

**The literary inheritance of paradise lost in
the nineteenth-century domestic novel**

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Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines how nineteenth-century women novelists rework Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667) within the domestic novel, particularly by reframing the Fall through the courtship plot. The central narrative conditions of the Fall—temptation, error, exile, and reconciliation—are not simply inherited or resisted but transformed within the social worlds of marriages, households, and provincial communities. In doing so, writers such as Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë, and George Eliot reshape the Fall narrative into a lens for exploring ethical choice and relational conflict, making the domestic novel a vital vehicle for Milton's nineteenth-century afterlife.

For many nineteenth-century readers, Milton's retelling of Genesis—with its psychological depth and rhetorical intensity—shapes the imaginative reception of the biblical Fall. Novelists adapt Miltonic motifs into new narrative forms: Austen refigures error as ironic misjudgement in *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) and *Mansfield Park* (1814); Brontë expands temptation into Gothic and communal ordeals in *Jane Eyre* (1847) and *Shirley* (1849); Eliot disperses the Fall across provincial causality in *Adam Bede* (1859) and *Middlemarch* (1871–2), presenting error and partial reconciliation as conditions of ordinary life. Taken together, these novels domesticate Milton's epic by resituating its theological drama within the intimate ethical concerns of everyday existence.

The project situates its readings within broader currents of feminist literary criticism and debates on influence, engaging especially with scholarship on domestic fiction as a site where gender, power, and narrative authority are continually negotiated. By highlighting the transposition of Milton's *Paradise Lost* into the domestic novel, the thesis demonstrates how epic motifs are repurposed to shape new genres and narrative practices. In this process, women writers transform Milton's narrative arc, redirecting a dominant literary inheritance into the sphere of courtship, marriage, and everyday ethical life. The result is a distinct form of domestic theology, in which the cosmic drama of the Fall is reimagined through the intimate terms of the nineteenth-century novel.

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INTRODUCTION: MILTONIC RESONANCE IN THE DOMESTIC NOVEL

I know of no history of the English novel that can explain why women began to write respectable fiction near the end of the eighteenth century, became prominent novelists during the nineteenth century, and on this basis achieved the status of artists during the modern period. Yet that they suddenly began writing and were recognised as women writers strikes me as a central event in the history of the novel. (Armstrong, 1987, p. 13)

Nancy Armstrong's study *Desire and Domestic Fiction* (1987) identifies the emergence of women novelists at the end of the eighteenth century as a significant event in the history of literature. She argues that domestic fiction is the "agency of cultural history," further stating that "Although concerned mainly with the vicissitudes of courtship and marriage, and fictional courtships and marriages at that, fiction that represented gender from this gendered viewpoint exerted a form of political authority" (Armstrong, 1987, pp. 35, 42). In positioning women and their fiction at the centre of literary history, Armstrong shifts the critical framework from seeing domestic novels as reflective of cultural change to recognising them as active forces in producing new forms of subjectivity, authority, and narrative discourse. She also insists, "narratives which seemed to be concerned solely with matters of courtship and marriage in fact seized the authority to say what was female, and that they did so in order to contest the reigning notion of kinship relations that attached most power and privilege to certain family lines" (Armstrong, 1987, pp. 10-11). In reframing domestic fiction as not merely a reflection of social change but an active participant in its transformation, Armstrong demonstrates how the marriage plot became a means of negotiating the tension between individual autonomy and the demands of social order (Armstrong, 1987, p. 5).

This project expands Armstrong's assertion by arguing that women writers further participated in the domestication of social and political order by converting epic theological narratives into the vernacular of domestic fiction. By analysing the motifs and markers defined as "Miltonic," this thesis will analyse how nineteenth-century women novelists remade John Milton's *Paradise Lost* in the conventions of the domestic novel, and, more specifically, within the rituals of courtship. By translating Milton's Fall narrative into the language of lived existence—courtship, household, and communal relations—for authors such as Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë, and George Eliot, the epic's theological dilemmas

became domestic experiments in knowledge, agency, and moral obligation.¹ These writers rework Milton's motifs to examine authority, gender, and authorship itself, instead of passively adopting a paternal literary legacy. In this study, *Paradise Lost* is treated not only as a poem but as a culturally diffuse literary forebear whose theological frameworks shaped the imaginative terrain of nineteenth-century domestic fiction. The term *domesticity* refers to the private spheres of home, marriage, and family, conceptualised as the site through which the terms of the Fall in *Paradise Lost* are renegotiated within nineteenth-century fiction. Thus, by literary inheritance, this dissertation understands the transmission of Milton's poetic and theological frameworks into nineteenth-century fiction as an adaptive process in which women novelists refashion epic authority within domestic narrative forms. This introduction situates the central argument of this dissertation by first examining the structure of the domestic novel, followed by an explanation of the methodology to define domestication in a way that builds off existing theoretical models of literary influence. It will then justify the concentration on the main case studies through a brief examination of other prominent works in nineteenth-century literature, finalised by an overview of how the dissertation will proceed to analyse the primary novels' domestication of *Paradise Lost*.

In this project, the main case studies—*Pride and Prejudice* (1813), *Mansfield Park* (1814), *Jane Eyre* (1847), *Shirley* (1849), *Adam Bede* (1859), and *Middlemarch* (1871-2)—represent recognisable phases in the history of the nineteenth-century novel: a satirical domestic comedy, a theatrical performance, a psychologically-imbued Gothic fiction of the discovery of self, and story of industrial unrest, a realist provincial marriage, and a study of vocation. Alongside these, this introduction will briefly examine a diverse range of works by authors such as Mary Shelley, Christina Rossetti, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and Anne Brontë. This chapter will also briefly examine how male authors such as Charles Dickens, Thomas Hardy, Wilkie Collins, and Oscar Wilde engaged with Milton and his work. However, this thesis primarily concentrates on women's domestic fiction, in which the inheritance of *Paradise Lost* was directly renegotiated and domesticated. Women writers of other genres and male writers are considered in this chapter in the diffusion of *Paradise Lost* in the nineteenth century, representing evidence of a larger cultural field of Miltonic influence and reception; they show how the Fall narrative has motivated nineteenth-century writers as a source of inspiration in new and contradictory ways across genres.

¹ Terminology: "Fall" is capitalised throughout when referring to the theological event of Adam and Eve's disobedience in Genesis and *Paradise Lost*, treated as a proper noun akin to "the Flood" or "the Crucifixion."

For nineteenth-century writers, Milton's *Paradise Lost* served as both a model of exemplary poeticism and a source of re-constructable inspiration. Critiques of Milton's work and life have enabled and reinforced Milton's relatively stable reputation and position in the literary canon, particularly since the discovery and publication of Milton's *De Doctrina Christiana* in 1825.² The rhetoric, structure, characterisation, and implications of *Paradise Lost* are common discussion points for many nineteenth-century women writers, and will be key categories in this analysis. Starting by setting out the terrain of existing literature and criticism on Milton's literary influence, the rest of this thesis moves from theoretical debates to focus on three case studies: Austen, Brontë, and Eliot. It examines how each author adapted Milton within the domestic fiction genre to uncover the renegotiation of the Miltonic Fall in the domestic novel.

The rest of this introduction will begin by defining the domestic novel and courtship plot, building on critical work by Nancy Armstrong (1987), Margaret Homans (1986), Mary Poovey (1985), and Catherine Gallagher's (1994). The subsequent section examines the theoretical landscape for existing theoretical frameworks of influence, sharpening this project's more dynamic model of Miltonic transposition and building on Laura Fox Gill's notion of peripheral influence (2017). The following section considers the diffusion of *Paradise Lost* in the nineteenth century across genres, thus framing the cultural field through which women's domestic fiction is read. The concluding section will justify the primary works as exemplifying the reworking of the Fall in the domestic novel.

THE DOMESTIC NOVEL AND THE COURTSHIP PLOT

Building on the ground-breaking work of Armstrong, Homans, Poovey, and Gallagher, the domestic novel is defined as a type of prose fiction that organises its narratives around the household, the moral imperatives of the household, and the reproduction of social order through private lives. It takes the everyday domestic setting as the crucial terrain of ethical and social formation. The domestic novel was the dominant space in the nineteenth century for women writers to renegotiate ethical philosophies, social structures, and narrative authority in the nineteenth century, and it is in this "everyday Eden" that Milton's epic drama of temptation, error, and reconciliation is relocated (Armstrong, 1985, p. 61; Wagener, 1999).

² See further discussion on diffusion in Chapter 2: Milton in the Nineteenth Century, Nineteenth Century Critical and Popular Reception.

Deirdre David defines domestic fiction as “predominantly a novel of domestic manners, not a novel of ideas” (David, 2001, p. 212). Because of its emotional dramas, moral dilemmas, and intimate spaces, domestic fiction laid much of the ground for the nineteenth-century novel. Armstrong’s *Desire and Domestic Fiction* provides more agency for domestic fiction: she claims the domestic novel has always been at the centre of the transformative phenomenon that was and is modern narrative fiction (Armstrong, 1987, p. 15). She further argues that the domestic novel is where the notion of subjectivity had its inception. According to Armstrong, the household is not an escape from social and political instrumentalisation but becomes the instrument through which political and social power are defined and realised.³ Margaret Homans, in *Bearing the Word: Language and Female Experience in Nineteenth-Century Women’s Writing*, further qualifies Armstrong’s account of domestic fiction by demonstrating how women wrote within a patriarchal language system, so their voices were mediated through the “masculine figurative” and “feminine literal” (Homans, 1986, p. 5). Therefore, women’s voices were always at risk of being muted or reabsorbed back into the structures they were trying to resist when writing from within such a social parameter. In her reading of *Jane Eyre*, she notes that “to become the child of her dreams would be to merge with objective nature and to transfer the self from subject to object” (Homans, 1986, p. 99). Even as the novel proclaims female autonomy, this autonomy is threatened by a figurative slide into objecthood and ultimately constrained within the conventional resolution of marriage.

Armstrong and Homans construct a view of the domestic novel as not only an essential piece of nineteenth-century literary culture but also inextricably connected with ideological projects about gender, power, and representation; Mary Poovey’s *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer* similarly frames domestic (referred to as ‘women’s’ or ‘sentimental’ by Poovey, although operating in the same generic form) fiction among the ideological work of creating femininity (Poovey, 1985, p. 38). For Poovey, the novel functioned in the disciplinary sense by training female readers and female writers into “the proper lady,” (properly) imitating socially determined modesty, conduct, and moral authority

³ “At first, I will demonstrate, writing about the domestic woman afforded a means of contesting the dominant notion of sexuality that understood desirability in terms of the woman’s claims to fortune and family name. But then, by the early decades of the nineteenth century, middle-class writers and intellectuals can be seen to take the virtues embodied by the domestic woman and to pit them against working-class culture. It took nothing less than the destruction of a much older concept of the household for industrialization to overcome working-class resistance. In time, following the example of fiction, new kinds of writing—sociological studies of factory and city, as well as new theories of natural history and political economy—established modern domesticity as the only haven from the trials of a heartless economic world” (Armstrong, 1987, p. 15)

(Poovey, 1985, p. 3). Poovey's discussion of domestic fiction shows that women writers practised "compensatory gratifications, ideal rewards, and ideal revenges," to enact some legitimacy within their writing and add their voices to dialogues surrounding gender and women's places in society (Poovey, 1985, p. 38). Poovey's argument is similar to Armstrong and Homans' arguments, further illustrating that the domestic novel is not only descriptive of women's lives, but prescriptive; the domestic genre models gendered identity, moral agency, and social positions, while also constituting a space through which these terms could be re-negotiated. Poovey further marks the extent to which domestic fiction was a space in which the contradictions in the ideologies of femininity, morality, and authority were allowed to be contended with.⁴ The domestic novel is therefore not a passive observation of private and public life, but one of the primary sites in which nineteenth-century anxieties and ambitions around gender and power were brought to the forefront.

Catherine Gallagher's *Nobody's Story* adds another element to the discussion of the domestic novel by using deconstructive feminist theory to demonstrate how domestic fiction creates its characters as "fictions of personhood" (Gallagher, 1994, p. xvi). These "fictions" enable individuality to be seen in an everyday narrative (Gallagher, 1994, p. xvi). According to Gallagher, the importance of the domestic novel can be found not only in its ideological and linguistic role, as Armstrong, Homans, and Poovey all indicated, but also in its formal ability to produce an illusion of interior livelihoods.⁵ Gallagher argues domestic fiction maps out the idea of the modern individual: an identifiable, private, moral subject. The portraits of "nobody's" lives, as the common property of fiction-hood, are not only characters—but manifestations of self and subjectivity (Gallagher, 1994, pp. 171-174). Domestic fiction establishes the notion of self-identity through realist detail, interior narration, and moral closure, transforming the private space into a more familiar representation of individual selfhood (Gallagher, 1994, pp. 171-174). Therefore, domestic fiction not only reveals existing cultural values, but also creates new ways of thinking about individuals, as both private and

⁴ "Not surprisingly, we will often see the complexities of their position within ideology most clearly at the moments these writers dramatize [sic] the eruptions of female feeling" (Poovey, 1985, p. 38).

⁵ Gallagher makes a point of differentiation from Armstrong (and Spencer, *The Rise of the Woman Novelist*, 1986): "Armstrong and Spencer identify a discursive break ... [Yet] Authors on both sides of the mid-century revolution in sensibility, in quite dissimilar social and economic conditions and across a range of discourses, portrayed themselves as dispossessed, in debt, and on the brink of disembodiment. How can we explain the continuities, as well as the historical ruptures, in the rhetoric of female authorship?" (Gallagher, 1994, p. xxi). In other words, Gallagher argues both earlier and later women writers drew on similar tropes of dispossession and self-effacement, suggesting continuities beneath the apparent rupture. Although the eighteenth century is outside the scope of this study, the context of continuity in women writers' feelings of fragile legitimacy over the course of the eighteenth to nineteenth century provides an important backdrop for understanding how the nineteenth-century domestic novel inherited and reshaped models of authorship and legitimacy.

social, significant and representative. Gallagher's theorisation builds on Armstrong's politicisation of the household, Homans's critique of constraint, and Poovey's discussion of gendered discipline, by explaining how the narrative techniques of realist narration—attention to common habits and routines, domesticity, and close reading of emotional states—made the private normative in the imagination of the writers of the nineteenth-century domestic novel.⁶ These critics use the domestic novel together to locate the space in which theology, politics, and ideology intersected in the nineteenth century. This dissertation extends this lineage by demonstrating how Milton's *Paradise Lost* emerges from this space, arguing first that the domestication of epic motifs of temptation, pride, and exile is situated in the domestic novel, and secondly that the reconfiguration of these motifs provides women novelists with the imaginative possibilities to negotiate authority and knowledge as it connects to the ordinary.

As Ian Watt first identified in *The Rise of the Novel*, at the centre of the domestic novel is the courtship narrative structure, which is situated in a similar negotiation of desire, power, and consent that leads to—or defers—marriage.⁷ The marriage plot has been identified by various critics, including Claudia Johnson, as a generative form that showcases the tensions of individual freedom (a character's freedom to desire, to choose a partner, and to imagine a different life) in relation to social regulation (the constraints of class, property, gender, family obligation, and moral expectations), specifically in the context of “the function of sentimentality within the public sphere.”⁸ For Armstrong, the marriage plot is a

⁶ Gallagher grounds the density of the realist novel as confirmation of fiction: “The very specificity and particularity of realist representation, moreover, should be viewed as confirmation, rather than obfuscation, of fiction. Those techniques that make up what Ian Watt called the novel's ‘formal realism’ ... are all overtly illusionistic confessions that the particulars of the novel character have no extra-textual existence. The character came into fictional existence most fully only when he or she was developed as nobody in particular ... A generalized character would too easily take on allegorical or symbolic reference ... But the more characters were loaded with circumstantial and seemingly insignificant properties, the more the readers were assured that the text was at once assuming and making up for its reference to nobody at all” (Gallagher, 1994, pp. 173-174). According to Gallagher, the realist novel's circumstantial detail functions not as a guarantee of referential truth but as evidence of fictionality, ensuring that its characters are recognised as “nobody in particular” (Gallagher, 1994, pp. 173–174).

