Milton's idea of the companionate marriage with limits: an evolution from the Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce to Paradise Lost

Yvonne Davenport-Perkins
Baruch College

Follow this and additional works at: http://academicworks.cuny.edu/bb_etds

Recommended Citation
Davenport-Perkins, Yvonne, "Milton's idea of the companionate marriage with limits: an evolution from the Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce to Paradise Lost" (2012). CUNY Academic Works.
http://academicworks.cuny.edu/bb_etds/13

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Baruch College at CUNY Academic Works. It has been accepted for inclusion in Student Theses by an authorized administrator of CUNY Academic Works. For more information, please contact AcademicWorks@cuny.edu.
Milton’s Idea of the Companionate Marriage with Limits: An Evolution from The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce to Paradise Lost

By Yvonne Davenport-Perkins

Submitted to the Committee on Undergraduate Honors at Baruch College of the City University of New York on April 30, 2012 in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in English with Honors

Professor Allison Deutermann
Faculty Sponsor

Professor Paula Berggren
Departmental Honors Committee

Professor Christina Christoforatou
Departmental Honors Committee
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE OF CONTENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgement .................................................................3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract ..........................................................4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction ..........................................................5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1: Changing Conceptions of Marriage in the Seventeenth-Century.................9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2: The Foundation of the &quot;Perfect&quot; Union - Milton's Interpretations of the First Couple ...........................................18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3: The Companionate Marriage with Limits and the Role of Dialogue.........28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4: The Fall and the Restoration of Grace--The Movement from a Positive to Negative Dialogic Model ...................38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afterword..........................................................50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes ..........................................................53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works Cited ..........................................................55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

In navigating the unknown terrain of the senior honors thesis, I would have been lost if not for the guidance of my mentor professor, Dr. Allison Deutermann, the Virgil to my Dante. Constant draft submissions and revisions, in-depth conversations and brainstorming sessions helped to hone my paper into one of my proudest academic achievements. I will be forever indebted to her for her incredible patience and intelligence as well as a sense of humor that helped me get through some of the most difficult parts of the process.

I would also like to extend my gratitude to Heather Samples, Keri Bertino and Stephen Francoeur, the facilitators of the Senior Honor Thesis Workshop, for being three incredibly invaluable resources.
A B S T R A C T

The goal of this thesis is to examine John Milton’s model of the companionate marriage with limits—first explored in *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* (1643) and then applied more practically in his portrayal of the union between Adam and Eve in *Paradise Lost* (1667). Within this model, he addresses the fair but unequal distribution of responsibilities between man and woman within a marriage, which I argue can be referred to as the Miltonic tradition. This thesis engages scholarship that has debated over many years the way Milton chose to deal with women and their roles, as well as the purpose of marriage itself. This thesis also highlights the importance Milton placed on dialogue within the union—expressing a need for true partnership and honesty—as it is when these two items are missing from the relationship that things go awry.

In Chapter 1, I will examine the effect of John Milton's personal and social life on his written works, which resulted in the noticeable contrast between the Miltonic tradition and the common religious customs of marriage held in the seventeenth-century. In Chapter 2, I will analyze Milton's progressive interpretation of Adam and Eve, which promotes his idea of a companionate marriage, as well as their shared responsibility in the Fall. In Chapter 3, I will introduce the idea of "limits" within Adam and Eve's relationship as well as the poet's use of dialogue to establish a more equitable marital union. In Chapter 4, I will discuss the failure of communication between Adam and Eve that leads to the Fall, but indicate that in its restoration, the first couple achieves grace and redemption. Finally, in the Afterword, I will speculate as to how Milton developed the concept of a companionate marriage as well as its implications on contemporary views of the bond.
INTRODUCTION

*It is not good, saith he, that man should be alone; I will make him a help meet for him [Gen. 2:18]. From which words so plain less cannot be concluded nor is by any learned interpreter than that in God's intention a meet and a happy conversation is thechiefest and the noblest end of marriage.* (Milton, *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* 249).

In the seventeenth century, authors and theologians such as William Gouge, Robert Cleaver and John Dod discussed the meaning of marriage and the ways in which the bond reflected the dominion of God over man, consequently helping to maintain order and humility within society. Church sermons, homilies and conduct books for women focused primarily on male dominance in the household and addressed how one would go about finding a suitable wife. Any mention made of women, especially in reference to a domineering or abusive husband, was met with the advice of bearing out the treatment patiently and trusting all other matters to God: “Even so think you, if thou canst suffer an extreme husband, thou shalt have a great reward therefore…But I exhort the women that they would patiently beare the sharpness of their husbands” (Jewel, Web). Such exhortations pointed to the Bible for authority, often citing I Corinthians 14:34-35:

> Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but *they are commanded to be under obedience*, as also saith the law. / And if they will learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church.¹

---

¹ I Corinthians 14:34-35, *The Bible*, King James Version. Emphasis added. All subsequent citations from The Bible will be taken from the King James Version, cited as *KJV Bible*. 
This edict of obedience and silence colored the prescribed relationship between man and woman, as her power has always been determined in relation to the men in her life.

In 1643 with *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, Milton was one of the most prominent figures to challenge the long-standing interpretation of scripture that held “mutual comfort and help” as an afterthought within the marital union. His idea reorganized the widely discussed aims of marriage—procreation, protection against sin/fornication, and mutual comfort and help—and placed the focus on the happy meeting of like minds: a marriage of love, not of convenience or obligation. He even denoted the presence of mutuality prior to wedlock as an indicator of a more successful and lasting bond. Without this likeness, he argued that marriage could not be considered a true union and thus should be dissolved based on these grounds. Through his writings, we see an interdependent element present in the gender dynamic, giving the power of influence to both parties; however, what is most important to the relationship is the role of conversation and dialogue. The lack of this interdependent element in marriage also confirmed to Milton that while a companionate marriage would benefit both man and woman, so too would a divorce if the individuals were poorly matched. John Halkett, author of *Milton and the Idea of Matrimony*, states that “woman was made for marriage, whereas marriage was made for man. Man is not limited by the same purpose as woman; the institution was created to serve his needs, whereas woman is the means by which his needs are served” (89). Milton felt that the dissolution of a marriage by the man would serve the ends of the woman as well, if mutual help and comfort were kept as the primary goal. Yet divorce was not to be taken lightly. In the *Divorce Tracts*, Milton never alludes to the need for divorce for purely superficial reasons.
Breaking the sacred vows of marriage would only be allowed if the individuals were incompatible and thus would not truly be married in the eyes of God.

In order to fully understand Milton’s views on companionate marriage, we need to consider not only The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce, but also Paradise Lost. In the near quarter century that passed between the publication of the two works, Milton became more experienced with both platonic and romantic relationships as well as with the corrupt nature of government and religion. In just 24 years, political upheavals—the English Civil Wars, the beheading of King Charles I, and Oliver Cromwell's reign as Lord Protector of England—and personal developments—three marriages, the loss of a child and two wives—all worked together to transform his views. In the Doctrine, Milton proposes the broad ideas and concepts that will frame the relationship between Adam and Eve in Paradise Lost. The poet's thoughts on the marital union went on to include the importance of dialogue, an element that had heretofore not been discussed in the Divorce Tracts.

The creation of Adam and Eve, the introduction of Satan as Serpent in the Garden of Eden, and the subsequent fall of Adam and Eve from grace are only covered briefly in the book of Genesis, from the end of Chapter 2 through Chapter 3. The first sin of man, which is such a crucial element of his biblical evolution, is treated somewhat trivially in comparison to the events that take place later in the Bible, such as the story of Noah and the Ark. This brief recounting leaves the details of the tale completely up to the interpretation, or even the imagination, of the reader. Milton’s considerably expanded illustration of the familiar temptation-sin-redemption parable takes his views on marriage and applies them to the story of the first husband and wife. This presents an image of both as truly human with faults and
weaknesses that threaten us all but, through their union, find strength and grace through redemption. Literary critic Barbara Lewalski argues that Milton’s portrayal of marriage in *Paradise Lost* makes two important points: "First, that both Adam and Eve have power within their union and the ability to make individual decisions that in the end still affect each other; and second, that their expressed need for one another gives true meaning to their lives."\(^2\) My thesis engages this scholarship but moves beyond it by isolating the role of the ongoing dialogue and conversation between both parties. Adam and Eve use reason and consider each other's views in their various interactions. It is this quality that makes their relationship unique—that is, it is a quality particular to marriage between a man and a woman, one that is absent from all other relationships in *Paradise Lost*. For example, the discourse between Adam and God—discussed in Book VIII—is one of command followed by obedience. Adam is not given the opportunity to reorder the cosmos or the choice to exclude certain animals from the Garden. He experiences the world as it is and is only allowed an opinion on the creation of a mate because all other animals have a partner. Within Adam and Eve’s relationship, there is no blind acceptance of Adam’s instruction as the final say. In fact, Eve is given influence within the relationship so that she ultimately plays a part in the eventual outcome, for good and evil. This might be interpreted by some as proof that power bestowed upon women can only have adverse effects, but through further reading we see that the fall occurs when both Adam and Eve cease to listen to one another and fail to consider the other’s concerns regarding the separation of work in the Garden over their individual wants and needs.

