eat allowing them harmonious consumption. In contrast, Satan exploits nature, ripping the “bowels” and making gunpowder to produce evil and destruction. Similarly, his exploitation of Eve produces all “our woe.”

Milton depicts nature as God's good creation yet potentially changeable. Williams points out that “there is then great complexity when this kind of singular [‘Mother Nature’] religious or mythical abstraction has to coexist, as it were, with another singular all-powerful force, namely a monotheistic God” (186). With a sense of a great force in Nature operating in the background of a monotheistic culture, Milton in a sense resolves the conflict of two great forces by associating Nature with God's first

command for light. Nature first begins where a “glimmering dawn” first becomes visible. Williams indicates “a recurrent tendency to see Nature [...] as an absolute monarch” which “express[ed] a sense of fatalism rather than of providence” (186). Fatalism negates free will, and Milton places Nature firmly under God’s creation in the image of light and Nature’s beginnings. The image of Satan entering where “Nature first begins” parallels his later entrance, thus corruption, upon humanity through Eve. When Michael says to Satan, “Author or evil, [...] how thou disturb’ d/Heav’ns blessed peace, and into Nature brought/Miserie, uncreated till the crime/ Of thy Rebellion?” (6. 262-69), he reiterates that Satan brings with him Sin and Death into Nature and at the same time reiterates that it is Satan who brings misery to the nature of humanity. Satan first demonstrates the mutability of nature as the first will to disobey and thus change, as well as a corruptive force in Nature and through Eve, in human nature.

Milton depicts nature as something created good by God but mutable, or as Madsen indicates, “innocent but capable of falling” (282). Additionally, Milton shows nature abused by Satan and the other fallen angels foreshadowing Satan’s deceitful abuse of Eve. Madsen interprets “the disorder in the world [...] as] the result of a spiritual disorder – the sin of the first man” (274). However, this interpretation fails to recognize the first transgression, Satan’s. Satan is represented in the epic as penetrating Nature with Sin and Death following him, and the poem implies that “the disorder in the world” (Madsen) has a source even before “the sin of the first man” (Madsen). The idea that Satan’s world, hell, is a place where “Nature breeds,/Perverse” (2.624-25) suggests a “disorder in the world” that within the narrative of the poem occurs before the Fall.

Milton depicts Satan entering nature's boundaries "now with ease" foreshadowing his approach to Eve's ear (2. 1041). Later the personification of Nature appears as the epic voice relates Satan's journey and comes upon "A glimmering dawn; here Nature first begins/Her fardest verge" (2. 1037-38). The distinction is significant. Nature begins where light first becomes visible, thus associating Nature's beginning with God's first command that there be light and with something He found to be good. Satan comes upon "[t]his pendant world" and brings with him evil and "Sin and Death amain/Following his track" and enters Nature (2. 1024-25:1052). Milton's use of *nature* suggests an entrance of sin into nature.

At a time of concentrated change in knowledge and understanding of the natural world, Milton produces an epic that through the use of the word *nature*, responds to the question of evil in the world, and clarifies the relationship of nature to God. In *The Scientific Revolution*, Steven Shapin notes that studies on the Scientific Revolution see this shift in the seventeenth century "as a conceptual revolution, a fundamental reordering of our ways of *thinking* about the natural" (2). He points out that historians have problematized the term "science" in discussions of this "conceptual revolution." Instead, historians recognize that "There was, rather, a diverse array of cultural practices aimed at understanding, explaining, and controlling the natural world, each with different characteristics and each experiencing different modes of change" (3). The figures Shapin refers to were not only involved in these changes, but they were also aware:

[...] that many key figures in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries vigorously expressed *their* view that they were proposing some very new and very important changes in knowledge of natural reality and in the

practices by which legitimate knowledge was to be secured, assessed, and communicated. They identified *themselves* as “moderns” set against “ancient” modes of thought and practice. (5)

Shapin notes that “our sense of radical change afoot” is not just from historians but “comes substantially” from those engaged in writing and reflecting on this change during the seventeenth century: “So we can say that the seventeenth century witnessed some self-conscious and large-scale attempts to change belief, and ways of securing belief, about the natural world” (5). In his work, Shapin demonstrates that understanding of the natural world was shifting and ways of securing knowledge about the natural world was shifting during this period and seventeenth-century thinkers were aware of change. While Shapin’s work refers to key figures in seventeenth-century natural philosophy, it nevertheless addresses a context significant in understanding the prominence of nature in *Paradise Lost* and nature’s relevancy to the poem’s theodicy.

Shapin demonstrates that during this period, right interpretation of and “direct engagement” with the “divinely authored” “Book of Nature” was considered a justified and worthy pursuit by these cutting edge seventeenth-century thinkers (78). In terms of justifying the ways of God to men, understanding nature could be just as significant as scripture:

But if the parallel Book of Nature could be read aright – with the discipline of proper method – then the natural philosopher could contribute as much as the theologian, if not more, in establishing religious truth and in ensuring right belief. (Shapin 138)

Seventeenth-century thinkers explored natural philosophy with a self-awareness of their endeavors as new. Reading the Book of Nature served as a means of better understanding God through his other book. The epic voice of *Paradise Lost* clearly expresses a sense of newness of endeavor in order to achieve a better understanding of God:

...I thence
Invoke thy aid to my adventurous Song,
...while it pursues
Things unattempted yet in Prose or Rhime...
I may assert Eternal Providence,
And justify the wayes of God to men. (1. 12-26)

The poem's emphasis upon nature reflects the artist's endeavor to read God's other book, the Book of Nature.

Madsen's interpretation of nature in Milton's epic is "that the natural philosophy of *Paradise Lost* [is], for the most part, traditional and orthodox, or at least not heretical [...]" (234). However, the words "traditional" and "orthodox" seem questionable regarding the concept of natural philosophy in seventeenth-century England. The epic voice of the poem clearly states the intention to attempt what has not yet been attempted and does so at a moment in history when great thinkers were self-aware of their own new thought.

Milton explores nature in all of its many facets and uses nature as a fundamental aspect of his free will defense. His uses of the word reflect the efforts of his contemporaries to reexamine the 'nature of things' and reflect engagement in

seventeenth-century conceptualization on the natural world. But readings such as Madsen's ignore the issue of gender and its place in the scheme of nature. The greatest challenge to interpretations such as Madsen's is that it leaves the impression that Eve's association with Nature in the epic is little more than a gender convention; however, her relationship to Nature holds far richer connotations than mere convention. Karen Edwards writes, "At a moment in the seventeenth century when the very concept of the natural was being turned upside down, Milton represents Eve's experience as being fully involved in the natural world" (16). Eve's relationship to the natural world provides a connection to human nature through the use of nature in the epic.