⁷ It would be remiss not to note that Armstrong critiques Watt's historiography: “Watt's historical explanation fails to consider why ‘the majority of eighteenth-century novels’ were written by women... ‘the feminine sensibility was in some ways better equipped to reveal the intricacies of personal relationships and was therefore at a real advantage in the realm of the novel.’ ... such attempts to explain the history of the novel fail because—to a man—history is represented as the history of male institutions. Where women writers are concerned, this understanding of history leaves all the truly interesting questions unasked: Why the ‘female sensibility’? How ‘better equipped’? What ‘intricacies’? Whose ‘personal relationships’? Why an ‘advantage in the realm of the novel’? And, finally, how did all this become commonplace?” (Armstrong, 1987, p. 14).

⁸ (Johnson, 1995, p. 13). Johnson uses Jane Austen's *Emma* to discuss interiority and gender performance, arguing that “Emma's energies and desires are not fully contained within the grid imposed by the courtship plot” (Johnson, 1995, p. 195). By characterising Emma Woodhouse in ways that “bend gender” but “without the

mechanism of making women's desire politically legible; for Poovey, it is also a form of disciplinary space through which female propriety and authorisation are regulated; for Johnson, it is the vehicle through which women renegotiate social constraints.

What remains undeveloped in these accounts, and what this thesis will attempt to address, is how the courtship plot also operates as a mechanism for domestic reworkings of Milton's Fall narrative in *Paradise Lost*. The courtship plot incorporates elements of temptation, error, exile, and reconciliation. The courtship rituals of flirtation and secrecy approximate Miltonic temptation; pride and misjudgement can serve as the Fall; rejection or expulsion can be identified as reconstructions of exile; and marriage becomes the contemporary covenant, or redemption. Brontë's *Jane Eyre* acts that out explicitly, but the same force underlies Austen's ironic comedies of courtship and Eliot's provincial examinations of contested or failed marriage. In framing the courtship plot as a domestic theology of the Fall, this thesis demonstrates that nineteenth-century women novelists were doing more than just telling stories about domestic drama. They were addressing Milton's grand questions about obedience, knowledge, error, and renewal, in the literary form of writing most associated with the category of women's writing (Armstrong, 1987, p. 3). The courtship plot becomes a domestic parallel theology, where Miltonic dilemmas of knowledge and obedience are replayed and reworked into drawing rooms and parlours.

In *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), Gilbert and Gubar explore how nineteenth-century women writers engage with Milton. They argue that *Paradise Lost* functions as a patriarchal literary forebearer, with Eve cast as the archetype of women's dependence and subordination. From this, they develop a powerful model of literary influence, imagining women writers as rebellious daughters contending with their symbolic father, Milton. At the same time, they propose that women's novels often operate as palimpsests, in which "surface designs conceal or obscure deeper, less socially acceptable levels of meaning" (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000, p. 73). This thesis acknowledges the contributions of Gilbert and Gubar and adds another layer of analysis, arguing that one should consider Austen, Brontë, and Eliot as not just writing with oppositional intent against Milton. Rather, they are borrowing from, rewriting, adapting, reworking, and renegotiating the Miltonic Fall within the geo-political context of domesticity and the courtship plot, and deliberately doing so not only in terms of resistance but also as a creative conversation surrounding domestic theology. In this study,

slightest hint of horror," Austen subverts the normalising power of the courtship plot and allows Emma's forcefulness to appear legitimate rather than threatening (Johnson, 1995, p. 196).

influence is understood not as resistance but as a dialogic process, in which women novelists recontextualised and transformed elements of *Paradise Lost* within domestic fiction—reshaping its theological and gendered paradigms into new narrative forms.

THE THEORETICAL LANDSCAPE OF INFLUENCE

Milton's influence on authors in the nineteenth century has been analysed in detail; this dissertation does not attempt to duplicate those investigations.⁹ Rather, this project proposes a model of literary influence grounded in processes of transposition, domestication, and recharacterisation. Transposition refers to the relocation of Miltonic categories—temptation, fall, reconciliation—into new narrative settings, particularly the structures of the domestic novel. Domestication describes the reduction of Milton's epic scale into the intimate sphere of family, marriage, and social comedy. Recharacterisation denotes the reworking of Milton's figures—Eve, Adam, Satan—into novelistic characters whose dilemmas resonate within nineteenth-century social life. This model emphasises adaptation over struggle, transformation over fidelity. Women novelists are not cast as anxious daughters resisting a patriarchal precursor, but as authors who continuously reshape Milton into new literary forms. Crucially, this model asks not only whether Milton's *Paradise Lost* is present in nineteenth-century domestic fiction, but also what its presence does: how it enables ethical critique, establishes narrative authority, and reconstitutes the agency of women's authorship in a culture negotiating the shifting balance of sacred and secular frames.

The theoretical frameworks that follow—Bloom's agon (1997), Kristeva's intertextuality (1986), Bakhtin's dialogism (1981), Genette's taxonomy (1997), Williams's cultural materialism (2005), and more recent cognitive and computational approaches (Manjavacas Arévalo, 2021)—are treated here as dialogic partners. Each clarifies the possibilities and limitations of existing approaches, but none fully accounts for the dynamic, genre-crossing processes by which Milton is reworked in the domestic novel. This project's model therefore positions influence not as linear inheritance, anxiety, or categorical classification, but as a flexible and networked practice of narrative refunctioning, continually reshaping Milton for new ideological and narrative purposes.

Harold Bloom's *The Anxiety of Influence*, originally published in 1973, provides a foundational theory of textual influence, where influence is conceived of as an agonistic and

⁹ See also: Erik Gray's *Milton and the Victorians* (2009); and, of course, the various works referenced in the section of this chapter, "The Diffusion of *Paradise Lost*."

psychological struggle. For Bloom, every poet encounters the precursor with some Oedipal anxiety: to be original, they must misread or distort what is already known (Bloom, 1997, pp. 10-11, 14). Influence becomes a violent act of incision and erasure. According to Bloom, the strong poets only survive through one of six forms of creative misreading of the precursor.¹⁰ Although Bloom's analysis focuses on originality and individualism, it treats influence as a heroic struggle between solitary writers. The approach adopted in this thesis understands influence as adaptive rather than agonistic. Where Bloom sees misreadings as destructive revisions, this study values transposition and recoding, with Miltonic figures and scenes spilling into domestic novels not through suppression but through creative reimaginings—for example, reframing temptation not as a fall into error but as a stage in courtship, or reworking reconciliation into the form of marital resolution.

By contrast, Kristeva's intertextuality and Bakhtin's dialogism remove the singular model entirely. In *Word, Dialogue, and Novel*, Kristeva sees intertextuality as "dialogue among several writings," and goes on to explain that every single text is always already an intersection of other texts (Kristeva, 1986, p. 36). In *The Dialogic Imagination* (1981), Bakhtin similarly argues that none of the texts exist without being an "active participant" in a dialogue with other voices, both current and historical.¹¹ Here, influence is never a struggle but immersion in a cultural conversation. Yet Kristeva and Bakhtin risk dissolving influence into a diffuse network. This thesis preserves the sense of dialogue but complicates it with sharper points of counter-exegesis: narrative choices in later texts that explicitly revise Milton's moral theology—such as Eve's curiosity reimagined as epistemological virtue, or providential causality redistributed into the contingencies of social life. This allows influence to be traced in concrete strategies of reworking, rather than in an imprecise intertextual field.

Gérard Genette's typology in *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree* (1997) offers another framework, classifying textual relations into five forms.¹² His scheme of

¹⁰ Bloom's taxonomy is as follows: "Clinamen," or "misprision proper;" "Tessera," or "completion" by improving the precursor's work; "Kenosis," or self-humbling; "Daemonization," or tapping into a higher power than the precursor; "Askesis," or diminishing both the self and the precursor; and "Apophrades," or making the precursor look derivative (Bloom, 1997, pp. 14-15).

¹¹ "The processes of ... unification and disunification, intersect in the utterance; the utterance not only answers the requirements of its own language as an individualized [sic] embodiment of a speech act, but it answers the requirements of heteroglossia as well; it is in fact an active participant in such speech diversity" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 272).

¹² Genette's taxonomy includes: "architextuality," or "the general or transcendent categories ... from which emerges each singular text;" "transtextuality, or the textual transcendence of text;" "intertextuality," or "a relationship of copresence between two texts or among several texts;" "paratextuality," or "a title, subtitle, intertitles ... and many other kinds of secondary signals, whether allographic or autographic;" and "metatextuality," or a text that "unites a given text to another, of which it speaks without necessarily citing it" (Genette, 1997, pp. 1-4).

hypertextuality enables the identification of quotation, commentary, parody, adaptation, and more. Yet these relations appear as fixed categories rather than dynamic cultural processes. Influence becomes a matter of classification, not dialogue. While Genette's typology is illuminating, it cannot capture the dynamics of domesticating Milton's narrative processes. This study foregrounds the counter-exegesis by which providential causality is redistributed into social causality—moments where Milton's epic logic of fall and restoration becomes translated into the rise-and-fall rhythms of courtship and marriage.

Cultural materialism, as described by Raymond Williams, moves the conversation from textual relations into historic-economic structures (Williams, 2005, p. 56). Influence is not merely a matter of literature, but also a matter of power relationships (class, gender, and institutions) and the distribution of communications.¹³ Texts influence each other in relation to capitalistic, hegemonic, and social structures: these ideological formations shape the formations of the canon. Jane Austen's own career shows how gendered codes and market forces determined literary value: her novels were discussed as moral guides to feminine sensibility but marketed by publishers responding to the rising trend of domestic fiction (Johnson, 1988, pp. xiv-xvi). These dynamics appeared to both limit her critical reception and shape her popularity, thereby shaping the foundations of her eventual canonisation (Johnson, 1988, pp. xvi-xix). Williams's model is productive in grounding influence in ideology and institutions, yet it can reduce texts to symptoms of larger cultural structures. To address this limitation, this study emphasises how women novelists inscribed agency into their fiction by reworking Miltonic patterns—such as temptation and resistance, exile and reconciliation, or providence dispersed into social causality. Through these narrative strategies, Milton's epic categories were reconceptualised within the intimate frameworks of the domestic novel.

Cognitive poetics and computational approaches have more recently expanded the field. Reuven Tsur, in *On the Shore of Nothingness* (2003), demonstrates how readers process metaphor and genre through cognitive schemata, showing how poetic structures simulate religious experience.¹⁴ Influence here is a cognitive event, not just textual borrowing; it is enacted in the reader's mental processing, where recurring metaphors, narrative structures,

¹³ "As I understand it, we have here a case of a definition of quality which becomes, through real usage, based on certain assumptions, a description of the world" (Williams, 2005, p. 68).

¹⁴ Tsur's outline for the activation of cognitive schema: "I have isolated four conditions the presence of which may induce a reader to perceive a group of signs (such as, e.g., a stretch of words) as displaying some nonconceptual, ineffable quality, that is, evoke a perception that the two are somehow "equivalent": the most salient features of the source phenomenon are represented; a relatively large number of distinguishing characteristics of the source phenomenon are sampled for representation; the target system is sufficiently fine-grained to capture the most salient features of the source phenomenon; the nearest options of the target system are chosen to represent features of a source phenomenon" (Tsur, 2003 p.2)

and symbolic patterns activate the reader's existing mental schema, and explains why some lines of poetry feel like they are embodying the very thing they are describing. In this view, Milton's epic provides the stored mental patterns of cosmic motifs—temptation, exile, and reconciliation—that subsequent texts re-trigger in readers' minds, producing a felt sense of continuity, familiarity, or transformation across genres. This project will use cognitive schemas as recurring motifs that resonate with readers on a conceptual level, while grounding them firmly in historical specificity.

Computational approaches, like those examined and tested in Enrique Manjavacas Arévalo's study 'Computational Approaches to Intertextuality,' (2021) use algorithms to trace networks across vast corpora, demonstrating how genre and canon shape textual relations over centuries. These methods are new for literary research and still being tested, but they illuminate the mental and systemic scales of influence in literature through data analysis. This study instead takes a much smaller scale approach to trace the influence of *Paradise Lost* in much greater detail. This greater detail is important, as the project focuses on how women novelists mobilised the domestic form to reconstitute Milton's categories of the Fall within the registers of everyday life and feminine experience, which requires a careful and qualified (as opposed to quantified) close reading analysis of each individual text.

Collectively, these theories show that influence is not singular but contested: individual (Bloom, 1997), dialogic (Kristeva, 1986; Bakhtin, 1981), classificatory (Genette, 1997), ideological (Williams, 2005), cognitive (Tsur, 2003), systemic (Manjavacas Arévalo, 2021). Laura Fox Gill's *Peripheral Vision: The Miltonic in Victorian Painting, Poetry, and Prose, 1825–1901* (2017) offers a particularly generative reorientation of this debate. Rather than locating Milton's presence only in direct allusion or overt homage, Gill demonstrates how the epic persists peripherally—surfacing in oblique images, half-veiled echoes, and motifs that slip into Victorian culture at the edges of awareness.¹⁵ Her account powerfully displaces the view of Milton as a monolithic patriarchal burden, recasting him instead as a diffuse cultural resource that artists and writers could rework with surprising flexibility.¹⁶ By showing how Milton circulated in painting, poetry, and prose not only through direct citation but through reframed motifs and visual or verbal resonances, Gill establishes a model of

¹⁵ Gill similarly acknowledges the multiplicity of the Miltonic: "the fragmented form in which Mary Shelley explores these ideas can be related to a persistent and Miltonic multiplicity. Shelley both uses and resists fragmentation—and likewise both uses and subverts the Miltonic ontological model" (Gill, 2017, p. 12).

¹⁶ Gill uses this section to highlight how Shelley's *The Last Man* can "be understood as cast in the 'terms of *Paradise Lost*,'" arguing its influence through terms of prophecy, "authority, family, and beginnings," and "the dreams of Milton himself" (Gill, 2017, pp. 22-24, 26).

influence that is dynamic, distributed, and alive in the margins. A complementary account is offered by Erik Gray, whose work on Milton and Victorian literature likewise emphasises the poet's pervasive yet often indirect presence, tracing how Miltonic forms and concerns are reconfigured within nineteenth-century texts even where explicit allusion is minimal—an approach developed most fully in his studies of Victorian poetry, including his discussion of “Victorian Miltons” (Gray, 2009, pp. 1, 154). More broadly, recent Milton scholarship has increasingly moved away from strictly agonistic models of influence, emphasising inheritance as transmission, adaptation, and “sweet influence” rather than struggle, as in John T. Shawcross's account of Milton's legacy (Duran, 2007, p. 25). This project builds directly on Gill and Gray's insights, extending the concepts of Gill's ‘peripheral vision’ and Gray's indirect but pervasive Miltonic presence into the realm of domestic novels and the courtship plot. Just as Gill and Gray reveal Milton haunting Victorian painting and poetry at the edges of vision, so too can Miltonic structures be discerned in domestic fiction, reframed within the rhythms of everyday life and the intimate negotiations of gender, marriage, and social order.

Taken together, these theories demonstrate that influence is never singular but a contested field: sometimes dialogic, structural, ideological, or cognitive. Each framework illuminates a part of the picture, yet none on their own can fully explain how Milton's *Paradise Lost* is absorbed, reconfigured, and redeployed within the domestic novel. Building on these theoretical frameworks—most directly on Gill's insight into Milton's peripheral presence—this study advances a model of influence that views the epic not as preserved intact, but as broken down, repurposed, and woven into the novel's everyday fabric. It conceives influence as a process of reconfiguration, domestication, and recharacterisation, enacted through counter-exegesis and through the redistribution of providence into secular causality, where divine order is reimagined as the contingencies of social life. The value of this model lies not in the accumulation of references, but in revealing the details of the structural work Milton performs within the domestic novel: reshaping plots, recalibrating moral stakes, and reconfiguring character types. Milton is then not an unassailable forefather but a refitted resource, continuously adapted to the domestic novel's ideological and narrative purposes. This model of influence establishes the basis for examining the literary diffusion of *Paradise Lost*, tracing how the epic circulated across nineteenth-century genres and discourses, and how this saturation created the conditions for its refunctioning within the domestic novel.

