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'"Superior; for inferior who is free?"': Sexual Conflict and the Male Gaze in *Paradise Lost IX* by John Milton (1667) and 'Eloisa to Abelard' (1717) by Alexander Pope.

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'There stern religion quenched the unwilling flame, / There died the best of passions, Love and Fame' (Pope 39-40).

Although Ellen M. Pollak employs John Berger's 'Ways of Seeing' with regard to Alexander Pope's poem 'Epistle to a Lady', this theory is invaluable to our understanding of sex related conflict in *Paradise Lost Book IX* by John Milton and in Pope's 'Eloisa to Abelard' as Berger writes 'Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves' (Pollak 461). Milton presents this conflict through his focus on a woman in a restrictive prelapsarian marriage whereas Pope explores this through his female persona who has been forcefully separated from her beloved. In both texts the internal conflict experienced by the main female character results from a central conflict relating to the opposite sex: the need to be at once independent *and* interdependent as female characters seek to establish or reaffirm their desired (sexual) identities. This essay explores this paradox by considering freedom and imprisonment, inequality and separation, and the problematic relationship between author and subject, relating to relations between the sexes in each text.

Conflict in both texts is the result of the inhibition of the free-will that would allow for female self-fulfilment, as female characters either seek to distance themselves or become closer to their lovers. Employing psychoanalytic theory, the humanistic assertion of inherent free-will and psychological independence comes into conflict with the neo-Freudian notion of the resolution of the Electra complex. This complex suggests that female characters develop their sense of identity by identifying with their mothers through association with members of the opposite sex. Shari A. Zimmerman points out 'the desire to be both separate from and united with another person without losing oneself in either isolation or fusion' (247). This suggestion that Eve's sense of independent identity is in conflict with her physical dependence upon Adam is first exhibited when Eve pleads 'Adam, well may we labour still to dress / This Garden, still to tend Plant, Herb and Flour . . . Let us divide our labours' (205-214). In this quotation, the contrast between the joint cultivation of the garden and Eve's

desire to separate herself from Adam, communicates Eve's disruption of the 'Great Chain of Being' as the setting of the garden signifies symbiosis with the interconnectedness of the images 'Plant, Herb and Flour'. Eve regards the divine fruit 'Of vertue to make wise: what hinders then / To reach, and feed at once both Bodie and Mind?' in which her inner turmoil is suggested by the structural contrast between empowerment and hesitation over the colon (778-779). This is however undermined by the rhythm of the second line created by the assonance of the 'ea'/'ee' sounds and the plosive 'b' sounds, and the additional syllable of 'Mind' hints that Eve will eventually obtain her liberation as it becomes antithetical to the entrapment of her physical 'Bodie'.

Where Eve seeks separation from her male counterpart through physical and psychological transgression, Eloisa, in her state of religious piety, seeks closeness to her beloved through her confessional response to his letter. In this way, Eve's transgressional act of eating the fruit is akin to Eloisa's transgressional act of confessing to her suppressed love. Barrett John Mandel points out the 'two apparently irreconcilable drives : ardor for love in this world and a pressing need to escape from worldly cares to the peace which religion affords to the devout' (57). Despite this, it is her confession that allows Eloisa an escape from her religious devotion. Eloisa laments 'Dear fatal name! rest ever unreveal'd, / Nor pass these lips in holy silence seal'd' in which the rhyming of 'unreveal'd' and 'seal'd' reinforces Eloisa's sense of restraint and the sibilance of 'silence seal'd' trails off into the silent void of pious self-denial (9-10). Punished for her passion, Eloisa admits 'There stern religion quenched the unwilling flame, / There died the best of passions, Love and Fame' in which the verb 'to quench' suggests an intentional destruction of liberating desire and the symbol of the 'unwilling flame' communicates the vitality of Eloisa's desire, which seeks to resist being extinguished (39-40). The motif of fire is developed in the quotation 'Even here, where frozen chastity retires, / Love finds an altar for forbidden fires' with the juxtaposition of the

images of fire and ice communicating the way in which Eloisa is now entrapped within the ice of religious piety, deprived of the flame that would liberate her (181-182). Although Mandel and Murray Krieger see Eloisa's conflict as a choice 'between God and Abelard, between religious and earthly love', her conflict, like Eve's, is essentially one of identity and fulfilment rather than one of desire and duty as the symbolic flame comes to represent her very essence (31).

The inhibition of free-will proves ultimately futile as female characters succumb to their desires in search of an independent and cohesive sense of identity, as this conflict arises from problematic power dynamics and disjunctures in the unit of the couple. Deborah A. Interdonato describes Eve's desire for 'an opportunistic advantage over Adam[;] it is a desire that emerges from a seemingly genuine sense of incompleteness and inferiority' in which it is suggested that Eve is stifled by the patriarchal order she finds herself in (95). After having eaten the fruit, Eve considers the power of her new knowledge when she says 'And render me more equal, and perhaps, . . . Superior; for inferior who is free?' in which the caesura in the antithetical 'Superior; for inferior' highlights Eve's sense of superiority having been able to free herself from emotional and intellectual entrapment (823-825). After eating the fruit, Eve feels 'not Death but Life / Augmented, open'd Eyes, new Hopes, new Joys' as she draws power from the fruit itself as well as the transgressive act of consuming it (984-985). In placing 'Death' before 'Life,' Milton implies that Eve's prelapsarian existence was one of blindness, silence, and submission to her husband. The triadic structure of 'open'd Eyes, new Hopes, new Joys' dominates her previous state as the image of 'open'd Eyes' embodies the conflict between ignorance and enlightenment, and the repeated 'new Hopes, new Joys' signals the newfound possibilities for a woman who has established her independence and assumed a position of power.