Through *nature*, *Paradise Lost* affirms God's good creation, of which Eve is an integral part. In fact, Eve is so integral that within the poem a cohesive natural philosophy of the Garden is only achieved between the pair, both Adam and Eve. Adam understands the natures of members of the animal kingdom; Eve understands the natures of members of the plant kingdom. The poem's images purposefully contrast Adam and Eve with Satan as natural philosophers.

When Satan first enters the Garden, the epic voice informs the reader that he "sat devising Death" (4.197). Satan seeks to pervert and poorly use nature:

So little knows
Any, but God alone, to value right
The good before him, but perverts best things
To worst abuse, or to thir meanest use. (4.201-4)

The epic voice notes that the animals play harmoniously around Adam and Eve:

"Sporting the Lion rampd, and in his paw/Dandl'd the Kid..." (4. 343-44). Satan moves

closer to Adam and Eve through the animals, and his corrupting influence changes their natures:

...about them round
A Lion now he stalkes with fierie glare,
Then as a Tyger, who by chance hath spi'd
In some Purlieu two gentle Fawns at play,
Strait couches close, then rising changes oft
His couchant watch, as one who chose his ground
Whence rushing he might surest seize them both
Grip't in each paw...(4.401-8)

In a note, Roy Flannagan explains: "All of the animals whose shape he [Satan] assumes become more fierce than they had been in this 'peaceable kingdom.' Each becomes a hunter: instead of dandling a kid, the lion 'stalkes with fierie glare'" (Riverside 454). Satan is portrayed as a disruptive and corruptive influence upon not only nature as a whole, but also the inherent natures of the animals.

In contrast, Adam and Eve are portrayed as almost exemplary natural philosophers, excepting, of course, the Fall. Their understanding of natural philosophy is such that they excel to the point of naming the natural organisms around them. In Adam's conversation with Raphael, the reader learns from the angel that Adam named the animals: "And thou thir Natures know'st, and gav'st the Names" (7.493). After the Fall as Eve laments leaving her plants, the reader learns that she understood their natures well enough to name them:

O flours,

That never will in other Climate grow,
My early visitation, and my last
At Eev'n, which I bred up with tender hand
From the first op'ning bud, and gave ye Names...(11.273-77)

Lewalski points out that the plants are a lesser order of creation than the animals which Adam names; nevertheless, Eve practices a prestigious area of natural philosophy. In her area, she is portrayed as expert. When Satan approaches Eve alone in the garden, he walks "Among thick-wov'n Arborets and Flours/Imbordered on each Bank, the hand of *Eve*" (9.437-38). The poem suggests that her knowledge of her given area, plants, even exceeds Adam's understanding of them. When Adam requests that Eve bring "what thy stores contain" for their celestial guest, she responds:

small store will serve, where store,
All seasons, ripe for use hangs on the stalk;
Save what by frugal storing firmness gains
To nourish, and superfluous moist consumes. (5.314, 322-25)

Eve leaves and contemplates:

What choice to chuse for delicacie best,
What order, so contriv'd as not to mix
Tastes, not well joynd, inelegant, but bring
Taste after taste upheld with kindest change,
Bestirs her then, and from each tender stalk
Whatever Earth all-bearing Mother yields...(5.333-38)

Again, Eve's use of nature contrasts with Satan's. While he and his crew "Rifl'd the bowels of thir mother Earth," Eve searches for "Whatever Earth all-bearing Mother yields" (1.687, 5.338). Satan forces nature; Adam and Eve work with nature. As a pair, they are represented as effective natural philosophers in the Garden. Eve is shown to have even greater knowledge of her given area than Adam.

The poem illustrates all nature as a part of God's good creation; however, because of the gift of free will, nature is mutable. The poem reminds the reader that Satan first disobeys God and then becomes a corrupting influence that penetrates nature. The poem demonstrates Adam and Eve to be effective natural philosophers in the Garden as a pair. Defining nature in such a way is essential to the poem's theodicy. Nature must be shown to be created good in order for God to have been provident; however, within the poem, nature extends to encompass Eve. For God to have been provident, Eve must be sufficient to stand and must also be a part of God's good creation. The poem illustrates this point by developing parallels between nature and Eve. These parallels lack the base connotations typical of the era and indicate that *Paradise Lost* takes a step forward in imaging the first woman.

CHAPTER III
THE BOOK OF NATURE; THE BOOK OF EVE

Just as *Paradise Lost* demonstrates nature to be created good by God, the poem also demonstrates Eve as part of God's good creation. Diane McColley explains the need for redeeming nature and Eve: "In current usage, the word *dualism* may mean a belief that God created things visible and invisible; or that good and evil have different and perhaps equal eternal sources [...] Milton was a monist" (9). In comparing the poem to other retellings of the creation story, McColley argues for a regenerative reading: "From this point of view, instead of being tainted by previous gardens and previous women, this Garden and this Eve may be seen as an artist's act of redeeming nature and womanhood from the dualistic distortions his predecessors purvey" (14). In order to accomplish the theodicy of the poem, Milton must demonstrate one source for creation and show that creation to be good. If Eve is a trap for Adam, then the creator is unfair, unjustified. Readings that attribute Eve's fall to an insufficient Eve undermine the poem's theodicy. Of the separation scene, McColley presents the following argument:

If the separation is predestined or haphazard, or if it results from original human weakness or progressive prelapsarian depravity, God has not been provident. If Eve is not sufficient, with Adam's counsel, to stand without

Adam's physical presence, her union with "God in him" is defective, her faculties are flawed, and her will is not free. (147)

The question of how to read Eve in *Paradise Lost* is a question directly "intangled" with the theodicy of the poem. The hierarchy in the poem supports contemporary misogynist arguments on the poem, yet in comparison to seventeenth-century perspectives on women, *Paradise Lost* reflects an Eve intellectually competent and strong. Reading Eve in the poem reflects a significant aspect of reading God's other great book, the Book of Nature, in order to achieve a better understanding of God.

