

Outline of the argument: Mary Nyquist, "Gynesis, Genesis, Exegesis, and the Formation of Milton's Eve"

IV (summary of relevant points only)

- Milton believes that marriage is constituted by (and for) rational fellowship, and particularly by man's ability to find comfort and refreshment in the company of his wife.
- "Comfort and refreshment": a subjective experience. Only I can say if I find refreshment in my partner's company. 17th-century Europe was newly interested in subjective experience as such.
- This idea of true marriage as defined by subjective experience contrasts with (for instance) the objective impediments to marriage enumerated by Canon Law: inability to have children; prior marriage; blood relations; insanity; coercion. These can be reported/evaluated/observed by others. (Information: the [Catholic Encyclopaedia](#)).
- If the true conditions of marriage, as solely interior, are only knowable by the individual, they can't be subject to regulation by church or state.
- As Milton reads *Genesis*, it is less important that Eve is made second than that she is made in order to remedy Adam's loneliness, *for him* in a way that he is not created *for her*.
- As he understands marriage, there is a huge importance placed on satisfying the psychological needs which men especially have or are recognized as having (these are the needs which matter), and which women are uniquely equipped to satisfy.

V

- why does Eve tell the story of her creation, which came second, first in the order of the poem? Nyquist begins by looking at a third narrative of human creation, given by the angel Raphael in Book VII 519-50. This account unifies the two Genesis accounts into one story. Raphael's account clarifies that it is "Adam, thee" (named male individual) who on the sixth day of creation was made in the image of God, from the dust, and then on that same day brought into the garden and given the one commandment.
- Raphael's speech weaves together everything the two Genesis accounts say in different places about Adam, but it does not weave in the story about the creation of Eve out of Adam's side in *Genesis* 2. This could easily have been inserted at line 530, and then followed by the blessing of fertility. So there is a hiccup in the text, where some details are left out.
- Adam supplies these details in his own creation account in Book VIII, and these details expand on, clarify, and reveal the full meaning of "female" in Raphael's "female for race." He includes the section of *Genesis* that Raphael passes over, re the creation of Eve from his side.
- Why? Milton's whole interpretation of marriage rests on this part of the Genesis account (*Gen.* 2:18), when God says "I will make him a meet help" and proceeds to create woman. Because it is so important to Milton, he wants to give it more space and more authority (having it told by Adam, *to whom God says these words* in Milton's account), rather than passing it over quickly in Book VII in an indirect (and thus hearsay) narrative by Raphael.
- In the dialogue Adam narrates in Book VIII, his desire for companionship proceeds and even seems to motivate God's announcement about the creation of a meet help, which makes that desire very important. This desire is primarily psychological rather than sexual: it is for "help, solace... collateral love and amity."
- Adams says, "I don't want to be alone, I want a companion" (Book VIII, 389 and etc.) -- God says -- "it is not good for man to be alone, I will bring the "fit help" you want" (445) -- Adam says, "thou hast fulfilled thy words" (491-92). There is a complete match between what Adam wants, what God says he will do, what God does, and what Adam then recognizes God to have done.
- This creation story, in the two versions of Books VII and VIII, is told so as to give particular weight to Adam's account of how and why Eve was made for him.

VI

- Eve's account of her creation in Book IV associates her with the kind of subjectivity Adam desires in the retrospective narrative of Book VIII, so that by the time we get his story, we understand very well the kind of thing he's talking about.
- Eve describes a private experience of autonomy, reflection, self possession -- weakening in a "world apart". But as Nyquist points out, the world of her experience does not actually exist independently of the larger world in which she really exists, and whose rules she will have to live by. So that "a world of her own" (the experienced impression that she lives in a world of her own) is a subjective rather than an objective experience. (It feels that way, but feeling does not correspond to what really is).
- Adam -- active, logical, focused on the external world -- desires a partner with whom he can enjoy the subjective world of feelings and interiority with which Eve is associated here. Adam's desire for that "world" does not make it superior to his kind of experience, much less independent of it; it functions as a complement to what he already enjoys. Eve also wants something that she doesn't have, but her private world cannot supply what she wants, only an illusion of it (the reflection in the pool). She has to learn to recognize that Adam *is* what she wants, and in order to have what she wants, she has to move into a larger world in which she is not autonomous but subordinate.
- Adam knows what he wants, and recognizes it; Eve doesn't know what she wants, and must be taught.
- In this process, she has to be detached from the illusory object of desire formed by her reflection in the water. The physical setting in which Eve's story takes place suggestively resembles the maternal body. So we may have the sense that Eve's preoccupation with the water reflects a kind of mother and daughter bond which she is reluctant to give up in order to bond with Adam. But unlike other texts, where there are actually other women with whom a female character can join in order to resist being told what to do (for instance, the plays by Shakespeare and Aeschylus), the image in the water here is only an illusion. There are no Amazons to conquer in *Paradise Lost*, no gendered struggle against the authority of Adam or God, no sea-mother to be defeated. (Chaos is actually male here, although his consort Night is female: mf).

VII

- in retrospect, we can say that *Paradise Lost* has frequently served as a source of illustrative examples for later theories about the development of female psychology. (For instance, the observation that women have to *learn* to be interested in men). Nyquist argues, however, that Milton's text documents an early moment in the emergence of a historically specific kind of subjectivity ("the private sphere"), rather than a transhistorical set of truths about what it is to be female or to have a particular kind of psychology.
- Adam's account gives us the theory of marriage, why it exists. Eve's account describes what it is subjectively like to go from a feeling of desire to the law-governed state of marriage.
- The genre of the novel arises precisely to explore that experience, and provides further evidence for a larger argument which locates the rise of "subjectivity" between 1600-1950 and associates it with historically specific social and economic formations.

MF: huge arguments such as this concluding one (i.e., the last bullet point re the rise of subjectivity) always leave me a bit skeptical, but that does not mean there isn't something there. Certainly, people who lived in earlier times may have experienced the world in profoundly different ways. Some suggestive evidence can be found in material culture (e.g., the absence of private bedrooms or studies in medieval buildings); in evolving religious practices (e.g., the explicit stress placed on private, individual confession by the 13th c. Lateran Council); and in the history of literary genres (e.g., the vast expansion

of autobiographical writing in 17th century England). For a fascinating read on the topic of privacy in history (full of vivid anecdotes, illustrations and surprising examples), I recommend *The History of Private Life*, a multi-volume work organized by time period and edited by Ariès and Duby.