"*Eve*, whose fault was only too much love,
Which made her give this present to her dear"
(Aemelia Lanier, *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, 1611)

Discuss Milton's interpretation of the Fall (in *Paradise Lost*) in the light of Lanier's comment.

Could it really be the case that Milton, who has been accused of a number of prejudices, and among these misogyny, presents in his interpretation of the Fall an Eve "whose fault was only too much love"? In one respect, this can be said to be true. Yet it remains that one of the more controversial passages of the Bible with regard to its definition of gender roles, has here been rewritten with a greater emphasis upon the deceit and the conceit of Eve.

Adam shows concern for Eve "lest harm / Befall thee" (on lines 251 and 252) if she is to be separate from him in the garden. It is ironic then that is Eve's love which blinds her to this concern responding to it rather as an affront on line 271, "as one who loves and some unkindness meets". If Eve's words are again to be taken in sincerity, then it is her fault of too much love for God, which leads her to trust in her Father's provision to too great an extent: "Let us not then suspect our happy state / left so imperfect by the Maker wise" (on lines 337 and 338). Eve seeks independence from Adam during this day that she might prove how strong her love for God is. Eve infers from Adam's words a suggestion that "my

firm faith and love / Can by his fraud be shaken or seduced" (on lines 286 and 287) and so is spurred in vehemence of her perceived love for God to demonstrate not only to herself but also in Adam's and in God's eyes the strength of her love and faith in Him.

It is the assumption of Eve's love and trust in a righteous God upon which Satan founds his ultimately fatal argument. He argues, "God therefore cannot hurt ye, and be just; / Not just, not God; not feared then nor obeyed" and Eve's trust in the Lord gives weight to this argument in her mind. The promise of Satan, embodied within the snake, that she will gain a "happier life, Knowledge of good and evil" (on line 297) helps to persuade Eve to eat of the fruit of the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (Genesis 2:17, The Holy Bible, New International Version (International Bible Society, Hodder and Stoughton, 1986) page 5). Thus, it is partly Eve's love for knowledge which leads her into temptation.

Eve claims also to have eaten the fruit for the greater part, out of her love for Adam: "which for thee / Chiefly I sought" (lines 877 and 878). Therefore, it is Eve's over-enthusiasm in her love for Adam which makes her vulnerable to sin. After Eve eats the apple, the second part of the Fall is the Fall of Adam, and again, the strength of Eve's love has unfortunate consequences. Adam falls not because of the strength of reason - he is "not deceived" (line 998), but rather

because of the strength of Eve's love for him. Thus he is "fondly overcome with female charm" in line 999. Indeed, Eve's susceptibility to persuasion by the snake, Satan, can also be attributed at root to an over-abundance of love. In line 644, Eve is described as "our credulous mother". It is perhaps a curse of having too much love for others which prevents Eve from mistrusting the snake's word. However, there is much to suggest that Eve does not demonstrate "too much love", but rather at times possesses a turn of mind more inclined to divisiveness and deceit. In this light, during her first exchange with Adam, we can understand that Eve uses a form of emotional blackmail in order to obtain the independence from Adam which she seeks. The mere suggestion that Eve would be more vulnerable were she to be on her own draws hurt reproach in the tone of "one who loves, and some unkindness meets" (line 271). This is all the more calculated for its measured delivery, "with sweet austere composure" (272) and its concluding reiteration in the suggestion that "Adam, misthought of her to thee so dear" (289). There is a strong suggestion of Eve's eavesdropping upon Adam's conversation with an angel in line 277, "as in a shady nook I stood behind" which raises doubts as to how much she trusts him.

The ambiguity of line 320, "Less àttributed to her faith sincere", allows for a reading which alters the motivation behind Eve's subsequent argument for her being apart from Adam during the day. Although the line suggests an attribution

of the desire to be separate more to herself than previously ascribed, or words spoken less out of attachment to her sincerest and faithful one - Adam; if, "her faith sincere" is to be read as referring to God, then Milton is suggesting that Eve's motivations stem from elsewhere, and perhaps from selfishness. I take line 320 to mean - less to defend her strength of faith in God, but rather to defend her wounded pride; thus imbuing her proceeding argument not with "too much love", but with too much selfishness.

A view of Eve emerges, as someone not subservient to a dominant Adam, not the "suitable helper" (Genesis 2:20, The Holy Bible, NIV, p5) depicted in the Bible, but rather as a portrayal of an intellectual superior to Adam, who confounds him with deceptive rhetoric in order to obtain her own ends. Thus seen in this light, the lines, "Let us not then suspect our happy state / Left so imperfect by the Maker wise" can be seen as calculated and divisive rather than sincere.