Milton, himself, draws attention to the art of reading the poem by stating that he attempts something new. Criticism has picked up on the significance of the reader within the poem, perhaps most notably through Stanley Fish's *Surprised by Sin*. However, the art of reading the poem also connects to the seventeenth-century metaphor for natural philosophy of reading the book of nature, which in turn connects to reading Eve in the poem. Diane McColley observes a pattern of response in the poem:

The scene in which Eve is tempted to prefer her self to Adam is a textual remedy for a narcissistic reading of the poem. It takes the reader with Eve through a pattern of response that is a mimetic model, both for the art of marriage and for the art of reading. (75)

The connection of Eve and nature is essential to reading the poem. Eve provides a pivot point between two types of reading in the poem. McColley argues that "Just as Eve's choice provides a model for a regenerate reading of the poem, Satan's survey of the Garden, which precedes and prepares for it, provides an image of a perverse reading" (76). The fallen reader finds a challenge in reading Eve in the poem; the imagery links

Eve and nature as part of God's good and provident creation, capable of change through disobedience to God's will. The epic reminds the reader that the first disobedient will is that of Satan, not Eve. The poem shows Satan entering nature with Sin and Death following in order to demonstrate the corruptive effect of Satan's first sin and also to separate Eve from Sin, thus redeeming Eve from misogynistic readings which suggest that God created an unfit partner. Reading Eve as the source of sin is a perverse reading of God's good creation.

McColley is not the only scholar to detect in Milton a rescuing or redemption of Eve. Anne Ferry notes of Adam's speech to Raphael that it explains how he feels about Eve, in book eight, lines 596-611, that "Adam's speech is therefore the culmination of Milton's efforts to lift Eve's unfallen nature out of the place assigned to it in the Old and New Testaments" (124). In addition, she finds that the language of the passage intersects with another line of seventeenth-century discourse, that of Milton's divorce tracts:

Adams reply is a lesson in human marriage, which closely resembles language used by Milton in the divorce tracts to praise the "sweet and mild familiarity of love," the "fit union of their souls" between man and wife. What he wants the Angel to understand is that his marriage is a "Union of Mind, or in us both one Soule," a "harmonious" conversation between worthily matched rational beings. (124)

Through his writing, John Milton addresses many of the debates of his day. His works address political issues such as censorship and fit government, religious issues and topics such as divorce that placed him outside of the seventeen-century status quo such as divorce. Born in 1608 and living until 1674, his life spans almost three fourths of the

seventeenth century, a century of major changes and shifts in man's understanding of the world. Of *Paradise Lost*, Joseph H. Summers explains that "the theme of the 'two great Sexes' is central to the entire poem" (23). The challenge before the seventeenth-century poet is to illustrate the "great" of the other sex, woman.

Anthony Fletcher explores shifts in thought regarding gender in his book titled *Gender, Sex and Subordination in England 1500-1800*. According to his text, in the early modern period of England, women are thought to be inside out versions of men following the model of Aristotle. Gender theory also included the humoral model:

With the precise boundary between the heat which made a man a man and the cold which predominated to make woman a woman difficult to draw, gender in fact seemed dangerously fluid and indeterminate. Yet sexual temperature was the only way people could look at it. After all, the humoral system explained satisfactorily enough why at some point male ended and female began [...]. (33)

He traces a major change in ideas of gender difference: "Anatomical parallelism was replaced, from around 1600, with a physiology that took its stand on specific sexual functions" (36). The beginning of the seventeenth century marks a shift in the very idea of the nature of woman. Ideas were in flux and would continue to be deliberated and guessed at. Fletcher explains that "[t]he year 1660 marks the beginning of a massive backlash against change which had lasting political, religious and social connotations" (283). *Paradise Lost* challenges views of women as imperfect versions of males and shows Eve as created perfect in her own right. At a period in time when men could joke "that women had no souls, but their shoe soles" (qtd in Thomas 43), Milton portrays a

sufficient and intellectually engaged Eve created as the appropriate companion for Adam. Milton's poem engages not only seventeenth-century natural philosophy, but also seventeenth-century gender. Using Eve, the poem corrects the mis-reading of woman that allows man to (just like Adam attempts) place all blame for the Fall on woman (Eve). The poem affirms individual responsibility and the ensuing consequences through Satan, Eve, and Adam. In order to accomplish this task, Eve must be rewritten to illustrate that she is created "noble, erect" and good.

Eve is key to understanding the poem's theodicy. In Diane McColley's *Milton's Eve*, the author addresses readings of Eve that fall into the traditional pattern of finding Eve flawed, weak, and/or vain, and she demonstrates how these views implicate Eve's creator, God, which is something that does not support the theodicy in Milton's poem. McColley outlines what she refers to as "certain habits of mind and articles of faith expressed alike in Milton's theology and in Renaissance poetics," which include the following:

First, God creates nothing that is not good. Second, every rational creature has freedom to become either better or worse; everything in nature can be either well used or abused; and evil is not the opposite but the perversion of good. Thus, the passions and pleasures that dualists who condemn the flesh would banish become, when "rightly temper'd," "the very ingredients of vertu"; and right tempering requires right use of "all the faculties of the mind." Third, everything lost with Paradise has been by "one greater Man" restored and, through the reciprocal action of divine

grace and human effort, and through purgative woe, can be regained. (16-17)

McColley demonstrates that Eve in this poem differs from other Eves and shows that the poem corrects the “dualism” of reading Eve as the bad or evil half of humankind instead of “meet help” (3). Eve must be created good and sufficient to stand for God to be justified in the poem. If God sentences Adam for falling due to an evil Eve, then he has tricked Adam. If God sentences the couple due to an incompetent Eve, then he has failed to provide for them and has acted unfairly. In *Paradise Lost*, Eve is characterized in such a way that the theodicy of the poem withstands scrutiny. The poem expresses connections between nature and Eve, connections significant in revealing the providence of their Creator. Milton’s poem reflects that reading the book of nature includes reading Eve as part of God’s good creation. Both nature and Eve are linked together in imagery of the earth and abundance, fertility, and the womb and renewal.

In *Paradise Lost* Milton’s poetic language creates a parallel between Eve and Nature. Following the language pattern develops a connection between Eve and Nature and evolves into a connection between Eve and human nature. The description of Adam and Eve in the garden begins with their similarities. They both walk upright, are naked, and reflect the work of their Divine Creator. The description then shifts into their differences. The most significant difference is in Adam being for God only and Eve for God in Adam. Another significant difference in their description is their hair. Where their differences begin, Eve’s character emerges as do her parallels to Nature:

...though both

Not equal, as thir sex not equal seemd;

For contemplation hee and valour formd,
 For softness shee and sweet attractive Grace,
 Hee for God only, shee for God in him;
 His fair large Front and Eye sublime declar'd
 Absolute rule; and Hyacinthin Locks
 Round from his parted forelock manly hung
 Clustering, but not beneath his shoulders broad:
 Shee as a vail down to the slender waste
 Her unadorned golden tresses wore
 Disshevel'd, but in wanton ringlets wav'd
 As the Vine curls her tendrils, which impli'd
 Subjection, but require'd with gentle sway,
 And by her yielded, by him best receivd,
 Yielded with coy submission, modest pride,
 And sweet reluctant amorous delay. (4.288-311)