THE GENRE DIFFUSION OF *PARADISE LOST*

Miltonic influence within the domestic novel emerges less as a static inheritance than as a dynamic resource continually reshaped in response to shifting cultural conditions. Women writers appropriated and reworked Milton's imagery and themes to test new possibilities of narrative form, authority, genre, and cultural meaning. Their novels demonstrate how Milton's figures and motifs could be used to renegotiate assumptions about morality, gender, and identity, showing influence not as a burden but as a site of agency. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), for example, engages with *Paradise Lost* both overtly and structurally, staging the monster's identification with Adam and Satan as a rethinking of Milton's myth of origins. Where Shelley's reading is explicit and radical, other novelists such as Anne Brontë, in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848), reconfigure Miltonic motifs in quieter but equally disruptive ways, situating them within the registers of domestic experience.

Among the many writers who reimagined Milton in this way, Mary Shelley offers one of the most striking cases, with *Frankenstein* positioning *Paradise Lost* at the very heart of its exploration of creation, transgression, and identity. Shelley consciously engages with *Paradise Lost*, as the monster in her novel questions whether he can fall only as Adam or as Satan when he reads the pages of Milton's epic. As John Lamb observes, Shelley's reading of *Paradise Lost* reconceptualises the birth myth and presents the possibility of seeing a monster not in the creature he has made, "but in a monstrous myth of identity that leads ... to the destruction of any other emergent voices a culture might carry" (Lamb, 1992, p. 305). In other words, Shelley's engagement with *Paradise Lost* suggests that monstrosity does not reside solely in the creature, but in the very cultural narratives that dictate identity, voices, and power. This line of interpretation has been further developed in recent scholarship such as Mandy Green and Sharihan Al-Akhras's *Women (Re)Writing Milton*, which situates *Frankenstein* within a broader tradition of women writers revising Miltonic paradigms (Green and Al-Akhras, 2021, pp. 49-68).

Though written in a comparatively restrained style, Anne Brontë's publication of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* provoked fierce controversy (Thormählen, 2018, p. 5). As Alexa Kelly observes in her essay 'Angel Bright, Infernal Demon' Brontë's villain Arthur Huntingdon has some of the same characteristics of Satan, in that both characters "cloak themselves in brightness to achieve their ends" (Kelly, 2020, p. 292). Huntingdon performs the role of the charismatic gentleman, but beneath this disguise lies a figure of cruelty, selfishness, and destructive appetite. Much like Satan, his artifice of charm hides an inner

hollowness, and his greatest weapon is deception. Further, Helen's struggle against her husband echoes Eve's conflict with Adam and with the temptations of Eden. However, Helen inverts Eve's trajectory: rather than succumbing to temptation or submitting passively, she defies both marital and social expectations by fleeing with her child. In doing so, Helen challenges the Victorian ideology of wifely obedience that had biblical sanction and Miltonic precedent (Thormählen, 2004, pp. 185-186). Her resistance reframes the Fall—not as sin, but as a courageous assertion of moral and maternal responsibility.

The identification of Satanic qualities can also be seen in Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* (1865). As Sarah Annes Brown observes, the character of Romney Leigh has "his real self ... revealed and shown to be wanting," in a manner reminiscent of Satan (Brown, 1997, p. 738). Brown also notes how Aurora's strengths are an inversion of Eve's weaknesses—where Eve Falls in her pursuit of independence, Aurora begins "a successful career as a poet" (Brown, 1997, p. 730). The poem exposes how men exploit women under the pretence of love, denying them the ability to love on their own terms and shutting down their pursuit of other forms of fulfilment. Brown's interpretation, however, neglects to address the significance of the fallen Marian. While Brown acknowledges the Miltonic echoes of Marian's Fall, she does not address the significance of how Marian's reconciliation is achieved through her rejection of Romney and in her bond with her child, in which Marian becomes an Eve of moral resilience.

Similar to how Barrett Browning challenges the notion of irrevocably fallen women, Christina Rossetti tackles it in her poem *Goblin Market* (1862) by presenting female desire and transgression as experiences that can be redeemed through sisterhood, compassion, and love, rather than punished with irredeemable disgrace. Laura's Fall to temptation and Lizzie's resurrection of Laura interpret the fallen woman, like the mythic Eve, as a social state that is not permanent, and as Melanie Ann Hanson argues, women through sisterhood and female love can overcome the Fall (Hanson, 1998, p. 86). Rossetti's reworking of redemption contrasts directly with Milton's *Paradise Lost*, where Eve's transgression results in the Fall of all humankind and requires male mediation for reconciliation. Janet Galligani Casey emphasises that Rossetti portrays sisterhood as an active, empowering force—instead of relying on male mediation, Rossetti locates the possibility of salvation in female bonds, reimagining Eve's legacy as one of recovery rather than ruin (Casey, 1991, pp. 142-145). As Gilbert and Gubar note, the poem's emphasis on nourishment and bodily imagery—Laura's consumption of the goblin fruit and Lizzie's offering of her juice-stained body as a channel of redemption—further grounds its vision of female solidarity in the physical and emotional

realities of women's lives (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000, p. 575). In this way, Rossetti not only resists the Victorian cultural script that equated female sexuality with permanent corruption but also provides a radical counter-myth: women can fall, but they can also rise again, and crucially, they do so not through men, but through each other.

Nineteenth-century male authorship also engaged with *Paradise Lost* through various ethical, thematic, and socio-cultural conversations in their novels. Charles Dickens inverts the narrative of *Paradise Lost* in *Great Expectations* (1861). As Jerome Meckier suggests, Pip and Estella's final separation echoes Adam and Eve's departure from Eden in *Paradise Lost*. Yet their "departure" is figured as an "arrival": a movement from a "ruined place" into a "broad expanse of calm light" (Meckier, 2002, p. 33). Dickens, in effect, inverts the narrative and instead takes his characters back to Eden through a muted form of providence, not through a *deus ex machina*—taking back its characters, and not by exploiting anyone, but by demonstrating dependability and maturity.

In a different vein, Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891) examines the tragic tale of the fallen woman. As Clay Daniel points out, Hardy's rewriting of *Paradise Lost* is radical because Hardy places Eve in the hands of two Satanic figures and sentences Eve to oblivion with Adam's (Angel's) ultimate rejection (Daniel, 1998, p. 101). From this perspective, writes Daniel, Milton becomes "not the defamer of women but ... their magnificent justifier" (Daniel, 1998, p. 107). Hardy's tragic narrative illuminates the cruel reality of women receiving a "fallen" status, whether through class, regard, or virginity.

The concept of the "fallen woman" was well-documented in nineteenth-century Britain, often appearing in literature and casual conversation, and served as cultural shorthand for moral and social devastation. With origins in the biblical Eve in her postlapsarian condition, the phrase conveyed not just sexual transgression but a Fall from respectability—and revealed an entanglement of class with gender. It was generally deemed that respectable middle- or upper-class women "had something to lose," while the sexuality of the poorer women was often judged less strictly, and would sometimes be tolerated to a greater or lesser degree concerning extramarital relationships within their working-class communities (Walkowitz, 1980, pp. 22-24, 62-65). In the moral economy of the nineteenth-century novel, the fallen woman frequently travels down a predestined road of 'the female formula of 'sin, suffer, die'," although this literary convention is much more symbolic than realistic (Butcher, 2016, pp. 44-45). Authors like Hardy use this motif, but the lived realities of numerous women did not follow this narrative's fatalism either so neatly or at all. The fallen woman as a cultural symbol held tremendous potency in nineteenth-century Britain, frequently applied

to women engaged in prostitution or sexual relations outside of marriage, whether consensually or not. But, as Judith Walkowitz points out, the fallen woman was not merely a moral category (Walkowitz, 1980, pp. 22–24). It was a device of class and gender boundary regulation, and a largely female-charged disciplinary in “rescue” establishments, which constructed their definition of redemption almost exclusively as female discipline of sexuality over male (Walkowitz, 1980, pp. 22–24). Penitentiaries for fallen women treated the women locked behind their patriarchal walls as “patients” of moral correction, reinforcing a gendered double standard of repentance and purity (Walkowitz, 1980, pp. 22–24). As George Watt observes in *The Fallen Woman in the Nineteenth-Century English Novel*, novels such as *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* impose a fatalism that overshadows the real, contingent alternatives available in women’s lives—alternatives in which sexual relations outside marriage, especially in working-class communities, were often accommodated in more pragmatic ways (Watt, 1984, pp. 2, 9). In this sense, the “fallen woman” in its most tragic and rigid definition was more a fictional and symbolic position than a direct reflection of social practice; there was “no one fall, no single disgrace, no automatic placing in categories of purity or prostitution” (Watt, 1984, p. 7).

The fallen woman, as part of a larger cultural discourse, was also reimagined in sensationalist fiction, a broad genre that dramatised anxiety about secrecy, guilt, and female transgression in new narrative forms, as in, for example, Wilkie Collins’s *The Law and the Lady* (1875). Collins relocates Miltonic error into the intertwined spaces of marriage and law. As Tamar Heller observes in *Dead Secrets: Wilkie Collins and the Female Gothic*, the novel is structured around “the concealment of knowledge within marriage” (Heller, 1992, p. 154), a concealment that resonates with the secrecy and partial knowledge central to Eve’s transgression in *Paradise Lost*. Valeria’s quest to uncover her husband’s past reframes the Fall not as a single act of disobedience but as a lingering stain of guilt carried into the marriage bond. The verdict of “Not Proven,” which hangs over the couple, echoes the indeterminate condition of postlapsarian humanity—neither fully condemned nor fully redeemed. By casting domestic life in the idiom of suspicion, investigation, and gradual revelation, Collins transforms the marriage plot into a space where Miltonic themes of temptation, error, and judgment are replayed. Yet, unlike Milton’s Adam and Eve, whose Fall signals exile from Eden, Valeria’s persistence suggests the possibility of reconstituting domestic order through female agency and interpretive labour.

Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) is perhaps the most radical reimagining of *Paradise Lost*, as the novel transposes the Miltonic Fall onto selfhood rather

than domestic and marital bonds. Where Milton's Adam and Eve fall together through disobedience, Wilde presents a solitary Fall enacted through vanity and narcissism. Dorian's pact of eternal beauty resembles Satan's wilful embrace of self over obedience, but unlike the transpositions of Satanic temptation of the domestic novel, in *Dorian Gray*, temptation is mediated through aesthetic philosophy rather than marital or household transgression. The portrait in *Dorian Gray* functions as a mirror, externalising corruption while preserving the illusion of innocence—an inversion of Eve's embodied culpability in *Paradise Lost*. In *Paradise Lost*, Eve's transgression is inscribed on the body, her act of eating marking sin as both visible and material. Wilde inverts this model: Dorian's corruption is displaced onto the portrait, while his own body remains untouched. As Regenia Gagnier argues in *Idylls of the Marketplace*, Wilde translates ethics into aesthetics, reframing the Fall as a drama of beauty and spectatorship, where temptation lies not in forbidden fruit but in the vain pursuit of art and appearance (Gagnier, 1986, p. 127). Dorian's descent shows how Miltonic motifs could be secularised into questions of identity, desire, and self-destruction in a culture where morality was increasingly imagined through aesthetics rather than theology.

For authors in the nineteenth century reading and rewriting Milton, the symbolic economy of the Fall provides an abundance of opportunities for reinterpretation. The story of Eve's transgression in *Paradise Lost* offered a cultural template through which writers could explore contemporary fears around morality, sexuality, and identity. Each retelling of the Fall had its own narrative: from Shelley's reframing of providence in *Frankenstein*, which excises personal responsibility from the individual, to Dickens's *Great Expectations* and Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, which emphasises personal agency in pursuing desire. These adaptations illustrate the process through which Milton's epic was secularised, domesticated, and reimagined, not just to dramatise the Fall from God's grace, but to explore the social theology of the Falls which constructed Victorian understandings of class, gender, and sexuality.

These various adaptations of Milton's Fall narrative illustrate how embedded *Paradise Lost* had become in nineteenth-century culture, influencing both literary tradition and broader social conversation. Authors drew on Milton to explore pressing questions of morality and identity in a culture increasingly conscious of its growing distance from religious orthodoxy. From this perspective, the domestication of the Fall did not diminish Milton's authority in literature; rather it opened broader possibilities for how his epic could be reinvented and reused across the nineteenth century. In this context, it is possible to think

about the distinctions between the texts that belong to a wider field of Milton's reception and the texts which engage more earnestly with the intent of the domestic novel.

SELECTION OF MAIN CASE STUDIES

The main case studies this dissertation will focus on are Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) and *Mansfield Park* (1814), Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) and *Shirley* (1849), and Eliot's *Adam Bede* (1859), and *Middlemarch* (1871–2), as each represent a key example of nineteenth-century domestic fiction. Together, these novels span the genre's development across the century, from the satirical comedy of Austen, through Brontë's Gothic and psychological intensification, to Eliot's realist provincial narratives. Each takes the courtship plot—the domestic novel's most recognisable plot structure of desire, mistake, and reconciliation—and extends its possibilities, using marriage, household, and community as testing grounds for ethical choice. It is in this expansion of the courtship plot that these novels most clearly intersect with Milton's *Paradise Lost*, transforming the poem's cosmic drama into the domestic and communal concerns of nineteenth-century fiction.

The work of literary critic Henry H. Bonnell offers an early reflection on how the women writers in this dissertation can be read comparatively. His study *Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot, Jane Austen: Studies in Their Works* (1902), establishes Austen, Brontë, and Eliot as “three of the greatest literary women in nineteenth-century England” (Bonnell, 2013, p. 2), canonising them as distinct voices brought into conversation about the projected course of nineteenth-century fiction. Bonnell situates Austen at the inception of the novel of manners, contends that Brontë heightened the psychological and emotional stakes of the novel, and argues that Eliot transformed it into a moral philosophy and a vehicle for social commentary (Bonnell, 2013, p. 3). For Bonnell, their significance lay in irony, passion, and moral seriousness—categories that, although not explicitly theological, can be read as dialectically related to Milton's Fall narrative, where irony resonates with error, passion with temptation, and moral seriousness with the possibility of redemption (Bonnell, 2013, p. 3). Bonnell's framework is useful in showing that Austen, Brontë, and Eliot had long been understood as a critical triad, but his model of literary development largely sidesteps the cultural and theological inheritances that this project foregrounds—particularly *Paradise Lost* and the domestication of its epic categories within nineteenth-century fiction. Bonnell sees irony, passion, and moral seriousness as purely literary qualities; this dissertation builds on these qualities as reconfigurations of Miltonic motifs—error, temptation, and redemption—through which the courtship plot becomes a site for negotiating the Fall.

It is with Austen that this reconfiguration first takes shape, as her fiction establishes the underpinnings of domestic fiction (Bonnell, 2013, p. 3). *Pride and Prejudice* reconfigures the Fall narrative through the ironic satirical novel of manners, using the household and the dance hall not only as social stages but as Miltonic arenas of trial where pride, desire, and misjudgement expose characters to error. *Mansfield Park* makes the Miltonic resonance sharper: the drawing-room and the amateur theatricals become spaces of temptation, where obedience and transgression are tested in forms that echo the garden trial of *Paradise Lost*. Fanny Price's outsider perspective positions her as a figure of vigilance and potential exile, her virtue standing against the household's susceptibility to error. In both novels, Austen translates Miltonic categories into miniature, domestic form: temptation refracted into flirtation or performance, error into misreading and social folly, exile into embarrassment or marginalisation, and reconciliation into the restored order of marriage. Although Austen's irony undercuts Milton's epic gravitas, it does not erase it; instead, irony becomes the very tool by which Miltonic motifs are domesticated, exposing how trials of obedience and error persist even in the seemingly trivial rituals of courtship and social exchange. Here Milton functions less as an object of direct allusion than as cultural inheritance: his epic categories reframed and ironised through the satirical scale of domestic comedy.