Adam finally acquiesces on line 372 with the words, "go; for thy stay, not free, absents thee more". With these words, Milton suggests that were Eve to be kept beside Adam against her will, she would respond badly to such a degree that her unwilling company would be, if not objectionable, then a poor reflection of her true self. If it is that Eve values her own independence over being with her partner, she is far from guilty of "too much love". In broadly Freudian terms,

Eve betrays Adam when faced with the more sexually potent image of Satan's snake. Milton's description of the snake does little to rebut this interpretation on lines 498 to 501. Satan's snake is one, "that towered / fold above fold a surging maze; his head / crested aloft, and carbuncle his eyes; / With burnished neck of verdant gold, erect."

Had Eve's love for God been greater, she would surely have not believed the snake so readily and been so swift to turn against Him as evidenced in her description of "our great Forbidder" (line 815). In comparing this moniker to that used earlier by the snake of "the Threatener" (line 687) we are made aware that Eve has not only accepted the snake's word, but has gone to the extent of adopting the snake's language. Milton's judgement upon her behaviour intrudes in lines 733 and 734 as the voice of the narrator, thus "his words, replete with guile, / Into her heart too easy entrance won". Eve accepts the snake's words "too" easily.

Primarily, Eve is not motivated by love. It is only after Eve eats the fruit that Milton tells us, in line 790, that "nor was godhead from her thought". This relates back to the snake's persuasions that were Eve to eat the fruit, "ye shall be as gods" (708). This insight into Eve's motivations alters our understanding of her actions, revealing that Eve not only acknowledged, but was also tempted by this line of the snake's persuasion. One of the reasons Eve ate the apple was

because she aspired to be "as gods". Eve later rationalises this selfish ambition. In lines 821 to 822, Eve describes this self-improvement as having been done for Adam's sake, thus: "so to add what wants / In female sex, the more to draw his love". Yet Milton will not stop there, ascribing Eve the further sentiments which cannot disguise a selfishness of ambition. In lines 823 to 825, Eve continues, "And render me more equal, and perhaps, / A thing not undesirable, sometime / Superior: for, inferior, who is free?". Eve is portrayed as a power-hungry woman, wanting first more love - thus more influence over her love, then equality; no sooner than which, her thoughts turn to fantasies of superiority over Adam, in her lust for godhead. It is this drive for self-advancement which prompts Eve to question whether she should even perhaps conceal from Adam the source of her new understanding. Thus in lines 819 and 820, Eve deliberates, "or rather not, / But keep the odds of knowledge in my power". The spirit of these words shows stark contrast to her later justifications to Adam; those in lines 877 and 878 of "growing up to Godhead; which for thee / Chiefly I sought, without thee can despise".

It is a sign of love, that one puts consideration for the needs and wonts of the loved one above and before those of oneself. Eve consistently fails even to consider this approach. Thus it is only after she engorges on the apple "greedily" and "without restraint" (line 791) herself, that her thoughts turn first

to fear of retribution under the "continual watch" of God (line 814), and then to Adam. Eve's first concern is to consider deceit in order to improve Adam's likely response to her actions: "But to Adam in what sort / Shall I appear? Shall I to him make known / As yet my change ..?" (lines 816 to 818). She then turns to the deliberations described above considering how best she can use this to her advantage over Adam. When it is that Eve finally does decide to share the secret of the apple with Adam, she is motivated not by love, but by jealousy. In lines 828 to 830, Eve considers the consequences of her possible death as a result of eating the fruit: "And Adam, wedded to another Eve, / Shall live with her enjoying, I extinct; / A death to think." It is this which confirms her resolve - that, if she should die, "Adam shall share with me in bliss or woe" (831). This would show love, were it not a pronouncement: that if she dies then Adam must die also.

Eve approaches Adam repressing feelings of guilt, not with the countenance of one who has acted out of love, but rather with, "in her face excuse" (line 853). Then to her loved one, Eve lies about her motives for eating the fruit, and uses emotional blackmail by raising the threatening prospect that they may grow apart, were Adam not to partake. On lines 883 and 884, Eve suggests a situation in which she might stop loving Adam: "Lest, thou not tasting, different degree / Disjoin us". Thus, is it little surprise to us that this duplicitous Eve "with

countenance blithe her story told; / But in her cheek distemper flushing glowed" (lines 886 and 887).