Eve's hair is compared in a simile to the vine. The vine and the wanton ringlets initiate an association in Eve's relationship to Adam as subjected but not by force and also initiate a parallel between Eve and Nature. The images occur again in reference to Nature; "...or they led the Vine/To wed her Elm; she spous'd about him twines/Her marriageable arms" (5.215-7). Eve's hair is like the vine implying her reliance upon Adam in the same way that the vine of Nature relies upon the Elm. Eve's ringlets lack the sense of wanton as lewd or unchaste; she stands innocent in a God-created ideal state (OED 2). Her ringlets and the vine express their wanton qualities in the sense that they

grow luxuriantly and in abundance (OED 7). The sense of wanton applied to Eve through her parallels with nature is characterized in a passage on nature: “A Wilderness of sweets; for Nature here/ Wantond as in her prime, and played at will/ Her Virgin Fancies, pouring forth more sweet,/ Wilde above Rule or Art; enormous bliss” (5.294-97). Eve and Nature are described in the same terms developing their parallels in spite of obvious differences between the two. Both Nature and Eve have wanton elements. The vine of nature needs or is wanton for the elm, and Eve needs Adam. Both the vine and Eve’s curls are luxuriant in growth. The poetic language links the two together, particularly in the sense of abundance, and a pattern of relationship develops. Milton takes a word with traditional derogatory connotations regarding women and places it before the fallen reader and draws attention to more positive meanings of the word. Just in case the reader fails to detect the difference, the poet uses the word in a more negative context with Satan: “So varied hee, and of his tortuous Traine/ Curld many a wanton wreath in sight of *Eve*,/ To lure her Eye” (9.516-18). Satan’s “wanton wreath” functions as an aspect of his temptation; he has just stood before Eve’s goodness and beauty momentarily paralyzed, yet his wanton or uncontrollable hatred overcome his “Stupidly good” moment (9.465). The use of wanton with Satan’s temptation reminds the reader of the lascivious sense of the word and contrasts with the previous, innocent uses of wanton.

An additional negative contrast emerges from the idea of Eve yielding, “And by her yielded, by him best receivd,/ Yielded with coy submission...” (4.309-10). Nature or mother earth is described as yielding to Eve, “Whatever Earth all-bearing Mother yields” (5.338). When properly understood or “require’d with gentle sway,” nature and Eve yield, but Satan ill-uses both (4.308). He and his crew “Rifl’d the bowels of thir mother

Earth,” which implies a forced and tortuous extraction (1.687). He uses false evidence to deceive Eve at the temptation in order to force his desired results.

Seemingly dissimilar, Eve is one woman while Nature is a composite of all living things or life; yet as the connection unfolds, they are described in very similar terms. Eve and Nature are drawn even closer together in the passages regarding fertility; “the fairest of her Daughters Eve” (4.324), “To first of women Eve” (4.409), “Mother of human Race” (4.475), “our general Mother” (4.492) all describe Eve. Nature is described as fertile and mother; “...where Nature multiplies/Her fertil growth” (5.318-9), “Whatever Earth all-bearing Mother yields” (5.338). Again, in spite of seeming differences, the language associates the two in the imagery of the maternal, furthering the pattern. Both Eve and earth are linked in life giving properties: “And Fruit Tree yielding Fruit after her kind:/Whose Seed is in her self upon the Earth” (7.311-2). In his footnote, Roy Flanagan acknowledges the possibility of a relationship to Eve: “Notice that Milton changes the sex of the fruit tree, perhaps following the gender of the Latin word for tree, arbor, or perhaps indicating feminine nature because the tree is pictured like Eve as a maternal source of a ‘Seed’” (Milton, 547). Eve is clearly linked to Nature in the epic; in these lines she is linked as something greater than a woman. She is a source of life.

Later in the epic, Adam, recovered, identifies Eve as mother of all:

Whence Haile to thee,
Eve rightly call’d, Mother of all Mankind,
Mother of all things living, since by thee
Man is to live, and all things live for Man. (11.158-61)

Eve is identified as a source of life, thus strengthening the relationship between her and nature. Scholars have noted aspects of Eve's connections with fertility. McColley points out classical associations of Eve with fertility: "Most of the goddesses to whom Milton compares unfallen Eve are, in their innocent aspects, patronesses of natural fertility" (66). However, even the connection between fallen Eve and fertility reflects the positive; through Eve man will live.

Another aspect of the fertility language is the language linking Eve and Nature through the image of a womb: "The Earth obey'd, and strait/Op'ning her fertil Woomb teem'd at a Birth/Innumeros living Creatures [...]" (7.453-5). Eve literally has a womb:

Haile Mother of Mankind, whose fruitful Womb
Shall fill the World more numerous with thy Sons
Then with these various fruits the Trees of God
Have heap'd this Table. (5.388-91)

This comparison directly links Eve's fertility with the fertility of Nature's fruits. Nature does not literally have a womb; the line "eldest birth/Of Natures Womb" (5.180-1) refers to a figurative womb, making the metaphor poetically effective. The earth is referred to as coming from a womb: "The Earth was form'd, but in the Womb as yet/Of Waters, Embryon immature involv'd" (7.276-7). A figurative womb connects Eve with Nature. This comparison works both ways. In the lines, "the mounted Sun/Shot down direct his fervid Raies to warme/Earths inmost womb" (5.300-2), earth's womb is warmed by the Sun's rays. This image is reminiscent of Medieval depictions of the Immaculate Conception, showing rays descending from Heaven upon Mary. Not only has Eve been described in terms from Nature, but now Nature is described in terms very similar to an

iconic female image. The image of Mary is associated with Eve in the line, “blest Marie, second Eve” (5.387). In the above passage on Eve, the “Haile” brings to mind, “Hail Mary, full of Grace.” The image created by the sun’s rays upon Nature’s womb and the language linking Eve and Mary further the poetic pattern between Eve and Nature.

McColley notes that the textual tradition of linking Mary and Eve served the purpose of contrasting the two; however, “by comparing *unfallen* Eve with Mary, Milton focuses attention on Eve’s virtues” (73). By linking Eve with Mary in a positive way, the poem emphasizes Eve’s role in humanity’s redemption.

Through imagery of abundance, fertility, and the womb, the poem develops a connection between Eve and Nature. Both she and Nature are connected in imagery to Mary, the vessel through which redemption will enter the world. As the “Mother of Mankind” she has a direct bearing on the possibility of redemption through her womb. The connection between her and Nature becomes an integral part of Milton’s theodicy and the free will defense. The natural philosophy of the poem demonstrates nature to have been created good by God; the poem represents Eve as part of God’s good creation. Seventeenth-century views diminishing Eve as flawed or as temptress impugn God. The poem reveals Eve to be in partnership with Adam as natural philosophers in the Garden. In addition, the poem repeatedly conveys the renewal capacity within Eve. The images of abundance, fertility, and the womb connecting Eve and Nature are positive images of a regenerative quality, and these images are an integral aspect of Eve’s association with human nature in the poem. In an inversion of the negative reading of these images, the carnivalesque reveals their nature to in fact be positive.