Brontë's novels increase the psychological and communal stakes within domestic fiction. *Jane Eyre* turns the marriage plot into a drama of selfhood and temptation: Jane's flight from Rochester reframes Eve's exile, while her eventual return stages the possibility of reconciliation without self-annihilation. *Shirley* widens the scope, considering how the domestic plot can accommodate political and social turbulence—including Luddite riots, industrial strife, and female solidarity—so that Miltonic categories of temptation and trial are tested not only within households but across communities. Unlike Austen's ironic reframing or Eliot's post-Miltonic sediment, Brontë occupies a hinge point in the nineteenth-century reception of Milton. She engages with his work via deliberate allusion—Jane's exile, like Eve's, is at once punitive and redemptive: a departure from a corrupted household that preserves her integrity and makes possible reconciliation on new terms. Gothic space also functions as a site of trial. Thornfield, with its garden, locked rooms, concealed secrets, and atmosphere of isolation, echoes Milton's Eden as the stage where temptation is dramatised: a place of concealment and revelation where the heroine must face the ethical test of obedience and desire. Rochester is not a straightforward Satanic figure but a Byronic tempter, carrying forward Satan's seductiveness and defiance while refracting them through Romantic individualism and Gothic psychology. Brontë's use of Gothic intensity may seem at times to

distort Milton's theological drama. Still, it also sharpens it—amplifying temptation into ordeal and exile into moral testing—so that Milton remains visible on the surface of her rhetoric even as his categories are recast into the idiom of female selfhood and communal solidarity. In *Shirley*, the Fall becomes not only a private drama but a public one: temptation and trial are tested in fields and factories as well as parlours, so that Milton's epic motifs measure the fate of a whole community rather than a single marriage.

Eliot repurposes domestic fiction into, ultimately, a genre of moral philosophy. *Adam Bede* maps Miltonic categories directly onto a domestic narrative: Hetty Sorrel's temptation and fall into sexual transgression echoes Eve's, her exile through flight and imprisonment mirrors Edenic banishment, and Dinah Morris figures the possibility of grace by offering consolation and spiritual renewal. The novel thus replays Milton's cycle of temptation, error, exile, and reconciliation on a provincial stage. *Middlemarch* expands this framework. The singular marriage plot becomes multiple, interconnected stories in which characters repeatedly stumble into error—Tertius Lydgate's imprudent marriage, Nicholas Bulstrode's concealed past, Dorothea Brooke's compromised hopes—and where reconciliation, if it comes, is partial and fragile. Here the Fall is no longer a singular act but the dispersed condition of provincial life: a continual state of ethical failure, endurance, and provisional repair. Eliot's engagement is almost post-Miltonic. The term post-Miltonic designates a literary condition in which Milton's epic frameworks have become culturally internalised, informing assumptions about fallenness, moral agency, and redemption without requiring overt intertextual reference (Foy, 2020, p. 1). Eliot rarely cites Milton directly, but her narratives operate through cultural tropes sedimented from *Paradise Lost*—temptation refigured as imprudence or moral blindness, exile as social ostracism or frustrated vocation, reconciliation as modest ethical accommodation.¹⁷ While her realism might seem to dissolve Milton's epic gravity, it in fact demonstrates its saturation: Milton's categories naturalised into the causal fabric of ordinary life.

This project focuses on Austen, Brontë, and Eliot because their domestic novels most fully reimagine the courtship plot as a vehicle for negotiating the narrative of the Fall in Milton's *Paradise Lost*.¹⁸ The psychological drama of temptation, obedience, desire, and

¹⁷ Milton's diffuse literary persistence and its cultural transmission are examined in greater detail in chapter one, devoted to Milton's reception and afterlife.

¹⁸ Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), *Emma* (1815), *Northanger Abbey* (1817a), and *Persuasion* (1817b) are all part of Austen's rich engagement with the domestic fiction novel, but they do not sustain the same symbolic weight of the Fall and reconciliation that *Pride and Prejudice* or *Mansfield Park* do. *Emma*, for instance, is more a comedy of self-deception and social misreading than a domestic Fall. *Northanger Abbey* parodies Gothic conventions more than it reworks temptation in a Miltonic sense. Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*

reconciliation in works like *Pride and Prejudice*, *Mansfield Park*, *Jane Eyre*, *Shirley*, *Adam Bede*, and *Middlemarch* is staged in marriage, the household, and the community, transforming Milton's cosmic Fall into a domestic one. Read together, these authors chart a trajectory of Milton's nineteenth-century afterlife in domestic fiction: Austen refracts Miltonic categories through cultural inheritance and irony, translating temptation and error into the rituals of comedy; Brontë, writing at a pivotal juncture, combines deliberate allusion with Romantic sediment, her Byronic tempter recasting Milton's Satan while her Gothic spaces and exiles dramatise trial and redemption; Eliot disperses Miltonic motifs across provincial realism, where temptation, error, and reconciliation appear as sedimented conditions of ordinary ethical life. Other contemporaries of domestic fiction—such as Emily Brontë, Anne Brontë, and Elizabeth Gaskell—pose moral and social questions that resonate with Milton but rely less centrally on the marriage plot as the vehicle of that dialogue.¹⁹ The claim that domestic fiction provided a form for nineteenth-century women writers to negotiate the meaning of the Fall remains, however, as even writers beyond the primary novels participated in the wider cultural project of Milton's influence, albeit in less direct or structurally central methods. By the same token, this project focuses on *Paradise Lost*, rather than *Paradise Regained*, as *Paradise Lost*—with its embellished Eve, Satan, and its narrative of temptation, error, and reconciliation—afforded nineteenth-century novelists a rich, motif-laden framework with far more adaptable narrative structures for domestic fiction than the drama of Christ's temptation in *Paradise Regained* (Milton, 1671a).

The six primary case studies of Austen, Brontë, and Eliot evidence how women novelists of domestic fiction made the household the site in which epic questions about freedom, knowledge, gender, and power were reimaged in a culture navigating the changing boundary between sacred and secular life. The thesis will begin by disentangling Milton's *Paradise Lost* from Genesis and tracing how Milton's epic of temptation and freedom became the cultural scripture inherited by nineteenth-century women writers. From

(1853) and *The Professor* (1857) are deeply psychological works of domestic fiction, but their energy is in isolation, unrequited desire, and the difficulties of transnational or cross-cultural relationships. They lack the same cosmic-into-domestic allegory you can trace in *Jane Eyre* or even *Shirley*. George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), *Silas Marner* (1861), *Felix Holt, the Radical* (1866) and *Daniel Deronda* (1876) all wrestle with morality, community, and reconciliation, but often outside the marriage plot, despite being domestic novels. *The Mill on the Floss* ends with sibling tragedy, not conjugal reconciliation. *Silas Marner* reworks temptation and redemption in terms of labour and adoption, not marriage. *Daniel Deronda* is about national destiny and Zionism more than the Edenic couple.

¹⁹ While this dissertation briefly touches on Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, it does not go into the detail of the primary novels; nor does it discuss *Agnes Grey* (1847) which may also fall under this genre, but for the same reasons, is not the primary focus of this dissertation.

there, the argument moves through Austen, who miniaturises Milton's Fall into ironic comedies of judgment and reconciliation; to Brontë, who magnifies temptation into Gothic ordeals and communal unrest; and to Eliot, who disperses error across the landscape of provincial realism, where the Fall is no longer an event but the very condition of human life. Taken together, these chapters map the arc from epic to domestic and from the cosmic to the everyday, revealing how the domestic novel emerged as central to the afterlife of Milton's epic narration of the Fall.

CHAPTER ONE: MILTON IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Between the Bible's bare bones and Milton's sinewed epic lies the nineteenth century's beating heart—this chapter begins with that hinge. *Paradise Lost* does not simply retell Genesis; it thickens it—turning a parable of prohibition into a theatre of persuasion, courtship, and choice. For nineteenth-century readers—and especially for women novelists—Milton's poem became an analogue to Genesis, the one with voices, motives, delays, and debates. Bishop Welldon's complaint that Milton made Genesis newly “literal” is itself a clue: by giving the Fall psychological interiority and rhetorical heat, Milton furnished later writers with a script they could stage in parlours and parishes (Welldon, 1912, p. 901). When these novels dramatise temptation as eloquence, love as deliberation, and marriage as verdict, they are not quoting the Bible so much as translating its Miltonic remake. To map that translation this chapter first separates Milton's epic from its biblical source, then follows the routes by which his additions—structure, character, setting, and theology—travel into nineteenth-century culture. It reads Milton alongside women's earlier exegesis that defended Eve, the Romantic and Victorian myth-making that multiplied “Miltons,” and the marketplace that carried his voice into periodical rooms and parlour talk. The claim is simple and consequential: the domestic novel is a refunctioned Fall narrative. Courtship recasts temptation, misjudgement restages transgression, estrangement echoes exile, and reconciliation tests the possibility of grace. Seeing this clarifies influence, upgrades the domestic novel to a primary arena of theological argument, and reframes women writers not as anxious daughters of a patriarch, but as deft theologians of the everyday. Let the epic enter the house; watch how the furniture moves.

PARADISE LOST VS. GENESIS

As a text that retells the biblical story of the Fall of Adam and Eve, *Paradise Lost* is often difficult to separate from the narrative of the Bible's Genesis. For many nineteenth-century readers, Milton's retelling of Genesis was a familiar touchstone, providing the emotional and rhetorical drama that scripture often lacked. In ‘The Theology of Milton,’ James Welldon notes that Milton was largely responsible for shaping the more literal interpretation of Genesis among Christians, observing that Milton's theology “seems to have drifted surely, if slowly, away from orthodox Christianity into a Christian belief and habit of his own” (Welldon, 1912, p. 901). The distinction is crucial: when nineteenth-century writers

invoked Adam and Eve, Satan, or Eden, they often drew not on Genesis directly, but on the richly elaborated Miltonic retelling.

Milton's departures from Genesis were extensive. Where the biblical account of the Fall is concise to the point of being skeletal, Milton expands with psychological and rhetorical density. Genesis 3 offers a brief sequence of dialogue and action: the serpent tempts, Eve eats, Adam follows. Milton transforms this into a drama of soliloquy, persuasion, and conscious choice.²⁰ Satan is reimagined as a charismatic orator and parodic hero, Eve becomes curious, articulate, and desirous of knowledge, and Adam knowingly chooses to share her fate out of love.²¹ The Fall, in Milton's writing, is less a static transgression and more of a dialogue in which courtship, marriage, and desire are tested under divine pressure. In *Paradise Lost and the Genesis Tradition*, J.M. Evans states, "Milton's version of the Fall is distinguished not by its indebtedness but by its profound originality" (Evans, 1968, p. 221). It is precisely this originality that circulated most powerfully in later literary culture.

Annotated editions such as Matthew S. Stallard's *Paradise Lost: The Biblically Annotated Edition* (2011) make clear for readers where Milton borrowed directly from scripture and where he embellished, while critics like Susanne Woods emphasise how structural changes—such as Adam's extended questions in Book VIII—introduced new layers of characterisation absent from Genesis.²² Welldon claims:

It is [Milton] more than anyone else who is responsible for the literal acceptance of the early narrative in the Book of Genesis. The story of the Garden of Eden is so lightly touched by the author of Genesis ... that its literal accuracy was never a recognised part of the Christian Creed until after ... the publication of *Paradise Lost*. (Welldon, 1912, p. 902)

²⁰ For the purpose of this dissertation, biblical citations are taken from the *Authorized King James Bible* (2011), cited by book, chapter, and verse. References to Milton's *Paradise Lost* are taken from Matthew S. Stallard's *Paradise Lost: The Biblically Annotated Edition* (2011), cited by book, line and page number(s).

²¹ From *The Theology of Milton*: "Milton's art ... invested the character of Satan with so striking a dignity that, in spite of his treason against the Almighty, he has commanded something of sympathy ... from many Christians ... the Satan of Milton is more than a gentleman; he is a stern, indomitable, majestic figure." (Welldon, 1912, p. 905). Stallard makes clear that Milton did not intentionally anticipate later interpretations of his work that derive sympathy for Eve, rooting his analysis in the echoes of the Lord's Prayer (Stallard, 2011, pp. xxvii, 218). However, despite the validity of the profuse conscription of scripture Milton alludes to in *Paradise Lost*, the internalisation and enrichment of these characters constructs a new layer to the story of the Fall from Genesis. Evans, however, argues that Adam's "is a love that is both blind and deaf, stirred not by any such impassioned pleas ... but by a sly hint that if he does not do something about it he is going to find himself subservient to his wife ... the assumption underlying this treatment of the Fall is the complement one that Adam's love ... is good only so long as it is directed to a good end" (Evans, 1968, p. 285). Evans's interpretation bears great implications for how Adam's characterisation in *Paradise Lost* is incredibly expanded from Genesis.

²² Woods notes that Adam's elaboration on Genesis 2:7-10 "reveals himself as a sentient, thoughtful, and rational being," emphasising the elaborate detail Milton pays to characterisation in *Paradise Lost* (Woods, 2013, p. 112).

Welldon's claim underscores how central the distinctions between the Bible and Milton's epic are when understanding nineteenth-century reception and inheritance. To trace Milton's influence, then, requires first separating his narrative of the Fall from the biblical Fall in Genesis. Only then can one understand how motifs of desire, agency, temptation, and eloquence percolated into the fabric of nineteenth-century popular and literary culture. When nineteenth-century women novelists stage courtship as dialogue, temptation as rhetorical contest, or domestic love as epic negotiation, they are inheriting Milton's additions rather than Genesis's parable. The question, then, is what difference this makes in understanding Milton's influence on the nineteenth-century domestic novel. This chapter argues that the answer lies in recognising that women writers inherit not the Bible alone, but the Miltonic Genesis—a text already shaped by seventeenth-century debates, already dense with psychological and rhetorical elaboration, and already circulating as a cultural scripture in its own right.

Before one can map the influence of Milton on nineteenth-century women's writing, it is necessary to disentangle *Paradise Lost* from its biblical source. Milton's epic poem is rooted in the biblical account of Genesis, even as it radically reshapes it. To read Milton's renditions of Adam and Eve is not to encounter the biblical archetypes of scripture but figures that have been expanded, dramatised, and endowed with psychological interiority. This distinction is not trivial, as for eighteenth- and nineteenth-century writers and readers, Milton's *Paradise Lost* often served as a complement to Genesis; a narrative so culturally pervasive that the biblical account could be read alongside it. As Bishop Welldon observes, Milton was responsible for shaping a more literal interpretation of Genesis among Christians in the nineteenth-century, his epic often displacing scripture in the imagination of readers (Welldon, 1912, p. 901). Recognising the differences between the two texts is thus essential for understanding exactly what later authors inherited from Milton. These are not rigid categories but recurring features—motifs, structures, characterisations, and rhetorical modes—that Milton added to Genesis and which later writers demonstrably inherit.

The Bible's concise narration leaves vast interpretative space, which later commentators and theologians filled (Evans, 1968, p. 21). In the Bible, Adam is formed from dust; Eve is formed from Adam's rib. God issues the prohibition against eating from the tree of knowledge. The serpent tempts; Eve eats; she gives the fruit to Adam; they are made aware and ashamed of their nakedness and clothe themselves. God questions and judges; the pair are expelled from Eden. The entire sequence plays out in fewer than a hundred verses.

The narrative is skeletal, the dialogue minimal, and the psychological detail absent. Motives are implied rather than explored, and interiority is non-existent. Eve “saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat” (Genesis 3:6). Adam’s choice is narrated in a single clause: “and gave also unto her husband with her, and he did eat” (Genesis 3:6).

