

Ecofeminism and john milton's paradise lost assignment

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Expressionism and John Milton's Paradise Lost In the King James Bible, God creates the world. He creates the sea, the field, the plants, and the animals. His most prized creation, however, is man, whom he creates in his own image. To man he gives dominion of his previous Earthly creations. The first man, Adam, chooses the name of each plant and animal. When Adam realizes that he is unfulfilled and lonely, God creates woman out of Adam's rib. Eve, the first woman, is also subordinate to Adam (King James Bible, Genesis: 1-3).

Thus, the creation story teaches us that women and the natural environment are inherently inferior to men because God intended it to be so. The field of expressionism links the environmental and feminist movements, highlighting their dual paths of exploitation and oppression at the hands of man. While men are typically associated with culture, women are associated with nature. Men are the cultivators of knowledge and civil society, with the power to govern and rule. Women, on the other hand, are the source of birth and nourishment.

It is no coincidence that "God" is male while "Mother Nature" is female. Though some women find the connection to nature imitating, there is no question that a parallel exists (Pulphood 22). Milton expands upon Genesis: 2-3 in his epic poem about Adam and Eve's fall from the Garden of Eden. In Paradise Lost, expressionism is obviously demonstrated as Adam's domination over Eve mirrors man's domination over nature. The environmental destruction that the world faces today is undoubtedly due to man and an anthropocentric worldview that places human needs and wants above all others.

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We face climate change, rising seas, ocean acidification, deforestation, massive extinction, and other devastating environmental problems because man is valued over nature. This problem is especially pronounced in Western capitalist and consumerist culture. Christianity is often cited as inherently opposed to the environmental movement because God gives dominion of nature to man, who obviously abused his power. Dominion can mean “responsible stewardship”, but it always means that man is fundamentally above nature (Gray). The Christian explanation for this hierarchy is expanded upon in Paradise Lost.

When God gives control of the world to man, he says “Not only these fair mounds but all the Earth / To Thee and to thy race give,” (Milton 186). Thus, responsibility to care for the world is bestowed upon man. Adam names each species and determines their nature, so although they existed before him, he gives them importance. If Adam shows any awe or appreciation for God's creations, it is not expressed in either Genesis or Paradise Lost. Instead, he takes his superiority for granted. He sees himself as God's substitute; his brutish earthly companions are unfit for companionship because they are so unequal to him.

In response, God creates Eve. This perpetuates the idea that tauter is inherently inferior to man, justifying its degradation and mistreatment. Female subordination is a phenomenon that transcends time, place, and culture. Though great strides towards equality have been made, women still do not share equal status with men, especially in developing countries. Men occupy the public sphere, taking leadership roles and working while women

are confined to the private sphere, making the home and caring for the children. Many religions, including Christianity, are rooted in these divided gender roles.

Paradise Lost clearly exemplifies the beginning of a patriarchal culture, where the first female is innately inferior to the first male. Eve's creation is different in the two versions of Genesis. In Genesis 1, Adam and Eve are created simultaneously while in Genesis 2 Eve is created after Adam. Paradise Lost is based off of the second version, allowing Milton to develop an unequal relationship between Adam and Eve. Eve is created from man's body, out of Adam's left rib, and given the name "woman", which means, "... Of Man / Extracted," (Milton 191).

Though humans are naturally born through the woman's body, the first woman was born of a man, securing his dominant place above her and demonstrating that his existence defines her existence (Gray). Eve is intended to be Adam's companion, created not for her own inherent value but to assist Adam in his duty to procreate. This suggests that Eve is only useful because of her ability to birth children; if Adam could populate the world by himself, he would have no need of her. Eve's inferiority is persistent throughout the epic, from her creation to the fall.

Because Adam resembles God more closely, he is closer to perfection and therefore superior to Eve. When Adam first beholds her, he is immediately entranced with her beauty. He sees her as virtuous, modest, and virginal, three classically feminine qualities that characterize her as worthy and good. Whenever he is around her, he is completely distracted and overcome by her

looks, and forgets that he is intellectually superior to her (Milton 191-192). This perpetuates the idea that a woman's value lies in her outward appearance, and her beauty is the only hold she can have over a man.