CHAPTER IV

EVE AND HUMAN NATURE

Milton's poem uses nature to reinforce the theodicy of the poem and in a very similar way, uses human nature to reinforce the theodicy. Fletcher describes the sources for early modern thought on "femaleness:"

In Greek theories of knowledge femaleness was always associated symbolically with what reason was supposed to have left behind, above all with nature. The Church Fathers explained and elaborated upon a creation story which began with the premise of woman's inferiority. For Augustine, woman had tempted man into the first disastrous act of the abandonment of the will and was forever thereafter identified with subjection of mind to body. Her natural subordination to him was a matter of rational control. For Aquinas woman's meaning was bound up with reproduction and this fact excluded her from a role in the higher pursuits of the mind. (68)

These sources leave an inheritance for the early modern period that associates woman with nature in a negative sense and limits woman's thinking ability because of her reproductive ability. Thus, in the early modern period, women were often associated with brute creation. Thomas explains that various groups of humans (i.e. infants and

young children) were considered less than human in the early modern period: “Women were also near the animal state” (43). As a consequence, **man** more typically represents **human** for this era, and **man** is distinguished by his thinking ability. The seventeenth-century sources that Fletcher and Thomas sift through reflect a tendency to view woman as something subhuman, a lack of male recognition for female as part of God’s good creation. *Paradise Lost* rejects this reading of the book of nature and corrects the reading of Eve in such a way that reinforces the poem’s theodicy. Eve’s abilities in the Garden of *Paradise Lost* purposefully reflect human intelligence, a necessary quality of her sufficiency. One of her most significant acts, that of naming the plants, reflects her ability to understand innate natures. Regarding this act, John Leonard observes the following:

The surprising fact is that Eve should give names at all. This, in the seventeenth century, was an extraordinary concession to her. [...] In naming the flowers Eve shares in Adam’s understanding of and lordship over Creation. (47)

The intellect attributed to Eve in Milton’s epic raises her above brute creation and defines her as human in nature.

In an inversion of typical seventeenth-century interpretation though, Eve, who should be represented as closer to brute in nature, represents human nature in the poem. Her representation as such supports the theodicy of the poem. This inversion is accomplished in the manifestations of the carnivalesque in the poem, in part through images reflective of “the material bodily principle” and in part through parodic contrasts between Satan, Adam and Eve.

Mikhail Bakhtin explains how the carnivalesque expression developed in *Rabelais and His World*. He identifies a special type of expression that developed against the formal backdrop and hierarchy of the official feasts of the Middle Ages. He refers to this “special idiom of forms and symbols” as the “carnival idiom” which he associates with “change and renewal.” Carnival celebrates inversion:

As opposed to the official feast, one might say that carnival celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order...It [the official feast] was a consecration of inequality. On the contrary, all were considered equal during carnival. (Bakhtin 45)

Bakhtin finds the carnival expression positive: “The utopian ideal and the realistic merged in this carnival experience” (46). The positive nature of this expression is intertwined with its ability to change and renew: “All the symbols of the carnival idiom are filled with this pathos of change and renewal ... We find here a characteristic logic, the peculiar logic of the ‘inside out’ ..., of the ‘turnabout,’ of a continual shifting from top to bottom, from front to rear, of numerous parodies and travesties...” (Bakhtin 46). The parody derived from carnival differs from modern parody because the parody of carnival is positive and allows something new to come about. According to Bakhtin, the “carnival forms and symbols” of Rabelais (and of the other writers of the Renaissance) constitute a “system of images” which he refers to as “the material bodily principle:”

It [the bodily element] is presented not in a private, egotistic form, severed from the other spheres of life, but as something universal, representing all the people...The leading themes of these images of bodily life are fertility, growth, and a brimming-over abundance. Manifestations of this life refer

not to the isolated biological individual, not to the private, egotistic
“economic man,” but to the collective ancestral body of all the people.

(46-47)

Bakhtin identifies the “aesthetic concept” of these images as “grotesque realism:”

The essential principle of grotesque realism is degradation, that is, the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body in their indissoluble unity...Not only parody in its narrow sense but all the other forms of grotesque realism degrade, bring down to earth, turn their subject into flesh [...] Degradation here means coming down to earth, the contact with earth as an element that swallows up and gives birth at the same time. (47)

Bakhtin associates degradation with “the life of the belly and the reproductive organs” (47). He explains that “degradation digs a bodily grave for a new birth; it has not only a destructive, negative aspect, but also a regenerating one” (47). The carnival expression that Bakhtin identifies in the work of Rabelais and other Renaissance writers manifests in *Paradise Lost*. From the carnivalesque inversion of Milton’s Eve, the numerous parodies involving Satan, to the bodily images of Eve connecting her to nature, the principles, aesthetic concept and carnival system fully manifest in the poem and invert the negative tradition surrounding such images.

In an analogous relationship with the carnivalesque, Eve represents human nature in the poem and her representation as such reinforces the poem’s theodicy. Within the carnivalesque, the system of images which typify “the material bodily principle” and which represent the “aesthetic concept” of “grotesque realism” manifests in the poem’s

imagery surrounding Eve. The poem's association of Nature with Eve offers points of comparison between the two including the womb, fertility, and *wanton*. These points have an analogous relationship with elements of the carnivalesque, elements which underlie Eve's representation of human nature.

The poetic imagery identifies Eve's womb as the maternal source:

Haile Mother of Mankind, whose fruitful Womb
Shall fill the World more numerous with thy Sons
Then with these various fruits the Trees of God
Have heap'd this Table. (5.388-91)

This poetic image of Eve provides an example of the positive side of the degradation principle. Eve's womb has a literal material bodily location; however, her particular womb within the Christian tradition possesses a connection with earth, or "the World," as her body will be responsible for populating the earth.

The poetic imagery also identifies Eve's fertility:

Whence Haile to thee,
Eve rightly call'd, Mother of all Mankind,
Mother of all things living, since by thee
Man is to live, and all things live for Man. (11.158-61)

In addition, the initial description of Eve in the garden refers to her "wanton ringlets" (4.298). These images are analogous to elements of Bakhtin's carnivalesque. The carnivalesque aspect of grotesque realism "is the fruitful earth and the womb" (47). Bakhtin identifies the "essential principle of grotesque realism" as "degradation" (47). Degradation "also means to concern oneself with the lower stratum of the body, the life

of the belly and the reproductive organs” (47). He identifies “the leading themes of these images of bodily life [as] fertility, growth, and a brimming-over abundance” (47). The physical description of Eve connects her with the nature imagery through *wanton* in the sense of “Profuse in growth, luxuriant, rank” (*OED* 7). The connection of Eve with *wanton* is positive and reinforces her image as fertile mother. Regeneration and renewal are fundamental qualities of the carnivalesque. Milton’s poem emphasizes Eve’s womb as the earthly source of renewal and a regenerate life.