\(^2\) Lewalski, *Milton on Women – Yet Once More*, 3, hereafter referred to as MOW.
CHAPTER 1: CHANGING CONCEPTIONS OF MARRIAGE IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

“...marriage is a covenant the very being whereof consists not in a forced cohabitation and counterfeit performances of duties but in unfeigned love and peace.”
(Milton, The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce 255-256).

A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF MILTON'S LIFE

One would be hard pressed to say that an author’s life has no bearing on the works that he creates. It is only natural that personal experiences subsequently influence creative expression. Experiences in Milton's life not only helped to form his ideas on marriage in the Doctrine (1643) but also shaped his portrayal of the first marriage in Paradise Lost (1667). In this chapter, I will discuss my theory that through Milton’s life experiences, we can see how his ideas on the companionate marriage progressed and evolved over time, giving the literary world the iconic pairing that we see today in the bond between Adam and Eve. I will also explore the seventeenth-century conventions of marriage and how Milton's ideal differed from the widely held beliefs of the time.

Born into an upper-middle-class family in December of 1608, John Milton had the benefit of a comfortable upbringing; he was educated at the finest institutions and by the best tutors. He was fluent in his native tongue as well as in Latin, Greek, Hebrew and Italian. In his time at St. Paul’s School, Christ’s College and Cambridge, Milton found solace in the relationships he formed with his fellow writers, artists and philosophers. According to the literary critic Stephen Dobranski, “In Milton's familiar letters we glimpse not a reclusive scholar but an author who so enjoyed companionship...For Milton, ‘the chief part of human happiness is
Such a perspective would later serve to frame Milton's reliance on a more equitable union between man and wife.

Coming from an extremely religious Puritan upbringing, it was Milton's desire from a young age to become a member of the clergy, both through the encouragement of his parents and by personal choice (Dobranski, 6). With the publication of The Reason of Church Government in 1642, he revealed that he no longer desired the responsibilities of a clergyman, having become acquainted with the sometime corrupt dealings of the church (Rosenblatt, xvii). It is at this point through his disappointment with the church and the separation from his first wife soon after they wed, also in 1642, that the text of The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce emerged. In Milton’s own account of the marital dispute the public was given a highly controversial yet progressive view of marriage, one that few shared with him in the mid-seventeenth century.  

John Halkett states that the view expressed by Milton was not shaped by a personal grudge against the institution of marriage, but rather that the ideas were “more forcefully present to him because of his own thwarted and unhappy experience”; Halkett adds that “it is inaccurate to read the tracts as largely personal documents” (3). Indeed, Milton's personal encounters affected his beliefs, but the experiences of his friends and family also helped to contribute to his views on marriage and on the ideal relationship between man and wife. Furthermore, marriage was just one of several controversial topics Milton discussed in print.  

According to Diane McColley, Milton redefines marriage in language of thorough mutuality as “meet and happy conversation” with “a fit conversing soul,” conferring the “dignity & blessing” of the “mutual enjoyment” of a love “begot in Paradise by that sociable & helpful aptitude with God implanted between man and woman toward each other.” Each is “the copartner of a sweet and gladsome society,” fed by a “coequal & homogeneal fire” which “cannot live nor subsist, unless it be mutual” (MS, 182-183). Through print Milton engaged in the historical and political changes taking place at this time. In constant turmoil and upheaval, seventeenth-century England was beset with many political difficulties. From 1608 to 1667, Charles I became king and ruled
published treatises on the state of government and religion in England that were banned after publication. He chose controversial subjects, marriage not being the first or the last, and the *Doctrine* is another indication of his willingness to apply the indelible Miltonic stamp to topics of intense seventeenth-century debate.⁵

Milton was married three times over the course of his life: after reconciling with his estranged wife Mary Powell in 1645, the two were wed until her death from childbirth in 1652. He then went on to marry Katherine Woodcock from 1656 until her death, also from childbirth, in 1658. He finally settled down with Elizabeth Minshull from 1662 until his death in 1674 (Teskey, xx-xxv). His familiarity with marriage as well as the loss of two wives prior to its publication, in my opinion, contributed to making *Paradise Lost* a more thoughtful examination of the woman's role in wedlock, for, in his own words “What thing more instituted to the solace and delight of man than marriage?” (*Doctrine*, 243). In addition, in 1652 at the age of 44, Milton became blind and depended on the help of his three daughters—Anne, Mary, and Deborah—and various other nurses and housekeepers to transcribe all the works that came after. Milton spent the remaining 22 years of his life in the dark, depending on the love and support of his wife and children to produce his works, including *Paradise Lost*. After losing his eyesight, companionship was now more important than ever, as Milton could not depend on all his senses, but only those

---

⁵ In Michael Wilding's article, *John Milton: the early works*, the writer muses that, "It would be difficult and indeed absurd to approach Milton's poetry without an awareness of his revolutionary commitment. One of the foremost polemists against the bishops, the monarchy, and the rest of the baggage of the old order...after the Restoration his life was in danger, he was imprisoned and some of the books that he wrote were burned" (221).
left to him. It is important to note that Milton’s last two marriages occurred after this loss, which means that the courtship and union with both women was based more on his interactions with the women than on his attraction to their youth or beauty. Milton himself must have seen how necessary, at that time more than ever, the ‘mutual help and comfort’ of a spouse could be.

THE SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY BACKGROUND AND INTERPRETATION OF MARRIAGE

In order to analyze the prelapsarian relationship between Adam and Eve and the companionate marriage that exists between them in *Paradise Lost*, we must first clarify the conventional seventeenth-century definitions of marriage and the roles distributed to man and wife. By placing the Miltonic tradition in direct contrast with that of the seventeenth-century religious tradition, the reader can see that these progressive ideas remained with the poet over the course of a near quarter of a century, though they changed in the application between *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* and *Paradise Lost*. My discussion of the seventeenth-century religious tradition will include Anglican and Puritan writers, since both had a role in shaping the period’s dominant definitions of marriage.6

In accordance with religious gospel and societal norms, the prescribed seventeenth-century paradigm of marriage was seen as a way to achieve three specific ends: “procreation, a remedy against fornication, and mutual comfort and help” (Davies, 62). The ordering of these

---

6 In reviewing the prescribed roles of marriage according to scripture, important differences emerge amongst the Protestants and Puritans. First, as noted in the Oxford English Dictionary, a Protestant is classified as "A member or adherent of any of the Christian churches or bodies which repudiated the papal authority, and separated or were severed from the Roman communion in the Reformation of the 16th cent," and from which Presbyterianism and Puritanism ultimately developed (*OED,* "Protestant," 2a.). Second, a Puritan is defined as, "A member of a group of English Protestants of the late 16th and 17th centuries, who regarded the reformation of the Church under Elizabeth I as incomplete and sought to remove any remaining elements of church practice (such as ceremonies, church ornaments, the use of musical instruments, and in some cases episcopal authority) which they considered corrupt, idolatrous, or unscriptural" (*OED,* "Puritan," 1a). Thus, Puritanism was viewed as the strictest of the three sects within the Anglican Church.
three aims remained mostly static in their various discourses and even a slight reordering kept “mutual comfort and help” as nothing more than the third and final byproduct of marriage—not a necessity. Church doctrine and homilies penned by the Anglican Church and discussed by Puritan religious writers focused on the precise duties of man and wife, as well as how they might deviate from these fixed ideas. Listed in great detail, these writings conformed to the long-standing model of man as head of the household and woman as subservient member, with little to no rights. John Dod and Richard Cleaver, seventeenth-century Puritan clergymen, delineated the responsibilities to correspond with one another so as to simplify their distribution (Davies, 67):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Husband</th>
<th>Wife</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Get goods</td>
<td>Gather them together and save them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get money and provisions</td>
<td>Do not vainly spend it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be intermeddling</td>
<td>Be solitary and withdrawn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be skilful in talk</td>
<td>Boast of silence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be lord of all</td>
<td>Give account of all</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What better justification for these views than the following passage from Ephesians 5:22-24, where the ideal marriage is articulated by Saint Paul:

Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. / For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. / Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. (KJV Bible)
In addition to the three traditional ends of marriage were the three kinds of love that men would display toward others, listed by Presbyterian Nathaniel Hardy as:

Spiritual Love is that we bear to a woman as she is a Christian…and in this respect another woman may deserve love when a man's own wife doth not…Natural love is to a woman as woman and thus a man may love other women besides his wife, but still he must love his wife before other women; Matrimonial love is of the wife as she is a wife, and this is solely and wholly due from every man to his own wife. (As cited in Halkett, 66)