Milton takes this space and fills it with a new and expanded narrative.²³ *Paradise Lost* is written in the form of the Greek heroic epic, and inherits epic conventions: starting *in medias res*, invoking a muse, epithets and catalogues, long speeches, and divine intervention. Where Genesis begins with creation (“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth”), Milton’s narrative begins *in medias res* in Hell, with Satan rallying his fallen legions (Genesis 1:1; Milton, I.20–330, pp. 4-18). The choice made in how to begin the story of the Fall is already telling: Milton situates the drama of human origins within a cosmic theatre of rebellion, defeat, and renewed defiance. This is not merely for aesthetics, but rather a structural reimagining of the narrative. Milton’s narrative divisions, his pauses, and the additional debates and soliloquies in *Paradise Lost* shift the story into psychological and philosophical terrain absent from Genesis (Woods, 1997, pp. 105-116). Adam’s questioning of Raphael in Book VIII, for example, directs the reader’s attention away from the simplicity of Genesis, and toward deeper philosophical reflections on freedom and choice, demonstrating how Milton transforms a biblical story into a dialogue about knowledge, obedience, and curiosity (Woods, 1997, p. 110). In this way, Milton does not merely supplement Genesis; he reframes it. Instead of a skeletal aetiological myth, he offers an epic punctuated by councils in Heaven and Hell, cosmic journeys, angelic battles, and philosophical speeches. Genesis uses austere language; Milton’s language is rich and lavish. Genesis proclaims with edicts; Milton probes with dialogues. The biblical account rests on divine decree and human compliance—Milton turns every moment into scenes of debates and interior struggles. As Woods notes, Milton’s interpolation of Adam’s meditative questions in Book VIII produces a structural shift away from Genesis into philosophical dialogue (Woods, 2013, p. 111). Genesis offers a linear narrative; Milton builds a narrative form of epic dialogue, debate, trial, and philosophical self-reflection. When nineteenth-century texts dramatise temptation or transgression through debates, trial-like scenes, or retrospective

²³ References to Milton’s *Paradise Lost* provide both Milton’s original book and line numbers to preserve standard scholarly citation practice, and the pages referenced in Stallard’s annotated edition, which is the edition consulted for this dissertation. This dual citation is intended to ensure transparency while acknowledging both the original work and the edition used.

narration, they echo Miltonic structure rather than biblical parable. Courtship scenes that unfold as arguments, or retrospective storytelling that frames domestic choices with epic weight (in other words, staging a moral or psychological test, rather than simply reporting on the outcome of that test), bear the imprint of *Paradise Lost*.

Milton's additions to Christian aetiology also include the additional characterisations afforded to God, Satan, Adam, and Eve. God, in Genesis, is "the Lord God," whose role is that of a commanding and interrogating presence (Genesis 2:4). God speaks in fiats and searching questions, establishing authority through commands: "Let there be light" and interrogations: "Who told thee that thou wast naked?" (Genesis 1:3; Genesis 3:11). In *Paradise Lost*, God becomes more distant, an ineffable figure of integrity and calm rationality.²⁴ Instead of the imperial force in Genesis, Milton's God assumes the role of calm logician, expounding principles of freedom and justice with philosophical detachment: "I made him just and right, / sufficient to have stood, though free to fall" (Milton, III.98-99, p. 92). Satan, too, is dramatically altered. In Genesis, the serpent is a static figure whose role is simply to tempt. Only later scripture identifies the serpent with Satan (Revelation 20:2). Milton, however, casts Satan as a charismatic anti-hero, whose rhetoric parodies epic heroism and whose defiance against heaven can be read both as villainy and as tragic grandeur. He is given soliloquies, set-piece speeches, and persuasive appeals. Satan even takes the role of a brave general rallying his forces, proclaiming, "All is not lost; the unconquerable will, / And study of revenge, immortal hate, / And courage never to submit or yield" (Milton, I.106-108, p. 10). Milton's Satan is central to the narrative—rhetorically stirring, although twisted toward rebellion. As Neil Forsyth argues in the appropriately titled study *The Satanic Epic*, Satan becomes the central character of the "satanic epic," a role absent from Genesis (Forsyth, 2002, pp. 3-6). Genesis, by contrast, gives the serpent very few and simplistic lines with no tragic grandeur or epic rhetoric: "Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:4-5). Unlike the Satan of *Paradise Lost*, the temptation from the serpent of Genesis contains only the barest of arguments for eating the forbidden fruit. When nineteenth-century novels present villains or tempters with Byronic charisma—eloquent, persuasive, but morally dangerous—they are drawing from the Miltonic Satan rather than from Genesis. Rhetorical seduction, as a trope, is a Miltonic marker.

²⁴ Stallard's *Biblically Annotated Edition* (2011) demonstrates how Milton frequently departs from Genesis to give God a juridical and rhetorical role, explaining divine justice in extended speeches.

Adam and Eve are equally reimagined in *Paradise Lost*. In Genesis, Eve's motives are reduced to her perception: she sees that the fruit is good and eats. In Milton, she is curious, articulate, desirous of knowledge, and deceived through flattery. Her soliloquy before eating is one of the poem's most sustained moments of interiority (Milton, IX.745–779, pp. 334–335). She weighs arguments, considers consequences, and imagines herself elevated through knowledge. Milton dramatises her desire not as static gullibility but as active reasoning misled by rhetoric. Adam's role is similarly transformed through Milton's addition of interiority. In Genesis, Adam eats the forbidden fruit without comment. Milton, however, insists on his conscious complicity. Adam chooses knowingly to join Eve, out of love and solidarity: "How can I live without thee, how forgo / Thy sweet converse and love so dearly join'd" (Milton, IX.908–909, p. 339). This is a decisive Miltonic addition: Eve falls through deception, Adam through deliberate love. The fall becomes not one transgression but two, distinct in motive and significance. Evans captures this when he argues that "Milton was very rarely content to take an idea or an incident as he found it. Invariably he modified it to meet the particular demands of his own interpretation of the story" (Evans, 1968, p. 221). In other words, Milton very intentionally reworks the aetiological Genesis narrative into a drama of choice and psychology: Eve falls through persuasion and misplaced reasoning, while Adam falls through conscious devotion. What is a brief and skeletal episode in Genesis becomes, in Milton's epic, a layered exploration of motive, interiority, and tragic consequence. Nineteenth-century women writers frequently appropriated Eve's curiosity, her aspiration to knowledge, or her susceptibility to flattery, while simultaneously portraying male characters who knowingly share in transgression. Plots in which heroines are flattered into perilous ambition and heroes consciously embrace their complicity thus re-stage the drama of Milton's Adam and Eve.

Milton's structural changes to Genesis deepen his complex characterisations. Where Genesis narrates creation in a single chapter, Milton stretches the aetiology across Books V–VII, narrated through angelic conversation and visionary retelling. Raphael's detailed account of the cosmic history of creation, framed by theological discourse and culminating in the War in Heaven, is an episode with no biblical precedent (Milton, VI.202–871, VII.131–633, pp. 220–247, 257–281). Book IV invents a domestic sphere for Adam and Eve, complete with gardening, prayer, and marital intimacy (Milton, IV.288–391, 610–775, pp. 143–147, 154–161). This harmonious model of companionship resurfaces in nineteenth-century domestic fiction as the ideal of marriage built on mutual affection rather than arranged duty. Their courtship is presented as a negotiation between obedience and love, foreshadowing their later

choices that lead to their Fall. This negotiation is punctuated by Adam's dialogue with Raphael, where he recounts how his love for Eve at times feels like it conflicts with his obedience to God:

... 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 ...
 (Milton, VIII.546-550, p. 303)

Adam's declaration that wisdom falters in Eve's presence foreshadows not only his Fall, but the later literary trope of women as both moral anchors and sources of potential ruin.

Nineteenth-century domestic fiction inherits this duality: heroines are tested as moral redeemers (the "angel in the house," as Virginia Woolf phrases it) or as destabilising forces when desire outweighs propriety (Woolf, 1995, pp. 1-8). Book V introduces Eve's dream, a foreshadowing of temptation by showing how flattery and desire for elevation already stir in her subconscious, which is absent from Genesis (Milton, , V.28-93, pp. 173-175). This structural addition makes the Fall more psychologically credible, planting the initial seeds of temptation and further interiorising the character of Eve.²⁵ Adam is similarly interiorised, as observed in his wide-ranging inquiries about the cosmos in Book VIII (Milton, VII.90-178, pp. 287-289). As Woods observes, Adam's questions about the cosmos, even going as far as to insert a Copernican model of the universe, dramatise a "meditative disposition" that has no scriptural parallel.²⁶ Finally, Michael's prophetic visions for Adam in Books XI–XII reframe the Fall within the sweeping view of Christian theological history, leading up to the salvation of Christ (Milton, XI-XII, pp. 395-494). In Genesis 3, once Adam and Eve fall, God expels them from Eden with a few verses about the toils of mortality; the edict is delivered quickly

²⁵ For further consideration: Eustace Tillyard argues that "Milton seems genuinely uneasy over the competing astronomical systems, while the combative tone in Heaven argues some unease and division in his mind" (Tillyard, 1973, p. 143). These embellishments, he suggests, reveal both scientific uncertainty about the universe's structure and ideological uncertainty about Heaven's stability, signs of Milton wrestling with contradictions rather than serenely presenting a single authoritative truth.

²⁶ Woods continues: "Yet the questions are addressed to Adam's environment, to the sun, the earth, and the mute creatures that surround him. What Adam models is not Socratic method but a meditative disposition, and one that bases its meditation not solely on what he might 'feel' but also on the questions raised by what he sees around him. These meditations lead him to desire knowledge of his clearly benevolent creator, and of how such a creator may be honored [sic]" (Woods, 2013, p. 110-111). Unlike Genesis, which contains no equivalent moment of inquiry, Milton inserts a mode of questioning that foregrounds Adam's psychological process and intellectual desire rather than a simple narrative event.

and locally.²⁷ Milton's Adam instead actually envisions, through Michael's prophecy, Cain murdering Abel, Noah and the Flood, and ultimately Christ's sacrifice. The Fall in *Paradise Lost* is not just one event punctuated by God's word, but the opening chapter of the vast history of the redemption of man. Milton's move from Eden to the Christian history of mankind sets a precedent for seeing domestic life as decisive for moral order; Adam and Eve's domestic act in their decision to eat the fruit is the hinge on which all of Christian history turns. Similarly, while a courtship plot seems like a private and personal affair, the domestic novel treats it as decisive for moral order—what happens in the drawing room or the parlour matters, as the smallest choices in marriage, love, or duty shape both individual lives and the fate of communities. Together, these structural changes relocate the focus of Genesis from a skeletal narrative of origins to an epic meditation on psychology, choice, and human destiny. When nineteenth-century fiction treats marriage and domestic life as moral epics—where courtship is framed as a test of judgment and love as a stage for obedience or rebellion—it reflects Milton's dramatisation of domesticity.

Milton's structural expansions from Genesis are matched by Milton's transformation of Eden: where Genesis sketches Eden in bare outline, Milton expands it into a richly detailed setting whose sensory abundance and domestic routines carry symbolic weight. Genesis describes the garden briefly, naming its rivers and trees.²⁸ Milton lavishes descriptive language on Eden and its lushness, turning it into a sensory and symbolic landscape where domestic labour is imbued with epic weight. In Book IV of *Paradise Lost*, Eden is described as a:

... blissful Paradise
Of God the garden was ...

²⁷ "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel. Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee. And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" (Genesis 3:15-19).

²⁸ "And the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground made the Lord God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil. And a river went out of Eden to water the garden; and from thence it was parted, and became into four heads. The name of the first is Pison: that is it which compasseth the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold; And the gold of that land is good: there is bdellium and the onyx stone. And the name of the second river is Gihon: the same is it that compasseth the whole land of Ethiopia. And the name of the third river is Hiddekel: that is it which goeth toward the east of Assyria. And the fourth river is Euphrates" (Genesis 2:8-14). There is no further description of Eden in Genesis, outside of placing the characters within its setting.

Out of the fertile ground he caused to grow
 All trees of noblest kind for sight, smell, taste;
 And all amid them stood the tree of life,
 High eminent, blooming ambrosial fruit
 Of vegetable gold ...
 Flowers worthy of Paradise, which not nice Art
 In beds and curious knots, but Nature boon
 Poured forth profuse on hill, and dale, and plain ...
 (Milton, IV.208-209, 216-220, 241-243, pp. 141-142)

Adam and Eve's labour in the garden of Eden is greatly expanded from Genesis; the description of labour in Genesis is simply that Adam was placed in Eden "to dress it and to keep it" (Genesis 2:15). Milton instead roots the labours of Adam and Eve in domestic unity, including Eve in the labour. Milton is portraying Adam and Eve doing ordinary gardening tasks like pruning trees and training vines, but describing these tasks in the elevated, symbolic language of marriage ("her marriageable arms" to describe the vine is particularly poignant) (Milton, V.217, p. 180). Domestic labour becomes a poetic image of harmony and union--Milton is not just describing horticulture, but weaving domesticity, conjugal love, and cosmic order into the fabric of Eden. This symbolic elevation of household labour anticipates the later strategies of domestic fiction, where the ordinary tasks of the home are invested with moral and spiritual resonance. Just as Milton turns pruning and vine-training into an emblem of conjugal harmony, so too nineteenth-century writers use the garden, the parlour, and the hearth as stages on which obedience, love, and duty are tested. The domestic setting thus becomes the stage where ethical and moral struggles are dramatised. Nineteenth-century fiction often imports this Miltonic scale, attaching sublime description to domestic scenes, or making household choices resonate as world-defining. Thus, when nineteenth-century fiction magnifies the household or garden into a stage for moral and spiritual consequence, Milton's enlargement of Eden lies in the background.

Milton also infuses Genesis with his own theological convictions.²⁹ His commitment to free will and his rejection of predestination shape the narrative—as Woods suggests,

²⁹ From Milton's *Aereopagitica*: "If every action, which is good or evil in man at ripe years, were to be under pittance and prescription and compulsion, what were virtue but a name, what praise could be then due to well-doing, what gramercy to be sober, just, or continent? Many there be that complain of divine Providence for suffering Adam to transgress; foolish tongues! When God gave him reason, he gave him freedom to choose, for reason is but choosing; he had been else a mere artificial Adam, such an Adam as he is in the motions. We ourselves esteem not of that obedience, or love, or gift, which is of force: God therefore left him free, set before him a provoking object, ever almost in his eyes; herein consisted his merit, herein the right of his reward, the praise of his abstinence. Wherefore did he create passions within us, pleasures round about us, but that these rightly tempered are the very ingredients of virtue?" (Milton, 1997a; Boss and Widger, 2013). This rejection of predestination and the insistence that virtue depends on freedom are the hinge of Milton's theodicy, distinguishing *Paradise Lost* sharply from Genesis, which never pauses to articulate such a theology.

Milton aligns his poetry, theology, and politics around liberty (Woods, 2013, pp. 110-111). Genesis narrates the Fall without theological commentary—God commands, and Adam and Eve ultimately disobey. In *Paradise Lost*, Milton actually halts the narrative to let God, the Son, Raphael, and Michael articulate principles of free will, embedding his own rejection of predestination into the poem. God is made to articulate a theology of freedom: “Freely they stood who stood, and fell who fell” (Milton, III.102, p. 92). This theology is reinforced by Raphael’s reminder that “God made thee perfect, not immutable” (Milton, V.524, p.192). As Keightley notes in his account of Milton’s theology, Milton rejected the authority of both church and state to dictate scriptural meaning, insisting instead on freedom of interpretation.³⁰ The reflection of Milton’s heterodoxy in *Paradise Lost*—from hints of Arianism in its portrayal of the Son to its emphasis on liberty—distinguishes it from the biblical Genesis.³¹ In much the same way, nineteenth-century domestic fiction reworks the household into a site for ideological contest, embedding debates over morality, marriage, and gender within the patterns of everyday life; Milton’s infusion of theology into Eden sets a precedent for this practice, showing how intimate settings can be utilised to shape morally formative principles. Thus, as a marker, when nineteenth-century texts present characters reflecting on freedom, grace, or divine justice in explicitly theological terms, they are often drawing on Milton’s re-imagined doctrines rather than on the sparse formulations of Genesis.³²

By the nineteenth century, readers were aware of Milton’s departures from orthodoxy. As Welldon emphasises, Milton’s theology diverged markedly from orthodoxy, and yet it profoundly shaped how later readers imagine Genesis and Christian doctrine (Welldon, 1912, p. 901). Stallard’s annotations, Woods’s structural analysis, and Evans’s emphasis on originality all confirm the same point: Milton’s narrative of the Fall is a distinctive inception, and recognisably different from Genesis. This distinction is key to understanding how nineteenth-century women writers adopt the Fall narrative in their work. They inherit not only Genesis in its scriptural form, but Genesis as reshaped and reimagined by Milton’s verse, which they re-shape to fit the mould of domestic fiction. Courtship becomes a form of

³⁰ Keightley quotes Milton’s *De Doctrina Christiana*: “it is by the declarations of Scripture, and not by the conclusions of the schools, that our consciences are bound.” Keightley explains this quote, stating that Milton believed “No church therefore, and much less the civil magistrate, has a right to impose its own interpretations on us as laws, or to require implicit faith.” (Milton, 1643, cited in Keightley, 1855, p. 201).