It is hardest to perceive "too much love" between Eve and Adam, at the point at which they fall to bickering and then to the bitter recriminations of "mutual accusation" (1187) in lines 1122 to 1124: when, "within / Began to rise, high passions, anger, hate, / Mistrust, suspicion, discord". It is in lines 1158 and 1159 that Eve has the temerity to blame Adam for having allowed her the freedom which she had so slyly procured. Thus she accuses, "Too facile then, thou didst not much gainsay, / Nay, didst permit, approve and fair dismiss".

If Eve did suffer from "too much love", then it is because she loved herself too much. It is this which makes Eve conceited and thus open to the snake's flattery, it is this self-love which makes her self-deceit all the more credible to her, and it is this love of self which prompts her to deceive Adam in order to defend and thereby augment her conceited sense of self.

"Eve whose fault was only too much love, / Which made her give this present to her dear". This is an interesting quotation because it makes two propositions which appear incongruous with Milton's version of the story of 'The Fall of Man' (Genesis 3, The Holy Bible, NIV, p5). The latter proposition is that Eve gave Adam the apple out of her love for him. In Milton's *Paradise Lost*, this is not the case.

The former proposition implies an argument. Thus: Eve's only fault was that she loved too much. This is not a Bad Thing *per se*. Therefore, even if Eve was responsible for the Fall of humankind, she should not be blamed, since her intentions were good. The question of how much responsibility Eve can reasonably be held accountable for in 'The Fall of Man' is not one for this discussion. It is a theological moot point which revolves around to what extent the story is an allegory for free will in which the central paradox (a morality-giving tree - which endows that free will which can only be based on knowledge of good and evil, yet cannot be eaten from without free will) is merely a story-telling device used to explain Original Sin. However, the question of how much responsibility Eve can reasonably be held accountable for in Milton's *Paradise Lost* is also raised by this quotation. Thus, although it is not helpful to question how much Eve is responsible for the Fall in *Paradise Lost*, it is instructive to examine to what degree Milton blames Eve, and in what light he casts her intentions.

We have seen how Milton consistently portrays Eve's behaviour as founded on selfish intentions throughout 'Book 9' of *Paradise Lost*. Before Eve falls, she demonstrates conceit, and if she does consider her husband, it is only after she satisfies her own lust for power. After Eve falls, she appears to usurp the role of

the snake and exhibits the same duplicity and deceitfulness towards Adam, which the snake showed towards her. Eve's intentions are not good intentions. Furthermore, having "too much love" is the least of Eve's faults in *Paradise Lost*. Other faults include rashness - as Eve reaches for the fruit on line 780, Milton casts judgement upon "her rash hand in evil hour". Eve seems ever but slenderly to have known herself, for despite her protestations about "my firmness" (279) in the face of temptation, Milton sees her differently in lines 432 and 433: "herself, though fairest unsupported flower, / from her best prop so far", and Eve ultimately is not able to stand firm in the face of temptation. In 'The Fall of Man' (Genesis 3, The Holy Bible, NIV, p5), Adam and Eve are thrown out of the Garden of Eden because, ""The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live for ever."" (Genesis 3:22). Eve wants too much power. She is not merely as the snake puts it, "venturing higher than my lot" (690), but with her thoughts of "godhead" (790) she seems to aspire to the snake's earlier words in lines 546 and 547: that she is one "who shouldst be seen / a goddess among gods, adored and served". Thus, in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, humankind falls as a result of the actions of a selfish Eve who demonstrates a number of faults and is thus "much failing" (in line 404). If the

question of free will attributes responsibility to Eve, then she is certainly open to blame.

If Lanier's comment is inappropriate when applied to *Paradise Lost*, and takes a stance too sympathetic to the first woman, then is Milton's rewriting of the Biblical story 'The Fall of Man', in 'Book 9' of *Paradise Lost*, too extreme in its portrayal of Eve; in short, is Milton a misogynist? To some extent difficulty arises in inferring from Milton's description of one woman his attitude towards women. This is especially the case when that woman's role has already been broadly defined in the Bible as the first weak link in the chain which led to the fall of man. Milton's starting point is the Bible which describes the creation of Eve out of a rib from the man's side, made because "for Adam no suitable helper was found" (Genesis 2:20, The Holy Bible, NIV, p5) amongst "all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field" (Genesis 2:20). Within these constraints, it would be difficult to rewrite 'The Fall of Man' without appearing sexist.