Here, it is acknowledged that a man may love more than one woman, but that his wife must be held above all others, for in the Bible it says, "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh" (KJV Bible). The clear delineation of the types of love, and to whom they were granted, supports Milton's claim that marriage is the most Godly union between man and woman. Matrimonial love is held as a love above all others because the wife plays such a pivotal role in the life of her husband, and vice versa. The importance of the love between man and woman is further proof of Milton's belief in the power of a healthy and companionate marriage. The conflicting nature of the types of love made the dynamic more muddled and challenging than writers of Milton's time admitted. It was not as simple as apportioning certain roles to man and woman and expecting everything to develop as planned. It is this inconsistency that seems to have led Milton to challenge the ideas of his time and promote a new and more equitable solution for those not experiencing a mutual companionship.
A DEVIATION FROM THE "PLAN": MILTON'S VIEWS ON MARRIAGE

In order to give his argument weight and credibility, Milton also uses scripture to support his ideas on marriage—namely that both individuals should have mutual love and respect for another in order to navigate their lives as partners—and divorce, but to very differing and specific ends. In his own writings, the poet refrains from separating the duties of man and woman into that of head and body (leader and follower). Instead, he cites the Mosaic laws of the Old Testament, specifically in the book of Deuteronomy 24:1-2, that allow for divorce:

When a man hath taken a wife and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favor in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness in her: then let him write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house. / And when she is departed out of his house, she may go and be another man’s wife. (KJV Bible)

Milton interprets Jesus’ contravention of the Mosaic law in the New Testament, in response to the Pharisees’ questioning of divorce, as “administering one excess against another to reduce us to a perfect mean...So here he may be justly thought to have given this rigid sentence against divorce, not to cut off all remedy from a good man...but to lay a bridle upon the bold abuses of those overweening Rabbis.” Even the words of Jesus could not be construed too literally as the school of Shammasi, a sect of the Pharisees, allowed divorce for any cause (Varner, Web).

One of the most concise statements made by Milton encompassing the theories expressed in his doctrine can be found in the following passage:

7 Milton, The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce, pp.274-275, hereafter referred to as Doctrine.
Love in marriage cannot live nor subsist unless it be mutual; and where love cannot be, there can be left of wedlock nothing but the empty husk of an outside matrimony, as undelightful and unpleasing to God as any other kind of hypocrisy (Doctrine, 256).

Here, the poet aims to assume the opinion of God in stating that a marriage maintained on false grounds would only disregard the true purpose of marriage, as God intended. Milton’s opinion in the passage stands in direct contrast to that of the Puritans or Presbyterians. Consider, by contrast, the points made by Puritan minister William Gouge in his sermon entitled Of Domestical Duties: Eight Treatises (1634), when he exclaimed:

The Ends for which marriage was ordained adde much to the honour thereof. They are especially three: 1) That the world might be increased…with a legitimate brood…2) That men might avoid fornication (I Cor. 7:2) and possess their vessels in holinesse and honour and 3) That man and wife might be a mutuall helpe one to another…so for bringing up children; and…for well governing their family (As cited in Halkett, 14).

Milton ignores the weight of importance that Gouge places on procreation and prevention of sin. In his writings, he makes no note of the continuance of the human race, though this is addressed by God to Adam and Eve upon their introduction to the Garden. He also does not concede the idea that marriage would act as a barrier to sin through fornication. There is no “end” higher than love within marriage because “He who affirms…the bed to be the highest of marriage, which is in truth a gross and boorish opinion, how common soever—as far from the countenance of Scripture as from the light of all clean philosophy or civil nature” (Doctrine, 265). Milton also holds mutuality in high regard because it directly affects the rearing of children and continuance
of the church. Without a solid foundation upon which the husband and wife could build, the home and family would be left to deteriorate and eventually poison society at large:

Why should we not think them [children of a second matrimony] more holy than the offspring of a former ill-twisted wedlock, begotten only out of a bestial necessity, without any true love or contentment, or joy to their parents? So that in some sense we may call them the children of wrath and anguish. (*Doctrine*, 258-259)

The relationship between the man and woman was the strongest foundation, and one that should be set before any long-lasting union was formed. This would ensure the survival of the Church and maintain a healthy and strong relationship among the members of the family. With his revolutionary view of the companionate marriage, Milton claimed that with a union based on mutuality:

...the best subsistence of a Christian family, will return home from whence they are now banished; places of prostitution will be less haunted, the neighbor’s bed less attempted, the yoke of prudent and manly discipline will be generally submitted to; sober and well-ordered living will soon spring up in the Commonwealth. (*Doctrine*, 240)

Milton argues that if the Anglican Church would simply reform the laws regarding divorce, the issues plaguing seventeenth-century English society—marriages of convenience, infidelity, prostitution and disease—would all be eradicated without delay.
CHAPTER 2: THE FOUNDATION OF THE "PERFECT" UNION - MILTON'S INTERPRETATIONS OF THE FIRST COUPLE

So hand in hand they passed, the loveliest pair
That ever since in love's embraces met:
Adam the goodliest man of men since born
His sons, the fairest of her daughters Eve.
(Milton, Paradise Lost IV: 321-324)

ADAM, EVE, AND THE LARGER IMPLICATIONS OF MILTON'S PORTRAYAL

In large part, the salvation of Adam and Eve and the strongest evidence of Milton’s plan for the companionate marriage with limits depends on the recuperation of Eve’s character. In this chapter, I will show that Milton's Eve is less gullible, less inherently morally inferior, than is the Eve of traditional seventeenth-century Biblical interpretation. I will also argue for the presence of human frailty in both Adam and Eve, as the combination of their mistakes ultimately lead to the Fall.

As noted in The Oxford Companion to the Bible, there is no direct evidence in Genesis that Eve is more flawed than Adam:

Traditional emphasis on the gullibility of Eve and her tendency toward sin is one possible interpretation of the Genesis narrative; it is not, however, inherent in the text of the narrative itself. Genesis 3 gives no indication why the serpent addressed the woman and even indicates that the man and the woman were together when the serpent spoke. (207)

Milton refrains from blaming Eve's inferiority on a moral flaw and places Eve second to man because she was made from Adam’s rib. This is in direct contrast to “An Homilie on the State of Matrimonie,” a sermon published by the Anglican Church in 1571, which justified the subjection
of woman due to her image as “a weake creature, not indued with like strength and constancie of minde, therefore they be the sooner disquieted, and they be the more prone to all weake affections & dispositions of mind” (Jewel, Web). Milton's placement of mutual help and comfort as the preeminent attribute of marriage—"mutual" implying not only reciprocity but also a level of interdependence and unity—would have Adam and Eve operating closer to equals as opposed to master and subject, the more conventional arrangement.

This does not mean that Adam is not in charge, but that he is in charge for different reasons, and that his power is less absolute. In Milton’s first description of Eve, we see how the poet aims to establish the power dynamic between husband and wife, specifically in his use of the words "subjection," "yielded," "coy," and "pride." There is a sense of compromise that corresponds with Milton's idea of a more equitable union:

She as a veil down to the slender waist
Her unadorned golden tresses wore
Dishevelled but in wanton ringlets waved
As the vine curls her tendrils, which implied
Subjection, but required with gentle sway
And by her yielded, by him best received,
Yielded with coy submission, modest pride,
And sweet reluctant amorous delay. (IV, 304-311)

Through the use of enjambment, the lines flow seamlessly from one to the next, reflecting that Eve is a creature formed of many parts—our first evaluation of her in the poem is a process that must be taken in as it is read. She is not simple and straightforward, but rather tangled or complicated. Her "dishevelled" appearance suggests the need of some outside authority—from Adam and God - but the consent is given only with her admission, making the union more equal
between the two. I interpret her "coy submission" as the iron fist in the velvet glove—yet another indication of the complex nature of Eve's character. The continuous flow of the lines imitates the movements of a snake and is also an allusion to Satan as the serpent and the description of Sin, which comes earlier in Book II. Contemporary Miltonist and writer King-Kok Cheung finds in these lines evidence of Eve’s moral weakness and explains that “the Fall occurs when the Serpent without beckons to a shadowy serpent within, when human desire answers to beastly provocation” (Cheung, 197). In similar fashion, the idea of Eve exhibiting serpentine qualities has also preoccupied artists, as can be seen in two popular frescoes of the 15th and 16th Centuries, one by Masolino da Panicale and the second by Michelangelo, that show Satan as the serpent with the head of a woman and the body of a snake (see Figure 1 and 2 in the Notes section). Constructing the passage in a serpentine way indicates Milton's familiarity with the concept but also confirms his intent to eliminate such a connection between the two. The lines in the description reveal Eve’s innate and imperfect humanity—a quality that she shares with Adam—rather than her possession of a uniquely sinful character.