³¹ On “Arianism,” from the Oxford English Dictionary: “Of, pertaining to, or adhering to the doctrine of, Arius, a presbyter of Alexandria in the 4th cent., who denied that Jesus Christ was *consubstantial*, or of the same essence or substance with God. His opinions were embraced by large sections of Christendom, and the dissensions by which the church was rent lasted for nearly a century” (Arian, adj.¹, n.d.; Welldon, 1912, p. 902).

³² This dissertation does not attempt a comprehensive reconstruction of Milton’s theology; rather, it considers how theological ideas shapes the narrative strategies and structures of *Paradise Lost*.

temptation; domestic love becomes a scene of epic choice; eloquence becomes a rhetoric of Satanic temptation. Eve is no longer a mute archetype of sin but a character whose reasoning, curiosity, and articulate voice could be reinterpreted in new cultural contexts. Adam's conscious fall creates a model of male solidarity with female weakness, a dynamic that resonates in novels where men knowingly joined women in socially precarious choices. Satan's charisma anticipates the Byronic hero, whose rhetorical seductions haunt nineteenth-century domestic fiction. To conflate *Paradise Lost* with Genesis risks erasing the elements that lend Milton's epic its distinctive cultural power. His expansion, characterisation, and theological variations provide the motifs that percolate into popular culture, biography, and women's writing. Disentangling Milton from Genesis is not only an exercise in accuracy, it is the necessary first step in tracing how *Paradise Lost* becomes, in the nineteenth century, a cultural scripture of its own.

MILTON'S MOTHERS: WOMEN'S EXEGESIS BEFORE MILTON

To define the "Miltonic" is also to recognise that Milton's own poem is shaped by conflict as much as by Genesis.³³ *Paradise Lost* emerges from the contexts of the upheavals of civil war, regicide, and Restoration—its arguments about liberty, obedience, and idolatry are framed through the same struggles that animate Milton's polemical prose (Hill, 1997, pp. 3-13; Lewalski, 2002, pp. 460-470). The epic's cosmic rebellion mirrors parliamentary revolution, its critique of divine monarchy reflects anxieties about earthly kingship, and its suspicion of ritual echoes Puritan distrust of the established church (Lewalski, 2008, pp. 55-59, 206-210; von Maltzahn, 1991, pp. 37-42, 101-104). In seventeenth-century England, religious authority was itself under siege: the episcopal hierarchy was bound to the crown, and conformity to its ceremonies was enforced as an arm of state power, even as Puritans like

³³ Milton's major polemical prose includes *Of Reformation*, published in 1641; *De Doctrina Christiana*, written in 1643, published in 1825; *Areopagitica*, published in 1644; *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* published in 1649; and *Eikonoklastēs*, published in 1649. Milton's portrayal of Satan's rhetoric in has been read as an echo of the parliamentary challenge to Stuart monarchy (Milton, V.772-902, pp. 204-210). Critics like Christopher Hill and Loewenstein note that the angelic rebellion mirrors arguments voiced in the mid-seventeenth century—appeals to natural equality, opposition to arbitrary authority, and suspicion of hereditary rule (Hill, 1997, pp. 82-85, 331-333; Loewenstein, 2001, pp. 145-150). As Frank Lovett also observes, *Paradise Lost* carries forward Milton's republican politics into epic poetry, embedding Parliamentary rhetoric within the cosmic conflict (Lovett, 2024, pp. 97-101). Satan's speech also channels a radical critique of monarchy, questioning, "Who can in reason then, or right, assume / Monarchy over such as live by right / His equals ...?" (Milton, V.772-802, pp. 204-205). In other words, no one has the right to be king over equals. This speech echoes republican resistance to Stuart monarchy—but Milton boldly places this rhetoric in Satan's mouth to highlight the difference between rebellion for the sake of liberty versus ambition. Milton dramatises his suspicion of ritual in Eve's dream sequence, where Satan "squat like a toad, close at the ear of Eve" (Milton, IV.797-822, pp. 161-162). This aligns Satan's whispering with a parody of sacred ritual.

Milton condemned such mediation as tyranny over conscience (Achinstein, 2014, pp. 88-92, 155-160; Morrill, 1993, pp. 33-36, 61-65). For seventeenth-century readers, Milton's *Paradise Lost* was already a political allegory as much as a theology, staging the questions of conscience and authority that defined seventeenth-century culture in epic poetry. Yet debates over monarchy, conscience, and church authority were not confined to the predominantly male spheres of lecterns and parliaments—they were also carried into women's interpretive writing (de la Croix and Vitale, 2023, pp. 112-118). Excluded from universities and official preaching, early modern women nevertheless made significant contributions to biblical commentary (Benckhuysen, 2019, pp. 47-52, 95-100; de la Croix and Vitale, 2023, pp. 110-118; Taylor and Choi, 2012, pp. 22-28, 141-147). Women's readings of Genesis, and especially of Eve, show that the Fall was already a contested site of meaning before Milton reshaped it into epic form.

Discussions of Milton's sources for *Paradise Lost* have traditionally emphasised early Christian theologians, Protestant doctrine, and the models of Homer and Virgil (Martindale, 2002, pp. 15-22, 63-70; Song, 2016, pp. 3-8, 41-47). Yet alongside these influences circulated the voices of women writers who reimagined Genesis to defend female virtue and intellectual authority. Figures such as Aemilia Lanyer, through *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* (1611), shifted blame away from Eve and onto Adam, portraying Eve as deceived rather than culpable.³⁴ In the poem "Eve's Apology," Lanyer insists that Adam's failure of leadership made his transgression greater: "Her fault though great, yet hee was most too blame; / What Weaknesse offerd, Strength might have refusde" (Lanyer and Woods, 1993, p. 85). Here, Genesis is reinterpreted against misogynistic readings, defending women and reframing the culpability of the Fall. In sum: Eve is defended as misled, Adam condemned as negligent, and women reimagined not as the universal source of sin but as figures capable of redemption and dignity. The resonance with Milton's later portrayal of Eve is suggestive. In *Paradise Lost*, Eve is indeed deceived by Satan's rhetoric, whereas Adam knowingly chooses to join her in transgression out of love. This structural distinction—that Eve sins through deception while Adam sins with full awareness—echoes the central claim of Lanyer's defence. As Kathleen Bonnette notes, religious authorities like Saint Augustine had already argued that Adam's sin was more deliberate.³⁵ Yet Lanyer's interpretation was distinct: instead of just pointing blame

³⁴ Sometimes also spelled Æmilia/Emilia Lanier, she was "was the first woman writing in English to produce a substantial volume of poetry designed to be printed and to attract patronage" (The Poetry Foundation, 2019).

³⁵ "Augustine suggests that Adam was not deceived—as a man (the 'more rational' being, according to the sexist prejudices of the time [namely 418 AD]) he could supposedly withstand the seduction of the serpent. But Augustine suggests that Adam 'could not bear to be severed from his only companion, even though this

towards Adam, she deployed the distinction of culpability to elevate women's moral standing and challenge inherited theological misogyny. The persistence of this interpretive move across both a female-authored devotional poem and Milton's epic suggests a shared conversation in which Eve's culpability was already being re-evaluated.³⁶

English debates about Eve were not isolated. Across continental Europe, female philosophers and theologians also defended women's dignity and intellectual capacity through reinterpretations of Genesis (Benckhuysen, 2019, pp. 8-10; Taylor and Choi, 2012, pp. 9-11). Their writings, circulating in manuscript, print, and correspondence, demonstrate a transnational discourse on creation, the fall, and the place of women in divine and human order. These voices widened the landscape of women's exegesis into which Milton wrote. Although there is no direct evidence that Milton read Lanyer or other female-authored exegeses, the cultural climate they created mattered. As Anna Beer argues in her study *Eve Bites Back*, seventeenth-century women such as Aphra Behn engage directly with the figure of Eve, transforming her from a static symbol of sin into a dynamic site of debate about women's dignity, creativity, and intellectual authority (Beer, 2022, pp. 135-174). Milton's Eve—eloquent, desirous of knowledge, capable of reconciliation—bears the marks of this contested exegetical environment.

To acknowledge these women's contributions is not to argue for direct textual inheritance but for discursive influence. Milton wrote in a culture where women's reinterpretations of Genesis circulated alongside sermons and theological commentary. Influence here should be understood not as linear transmission but as participation in a broader cultural conversation. Milton's Eve thus emerges not as a solitary creation of male imagination but as a figure shaped within a field of contested readings, many of them authored by women. This recognition complicates the image of Milton as an isolated patriarchal voice—his Eve is not simply the biblical Eve of silence and condemnation, but the Eve of aspiration, rhetoric, and dignity. These qualities align with the intellectual presence of female voices reclaiming Genesis in the seventeenth-century. Lanyer's defence of Eve as

involved a partnership in sin.' So he too ate the apple. When forced to choose between honoring God's command but losing his beloved, or accompanying Eve into corruption, Adam, in his desire for communion, undermined the very reality that could sustain it" (Bonnette, 2024, para. 5).

³⁶ Interestingly, Lanyer's poetry also features the lush landscapes that, although there is no direct reference, may have inspired some of the descriptions for Eden: "you might plainly see, / *Hills, vales, and woods* ... All interlac'd with brookes and christall springs, / A Prospect fit to please the eyes of Kings" (Lanyer and Woods, 1993, p. 133, emphasis mine) Compare to Milton's later description of Eden: "Upon the rapid current, which ... Rose a fresh fountain ... Down the steep glade And now, divided into four main streams, / Runs diverse, wandering many a famous realm Flowers worthy of Paradise ... poured forth profuse on *hill, and dale, and plain*" (Milton, IV.227-243, p. 142, emphasis mine).

deceived anticipates Milton's distinction between Eve's fall through deception and Adam's fall through solidarity. More symbolically, as Beer notes, Aphra Behn treated Eve's legacy not as a fixed emblem of female frailty but as a narrative open to re-interpretation, using authorship itself to claim dignity and agency (Beer, 2022, pp. 135-174). Even if Milton did not read *Salve Deus*, or engage with Behn's authorial agency, the work of seventeenth-century women demonstrates that alternative understandings of Eve were available, making Milton's Eve part of a larger exegetical moment.

The significance of women interpreters writing before and during Milton's composition of *Paradise Lost* lies in how they shift the understanding of literary influence. By foregrounding women's exegetical work, it is clear that Milton is not only resisting or reforming patristic tradition but also participating in a gendered debate already underway. Women's voices form part of the intellectual genealogy of *Paradise Lost*, a point increasingly recognised in recent criticism such as *Women (Re)Writing Milton*, which traces women's engagements with Milton across periods and genres (Green and Al-Akhras, 2021, pp. 1-12). In this way, these women are Milton's "mothers" as much as Homer or Augustine are his fathers. For the nineteenth century, this genealogy matters. Women novelists do not inherit Milton in isolation from biblical tradition but engage with a Milton whose portrayal of Eve was already shaped by women's earlier defences of female agency. To read *Paradise Lost* as purely patriarchal influence, as Gilbert and Gubar suggest, risks missing how Milton's Eve carries traces of women's theological work. The sympathetic and complex Eve later reimagined in nineteenth-century fiction is already prefigured in the cultural conversation of Milton's seventeenth century.

NINETEENTH CENTURY CRITICAL AND POPULAR RECEPTION OF MILTON

Any discussion of Milton's nineteenth-century reception must first account for the literary and cultural conditions of the period, in which women's authorship, religious authority, and the marketplace of periodical culture all shaped how texts were read, circulated, and valued. Women's authorship in this period was inextricable from cultural structures that both enabled and constrained it (Easley, Gill and Rodgers, 2019, pp. 1-3). As Linda Peterson observes in *Becoming a Woman of Letters*, religious discourse provides one of the few legitimising grounds for nineteenth-century women writers' moral authority, especially in genres such as devotional prose, educational treatises, and reform literature (Peterson, 2009, p. 7). By contrast, Milton and his seventeenth-century contemporaries

invoke religious language to contest doctrinal and institutional power.³⁷ In the nineteenth century, however, women writers appropriate religious discourse as a cultural resource, invoking it to authorise interventions in debates on education, reform, and morality, even as it simultaneously reinforced the boundaries of domestic ideology (Peterson, 2009, pp. 4-6).

When Milton is imagined and reimagined in the nineteenth century, he is not just a revolutionary Puritan poet but also a moral and theological touchstone in a religious climate that was trying to hold tradition and modernity together.³⁸ Readers could see him either as a prophet of liberty, a defender of biblical truth, or even as a problematic radical whose theology jarred with Victorian orthodoxy.

At the same time, the expansion of periodical culture created new opportunities while also demanding conformity to “appropriate” feminine genres such as domestic fiction, devotional prose, or sentimental poetry (Peterson, 2009, pp. 4-7). Yet the very marketplace that threatened to confine women gave them unprecedented reach, as writers like Harriet Martineau and Elizabeth Gaskell used the periodical press to shape debates about morality, economics, and gender ideology (Logan, 1998, pp. 22-27, 41-45; Peterson, 2009, pp. 9-12). As Alexis Easley notes, “periodical journalism was instrumental in the rise of the woman author during the nineteenth century,” as it enabled women to address, often anonymously, “subjects as diverse as slavery, women’s emancipation, parliamentary reform, and industrialism” (Easley, 2016, p. 2). Sarah Malden recounts a particularly amusing story of Austen’s publication process:

... she offered *Northanger Abbey* ... to a local publisher ... he never brought it out, and the MS. remained in oblivion ... Henry Austen, her third brother, who often helped her in the intercourse with publishers and printers ... regain[ed] the work ... he quietly informed the unlucky man that it was by the author of *Pride and Prejudice*, and left him, we may hope, raging at himself. (Malden, 1889, p. 40)

Malden’s recollection also highlights how women authors maintained some level of anonymity—often using male family members to handle in person negotiations with their publishers. While Austen initially published under the modest signature “A Lady” or simply

³⁷ See previous discussion in the section “Milton’s Mothers” in this dissertation.

³⁸ For example: In his *Collected Works*, Thomas Carlyle christened Milton as the “the moral king of authors,” elevating him far above mere poetic prowess to a figure of spiritual and ethical guidance—a moral touchstone for his age (Carlyle, 1871, p. 54). By contrast, in a letter to her father, George Eliot situates Miltonic theology in the midst of shifting Victorian attitudes toward realism and objectivity, describing how religious doctrine was “pernicious in its influence on individual and social happiness” (Eliot, 1954, p. 128)

“the author,” other women writers felt compelled to adopt male pseudonyms. The Brontë sisters, for instance, wrote as Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell, while Mary Ann Evans became permanently known by her pen name, George Eliot (Lapp, 2015, pp. 12-13). In a literary culture that often dismissed or demeaned women writers—as Charlotte Brontë notes, they “did not like to declare ourselves women ... we had noticed how critics sometimes use for their chastisement the weapon of personality”—they often used the anonymity of a male pen name to protect against scandal in their personal lives and enable their novels to be judged on merit rather than gender (Lapp, 2015, pp. 15-16). In this way, women writers could negotiate questions of ethics, authority, and hierarchy through the strategic use of (relative) anonymity. These negotiations unfolded against the backdrop of domestic modernity—the ideological reconstruction of home, family, and gender roles in an industrialising society (Poovey, 1985, pp. 3-6). Women writers often engaged in the delicate act of presenting themselves as moral guardians of the private sphere while simultaneously embedding critiques of politics, cultural authority, and social hierarchy (Logan, 1998, pp. 22-27, 41-45; Poovey, 1985, pp. 3-12, 182-187). The cultural agency of nineteenth-century women writers must be situated within the overlapping discursive formations of authorship, religious morality, market culture, and domestic ideology—frameworks that mediated not only their self-representation but also their engagement with, and reshaping of, Milton’s cultural authority.