Both Eve and Eloisa express their internal desires despite the efforts of the patriarchal order, however Eve's need to do this stems from her unequal relationship with Adam, and Eloisa's from a need to be equated with her beloved. For Mandel, '"Eloisa to Abelard" derives its strength from the tension between the natural world of spontaneous love and the formulaic world of religion' in which the assumption is that the world of religion is by default 'unnatural' (66). The sense of freedom communicated through the alliterative aphorism 'love is liberty' is developed through the following lines: 'All then is full, possessing, and possessed, / No craving void left aching in the breast' (92-94). The repeated verb 'to possess', in the present continuous and in the past simple, emphasises the need for reciprocity and the adjectives of pain in the image of the 'craving void left aching' communicate the despair that Eloisa feels in not being able to achieve togetherness. Eloisa's conflict between isolation and contact is visible in the quotation 'I ought to grieve, but cannot what I ought; / I mourn the lover, not lament the fault; / I view my crime, but kindle at the view' in which the repeated commas between phrases and semicolons between the lines structurally emphasises Eloisa's conflict between her past and present states (183-185). This supports O Hehir's notion of 'Eloisa's inability to reconcile with her spiritual duties as a nun her carnal memories of her former lover,' even if Eloisa can only attain a sense of cohesive identity by loving both Abelard and God (227).

If relations between characters of the opposite gender cause conflict, problematic relations between male authors and critics with female subjects also becomes a source of conflict in both *Paradise Lost Book IX* and in 'Eloisa to Abelard'. Where Milton presents Eve as the cause of the Fall of Man, weak and unable to resist temptation, Pope appropriates a female persona who is dependent upon men for self-fulfilment. Both authors present sinful female characters who transgress by performing Deadly Sins. As Minaz Jooma puts it, 'Eve regards nothing but her own desire . . . and so brings about the deathliness and destruction for

which Satan hungers' and this notion of female selfishness is communicated through Milton's third person omniscient narrator (37). The narrator describes 'Greedily she ingorg'd without restraint, / And knew not eating Death: Satiate at length' in which Eve is presented as inherently sinful as the adverb 'Greedily' recalls the Sin of Greed, the verb '(in)gorg'd' suggests that Eve willingly takes sin into her body, and the verb 'Satiate' communicates an intense desire that she is unable to suppress (791-794). Furthermore, Eve is also presented as being responsible for the Fall of Man as Adam follows Eve's example of choosing emotion over reason in the quotation 'How can I live without thee, how forego . . . To live again in these wilde Woods forlorn?' (908-910). The repetition of the assonant 'o' sounds communicates a sense of longing and emphasises Adam's inability to separate himself from Eve, because his own identity is formed out of Eve's psychosexual difference or Otherness (908-910).

In a similar way to this, relating to Pope, Carole Fabricant argues that women are disempowered 'through their consignment to the category of the "permanently represented," hence forever passive and silent' as although Pope does appropriate an expressive female voice, Pope's persona ultimately fails to liberate herself and select earthly love over divine love (504). Throughout the poem, Eloisa attempts to reconcile her conflict between Abelard and God and reaches the conclusion that 'Death, only death, can break the lasting chain' in which the repetition of 'death' overpowers the metaphor of the 'lasting chain' and communicates that Eloisa sees her only escape as 'Death' (173). In this way, Eloisa is also presented as sinful as the hint at suicide is a transgression against God with John F. Sena noting that Eloisa is 'a traditional personification of the sin of accidie or sloth' (443). Eloisa succumbs to the pressure of the patriarchy in 'Renounce my love, my life, myself—and you. / Fill my fond heart with God alone' where the longer em dash in the quadratic structure 'my love, my life, myself—and you' highlights the significance that her love for Abelard holds for

her personal identity, and so the implication is that Eloisa is willing to lose her sense of self in her devotion to God (204-205). It is in these various ways that the patriarchal conflict between male authors and their female subjects manifests itself in these texts through these characters who are presented as sinful and in need of spiritual guidance.

Douglas Anderson writes that '[t]he distinction between man and woman, however, is both a solace to human loneliness and the central physical emblem of human division,' which suggests that this conflict is irreconcilable, because psychological independence is presented as ultimately incompatible with physical separation in both texts (142). Conflict is created through a central female character or persona who attempts to fulfil their identity by expressing their desire for either independence or for interdependence in a patriarchal context. Milton and Pope explore female psychological liberation from physical entrapment and the way that this sense of imprisonment stems from a lack of mutual and equitable connection, and a conflict also exists between the authors and their female subjects. As a result of these considerations, the question of proto-feminism in Milton and Pope's works arises, as although Eve and Eloisa are presented as weaker and inferior beings, their actions are suggestive of a need for female agency in a patriarchy which seeks to curtail women's freedoms.

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