Further evidence of Milton’s rejection of any easy identification of Eve and of Eve alone with the Serpent can be seen in his treatment of Sin. Milton scholar Diane McColley states that introducing Sin prior to the creation of Eve is a technique employed by the writer to "present to us the perverse parody of an episode before the episode itself, and thus challenges us to make careful distinctions" between the author's model of what a woman should be and the corruption of this state—what she could become if given to indulgence and disobedience.⁸ In the introduction of Sin to Satan, she is described as:

---

⁸ McColley, *Eve’s Dream*, 38, hereafter referred to as *ED*. 
Here, we see a joining of woman’s disobedience and the form through which Satan will corrupt her, a suggestion that seems to propose an inherent flaw in Eve. With Sin as both the daughter of Satan and mother of his progeny, Death, this episode is also the negative inverse of the holy Trinity—the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit—recalling the dichotomous perversion that McColley cites. In addition, as Halkett notes in his thoughts on the ideal marriage, “Sin is the image of Satan, as the Son is the image of the Father; Sin and Satan beget Death, the principle of destruction, as the Father and Son generate the Holy Spirit, the creative principle” (100). Through Satan’s disobedience a hierarchy is formed that leads to the corruption of more than just himself and a creation of the means that will bring about the fall of man.

Within the distortion of the Holy Trinity is also a relationship that is diametrically opposed to the one between Adam and Eve. The most compelling evidence of this is found when Sin exclaims to Satan, “Thou art my father, thou my author, thou / My being gav’st me: whom should I obey / But thee, whom follow?” (II, 864-866). This mirrors Eve’s declaration to Adam in Book IV after being told that the Tree of Knowledge is forbidden, when she replies, "My author and disposer, what thou bidst / Unargued I obey: so God ordains. / God is thy law, thou mine. To know no more / Is woman's happiest knowledge and her praise" (IV, 634-638). Both “women” acknowledge the superiority of their mate and ruler. However, the image of Sin is what Eve could succumb to if fully corrupted by evil. In this respect, I feel that it is Milton's desire to...
acknowledge these weaknesses if only to have Eve appear more human to us. Does she sin? Yes. But so does Adam. And in recognizing this fact Milton allows for the humanity of them both. They sin, but they are also allowed the opportunity to redeem themselves. Halkett continues in the same line of reasoning, insisting that “Sin epitomizes the worst possibilities of ensnarement in womanhood, as she contrasts with the purity which will ultimately conquer her” (100). Just as Eve can deteriorate in form and character to resemble that of Sin, so too can Adam be reduced to an image of Satan if they choose to rebel against the will of God.

**Eve's Dream and the Issue of Human Frailty**

Free will is a quality imbued in the relationship between God and human. Eve's dream is a chance for both her and Adam to encounter evil and decide the best way to deal with the introduction of three powerful elements—ambition, power, and vanity. God is well aware of Satan's presence in the Garden but wishes to give Adam and Eve power to choose. After Satan has witnessed the interaction between the first couple in Book IV, his jealousy and ire are provoked. He resolves to sow the seeds of discord in Eve to bring about the eventual corruption of both. Satan stirs feelings of ambition in Eve that she, in her innocent state, is not able to control or fully comprehend. Fearful of what could come to pass, and confused as to the origin of these once unfamiliar thoughts, she relates her dream to Adam and confesses her concern about the dream's meaning and whether it implies some evil inherent in her. Eve's reaction to Satan's consumption of the forbidden fruit—horror—is what she is expected to feel upon witnessing it, but his appeals to her seeming lack of power and the Tree's ability to give her more than what she has ultimately overwhelm her ability to withstand such temptation. Satan frames his "sin" as one that will honor the Creator because it will give both Adam and her a chance to communicate
on a higher plane, one reserved for gods over men. The introduction of the unknown to Eve and the possibility that she could be closer to God and more in control of her own life is the bait that at last hooks her and makes easy work of Satan's plan. After consuming the fruit, she ascends with Satan and sees the world with new eyes. Of great significance is the fact that the reader does not witness her actual eating of the fruit which may imply that even she could not imagine herself participating in such a sinful act. The break in her recounting of the dream is important because it leaves the sin itself up in the air. It is not yet written in stone, for them, that Eve will sin and bring about the fall of both Adam and her. Being familiar with the story of the Garden of Eden, we as readers are aware that this eventuality cannot be avoided. But Milton leaves this portion of the dialogue in question, implying that Eve may yet still have some power to resist the temptation that is presented in her dream.

Unlike the homilies of the Anglican Church or the popular frescoes of Michelangelo and Masolino, discussed above, in Milton’s poem the woman is not inherently stained with sin. She has been touched by evil but has not yet succumbed to it and this makes all the difference in Milton's recounting of the tale. Adam appropriately tells Eve:

Yet be not sad
Evil into the mind of god or man
May come and go, so unapproved, and leave
No spot or blame behind. Which gives me hope
That what in sleep thou didst abhor to dream
Waking thou never wilt consent to do. (V, 116-121)

Expanding on the original story of Genesis, Milton’s epic gives the reader a frame of reference for Eve's disobedience. We are not presented with a series of events that simply flow from the
creation of the world to the creation of Adam and Eve and the eating of the fruit of the Tree of
Knowledge. Layers of description are included here to give a sense of shared responsibility in the
disobedience and to show how the introduction of evil into a once pure paradise affects both
individuals. The introduction of sin in the Garden shows that even in a prelapsarian state, man
was never free from the possibility of transgression. 9

The argument stands that because Eve was the first of the two to disobey and eat of the
Tree of Knowledge, her flaw and thus her sin were the greater. Upon further observation, one
can see that the failing of both Adam and Eve is an obsession with the latter's beauty. A display
of both Adam and Eve's preoccupation with her beauty can be seen in two specific passages, the
first of which occurs when Eve relates her creation and first impressions to Adam:

I thither went
With unexperienced thought and laid me down
On the green bank to look into the clear
Smooth lake that to me seemed another sky.
As I bent down to look, just opposite
A shape within the wat’ry gleam appeared
Bending to look on me…There I had fixed
Mine eyes till now and pined with vain desire. (IV, 456-466)

It is important to note that Eve does not recognize the image in the water as a reflection of
herself. She believes this to be another person and recoils from Adam initially because she does

9 Diane McColley reminds us that, "The dream that Satan induces in Eve and Eve relates to Adam, often thought as proof of
Eve's weakness and a step in her corruption, shows rather that Eve is uncloistered, not only in the sense of being a free agent in a
perilous world, but even in the sense that neither God, nor Adam, nor her own innocence protects her from the intrusion of evil
into her mind and imagination: she is responsible, with Adam's help, for coping with evil even in her innermost thoughts" (ED, 26).
not know who he is and prefers the figure in the lake to his. This does not make the consequent sin implicit but rather renders her vulnerable to the workings of Satan. When Adam explains his love for Eve to the angel Raphael, he reveals his own similar weakness as well,

Yet when I approach
Her loveliness so absolute she seems
And in herself complete so well to know
Her own that what she wills to do or say
Seems wisest, virtuousest, discreetest, best.
All higher knowledge in her presence falls
Degraded…Authority and Reason on her wait
As one intended first, not after made. (VIII, 546-555)

The passage shows that equal blame must be accounted for in the transgression as one contributes to the other’s. The seeming flaw in Eve is in fact shared by Adam: an overwhelming love of her beauty renders both susceptible to Satan's deceptive maneuvers. These imperfections also show the characters’ true humanity and allow the reader to more closely identify with their plight as well as to acknowledge them as more inherently equal, and thus better suited for a more equal marriage in terms of mutual respect. This approach helps the reader to evaluate Paradise Lost with an unbiased eye, as neither individual is portrayed as having an advantage over the other. It is when they come into contact with their world, its inhabitants, and how they fit into the arrangement, that these “flaws” begin to manifest. The argument that the fall is not due to qualities inherent in one or the other but in both Adam and Eve is again echoed by McColley, who notes that they use these instances of encountering evil

10 John Halkett, in Milton and the Idea of Matrimony, notes “the natures of man and woman being somewhat different, it is possible that Milton means to show that they are exposed to different dangers. The danger is not in itself a fault any more than temptation is a sin” (106).
and overcoming any adverse effects well and that "these scenes present difficulties requiring skill and courage and demonstrate the growth of understanding and the liberty of will to which the regenerate are restored" (ED, 26). For in truth, what being could remain purely good and chaste with the presentation of evil? It is impossible for Adam and Eve to retain their innocence when they encounter a world that has, from its very beginnings, been compromised by the wicked machinations of one bent on revenge.