In addition, the poem uses parody to intensify the positive nature of the bodily imagery of fertile Eve. Consistent with the overall pattern of parody, the poem provides a parodic contrast to Eve’s renewal imagery. On Sin’s birth, John Carey notes the following: “The emergence of Sin from Satan’s head was Milton’s way of dealing with the poem’s (and Christianity’s) most difficult question – how evil originated” (171). McColley refers to Sin’s birth as “the proleptic parody of Eve’s:”

She [Sin] too has sprung from her consort’s “left side op’ning wide”; she is his “perfect image”; and, much as Eve will say to Adam, “My Author and Disposer, what thou bidst / Unargued I obey,” Sin says to Satan, “Thou art my Father, thou my Author, thou / My being gav’st me; whom should I obey / But thou, whom follow?” (84)

McColley then addresses some of the “monstrous opposites” between the two births. Yet there remains another similarity significant to the overall pattern of parody in the poem. Sin asks Satan, “Hast thou forgot me then, and do I seem/Now in thine eye so foul, once deemd so fair” (2.747-48). Her lines provide a parody for Adam’s reaction to Eve after the Fall is complete. After the Fall, Adam refers to Eve as “that bad Woman” because he

no longer recognizes the good in her (10.835). Adam says to Eve, “Out of my sight, thou Serpent, that name best / Befits thee with him leagu’d, thy self as false / And hateful” (10.867-69). John Leonard examines the significance of Eve’s name and finds that “The dignity of Eve’s name and nature are nowhere more celebrated than in *Paradise Lost*” (37). Leonard notes that “The naming [Eve] Genesis places after the Fall, Milton places before it” (38). Significantly, Adam renames Eve as “Serpent,” not because the name fits her best for she is “*Eve* rightly call’d,” but rather because he no longer recognizes the good of her; for Adam, Eve has become equivalent or the sum of her act of sin (11.59). Adam continues to excoriate Eve, “all but a Rib / Crooked by nature, bent, as now appears, / More to the part sinister from me drawn” (10.884-86). Adam no longer reads nature clearly and no longer recognizes the good of God’s creation. Adam suggests not only a flawed Eve, but also a flawed Adam, a suggestion that impugns the pair’s Creator and once again accuses nature. Satan’s lack of recognition for Sin parodies Adam’s lack of recognition for Eve after the Fall and in turn brings the poem back to the engagement of the seventeenth-century reader of the poem.

By personifying Sin and using parody to contrast Sin and Eve, the poem clarifies Eve’s individual act of sin as such. Through the imagery, the poem completely distinguishes the act of sin from the synonymous equating of Eve with Sin. The image of the offspring of Sin and Satan, Death, represents the antithesis of the regenerative earth and body imagery associated with Eve’s womb:

At last this odious offspring whom thou seest
Thine own begotten, breaking violent way
Tore through my entrails, that with fear and pain

Distorted, all my nether shape thus grew
Transform'd: but he my inbredemie
Forth issu'd, brandishing his fatal Dart
Made to destroy: I fled, and cry'd out *Death*;
[...] but he pursu'd (though more, it seems,
Inflam'd with lust then rage) and swifter far,
Mee overtook his mother all dismaid,
And in embraces forcible and foule
Ingendering with me, of that rape begot
These yelling Monsters that with ceaseless cry
Surround me, as thou sawst, hourly conceiv'd
And hourly born, with sorrow infinite
To me, for when they list into the womb
That bred them they return, and howle and gnaw
My Bowels, thir repast; then bursting forth
Afresh with conscious terrours vex me round,
That rest or intermission none I find. (2.781-802)

The imagery of Sin and her offspring centers on consuming and destroying the lower body stratum. The imagery lacks the positive, carnivalesque qualities of renewal and redemption like the imagery surrounding Eve, and instead, this imagery is locked in a stagnant and unproductive cycle. The intensity of the contrast contributes to the “proleptic parody” pattern recognized by McColley.

As Bakhtin reads the “bodily element” found in the carnivalesque, it is “deeply positive,” “representing all the people” (47). He finds in this imagery a unification of the earth and the body: “Manifestations of this life refer not to the isolated biological individual, not to the private, egotistic ‘economic man,’ but to the collective ancestral body of all the people” (47). Eve’s bodily representation in the poem reflects positively upon her regenerative capacity. She is associated with Nature and the earth as a maternal source for life and renewal. Her regenerative capacity represents humanity’s regenerative capacity.

The carnivalesque recurs within the poem and reaffirms Eve’s connection to human nature in the poem. The mutable aspect of nature (and human nature) not only means free to fall, but mutability also means free to repent. Eve’s representation in the poem provides the model for human nature’s renewal.

In developing the association with the nature of humankind, two different reactions to Eve’s appearance come into play through parody. Milton carefully crafts a clever and charming Satan making Eve’s fall for his rhetoric more sympathetic to the reader. Adam has full awareness when he succumbs yet later will attempt to completely shift the blame. Eve is humanity; she is flawed but also the vessel through which redemption will enter the world. The role of Satan is pivotal to interpreting Eve in two ways. First, his clever rhetoric and charismatic character make Eve’s gullibility less condemning. Secondly, his character’s pause at Eve’s beauty contrasts against Adam’s blame of it. Satan does not fall from his purpose because of her beauty, yet Adam claims that he (Adam) does. It is not Eve’s beauty but Adam’s own desire that causes his fall.

Satan (a rebel against God) keeps his desire in check while Adam (knowing and aware of the consequences) gives in to his desire.

In “Resisting Representation: All about Milton’s ‘Eve’” Karen Edwards offers a theoretical study of how desire relates to the representational status of Eve in the poem. Edwards finds Milton’s Eve to be “a site of representational crisis” in the poem (253). However, if the focus on desire in the poem is shifted to contrast the responses of three characters, specifically Satan, Adam, and Eve, then the differences in their responses reveal how parody transforms the traditional interpretations of Eve’s role in the Fall. McColley addresses the challenge facing Milton’s theodicy that is posited by traditional interpretations which suggest that with Eve, God is guilty of “baiting a trap:”

If Milton was to obey his own calling to “assert Eternal Providence,/And justify the wayes of God to men” in sacred song, his crucial task was, in the face of an overwhelmingly antifeminine tradition, to create poetically such an Eve as a just and provident God must be supposed to have created actually. (McColley 3)

Traditional interpretations read Eve as temptress and impugn God as her Creator. Instead, *Paradise Lost* exonerates God and reveals Adam’s share in culpability. Once again, following the larger pattern of the poem, the character of Satan provides a parodic response to Eve’s beauty.