The angel Raphael warns Adam against this, claiming that if he falls victim to his passions she will assume control in the relationship. Despite his best efforts, his is proven true when Adam, against his better judgment, allows Eve to work separately from him, ultimately leading to Satan's temptation and the fall from the Garden of Eden. Milton frames man's downfall through two temptations, the apple and Eve. Eve represents women while the apple, a piece of the natural world, represents knowledge of good and evil. God warns Adam and Eve, "Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die," (King James Bible, Genesis 2).

He manipulates the apple, a simple fruit, into a loaded object that determines the fate of humankind. He transforms the nature of the apple into an object that is desired yet ultimately leads to undesirable consequences. Though it is Satan who convinces Eve to eat of the Tree of Knowledge, it is the apple that carries the stigma of the fall from the Garden of Eden and has the lasting reputation of the forbidden fruit. Thus, God uses the natural world as a tool by which to influence mankind, showing its total domination by human needs and purposes.

Eve is both vilified and vindicated in her role in man's downfall, both of which demean Eve in her position to Adam. Satan, in the form of the snake, risks Eve into eating from the Tree of Knowledge. Eve then decides whether to share the apple with Adam or not. On one hand, by eating the apple she has

become equal, or even superior to Adam: ... The more to draw his love And render me more equal, and, perhaps A thing not undesirable, sometime Superior: for who inferior is free? (Milton 219) Clearly, Eve understands her subordinate position to Adam and seeks to shift the dynamics in their relationship in her favor.

However, once she realizes that he could replace her if she dies without him, she decides to convince him to eat the apple as well. Though Adam tries to follow Raphael's advice and love Eve rationally, he is still entranced and tempted by her. She is so beautiful that whatever she says is what he believes is right. He says, " All higher knowledge in her presence falls / Degraded," (Milton 193). Thus, Adam's passion blinds him and Eve fills the role of the traditional temptress, a stereotype that persists today. Once God, in the form of Jesus, confronts Adam and Eve about their transgression, the blame is shifted from Eve to Adam.

Although she knowingly tempted him to eat the apple, God turns to Adam, saying: Was she thy God that her thou didst obey Before His voice? Or was she made thy guide Superior, or but equal, that to her Thou didst resign thy manhood and the place Wherein God set thee ' above her, made of thee And for thee, whose perfection far excelled Hers in all real dignity? (Milton 233) Although Eve is somewhat vindicated and Adam now bears the brunt of the responsibility, she is degraded and marginalized by God, who obviously sees Adam as the more perfect being and expects more of him.

Therefore, both the apple and Eve share the similar experience of being shaped by God into something that is used to benefit man. Further, Adam and

God wrongfully blames Eve and the snake, respectively, for wrongs they did not commit. Through his omnipotence, God knows that it was not the snake, but Satan who truly tempted Eve to eat of the Tree of Knowledge, yet because he could not punish Satan, he transfers the punishment onto the snake. The serpent is doomed to move on his stomach and bear the enmity of Eve's children for the rest of his existence (Milton 234). Nature is continually dominated and controlled by man to suit their needs.

Unable to fully admit responsibility for his part in the original sin, Adam continues to blame Eve, likening her evil nature to that of the snake's: "Out of my sight, thou serpent! That name best Befits thee with him leagued, thyself as false And hateful!" (Milton 253) He sees Eve, and all women, as a "fair defect of nature," whose beautiful appearance blinded him from the truth (Milton 254). Though Eve did commit the initial offense, Adam struggles admitting that he played an equal role in their expulsion from paradise, instead finding all faults in female nature for his choice to eat the apple.

Eve and the serpent are similarly victimized as evil characters wrongfully. Examined through the lens of expressionism, parallels between Eve's subordination to Adam and man's normalization of the environment are evident. The apple and the snake, representing the natural world, are manipulated into tempting, evil beings to suit the will of God and Satan, who wish to influence the lives of Adam and Eve. This emulates the subordinate position Eve holds in relation to Adam. She was created as an inferior being, who by nature is less intelligent and able-bodied than man.

Eve's beauty is the only hold she has on Adam, who blames her appearance for hiding her cunning, immoral nature. Women and nature essentially cause man's downfall from paradise, absolving man from blame and allowing his domination to persist throughout time.