In reconsidering the creation of Adam and Eve, we are reminded that she was made from Adam's rib as a companion first and a helpmate second. The emergence of their union is marked by an idyllic environment—they reside in a beautiful Garden and each share in the responsibility to maintain their surroundings, but also serve as a comfort and help to each other. Through this analysis, the terms "divine" or "ideal" often come into play when describing their union. It is important to remember that these terms do not imply an absence of challenge, hardship or faults. In revealing God's knowledge of Satan's plans and the eventual dishonesty of Adam and Eve in Book III, Milton proves to us that Adam and Eve are perfectly matched because even God recognizes that they have the power within themselves to rise above any misfortunes that may beset their path. For better or for worse, they are in it together and can return to the grace that was once bestowed upon them. They are perfect in the sense that they both help one another to work their way through their interactions with the world. In God's conversation with the Son in the beginning of Book III, God exclaims to the Son that though man will fall:

Man falls deceived
By th' other first: Man therefore shall find grace,
The other none...
Man shall not quite be lost but saved who will,
Yet not of will in him but grace in me
Freely vouchsafed. (III, 130-132, 173-175)

It is just as hard to submit as it is to rule, and in this admission Eve has as much power as Adam. When Eve is first described to the reader, she is given an air of wildness, with the reference to her "unadorned" and "dishevelled" hair with vine-like tendrils, that needs structure and outside authority, in the form of Adam and ultimately God. However, Eve is just as able to rebel from Adam's rule as she is to follow it, and vice versa. When either individual goes too far in the opposite direction—Eve trusting only to her strength and wisdom and not considering the appeals of Adam, as well as Adam being blinded by his love for Eve and the effect that her beauty has on him—we see a sequence of events that lead to the fall of man but also the road to redemption.
CHAPTER 3: THE COMPANIONATE MARRIAGE WITH LIMITS AND THE ROLE OF DIALOGUE

Hail wed'ded love, mysterious law, true source

Of human offspring, sole propriety

In Paradise, of all things common else!

(Milton, Paradise Lost IV: 750-753)

THE INITIAL MODELS OF POSITIVE DIALOGUE

Within the text of Paradise Lost, Adam and Eve are in constant communication with each other, working through their new environment and carving out their places in the world with respect to each other and to their religion—God, the Son and the angels. In this chapter I argue that Adam and Eve engage in open discussion—for Milton, the key to companionate marriage—and that their union breaks down only when this dialogue fails, as when the two separate in Book IX to complete their daily chores. Their style of open, nearly equal dialogue differs from that of every other pair of speakers in the poem, yet it shares with these other conversations certain limitations: in other words, as speakers, Adam and Eve are not entirely equal. I will also argue that although the first couple possesses their own specific susceptibilities to the cause of the fall—both are distracted by Eve's beauty—they are also each other’s salvation in recovering grace after expulsion from the Garden.

The prelapsarian marriage is Milton’s ideal and the one to which he implies we should all strive to return. We see an example of Adam and Eve’s companionate, conversational marriage working upon their first meeting in Book IV. After Eve's creation they greet each other with plesantries befitting a newly married couple, with Adam addressing Eve as:
Sole partner and sole part of all these joys,
Dearer thyself than all, needs must the Power
That made us and for this ample world
Be infinitely good. (IV, 411-414)

and Eve paying tribute to Adam with:

O thou for whom
And from whom I was formed flesh of thy flesh
And without whom am to no end, my guide
And head, what thou hast said is just and right.
For we to Him indeed all praises owe
And daily thanks. (IV, 440-445)

Keeping in line with what I view to be the Miltonic tradition, Adam and Eve show gratitude first toward each other and then toward their creator. Adam’s repeated use of the word “sole” is also a nod to Eve being a part of his “soul” and the two coming together as one. Though brief, this treatment is innovative and possibly a bit radical for Milton's time, while simultaneously it achieves two ends. First, it exhibits the importance of the relationship to Adam and Eve. Second, it shows how they use their words to honor one another. The poet represents the relationship between Adam and Eve as most important because their interactions reflect, and are also an extension of, their relationship with God—they are grateful, considerate and genuine. Exhibiting these three important qualities confirms the love with which they were formed and the generosity of their creator in recognizing their need for each other.

In Chapter 1, I discussed Milton's affinity for companionship, both platonic and romantic, and argued that for the poet a true marital union is one that meets all the original conditions set
by God and "that next to the relation between each person and God, the relation of husband and wife was the chief source of personal happiness or misery" (*Milton & the Sexes*, 178). Eve displays the woman's deference to the husband in her greeting of Adam, in accordance with the traditional seventeenth-century interpretation of the Bible, but it is essential to note that Adam gives her as much respect and adoration as she does him. There is mutuality between the two that is reflected in their greetings of one another. This is also true in plain rhetorical terms: their lines echo one another. The echoing of adoration and respect further solidifies Milton's claim that through dialogue, man and woman would find a common ground and be able to engage in a more equitable marital union. It also confirms his ideas that though a wife should honor her husband, so should a husband honor his wife, as they are ultimately extensions of each other. Prescribed roles supported by religious conventions of the seventeenth century did not fit in with Milton's ideals of marriage, and in *Paradise Lost* he aims to paint the most comprehensive picture of an open and pure love by juxtaposing it to the affairs, romances and marriages of convenience or money that were prevalent during his time. For example, he writes:

> Here Love his golden shaft employs, here lights  
> His constant lamp and waves his purple wings,  
> Reigns here and revels, not in the bought smile  
> Of harlots, loveless, joyless, unendeared,  
> Casual fruition, nor in court amours,  
> Mix dance or wanton masque or midnight ball  
> Or serenade which the starved lover sings  
> To his proud fair, best quitted with disdain. (IV, 763-770)

---

11 McColley, *Milton & the Sexes*, 177, hereafter referred to as *MS*. 
This description comes after Adam and Eve’s first exchange in Book IV and shows that their love does not have the trappings of the court—there are no conventions to uphold, no masquerades to employ in order to secure a mate. They are, quite simply, a perfect match. There is nothing contrived in their union and Milton goes to great lengths to establish this quality from the very beginning through the exchanges between them.

In Milton's marriage dynamic, Adam and Eve are allowed to explore their new world together using their reason and knowledge to educate each other through open dialogue. No passage could be more telling of the freedom of expression between man and wife, as well as an innocent curiosity of the world, than Eve's exchange with Adam in Book IV as both she and Adam begin to speculate about their surroundings. While extolling the virtues of the Garden at length, Eve makes reference to the stars, asking, "But wherefore all night long shine these? For whom / This glorious sight when sleep hath shut all eyes?" (IV, 657-658). The inclusion of this passage reveals two important facets of Eve's character, and by extension her relationship with Adam. First, she is constantly using her God-given reason to question her surroundings, seeking to determine the origin of all things within her new world. Second, she is free to discuss her puzzlement and assumptions with Adam as they work through the information together. Also working through the information provided and using his reasoning capabilities, Adam responds:

Those have their course to finish round the Earth
By morrow evening and from land to land
In order, though to nations yet unborn,
Minist'ring light prepared they set and rise
Lest total darkness should by night regain
Her old possession. (IV, 661-666)
Eve's curiosity is satisfied by Adam's knowledge and Adam is able to impart information to Eve of which she had no prior understanding. In this way, both Adam and Eve are teacher and student through their dialogues with each other. Adam is a student in his exchanges with Eve because she continuously questions her surroundings and thus pushes him to consider ideas that he had formerly not considered. His interactions with Eve force him to see the world not only through his eyes, but through hers. The important exchange between them serves in providing proof to the argument that Eve is the smarter of the two, because she is the more curious. Adam does not question his surroundings and although he may be able to use his reason to surmise a fitting answer, he does not ask the question to provoke such consideration in the first place. Through Eve, a fresh perspective is offered that would have been missed had she not been created.

It is the longing for an interlocutor, in fact, that precipitates Adam’s request for a mate in the first place. Adam's initial appeal to his maker for a partner with which he can explore this new world emphasizes the “contentment” he will experience in enjoying the presence of a companion:

But with me
I see not who partakes. In solitude
What happiness? Who can enjoy alone
Or all enjoying what contentment find?...

Of fellowship I speak
Such as I seek, fit to participate
All rational delight wherein the brute
Cannot be human consort. They rejoice
Each with their kind, lion with lioness,
So fitly them in pairs thou hast combined. (VIII: 363-366, 389-394)
Adam wishes to *share* his existence in the Garden with another being like him and does not simply ask his maker for someone to help with the work in the Garden, nor does he ask for someone who will do his bidding or attend to his every need. He asks for a suitable companion with whom he can "participate in all rational delight"—another reference to the inclusion of conversation in marriage. The use of logic and reason dominate Adam and Eve's conversations with each other in *Paradise Lost*, even within the conversation that leads to their separation.

In short, then, Milton does not subscribe to the teachings of contemporary clergymen to put the wife in submission to the husband.12 This further reinforces the previously mentioned return to the prelapsarian state that Milton desires for marriage as a whole and by this admission, is the only way the union can be successful. In response to Adam's appeal for a companion, God exclaims, "What next I bring shall please thee, be assured, / Thy likeness, thy fit help, thy other self, / Thy wish exactly to thy heart's desire" (VIII, 449-451). This "other self" is, in simple analysis, an extension of Adam. Thus by implication Milton comments that in creating Eve, God desired to create a being as similar to Adam as possible. This "likeness," created in imitation of, but not as a mirror image, denotes similarities between Adam and Eve but also points out the slight differences between the two, namely in their specific labor responsibilities in the Garden.13 Above all, they will "enjoy" the "rational delight" of one another's company and conversation.