Indeed, as Adam considers the prospect of also eating the fruit, Milton goes as far as to ascribe to him many of the traits which Eve similarly displayed. We see that Adam makes excuses for himself, falling into the same trap of wilful self-delusion which Eve did about the severity of his action. Thus in lines 928 to 931, Adam espouses: "perhaps the fact / Is not so heinous now, foretasted fruit,

/ ... / Made common and unhallowed ere our taste". Adam questions God's word, in line 938: "Nor can I think that God, Creator wise". Adam also is attracted by the power which he may gain and thus in lines 935 to 937 shares delusions of potential grandeur with Eve: "to attain / Proportional ascent, which cannot be / But to be gods, or angels, demigods".

Nonetheless, in lines 823 to 825, in which Eve considers retaining the secret power for herself, in order to "render me more equal, and perhaps, / A thing not undesirable, sometime / Superior: for, inferior, who is free?", we see what might be considered today as Eve deliberating whether or not to fire the opening salvo in the "sex war". Milton accentuates and politicises the significance of gender in the Fall further, by portraying each of Eve's persuasions over Adam as personal victories for her. In line 975, as Adam reveals how much he loves Eve and thus how much he is prepared to do for her, Eve describes it with seemingly misplaced elation, "This happy trial of thy love". After she delivers her final speech persuading Adam to eat the apple, in lines 990 to 992, Eve, "for joy / Tenderly wept, much won that he his love had so ennobled". This sense that Eve is revelling in her small personal triumphs over Adam is extended as we learn in lines 998 and 999 that Adam was "not deceived, / But fondly overcome with female charm". Thus Eve is using her natural charms and the influence which Adam's love gives her, in order to control him.

In the spartan descriptions of the Bible, there is not room for this degree of cynicism in the character of Eve. The Eve which Milton invents is calculating and much more overtly hungry for power than the Eve of the Bible. Thus the original version of events which Milton embellishes upon (Genesis 3:6, The Holy Bible, NIV, p5) is less emotive: "When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate it". Writing in 1611, it is this version of events to which Lanier's reading is better applied.

Where Milton does make a general comment upon women, at the end of 'Book 9' from lines 1182 to 1186, he writes:

Thus it shall befall
Him who, to worth in women overtrusting,
Lets her will rule; restraint she will not brook,
And, left to herself, if evil thence ensue,
She first his weak indulgence will accuse.

This passage is revealing, regarding how Milton's conclusions from 'The Fall of Man' differ from those of Lanier. Thus whereas Lanier gives Eve a benevolent leniency in her assessment, Milton is not only harsh in his judgement upon Eve, but extends the views which he specifically establishes in his reading of 'The

Fall of Man' to cover womankind in general. Milton suggests that men should not put too much faith in the "worth" (1183) of women. He describes letting women do as they wish as a sign of "weak indulgence" (1186). Milton suggests that once a man has lost his dominance over a woman and thus "Lets her will rule" (1184), she will no longer tolerate restraint. Furthermore Milton suggests that women will always blame the man first if their own efforts fail. This can be summarised as a tone of rhetoric which claims that women are fickle, hypocritical creatures who are not to be trusted and must be dominated.

We may notice too, the ideological roots of this way of thinking on line 998: "Against his better knowledge, not deceived". This description of Adam's decision to eat appears strongly to have been influenced by Timothy. In 1 Timothy 2:11-14 (The Holy Bible, NIV, p1192), it is written: "A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner." We can see that Milton's views strongly mirror Paul's words, concerning the place of women, their role in being submissive to a dominant male and their irredeemable culpability for the fall of man. By modern standards, Milton demonstrates sexism to the point of misogyny in 'Book 9' of *Paradise Lost*.

To conclude, although it can be argued that Eve has "too much love" and it is this causes her own fall, then that of Adam and humankind; in *Paradise Lost*, Milton's portrayal of Eve is such that one begins to doubt, first her sincerity, and subsequently her motives, ultimately making this standpoint untenable. Milton's Eve is a selfish, conceited, deceitful and power-hungry Eve. It is these factors, and not her love for Adam which motivate Eve to eat the apple and then to persuade Adam to do likewise. Only by means of a quibbling rhetorical flourish can Eve be said to love "too much" - for she loves herself too much. I distinguish between responsibility and culpability. Eve cannot be held responsible for her actions in the Garden of Eden without the resolution of a theological paradox. However, Eve is open to blame in *Paradise Lost* because she behaves selfishly and exhibits a number of faults. Milton takes the Biblical story from Genesis 3, 'The Fall of Man', and in rewriting it, turns Eve from an apparently naïve character into a cynical and grotesque one. Moreover, the tone of Milton's closing pronouncement on womankind demonstrates misogyny; it seems more intended to justify the ways of men towards women, than to "justify the ways of God to men" ('Book 1', line 26).

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