It is also important to note that, among nineteenth-century novelists, Milton is hardly the only cultural authority. Shakespeare’s influence permeates the period, shaping language, wit, and psychological nuance.³⁹ Yet Shakespeare’s presence, while pervasive, does not account for the particular narrative scaffolding of the domestic novel. To read these texts without attending to Miltonic markers is to risk mistaking their Fall narratives for mere reconfigurations of Shakespearean romance. Where Shakespeare lends theatricality and dramatic form, nineteenth-century women writers inherit from Milton a narratorial mode of wit and irony. Dante also surfaces in moments of visionary intensity, his infernal topographies reworked into moral allegories for Victorian narratives.⁴⁰ Yet where Dante imagines *Inferno*, *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso* as tiered landscapes of descent and punishment, Milton renders Heaven and Hell as dramas of voices and minds—arenas of rhetoric and

³⁹ For further reading: Richard Foulkes’s *Shakespeare and the Victorian Stage* (1986)—Study of how performance shaped Shakespeare’s Victorian presence; and Gail Marshall’s *Shakespeare and Victorian Women* (2009)—Examines how Shakespeare was used in debates about gender and morality in the nineteenth century.

⁴⁰ For further reading: Federica Coluzzi’s *Dante Beyond Influence: Rethinking Reception in Victorian Literary Culture* (2021) —Study on how Dante’s works were received, translated, and woven into Victorian literary and scholarly networks.

conscience rather than maps of cosmic topography. The Bible, too, remains a pervasive intertext, its cadences and parables furnishing both moral instruction and stylistic gravitas.⁴¹ Classical antiquity lends its own prestige to the bildungsroman, Homer supplying archetypes of journey and trial, and Virgil embedding patterns of destiny and inheritance.⁴² Milton's influence is distinct, supplying not teleological progress and fulfilment, but temptation, fall, and redemption—the drama of cosmic error, recast in the domestic in the nineteenth-century. Romantic poets such as Byron and Wordsworth supply more immediate inspiration: Byron bequeathing the brooding, transgressive hero to prose fiction, while Wordsworth's meditations on memory and the everyday recalibrate the scope of the novel toward interiority and domestic life.⁴³ Together, these influences create a crowded imaginative field, but it is the Miltonic scaffolding, rather than Shakespearean dramaturgy or Romantic subjectivity, that underpins the argument of this thesis.

Miltonic scaffolding—the narrative patterns, moral frameworks, character archetypes, and theological arguments related to Milton—are not built from *Paradise Lost* alone. In the nineteenth century, Milton himself becomes a cultural artefact: his life is scrutinised, debated, and mythologised almost as heavily as his verse. Biographies, essays, and anecdotes circulated alongside the poem, providing readers with a Milton whose personal narrative—of blindness, republicanism, exile, perseverance—intertwined with the epic's themes and refracted its reception. What nineteenth-century readers thought they knew about Milton—his politics, religion, and domestic life—was often as influential as the text itself. The story of Milton's reception in the nineteenth century begins with Samuel Johnson's *Lives of the English Poets*, originally published in 1779. Johnson praises Milton's "unquestionable" literary greatness yet tempers it with barbed qualifications: Johnson claims Milton's notes on Euripides are "nothing remarkable," his wordplay excessive, and his genius borrowed from Homer (Johnson, 1906, pp. 69, 110, 135). Johnson's critique dwells less on the epic than on the man. Milton is portrayed as "dangerous" in theology, an "acrimonious and surly republican" in politics, and "severe and arbitrary" in his domestic life, particularly towards

⁴¹ For further reading: George P. Landow's *Victorian Types, Victorian Shadows: Biblical Typology in Victorian Literature, Art, and Thought* (1980)—Study of how biblical typology structured Victorian narrative and imagination.

⁴² For further reading: Richard Jenkyns's *The Victorians and Ancient Greece* (1980)—Study of the nineteenth-century reception of Greek antiquity, tracing how Homer and the tragedians shaped Victorian conceptions of heroism, moral education, and the epic tradition.

⁴³ For further reading: Peter L. Thorslev's *The Byronic Hero: Types and Prototypes* (1962)—Study defining the Byronic hero as a literary type, tracing its genealogy from Miltonic and Gothic antecedents to Byron's works, and its afterlife in nineteenth-century fiction. Also for consideration: Stephen Gill's *Wordsworth and the Victorians* (2001)—Comprehensive study of Wordsworth's Victorian reception.

the women in his household (Johnson, 1906, pp. 111-112, 132). Johnson's portrayal of Milton pairs biographical rumour with cultural stereotype: Milton the heterodox republican becomes Milton the domestic despot. These tropes entered nineteenth-century discourse, feeding later depictions of Milton as both patriarch and rebel. As William Riley Parker documents in *Milton: A Biography*, Johnson's *Life of Milton* made accusations that cast a long shadow over Milton's reputation—so much so that sympathetic biographers devoted energy to rebutting his portrait of Milton as a domestic tyrant (Parker, 1999, p. xi).

Milton's posthumously discovered *De Doctrina Christiana* added another layer to Milton's nineteenth-century reception. Published in 1825, the treatise revealed Milton's heterodox theology: rejection of the Trinity, defence of polygamy, and insistence on referring to scriptural authority instead of ecclesiastical dogma (Masson, 1859–1880, vol. VI, pp. 817–840). Nineteenth-century readers had already inherited a fractured version of Miltonic theology and politics: Johnson had denounced him as “of no church,” while Thomas Macaulay reframed the same traits as heroic independence (Johnson, 1906, p. 165; Macaulay, 1899). The publication of *De Doctrina* renewed debates: was Milton a dangerous heretic, or a proto-liberal reformer? Biographers Thomas Keightley and David Masson tried to stabilise the record with less opinionated details on the life of Milton, but Milton's politics remained a touchstone for discussions of republicanism, liberty, and religious dissent (Keightley, 1859; Masson, 1859–1880, vol. VI, p. 833). For orthodox critics, these positions were scandalous; for admirers, they underscored Milton's independence of mind (Macaulay, 1899, pp. 356–358). The *Doctrina* reframed Milton as a figure of theological controversy, aligning the poet with the liberty of interpretation that he dramatised in *Paradise Lost*.⁴⁴

Thomas Macaulay's 1825 essay on Milton brought a more positive balance to Milton's reputation. Where Johnson had censured, Macaulay praised, presenting Milton as “the poet, the statesman, the philosopher, the glory of English literature, the champion and the martyr of English liberty” (Macaulay, 1899, p. 4). He dismissed *De Doctrina*'s heterodoxies as unsurprising to anyone who had read *Paradise Lost* and instead celebrated Milton's independence of spirit (Macaulay, 1899, p. 3). For Macaulay, Milton's pursuit of liberty was martyrdom, his poetic achievement inviting comparison to Homer through its revitalisation of the epic form for a new age (Macaulay, 1899, pp. 4, 11). Interestingly, Macaulay's rhetorical style was heavily influenced by Milton's own polemical prose. His

⁴⁴ See also: Stopford Augustus Brooke's *Milton* (1887); William Hazlitt's *The Spirit of the Age*, (1825); Mark Pattison's *Milton*, (1879); and John Symmons's *The Life of Milton*, (1806).

essay staged liberty as a juridical case, defending Milton's republicanism against charges of treason and tyranny. In this framing, Milton's politics became heroic rather than acrimonious, his domestic myths softened into reverence.

The image of Milton's daughters was a focal point of late eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century biographical imagination. Johnson reports that Milton "debarred his daughters from the advantage of learning" and instead compelled them to read aloud in languages they did not understand, leaving them resentful of the labour (Johnson, 1906, pp. 100, 104). Yet David Masson, whose *Life of John Milton* remained the standard Victorian biography, was careful to rebut this portrait (Masson, 1859-1880). In Volume VI, Masson insists that "While Milton employed his daughters, or two of them at least, as readers, he by no means depended on them" (Masson, 1859-80, vol. VI, p. 466). Keightley further suggests that Milton's daughters read languages to him, more likely to aid his recall than as a labourious task (Keightley, 1859, p. 90). Macaulay, by contrast, cast the daughters as privileged participants in poetic creation, proclaiming he (Macaulay) would have "contested with [Milton's] daughters the privilege of taking down the immortal accents that flowed from his lips" (Macaulay, 1899, p. 60). The biographies of Johnson, Macaulay, Keightley, and Masson all reinforced or resisted myths about Milton: the tyrannical father, the martyr of liberty, or the national scholar.⁴⁵

The nineteenth century's impulse to mythologise Milton also manifested in material artefacts that seemed to grant intimate access to his private life. Among these artefacts was Milton's family Bible, annotated with marginal



Figure 1. Milton's annotated family Bible. British Library MS Add. 32310

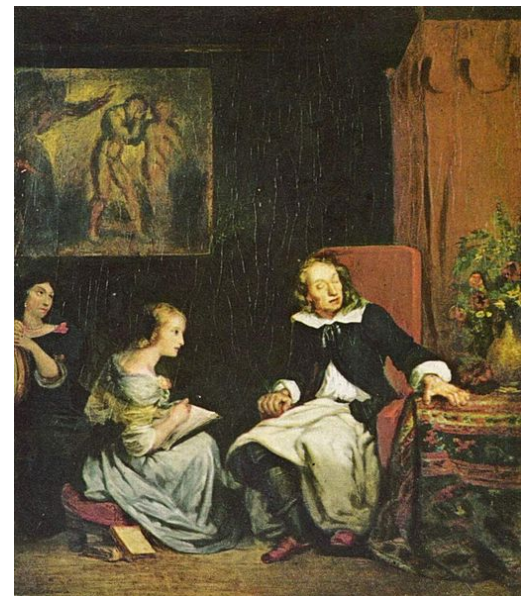


Figure 2. Milton dictating (*Paradise Lost*) to his daughters (1826), by Eugène Delacroix, oil on canvas, 79 × 63 cm, Kunsthau Zürich, Collection G. H. Hamilton. Public domain.

⁴⁵ Masson attributes the bulk of Milton's dictation to hired aides or nephews (1859-80, vol. VI, p. 621). Yet the image of Milton dictating to his daughters had already captured cultural imagination, immortalised in Victorian paintings and invoked in feminist criticism (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000, p. 187). Fact mattered less than symbol: Milton's daughters stood for contested readings of paternal authority, literary inheritance, and gendered power.

notes of births and deaths (see Figure 1). Displayed as evidence of Milton's piety and patriarchal authority, Milton's Bible reinforced the image of the poet as both domestic head and scriptural interpreter, rooting his public genius in the private sphere. Paintings of Milton dictating *Paradise Lost* to his daughters, popular in the nineteenth century, further cemented the patriarchal image of the poet (see Figure 2).⁴⁶ These images operated not as evidence but as visual arguments, shaping readers' perception of Milton's domestic life.

If such artefacts and paintings constructed Milton as a domestic patriarch for Victorian audiences, the Romantics had already begun to fashion him into a symbolic ancestor of another kind. For them, Milton's authority extended beyond the family home into the realms of poetry, politics, and prophecy, where he could be revered, resisted, and reimagined. William Blake was among the earliest Romantic artists to seize Milton as a personal and cultural symbol. In his prophetic poem *Milton: A Poem in Two Books* (1804–10), Blake imagines Milton's spirit descending from heaven and entering his own body, fusing poet and visionary into one. This intimate act of possession turns Milton into Blake's prophetic double—not merely a revered author, but a living companion who licenses Blake's own radical, heterodox voice. Blake's accompanying images extend this radical reception. His *Paradise Lost* illustrations (produced between 1807 and 1827) repeatedly give Satan a tragic grandeur: muscular, luminous, even heroic. In works such as *Satan Arousing the Rebel Angels* (1808), Satan is depicted in a way that rivals, and often outshines, the supposedly righteous figures of God and Adam. Satan's arms are thrown upward in a commanding, almost Christ-like pose. The gesture is one of messianic charisma, in contrast to the passive or absent portrayal of the "righteous" figures elsewhere in Blake's *Paradise Lost* cycle.

⁴⁶ Other notable examples include Henry Fuseli's *Milton Dictating to His Daughter* (1794, exhibited into the nineteenth century), Eastman Johnson's *Milton Dictating to His Daughters* (c. 1875), and Mihály Munkácsy's monumental *Blind Milton Dictating Paradise Lost to His Daughters* (1877).

In *Christ Offers to Redeem Man* (1807), Blake stages a very deliberate inversion (see Figure 4): His body is pressed against the bosom of the Father, arms stretched outward in a posture that is both cruciform and embracing. This turning away from the audience is striking: the “hero” of the scene literally faces into divine mystery, not out toward humanity. By contrast, in *Satan Arousing the Rebel Angels*, Blake puts Satan frontally, squarely confronting us with uplifted arms. Christ’s orientation embodies obedience and surrender, but it also renders him visually recessive, almost absorbed into the Father. Blake makes Christ’s humility and obedience to God visible by rendering him quiet, turned, and composed — theologically “correct,” but less visually arresting. Satan, in turn, is drawn with all the fire of defiance, which in pictorial terms reads as charismatic grandeur. Blake’s art captures Milton’s theological hierarchy, but the way he paints it inevitably makes rebellion look more vivid. For Blake, this elevation of Satan and rebellion reflects the energy of revolt, echoing Romantic interpretations that identified in Milton’s devil a figure of tragic grandeur and rebellious charisma—although never the hero without complication.⁴⁷ At the same time, Blake rewrites Milton’s theology: his *Milton* stages Milton’s repentance, stripping away what Blake called the poet’s “errors” about morality and religion, and reorienting him toward Blake’s own vision of liberated prophecy.⁴⁸ Such Romantic reimaginings prepare the ground for the nineteenth century’s broader mythologising of Milton, in which his figure is refracted through biographies, criticisms, and visual culture into a host of competing identities.

By the nineteenth century, Milton had become both a literary colossus and a cultural plurality. His poetry was revered, yet his politics, theology, and personal life made him a



Figure 3. William Blake, *Satan Arousing the Rebel Angels*, watercolour, 1808. Victoria and Albert Museum, London.



Figure 4. William Blake, *Christ Offers to Redeem Man*, pen and watercolour, 1807. The Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

⁴⁷ Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818) is a key example of a Romantic reading of Satan.

⁴⁸ Blake goes as far as to note that Milton wrote “in fetters when he wrote of Angels and of God, and at liberty when of Devils and Hell” as a “a true poet and of the Devil’s party without knowing it” (Blake, 1907, p. ix). Blake finds in Milton creative sympathies for Satan’s rebellion, despite Milton’s declarations of theodicy.

divisive figure. To speak of Milton in this period is therefore to speak of multiple Miltons: the republican firebrand, the blind prophet of liberty, the stern patriarch, the heterodox theologian. These competing images filtered through poems, essays, biographies, and visual culture, producing a legacy as contested as the man himself. Each of these Miltons coloured the reception of *Paradise Lost* and shaped how women writers negotiated Miltonic influence. For women writers, reception is not an abstract scholarly debate but the cultural horizon against which they write. Women novelists did not need to cite Milton explicitly; they encountered him through essays, illustrations, and cultural myth. To write about courtship, temptation, or marriage was already to write in Milton's shadow, because his retelling of Genesis had become the cultural script. To invoke Milton was to invoke these competing legacies—domestic, theological, political, and visual. The Miltonic influence on nineteenth-century women's literature cannot be separated from the Milton they would encounter through Johnson, Macaulay, Keightley, Masson, and popular culture. Reception history thus complicates simple models of influence. Milton is not merely a forebear, but a cultural presence, continually re-shaped. The Miltonic inheritance is distributed through criticism, biography, and image—producing a legacy as contested and multifaceted as the poem itself: the myth of Milton's treatment of his daughters made him a patriarchal symbol; Macaulay's panegyric, a liberal hero. The reality was less important than the cultural figure of Milton as the contested embodiment of liberty and literary authority. To trace his influence requires attending to this figure of Milton, recognising that the Milton nineteenth-century women writers inherited was already a construction of critics, biographers, and cultural myth.