---

12 Milton’s argument is still based in scripture, specifically in the book of Ephesians, where this affection and need for a mate is fully supported by the assertion that a woman is an extension of the man and thus the husband should love the wife as he loves himself (Ephesians 5:25-33). Even more powerful is the assertion in the book of Proverbs that "Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the Lord" (Proverbs 18:22).

13 Milton scholar Barbara Lewalski confirms this outlook: "Adam and Eve's roles and talents are not sharply segregated by gender, as convention would dictate. Eve performs certain domestic tasks...but otherwise the couple share the physical and intellectual activities of Edenic life. They take equal responsibility for their world, laboring together to maintain its ecosystem (*The Life of John Milton*, 479-488).
THE INTRODUCTION OF "LIMITS" WITHIN THE COMPANIONATE MARRIAGE PARADIGM

Just as the relationship between God and the angels differs from the relationship between God and the humans or even the angels and the humans, so too is there a differentiation in the relationship between man and woman. The minimal conversation between the angels and God differs from that of the conversation between God and Adam in that the angels are not given a chance to debate. The angels are given directives to carry out but also have responsibilities which consume much of their time. While Adam and Eve may have instances of leisure time, the angels do not.

Our first introduction of a limit is seen within the conversation between Adam and God—a conversation that is only explored by Adam, as Eve is never allowed to converse with God firsthand. Adam is in direct conference with his creator and shows his ability to reason and debate with Him in order to propose the idea of a mate. This dynamic, however, differs from any other relationship that Adam and Eve may hold with other individuals in the poem. For example, as stated in Chapter 2, Adam is able to appeal directly to his Creator in requesting a mate. Such a conversation never takes place between God and the angels or God and Eve. While Adam and Eve are equally matched in their ability to reason and debate, they are not entirely equal in their conversational roles. An imposed limit reinforces the relationship that Adam holds with God and the expectation of Eve to gain knowledge through her interactions with Adam.

These limits are also present in the relationships between God and the angels as well as between the angels and the humans. This observation matters in terms of the relationship between Adam and Eve because it shows the poet's penchant for creating connections that may not always be perfectly equal. Much like in any human relationship, there is a balance and a
compromise that must be met. While the apportioning may not always be equal, the ends are mutually agreed upon and consent is given from both parties. Take, for instance, the conversation between Adam, Eve and Raphael in Books IV-VIII. Vestiges of these boundaries within communication can be seen here, but the biggest difference between the conversation of Adam and God, on the one hand, and that of Adam, Eve, and Raphael on the other, are two-fold. First, Raphael is used primarily as a vessel, delivering the word of God with little to no opportunity for debate from Adam and Eve; and second, Eve is not an active participant in the conversation. She is present for most of the exchange and retires at the beginning of Book VIII. Milton clearly designates her removal:

went she not as not with such discourse
Delighted or not capable her ear
Of what was high. Such pleasure she reserved,
Adam relating, she sole auditress:
Her husband the relater she preferred
Before the angel. (VIII, 48-53)

Capable of engaging in and understanding the counsel delivered by the Creator's emissary, Eve prefers instead to converse with her husband. She is removed from the one-on-one relationship with her Creator and the divine. This revisits the impression that Milton wishes to stimulate in his reader—namely that a hierarchy is present in any interaction between individuals and the movement from God to Angel to Human is no different.

In another instance of Raphael as a disseminator of information, he imparts to Adam and Eve the details of Satan's fall and his intentions in entering the Garden (VI, 900-907). Here, they are given very specific and crucial information, which they are asked to interpret and use to fight
the influences of Satan as best they can. There is no option for an appeal of assistance, and in some instances what Adam asks Raphael cannot or will not always answer. A prime example of the limitation comes in Book VII, where Raphael conveys to Adam that:

Joy thou
In what He gives to thee: this Paradise
And thy fair Eve. Heav'n is for thee too high
To know what passes there. Be lowly wise:
Think only what concerns thee and thy being (VIII, 170-174).

Raphael reiterates that there is a natural order to things, a plan that they must all follow and certain issues of which Adam will not be made aware. Though both God and Raphael are aware that Adam will sin, they still trust to human free will and strength of character not to prevent the fall but to recover what will soon be lost by both.

The natural inequality of relationships is present in every dynamic explored within *Paradise Lost*, including that of the prelapsarian Adam and Eve. The poet does not minimize the weaknesses and possible failings of romantic relationships. In establishing a marriage with limits, Milton acknowledges this disparity but also contends that it is there for good reason. 14 The love between Adam and Eve depends upon mutual respect and honesty but does not necessarily denote a perfect equality between the two. Certain roles are shared, others delegated to a specific individual. The distinction made here gives complexity to their relationship because

14 The literary critic and theorist Northrop Frye once observed that in *Paradise Lost*, there is a "hierarchy of reason, will and appetite in the individual...the man would correspond to the level of the reason, the woman to that of the will united to the reason, and the child to that of the appetite, subordinate to both but still protected and cherished" (As cited in Milton, 460). I feel that the model reiterates the idea of a companionate marriage with limits, though the exact term is not used in Frye's writing. In making this comment, Frye urges us to examine the importance not only of the man's role in the relationship but also that of the woman. Though reason may come first, it is in joining it with will that Adam and Eve give shape to their lives. Appetite is rather an afterthought, with reason and will being the most important of the three.
it is a bond that is not necessarily as clear cut as one might expect. In Milton's ideal, conversation is employed and mutually beneficial outcomes can result. When this conversation fails, as I will show in the next chapter, chaos ensues.
CHAPTER 4: THE FALL AND THE RESTORATION OF GRACE - THE MOVEMENT FROM A POSITIVE TO NEGATIVE DIALOGIC MODEL

Adam, from whose dear side I boast me sprung
And gladly of our union hear thee speak,
One heart, one soul in both whereof good proof
This day accords, declaring thee resolved
Rather than death or aught than death more dread
Shall separate us, linked in love so dear
(Milton, Paradise Lost IX: 965-970)

THE TRANSGRESSION: ADAM AND EVE'S SEPARATION

To examine the failure of Milton's prototypic model for marriage—that is, of a nearly equitable union based on mutual respect and open dialogue--one need only turn to Book IX of the poem. The first couple’s troubles begin when Eve conveys to Adam that they must separate in order to accomplish more work in the Garden:

we may well labor still to dress
This garden, still tend to plant, herb and flow'r,
Our pleasant take enjoined, but till more hands
Aid us, the work under our labor grows
Luxurious by restraint...
Thou therefore now advise
Or hear to what my mind first thoughts present:
Let us divide our labors. (IX, 205-214).

Here, we see two conflicting elements at play in the dialogue. Eve uses her ability to reason in proposing a seemingly viable solution to the overwhelming amount of work to which they must attend in the Garden. But in light of their recent conversation with Raphael, we see that this is not the best course of action for either individual to take, and once we investigate Eve's
underlying reasons for the separation we know that it will inevitably lead to trouble. It is the melding of both the positive and negative models of dialogue in this passage that serves to drive home Milton's point—a technique that the author often uses by precipitating one event with an exact opposite. In doing so, Milton makes the difference between these twinned episodes that much more astounding, yet easily recognizable to the reader. Here, Adam responds to Eve not in an authoritative tone but rather in one implying a sense of fair exchange, in an effort to come to an equitable solution together:

Doubt possesses me lest harm
Befall thee severed from me for thou know'st
What hath been warned us, what malicious foe,
Envying our happiness and of his own
Despairing, seeks to work us woe and shame. (IX, 251-255)

Adam recounts Raphael's recent admonition—a stern reminder not only to Eve but also to himself—of their foe and of his evil intentions toward them both. It is not that he does not trust her strength, but rather that together, they are both stronger—a vital point for Milton. At this point we would expect Eve, having been reminded of the threat close at hand, to rescind her offer to work alone and to resume such responsibilities as have been entrusted to her. And herein lies the challenge of the dialogic model within the limited companionate marriage: because neither Adam nor Eve are servant to the other, they are ultimately free to do what they will. Their ability to engage in debate, to reason with each other and to ultimately come to their own and sometimes differing conclusions, is both the gift and the curse of Milton's marriage model. In their natural state, they are uninhibited and able to make decisions that could affect them for good or ill. Just as in the case of delivering the narrative of Sin before the birth of Eve, here we
see the fracturing of the once perfect marriage which will lead to its perversion before regaining some of its former grace.