When Satan finds Eve, he is momentarily “stupidly good:” “That space the Evil one abstracted stood/From his own evil, and for the time remaind/Stupidly good, of enmitie disarm’d,/Of guile, of hate, of envie, of revenge [...]” (9.463-6). Satan is stunned by Eve’s appearance and momentarily “stupidly good,” but in contrast to Adam, he never

gives up his purpose or reason and follows his goal to tempt her. Adam, in all of his goodness, is unable to resist what Satan does resist: “[...] he scrupl’d not to eat/Against his better knowledge, not deceav’d,/But fondly overcome with Femal charm” (9.997-99). But Satan stood before the same female charm “stupidly good” and recovered his reason. Adam is created sufficient to stand and has been educated directly from God and Raphael. He chooses to give in to his desire of his own free will. Although Eve’s beauty momentarily alters Satan’s nature making him “stupidly good,” Adam attempts to shirk culpability by attributing his desire to nature. Twice Adam connects his desire to nature. First he does this in contemplating whether or not to eat the fruit, “[...] I feel/The Link of Nature draw me” (9.913-4). Later he connects his desire to nature when he convinces himself to eat: “So forcible within my heart I feel/The Bond of Nature draw me to my owne,/My own in thee, for what thou art is mine [...]” (9.955-7). Adam’s desire for what he sees as his own causes him to eat the fruit, and his lines even more closely associate Eve and Nature. Liebert states that Adam falls “because he is sensitive to the necessity of relationships” (155). The draw of *nature* that he feels is human desire for human companionship, and at this point in creation, Eve, made from flesh, represents humanity for an isolated Adam. Even though she is fallen, unfallen Adam recognizes her as human.

Eve’s fall is much more representative of human nature’s vulnerability in an inferior position. Adam is fully aware when he chooses to eat the fruit. His fall is parallel with Satan’s rebellion in that it is driven by desire. Satan desires autonomy while Adam desires Eve. Satan’s rhetoric lifts Eve’s eyes upward from her place in the hierarchy with promises of greatness.

Not only is the fruit tempting in her hour of hunger, but more importantly, the apparent reasoning in Satan's words offers a temptation. She gazes at the fruit in the tree and also at the possibility of advancing in knowledge and even status. After Satan's temptation performance, the epic voice narrates:

He ended, and his words replete with guile
Into her heart too easie entrance won:
Fixt on the Fruit she gaz'd, which to behold
Might tempt alone, and in her ears the sound
Yet rung of his perswasive words, impregn'd
With Reason, to her seeming, and with Truth;
Mean while the hour of Noon drew on, and wak'd
An eager appetite, rais'd by the smell
So savorie of that Fruit, which with desire,
Inclinable now grown to touch or taste,
Sollicited her longing eye; yet first
Pausing a while, thus to her self she mus'd. (9.733-44)

Eve accepts the serpent's testimony; she desires the fruit not only to satisfy her physical appetite, but also to satisfy her intellectual appetite. Satan's claim that if the fruit allows him to speak, then certainly it will give her godlike knowledge seems plausible to her. She refills Adam's and Raphael's cups at the table while the angel tells Adam that "time may come when men/ With Angels may participate, and [...] perhaps/ Your bodies may at last turn all to Spirit" (5.493-97). She has heard of the possibility of ascension before

Satan's words. Karen Edwards effectively explains how Eve fails once she abandons the methods of the "new science:"

Yet, had she [Eve] sought corroboration of the serpent's claims, refusing to credit his claims until she had such corroboration, she would have exposed Satan as a charlatan. Experimentalism does not conflict with and indeed would have complemented the theological injunction not to eat the fruit.

When she abandons her skeptical and open-minded spirit of inquiry, Eve leaves herself vulnerable to manipulation. (37)

Instead of utilizing her ability as a natural philosopher, Eve submits to her immediate desire. Eve fails to even attempt to read the book of nature and instead, focuses on the possibility of ascending in knowledge to the exclusion of the knowledge that she already possesses.

The contrast between Adam and Eve is deepened in their responses when they answer for their actions, in such a way as to elevate Eve's image over Adam's. When Adam answers to the Son for eating the fruit, he avoids accepting responsibility:

This Woman whom thou mad'st to be my help,
And gav'st me as thy perfect gift, so good,
So fit, so acceptable, so Divine,
That from her hand I could suspect no ill,
And what she did, whatever in it self,
Her doing seem'd to justify the deed;
Shee gave me of the Tree, and I did eate. (10.137-43)

Adam attempts to shift the blame not only upon Eve but also upon the gift, Eve, and therefore indirectly upon the giver of the gift, God. Diane McColley explains Adam's error:

More insidiously, Adam suggests that God is the author of sin – a blasphemy Milton warns against throughout his doctrinal prose. By blaming God for making Eve “so good,” Adam falls into the kind of dualism that attributes evil to good things because they can be misused, an error which Milton combated in both mysticism and puritanism. (27)

Satan, in the epic, resists his “stupidly good” moment before Eve while Adam attempts to excuse himself for what is essentially failing to be better than Satan. But the Son will identify his feeble attempt as such:

Was shee thy God, that her thou didst obey
Before his voice, or was shee made thy guide,
Superior, or but equal, that to her
Thou did'st resigne thy Manhood, and the Place
Wherein God set thee above her made of thee,
And for thee, whose perfection farr excell'd
Hers in all real dignitie [...]. (10.145-51)

Adam's perfection resides in the past, as does Eve's, yet in a carnivalesque inversion upon the traditional story of the Fall, Eve leads the pair to their redemptive and regenerative moments.

In contrast to Adam's response, Eve gives Milton's reader an example of humble repentance:

To whom sad Eve with shame nigh overwhelm'd,
Confessing soon, yet not before her Judge
Bold or loquacious, thus abasht repli'd.

The Serpent me beguil'd and I did eat. (10.159-62)

Eve's manner expresses embarrassment and humility, and her response addresses the events in a simple and direct manner. She could have lamented that Adam allowed her to go alone but does not. She exemplifies a model for fallen humankind demonstrating a repentant and humble attitude.