Milton constructs Eve's rejoinders to Adam's cautioning so expertly that it is not hard to see why so many literary critics and contemporaries of Milton's time felt his portrayal of Eve a damning one for all women. She responds to Adam's reminder of Satan's presence in the Garden with an argument that any defense attorney would be proud of:

And what is faith, love, virtue unassayed,  
Alone, without exterior help sustained?  
Let us not then suspect our happy state  
Left so imperfect by the Maker wise  
As not secure to single or combined,  
Frail is our happiness if this be so  
And Eden were no Eden thus exposed! (IX, 335-341)

Eve takes Raphael's—and by extension, God's—warnings and turns them against each other. Yes, there is an evil presence in the Garden, of which we have been made aware. But how strong can we possibly be if we have not tested ourselves? This can truly be no Eden if we are left to fear or frailty. We have been given reason and free will—let us use it! In Adam's response we see another stern reminder, yet not a command, for her to remember what she has been told and to trust to the will of God:

Seek not temptation, then, which to avoid  
Were better and most likely if from me  
Thou sever not: trial will come unsought.  
Wouldst thou approve thy constancy? Approve  
First thy obedience! (IX, 364-368)
After Adam concedes and allows Eve to separate from him, we see Satan insert himself into the picture and supplant Adam. Here, and much like in the dream from Book V, Satan uses flattery and appeals to Eve's vanity. Resembling the earlier juxtapositions in the poem, the conversation between Eve and Satan is bursting with deceit wrapped in delusions of grandeur and power. What is new to the conversation that has not been seen in any other exchanges through the course of the poem is an introduction of envy and a desire for power. Satan imparts the following message to Eve, which leads her to a point of no return:

And wherein lies
Th' offence that Man should thus attain to know?
What can your knowledge hurt Him or this tree
Impart against His will if all be his?
Or is it envy? And can envy dwell
In Heav'nly breasts? These, these and many more
Causes import your need of this fair fruit.
Goddess humane, reach then and freely taste! (IX, 725-732)

Satan, much like Adam and Eve, uses reason in his argument but only to mask the justification of the transgression. Soon after she eats of the tree, Eve's speech begins to mirror that of Satan when she refers to her Creator and the Angels as "Our great Forbidder, safe with all His spies / About Him" (IX, 815-816). Here we see Eve's deterioration into a creature much like the description of Sin. She does not revere the power or knowledge of her Creator but rather that of a tree and of the serpent that led her to it. With the transgression, Eve's speech changes considerably, especially when she contemplates whether or not to share her newly found freedom with Adam:
to Adam in what sort
Shall I appear? Shall I to him make known
As yet my change and give him to partake
Full happiness with me? Or rather not,
But keep the odds of knowledge in my pow'r
Without copartner so to add what wants
In female sex, the more to draw his love
And render me more equal and, perhaps,
A thing not undesirable, sometime
Superior: for inferior who is free? (IX, 816-825)

Much like McColley's previous comments that Eve is "a free agent in a perilous world," we see here that she has truly harkened to the danger that surrounds her (ED, 26). Her free agency has left her susceptible to her already corrupted world, which will eventually corrupt Adam, too.15 Reminding the reader of Adam's own fascination with Eve's beauty, after Eve confesses that she has eaten of the fruit of the Tree, he muses internally:

And me with thee hath ruined, for with thee
Certain my resolution is to die!
How can I live without thee, how forgo
Thy sweet converse and love so dearly joined
To live again in these wild woods forlorn?
Should God create another Eve and I
Another rib afford, yet loss of thee
Would never from my heart. No! (IX: 906-913)

15 Lewalski reiterates this sentiment when she comments that, "Adam is Eve's superior and appointed guide, but not her lord and master. Eve is no dependent child-wife: her choices are and must freely be her own, and she bears the adult responsibility for them, even as Adam does for his" (MOW, 13). Here, again, we see the introduction of man's free will and his power to choose between good and evil.
What has happened, then, in Book IX is that Satan has infected Eve’s speech, and that she has carried this infection back to Adam. Their conversation, so vital to their mutual support, is now polluted, and it begins to cause as much harm as it once did help.

Further evidence that their conversation, which once preserved them, will now produce their downfall can be seen in the exchange between Adam and Eve after they have both eaten of the tree. They are both overly defensive, with Adam attributing the transgression to Eve's weakness and Eve assigning the blame to Adam's lack of control over them both:

Adam: Would thou hadst hearkened to my words and stayed  
With me as I besought thee when that strange  
Desire of wandering this unhappy morn  
(I know not whence) possessed thee! (IX, 1134-1137)

Eve: Being as I am, why didst not thou, the head,  
Command me absolutely not to go,  
Going into such danger as thou saidst?  
Too facile then thou didst not much gainsay,  
Nay, didst permit, approve, and fair dismiss! (IX, 1155-1159)

The former give-and-take of their previous discussions is changed here and the reader is only privy to the aggressive and guilty arguments that result when two people are equally culpable in a negative outcome but do not have the presence of mind to acknowledge it. The conversation is one that the reader can recognize because it is an exchange that is not exclusive to the characters of the poem. It takes an incredibly self-aware and grounded individual to immediately accept responsibility and admit his or her role in the occurrence of events, especially those with adverse effects. By making his Adam and Eve seem as human as possible, Milton achieves two specific
ends. First, he keeps the reader on the first couple’s side because the conversation is one with which we can easily identify. Any relationship, whether intimate or platonic, shares an element of give and take, with communication playing a big part in that. Second, the poet again uses his binary oppositions in setting up the aftermath argument to starkly oppose the reconciliation that will soon follow. What Milton strives to communicate to the reader is that marriage can never be the Edenic ideal, as we have already been banished from Paradise. But still, in its companionate form, it is as close to that ideal as we can possibly get.

Repentance: Adam and Eve's Transformation After the Fall

After their indiscretion, Milton presents the movement of both Adam and Eve towards a return to the prelapsarian state. Because they have sinned, this is not entirely possible, but the fact that they are able to reunite in spite of what has occurred speaks volumes to Milton's belief in the importance of dialogue in the marriage model. It is worthwhile to point out that Satan's corruption of the first couple is a logical one: had Satan chosen to approach Adam for the first temptation, he would have had to contend with someone who had been in direct conversation with God and who was aware of Satan’s presence in the Garden. The only way to manipulate Adam would be to first corrupt Eve—which is exactly how Satan achieves the fall of both. He appeals to Eve’s vanity and curiosity first but in doing so secures Adam and achieves what he feels to be a victory over the tyranny of Heaven. It is within this event in the poem that we see not only the importance of dialogue but also the importance of limits being placed upon it. Satan plays on the weakness in the overall structure of the relationship and is able to achieve his ends. Upon first viewing them in the Garden, Satan exclaims:

Sight hateful! sight tormenting! Thus these two
Imparadised in one another's arms...
I will excite their minds
With more desire to know and to reject
Envious commands invented with design
To keep them low whom knowledge might exalt
Equal with gods. (IV: 505-508, 522-526)

Satan's jealousy as well as his evil nature allow him to immediately identify the weakness in their relationship. On Adam and Eve's first night together, Satan induces the dream in Eve, disguised as a toad, "Assaying by his dev'lish art to reach / The organs of her [Eve's] fancy and with them forge / Illusions as he list, phantasms and dreams" (IV:801-803). It is a tactic designed to “excite their minds / With more desire to know,” the idea being that Adam and Eve already had this desire, and that in approaching one of them, Satan will only increase their desire to know by encouraging Eve to share with Adam her “illusions...phantsams and dreams” in open conversation.

Immediately following the indiscretion and the subsequent argument, in Book X we see that Adam and Eve’s once open, almost equal dialogue has changed in tone and style. This change reflects a transformation in their relationship: no longer one another’s mutual help and support, no longer joined in a companionate marriage, they are instead each other’s adversaries. Eve is instantly remorseful for the part she has played in the downfall of man, while Adam is angry. When God appears in the Garden to judge them both, there is an extreme difference between Adam's lengthy defense and Eve's simple response:

Adam: 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 itself,
Her doing seemed to justify the deed,
She gave me of the tree and I did eat (X, 137-143).

_Eve:_ The serpent me beguiled and I did eat (X, 162).

In the exchange, Adam uses his dialogue too profusely, trying to place the blame on Eve and as a result, indirectly on God. With Milton quoting directly from the King James Version of The Bible, Eve owns up to her complicity in the sin and does not try to lay blame on anyone but herself. Even Adam's adoration of Eve's beauty has waned, in the span of just one book. Prior to their eating of the Tree of Knowledge, Adam addresses Eve as "Sole Eve, associate soul, to me beyond / Compare above all living creatures dear" (IX, 227-228). He regards Eve as the best thing in his world, more important than any other element, which exposes the weakness to which he will soon succumb when Eve convinces him to eat of the Tree. In direct contrast to this are his words to Eve immediately after they are judged by God for their sins:

    Out of my sight, thou serpent! That name best
    Befits thee with him leagued, thyself as false
    And hateful! Nothing wants but that thy shape
    Like his and color serpentine may show
    Thy inward fraud to warn all creatures from thee
    Henceforth, lest that too Heavn'ly form pretended
    To Hellish falsehood snare them! (X, 867-873)

No longer speaking with one another, in a give-and-take, they are instead speaking _at_ one another, or about one another to God.
Furthermore, in this passage we see that Milton does not hold Adam as superior to Eve. It is she who is able to acknowledge her sin and beg forgiveness from Adam and God, while Adam simply laments his situation with Eve and questions why his maker would provide him with such a creature—conveniently forgetting that she was created at his request! Reference to Eve's similarity to the snake and her false character are reminders of the seventeenth-century view of women who, in scripture and conduct books, were rarely entrusted with any major responsibilities because they were believed to be the impetus for all the wrong in the world. Further proof of Eve's humble and mature development is her response to Adam's rebuke of her as a serpent, insisting that:

Thy suppliant,
I beg and clasp thy knees. Bereave me not
Whereon I live: thy gentle looks, thy aid,
Thy counsel, in this uttermost distress
My only strength and stay! Forlorn of thee,
Whither shall I betake me, where subsist? (X, 917-922)

Both have sinned, but thou
Against God only, I against God and thee,
And to the place of judgement will return,
There with my cries importune Heav'n that all
The sentence from thy head removed may light
On me, sole cause to thee of all this woe,
Me, me only just the object of his ire! (X, 930-936)

---

16 John Sprint, a prominent clergyman of the same time period wrote a sermon that held the woman responsible for man's ruin, stating that, "A learned Woman is thought to be a Comet, that bodes Mischief, whenever it appears" (Wittreich, 51).
Eve recognizes her sin, both against Adam and God, and makes an effort to absolve Adam of his equal share of the blame. Because the exchange ultimately brings Adam and Eve back together, it is another instance of conversation that we recognize from before the Fall: the ability to step back from a situation and assess all its parts, not just those one wants to see. She brings Adam to a place where he can begin to see his role in their disobedience and come to terms with how this has changed their world, as well as what lies ahead for the both of them.\textsuperscript{17}

\textit{Restoration: The "Return" to Paradise and Milton’s Final Reflections}

No statement could be more significant regarding Milton’s views on the companionate marriage, as well as the power of man and woman to be each other’s salvation, than the final lines of the poem:

\begin{quote}
The world was all before them, where to choose  
Their place of rest, and Providence their guide.  
They hand in hand with wand'ring steps and slow  
Through Eden took their solitary way. (XII, 645-648)
\end{quote}

Not only does Milton view marriage as the most important relationship between man and woman, he also shows the couple leaving “hand in hand.” Seventeenth-century homilies and scriptures would most likely have had Eve following Adam out of the Garden, defaulting in a sense to his superiority while also condemning her own weakness and complicity in the fall. Here, Milton shows a couple equal in human capacity and love, which goes on to face a very

\textsuperscript{17} Barbara Lewalski commented that "Indeed, despite Adam’s harsh denunciations of Eve and of all womankind under the impetus of his terrible misery, Eve is, if anything, shown to be even more necessary to Adam than he to her. For although their reconciliation with each other and with God is in the final analysis made possible by the removal of the ‘stony’ from their hearts by ‘prevenient Grace’ (XI, 3-4), Eve is the human agent of Adam’s salvation, bringing him from utter hopelessness and immobility of despair to some capacity for thought and action (MOW, 18). This corroborates my claim that Eve assists Adam in regaining his humanity, a fact that seventeenth-century religious scholars would never admit."
new and different world than that to which they have become accustomed. They have the entire world to consider as their future home and it is Milton who acknowledges their shared ability in determining the decision. It is not left to the man alone or the woman alone, but together—presumably, I argue, through conversation with each other—to determine where they will go and how they will continue their lives.

The most important element of the passage, then, is that Adam and Eve are together as they take "their solitary way." They are "solitary" in the sense that they must now fend for themselves and will be removed from the direct influence and conversation with God and the Angels, but they still have each other. These few lines demonstrate that Milton believed in the power of companionship, and by extension the power of marriage, as well as the strength of the bond between man and woman and its ability to return them to their previous grace. Adam and Eve were not successful in their initial effort to resist temptation, but they have now learned from the transgression and have made steps to correct what has been corrupted. Their future together will depend on the ability of both to encounter the further evils in this new world and determine how best to navigate them for each other. The image of Adam and Eve, moving into a land that is altogether unfamiliar and potentially dangerous to them, is a strikingly contemporary image. Each couple operates as a single unit that must work together to return to paradise and regain the perfection that was lost.

---

18 Diane McColley agrees with my argument when she declares that, "For Milton, whether in heaven, in Paradise, or in the world we know, the peace of God is not in the absence of labor or even of evil, but the power and grace to resist evil and achieve good" (ED, 40-41).
Having considered all the working parts of Milton’s evolving views on marriage and the best fit between man and woman—the political state of England in the seventeenth-century, the prevailing views of marriage based on scripture and strict gender roles, and Milton’s personal life—how exactly did the poet go from the prescribed marriage in *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* to the practical application in Adam and Eve’s relationship in *Paradise Lost*? It is my belief that in losing two wives to early deaths and the loss of his eyesight, arguably the most important faculty available to a writer, Milton became acquainted with the importance of mutual partnership and friendship, even in the bounds of the marital union.

In 1658, Milton lost both his second wife and their child to a complicated birth. In the same year, he also began working on the text of *Paradise Lost*, enlisting the help of his daughters to compile the manuscript. The presence of female assistance in the creation of such a seminal text, in my opinion, may have led to the more favorable depiction of Eve within the narrative. In fact, such an even representation of the first woman, differing from the widely held beliefs of Eve as inherently imbued with sin, speaks to Milton’s own encounters in his relationships with his wives as well as his three daughters.\(^{19}\) It is my theory that Milton’s predisposition to the social life at a young age as well as his experiences with the church, government, and marriage led to the development and shaping of his ideas on the union.

\(^{19}\) As McColley notes, “The obvious way to represent man and woman ‘when man and woman were both perfect’ would have been to let Adam and Eve represent traditionally gendered virtues. But to bring them closer to a ‘conjugall fellowship’ of beings more ‘like’ than convention allowed...Milton chooses instead to show Eve and Adam in their dialogues both capable, in proportion, of all sorts of virtue” (*MS*, 183).
In the *Doctrine*, Milton primarily focused on the scriptural arguments that framed his reworking of the prescribed seventeenth-century paradigm of marriage. Placing "mutual comfort and help" as the foremost important aspect of marriage was not only different from other prominent writers of the time, but it was also extremely progressive in its views of the evolving nature of the relationship between husband and wife. Milton's advice to men and women of his time, though directly addressing men, would also serve the needs of the woman in obtaining this mutuality:

> If any good and peaceable man should discover some helpless disagreement or dislike of either mind or body, whereby he could not cheerfully perform the duty of a husband without the perpetual dissembling of offense and disturbance to his spirit; rather than to live uncomfortably and unhappily to both himself and to his wife, rather that to continue undertaking a duty which he could not possibly discharge, he might dismiss her whom he could not tolerably and so not consciently retain. (*Doctrine*, 285)

In a way, Milton anticipated the changes that would take place within the marriage dynamic. His arguments in favor of divorce were not self-serving or misogynistic, but rather if implemented would lead to healthier relationships and a more prosperous state. A successful family would contribute to the society and economy in ways that an unhappy marriage could never do.

In viewing the relationship between Adam and Eve, the poet's interpretation of the Edenic ideal is presented but the power of dialogue—not only between the first couple, but also in their interactions with other individuals in the poem—is what makes this a divine match through which they can work to regain the paradise that was lost. The conversations between
Adam and Eve are the strongest character building portions of the text due in large part to the mutuality present between them. Milton drives home the point that within a marriage—by and large, in any relationship—an intricate dance takes place, one of compromise and reciprocity. He thus introduced to his poem the idea of limits in a relationship, yet another progressive element of his overall argument. It is also a logical one.

The inventive suggestion of a mutual marriage developed over time into the companionate marriage with limits, which was heavily dependent on the use of dialogue between man and wife. With the communication present between the two parties, mutuality would always be the first and foremost important element. After losing his first two wives through childbirth, Milton was no stranger to the delicate nature of life and the importance of finding a mate with which to share it. And because of this lapse in time between the two publications, Milton was better able to envision his interpretation of the Edenic ideal, providing a model not just for his time but a paradigm that would carry through to present-day gender dynamics.
Fig. 1 - Temptation of Adam and Eve, Masolino
c. 1425. Fresco
Brancacci Chapel, S. Maria del Carmine, Florence (Witcombe, Web)
Fig. 2 - Fall and Expulsion of Adam and Eve, 1510
Michelangelo. Fresco, Sistine Chapel, Vatican, Rome (Witcombe, Web)