In a cycle of negativity directed at Eve, yet indirectly faulting God, Adam persists in bemoaning his loss:

O why did God,
Creator wise, that peopl'd highest Heav'n
With Spirits Masculine, create at last
This noveltie on Earth, this fair defect
Of Nature, and not fill the World at once
With Men as Angels without Feminine,
Or find some other way to generate
Mankind? (10.888-95)

Adam continues to not only complain of the consequences of his action but also to question an omnipotent God's creation. He has already been instructed once to "Accuse not Nature, she hath don her part;/Do thou but thine [...]" (8.561-2), but he continues to do so. Adam's attempt to blame nature represents a failure in him to recognize his own

responsibility. The contrast between Adam's and Eve's responses relates back to Eve as representing human nature and a proper model of humble repentance.

In her efforts to console Adam, as Lewalski points out, Eve echoes the sacrifice of the Son in subjecting himself to mortal man:

[...] both have sin'd, but thou
Against God onely, I against God and thee,
And to the place of judgement will return,
There with my cries importune Heaven, that all
The sentence from thy head remov'd may light
On me, sole cause to thee of all this woe,
Mee mee onely just object of his ire. (10.930-36)

Earlier in the epic the son makes the following offer: "Behold mee then, mee for him, life for life/I offer, on mee let thine anger fall;/Account mee man; [...]" (3.236-8).

Similar to the Son's offer to sacrifice himself for mankind, Eve offers to sacrifice herself for Adam and accept all the responsibility for the sin. Lewalski elucidates this significant moment:

Eve's behavior breaks through the syndrome of mutual recriminations into which they were heretofore locked, thus making reconciliation possible. Moreover, in her offer to plead with God to transfer upon her the entire sentence of punishment, she echoes the Son's offer to die for man—an inadequate human type of the divine heroism to be sure, but yet the immediate cause of the "redemption" of Adam from his self-destructive anger and despair. (19)

Unlike the Son, she does not have to follow through on her offer; however, by humbling herself and ending “at his feet” she becomes, as Anne Ferry indicates, the saving “instrument” of Adam for up until this point, he has been despairing, blaming and unable to move forward (129). Eve is elevated in this association. She represents human nature in that repentance is the only appropriate beginning for fallen humanity; she recognizes her error and presents for humanity a humble and repentant human model.

That Milton’s Eve could have such a postlapsarian moment is indicative of how she becomes incorporated into a philosophy of human nature. Her recognition of and reasoned response to Adam’s need for healing places her postlapsarian being firmly within the realm of thinking human. The poem suggests that the first mother is also the first truly repentant human.

The moment that Eve ends “at his feet” marks the climax of the carnivalesque in the poem. Eve’s highest point in the social inversion is also her most humble. At Adam’s feet, prepared to absorb all blame, she achieves through humility and love a connection to the Son in the poem. From this point until the end, her position returns to the traditional image of Eve, yet from the prelapsarian through to the postlapsarian imagery, the reader observes an Eve outside of the tradition.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The poem establishes a natural philosophy that reveals nature as created good by God, yet mutable due to God's gift of free will. The poem extends this natural philosophy into an exploration of the word *nature* and demonstrates a conscious sensitivity to the sense of the word that includes innate natures. In addition, the poem reveals Eve to be a thinking partner with Adam in understanding innate natures, and as a pair, the two work as natural philosophers in the Garden. Through imagery, the poem connects Eve and nature in a positive way, reflecting Eve's role in redeeming humanity. By way of the carnivalesque, the poem connects Eve to human nature, manifesting lower body stratum imagery that links Eve to humanity's regeneration via redemption.

While the poem inverts or, at the very least, upsets the seventeenth-century hierarchy with the prelapsarian imagery of Eve, the carnivalesque inversion cannot be maintained. The inversion of the social order is always temporary in the carnivalesque. The postlapsarian imagery must return to the biblical source; however, before doing so, the poem offers the reader one more regenerative image of Eve, rescuing Adam from an unproductive cycle of blaming. This tension between the carnivalesque inversion of the prelapsarian imagery and the restoration of the social order with the postlapsarian imagery suggests the validity of the polarity reflected in scholarly debates on Eve.

Finally, one particularly interesting aspect of human nature in the epic is the language of equality. In Milton's epic it is not one but "two great Sexes [that] animate the World" (8.151). When Adam argues for a companion before God, he asks "Among unequals what societie/Can sort, what harmonie or true delight?" (8.383-4). Liebert finds an acknowledgement of the "necessity of relationships" in the epic (155). But it is more than a need of relationships. The need is for a companionship between equals. When Eve debates sharing the fruit, she questions "[...] for inferior who is free?" (9.825). Because Eve represents human nature, she must in Milton's epic question the domination of one human over another.

While Edward Pechter argues that "[...] it is implausible to suppose Milton capable of thinking up feminist answers to feminist questions, or for that matter of being able to ask such questions," it is certainly plausible that Milton may have posited some degree of challenge to the typical thinking of his day (166):

He gave us onely over Beast, Fish, Fowl

Dominion absolute; that right we hold

By his donation; but Man over men

He made not Lord; such title to himself

Reserving, human left from human free. (12.67-71)

When a writer with the vocabulary of Milton selects a word, for example "human," it begs a certain importance, particularly taken in context with (as Lewalski points out) a carefully written Eve. Eve provides the reader a model of humility and repentance for fallen man. She represents human nature and therefore must challenge ideology that allows tyrannical thinking. Milton's writings posit numerous challenges to tyrannical

thinking. This is not necessarily the same thing as challenging hierarchy. The hierarchy of Milton's epic is not a tyrannical imposition of one human over others but instead is imposed by God placing all things into an order. Perhaps part of free will is discerning for oneself the degree of place within the hierarchy.

By developing a connection between Eve and Nature, the reader is prepared to associate Eve with nature as in the nature of mankind. This association is significant because she is created of man. Her nature represents that of mankind, specifically, her vulnerability to temptation. By connecting Eve and Nature within the language, Eve's character becomes more complex. She falls for the temptation and will in turn tempt Adam. But both she and Nature are connected in imagery to Mary, the vessel through which redemption will enter the world. As the "Mother of Mankind" she has a direct bearing on the possibility of redemption through her womb. Like humankind, she is neither necessarily good nor evil, but a product of her choices. The connection between her and Nature becomes an integral part of Milton's theodicy and the free will defense.

As the scholarship has shown, Milton's representation of Eve is far too complex to be reduced into a one-dimensional caricature of all bad or even all good. His Eve opens up debates dealing with aspects of human nature, because she is a complex representation of human nature. There is sufficient evidence in the poem to support that Milton's representation of Eve is positive, at least within the historical context of his society. He clearly wrote her within the hierarchy of his world, but it is only our contemporary views of that hierarchy that induce readings vilifying Milton. When we look at the question of Eve, we look back: Milton's Eve was ahead of her time.

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