THE MILTONIC GENESIS IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

To conclude, it is necessary to return to the central question: what difference does it make to understand Milton's influence on nineteenth-century women novelists not merely as a literary inheritance, but as a domestic reimagining of *Paradise Lost* through the conventions of the domestic novel? This project has thus far argued that the courtship plot, as the primary narrative engine of nineteenth-century domestic fiction, functions as a domesticated reworking of Milton's Fall narrative. By framing temptation, error and the Fall, exile, and reconciliation in terms of flirtation, misjudgement, estrangement, and marriage, women writers transform the theological structure of Milton's epic into the narrative genre of domestic fiction. The difference this makes is threefold: it clarifies the frameworks of

influence, it resituates the domestic novel as a primary site of theological and cultural debate, and it reframes the relationship between women's writing and patriarchal tradition.

This thesis first clarifies the frameworks of Miltonic influence. If influence is understood solely as a matter of thematic borrowing or surface allusions, then Milton's presence in the nineteenth century risks being reduced to shallow echoes: Satan as a tragic hero, Eve as an archetype of temptation, Adam as a figure of male authority. Such an approach cannot explain why Austen, Brontë, or Eliot appear to grapple so consistently with questions of error, obedience, and redemption in their novels of courtship and marriage. What these writers inherit is not just Milton's characters but the theological and cultural frameworks those characters embody. The struggle between autonomy and submission, the tension between private desire and public duty, and the possibility of reconciliation through forgiveness or grace—all of these are Miltonic legacies refracted through nineteenth-century domestic fiction. To read *Paradise Lost* in this way is to see not only archetypes but also a set of moral and imaginative problems that novelists rework within the intimate plots of love, choice, and marriage. Simplistic frameworks for Miltonic influence also cannot account for the cultural saturation of Milton across nineteenth-century literature, from Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* to Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market*; from Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations* to Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. By defining the "Miltonic" not only in terms of characters and images but also in terms of narrative structures and theological motifs, this thesis demonstrates that influence operates through the deep architectures of plot, motif, and characterisation. Milton was not simply quoted or resisted; he was reshaped in ways that transformed the trajectory of the narrative of the Fall.

Second, this reframing of domestication elevates the domestic novel as a central site of cultural and theological debate. As Armstrong has argued, the domestic novel was not merely a reflection of social change but a force that shaped modern subjectivity by redefining the relation between private life and public authority (Armstrong, 1987, pp. 8-9). In this context, the marriage plot is not a minor or conservative form, but a generative structure for negotiating desire and regulation. By showing how Milton's *Paradise Lost* was translated into the conventions of domestic fiction, this project demonstrates that the domestic novel also became a space for the domestication of theology. The Fall was reimagined in the drawing room, in the garden, and in the marriage covenant; its motifs re-emerged in scenes of household negotiation, estrangement, and reconciliation. The domestic novel was therefore not a marginal or "lesser" genre, but the very place where Milton's theological epic was remade into the imaginative possibilities of everyday life.

Finally, this thesis reframes the relationship between women's authorship and patriarchal literary tradition. Earlier criticism, from Harold Bloom's theory of the "anxiety of influence" to Gilbert and Gubar's notion of the "literary bogey" of Milton, has tended to interpret women writers' engagement with Milton as primarily agonistic: a struggle against a patriarchal forefather, or a rebellion against the weight of inherited tradition (Bloom, 1997, pp. 5-16; Gilbert and Gubar, 2000, pp. 187-194, 200-202). While these models identified important dynamics of resistance, they risk flattening the complexity of nineteenth-century women's writing by reading every engagement with Milton as rebellion. The evidence presented here complicates this narrative. Austen, Brontë, and Eliot did not simply resist Milton; they reworked his epic dilemmas into the narrative forms available to them, embedding Miltonic categories into the very structure of domestic fiction. Influence, in this sense, is not reducible to agon but should be understood as adaptation, transposition, and creative negotiation—a view that aligns with more recent Milton scholarship, which has increasingly emphasised inheritance as a process of transmission and reconfiguration rather than purely antagonistic struggle.⁴⁹ By shifting the frame from anxiety to conversation, it becomes possible to see women novelists not as oppressed daughters of Milton but as theologians who transformed Miltonic categories into domestic narrative idioms.

The significance of this framework of influence extends beyond Milton studies. It provides a more flexible model for thinking about literary influence in general. If *Paradise Lost* can be reshaped into the domestic novel, then influence is not only a matter of linear inheritance but also of generic transposition, ideological re-contextualisation, and cultural diffusion. It builds off the notion of Bakhtin's dialogism that influence is not fixed in the moment of reception but unfolds across decades, genres, and cultures (Bakhtin, 1981, pp. 276-277, 293-300). This has implications for the study of intertextuality more broadly: it requires attention not only to citation and allusion, but to how motifs and structures are reshaped across different narrative forms, cultural contexts, and historical moments. The implications are also historical. The nineteenth century was a period marked by the recalibration of sacred and secular authority, in which theological concepts increasingly became reinterpreted in social and psychological terms. The relocation of Milton's narrative of the Fall into the domestic novel exemplifies this cultural shift. Where Milton asked theological questions of obedience and providence, Austen, Brontë, and Eliot asked social

⁴⁹ For example, Paul Alpers discusses Milton's poem *Lycidas* in "The Lives of *Lycidas*," noting how the poem "has been something of a benchmark for English poetry," and traces the poem's shifting reception and its role as a touchstone for changing ideas of poetic value and authority (Duran, 2011, pp. 106-109).

questions of choice, autonomy, and moral responsibility within the household. By embedding Milton's categories into courtship rituals, these writers domesticated the Fall narrative and in so doing, reshaped the domestic novel as a form that could accommodate both theological inheritance and modern social dilemmas.⁵⁰ The difference this makes is not merely literary but cultural: it reveals how epic theology became everyday ethics, and how women novelists were central agents in this transformation. This reframing also alters the understanding the history of the novel itself. As Armstrong observes, the rise of women novelists in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was a decisive event in literary history (Armstrong, 1987, pp. 3-4). The significance of their achievement cannot be fully understood without recognising how they engaged with and reworked inherited traditions. By showing how Austen, Brontë, and Eliot translate *Paradise Lost* into the conventions of the domestic novel, this thesis assists in illuminating the role of women novelists not only as participants in a literary tradition but as shapers of its theological categories. The domestic novel was not only a genre of manners or morality; it was the space where the Miltonic epic was naturalised into the household. In sum, reading nineteenth-century women novelists through Milton clarifies how influence operated in this period, not as anxious resistance but as creative reworking. The domestic novel emerges as a stage on which Milton's epic was re-enacted and reshaped into a form of domesticated theology, situating women's writing at the centre of cultural debate. This redefinition of influence and form establishes a framework for the subsequent analysis of how these negotiations of theology, gender, and genre continue to develop across nineteenth-century fiction.

⁵⁰ It is important to note that the Fall narrative in domestic fiction is not equivalent to the nineteenth-century "fallen woman" trope. It is not necessarily sexualised: the Falls reconstructed in domestic novels often take the form of errors in judgement, failures of self-knowledge, or vocational missteps rather than explicitly sexual transgressions.

CHAPTER TWO: DEFINING MILTONIC MARKERS IN THE DOMESTIC NOVEL

This study reads Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë, and George Eliot along a shared axis: each refunctions *Paradise Lost* by translating its arc of temptation, error, exile, and reconciliation into the domestic narrative—first miniaturised, then magnified, and finally dispersed. Across their work, the courtship plot becomes a form of domestic theology, a narrative technology for testing knowledge, agency, covenant, and consequence within households and communities.

Austen exemplifies the miniaturising aspect of Miltonic inheritance. As Olivia Murphy argues, her fiction operates through a “system of covert quotations,” using allusion as both literary and social criticism, where the supposedly sealed world of the drawing room is “penetrated by history” (Murphy, 2013, pp. 23, 111-112). Building on Jocelyn Harris’s claim that Austen reads her precursors—Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton—with concentrated imaginative attention, this project treats Austen’s Miltonism as structural rather than merely citational (Harris, 1989, pp. x, 26-28). Miltonic grandeur is domesticated into ironic trial: Henry Crawford’s borrowed “Heaven’s last best gift” exposes rhetoric as temptation (Austen, 2005, p. 34; Milton, V.19, p. 172). *Pride and Prejudice*’s and *Mansfield Park*’s marriages are neither solely Edenic restorations or simple pastoral closures but contingent covenants tested by error—Lydia’s elopement, Charlotte’s pragmatism, Maria Bertram’s ruin. Following Stefanie Markovits, the *felix culpa* offers the governing paradox: Austen’s heroines are educated by mistake, their “happy fault” is epistemological, a movement from ignorance to judgement enacted through humility, communication, and revised consent (Markovits, 2007, p. 789). In this register, Austen relocates epic theology to parlours and assemblies, where irony does the interpretive work Milton assigns to his narrator. She inaugurates the trajectory of this dissertation by showing how the marriage plot can carry the weight of a fallen world without invoking providence directly. Through miniaturising Milton’s epic, instead of trivialising the stakes of the marriage plot, she elevates them into the register of cosmic consequence.

Brontë marks the central point of transition in this thesis. Where Austen miniaturises, Brontë magnifies—intensifying epic motifs within Gothic domesticity and extending them into industrial and communal life. *Jane Eyre* recasts *Paradise Lost* as a courtship ordeal: Rochester as tempter, St. John as a false redeemer, the bigamous wedding as internal Fall, the moor as exile, Ferndean as covenant renewed on terms of relative parity. *Shirley* pushes these

Miltonic trials outward to factory gates and parish politics, multiplying Eve into Shirley Keeldar and Caroline Helstone so that feminine agency appears as a spectrum rather than a single exemplar. Brontë's publication posture—"Truth has a severe charm of its own"—aligns aesthetic with ethical fidelity, a stance mirrored in the novel's contested reception from Rigby's charge of pride to Lewes's praise of moral seriousness (*The Brontës*, n.d.; Lewes, 1848, pp. 692-695; Rigby, 1848, pp. 153-154, 164-166).⁵¹ Her lifelong engagement with Milton saturates these designs, while the fiction itself stages debate about Milton's Eve through Shirley's provocation and Caroline's tempering rejoinder.⁵² Critical accounts sharpen her engagement—Gilbert and Gubar's "bogey" thesis captures Brontë's doubling but risks flattening her active re-framings, while Emily Griesinger's "biblical feminism" and Clay Daniel's epic-structural reading emphasise how Brontë translates temptation, exile, and reconciliation into domestic covenant and communal conscience.⁵³ Bridging Austen's calibrated irony and Eliot's social web, Brontë intensifies the domestic novel along two axes—psychological depth and industrial life—so that epic trial becomes a test of mind, work, and community.

Eliot completes the movement through dispersal. She turns perspective itself into plot, dissolving *Paradise Lost* into provincial realism. Having left doctrinal orthodoxy while retaining its ethical force, Eliot absorbs Miltonic structures as narrative grammar rather than overt polemic (Haight, 1968, p. 331). Critics from Ulrich Knoepfelmacher to Anna Nardo trace this appropriation: in *Adam Bede*, epic catastrophe is domesticated into Hetty's provincial crime and Dinah's work of consolation; in *Middlemarch*, temptation and error recur as patterned misjudgement—Lydgate's compromises, Bulstrode's concealments, Dorothea's misprisions—while reconciliation arrives as partial repair rather than grace (Knoepfelmacher, 1967, pp. 518-519; Nardo, 2003, pp. 170-176). Gillian Beer names the effect succinctly: "God is absent," but the epic sequence—temptation, error, exile, reconciliation—remains, reconstructed in social causality and sympathy (Beer, 2006, p. 26). In this thesis's terms, Eliot disperses the Fall into a taxonomy of ordinary errors, the narrator

⁵¹ Available at: <http://thebrontes.net/reading/appendices>

⁵² Brontë states in a letter to Elizabeth Gaskell that Shirley is more "a portrayal of Emily [Brontë, Charlotte's sister] as she might have been had she been placed in health and prosperity" (Barker, 1995, p. 612). This suggests the novel's Miltonic dialogue doubles as intra-familial ventriloquism—Emily the Romantic rebel, Charlotte the tempered realist. Read this way, *Shirley* is not only a refunctioning of *Paradise Lost* but also a dramatisation of the Brontë sisters' differing dispositions, transposed into Miltonic categories of rebellion, error, and covenant. See also: Barker, 1995, p. 185; Brontë, 1993a, p. 240; Emberson, 2007, p. 211.

⁵³ See also: Clay Daniel's 'Jane Eyre's Paradise Lost' (2007), pp. 101-108; Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* (2000), pp. 187-194; and Emily Griesinger's 'Charlotte Brontë's Religion: Faith, Feminism, and "Jane Eyre"' (2008), pp. 59-63.

assuming Milton's moral attention while justifying not the ways of God to man, but the ways of persons to each other (Milton, I.26, p. 5).

Read together, then, Austen, Brontë, and Eliot map a nineteenth-century afterlife of Milton across the domestic novel. Austen re-scales epic theology into ironic courtship trials to elevate domestic error into the proving ground of moral and social knowledge. Brontë drives the form into Gothic ordeal and industrial negotiation, transforming epic motifs into crises of psyche, labour, and community. Eliot disperses them still further, embedding the Fall into realist networks of consequence where error becomes habit, exile alienation, and reconciliation the fragile work of sympathy. Throughout, the courtship plot functions as the novel's analogue to Milton's salvific arc: temptation refracted through rhetoric and desire; error as misjudgement or compromise; exile as estrangement within household or society; reconciliation as covenantal marriage or provisional community. Influence here is not agonistic inheritance but dialogic refunctioning—what this project frames as domestication—through which women novelists convert the epic's cosmic stakes into the intimate ethics of everyday life.

Having established the shared dialogue between Milton and Austen, Brontë, and Eliot, the next step is to identify the stylistic markers through which this engagement becomes legible in their novels. If Genesis gives only the bare bones of humanity's first disobedience, Milton furnishes its flesh, sinew, and voice. *Paradise Lost* elaborates the Fall into a drama of conscience, persuasion, and consequence, shaping how later writers imagined temptation, error, and renewal. This chapter thus turns from broad framing to the finer grain of what this thesis refers to as "Miltonic markers:" the stylistic and structural features through which Milton's epic reshaped the biblical narrative, and through which Austen, Brontë, and Eliot inherit and refashion it. These markers are drawn from the established domains in which *Paradise Lost* most clearly departs from Genesis. Where scripture offers only a skeletal account of disobedience, Milton elaborates it into an epic architecture of Edenic setting, narrative authority, psychological interiority, rhetorical temptation, and archetypal reconfiguration. Each of these embellishments become a resource for later novelists.

Across Austen's, Brontë's, and Eliot's novels, these stylistic markers serve as signposts of Milton's afterlife: (1) Edenic settings and landscapes, where household and estate becomes moral paradises, provisional and precarious; (2) the claim of narrative authority, where the narrator shapes moral interpretation; (3) psychological interiority, in which temptation is staged as inward debate; (4) rhetoric as temptation, where eloquence rather than force seduces and destabilises; and (5) archetypal reconfiguration, where Adam,

Ede, Satan, and angels are dispersed into the *dramatis personae* of the domestic novel. These markers are not separable techniques in function—they operate together, deriving meaning only through their function in the trajectory of temptation, Fall, exile, and reconciliation. The same interdependence holds in the domestic novels of Austen, Brontë, and Eliot. To treat these markers individually is therefore a matter of critical clarity rather than formal isolation. They are best understood as interwoven strands of a shared Miltonic inheritance, each strengthening and relying upon the others. For this reason, while the first four markers will be traced comparatively across all three novelists to establish the breadth of Miltonic inheritance, archetypal reconfiguration will be taken up within the chapters devoted to Austen, Brontë, and Eliot themselves, where the figures of Satan, Eve, Adam, and the angels are interrogated through an archetypal lens and interwoven with close readings of these Miltonic markers.

EDENIC SETTINGS

Milton elaborates Eden far beyond Genesis' sparseness. Whereas scripture offers only, "And the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed," *Paradise Lost* unfurls hundreds of lines to describing Eden not as an abstract paradise but as a richly cultivated, recognisably domestic space (Genesis 2:8; Milton, IV.131-290, pp. 137-144). Adam and Eve appear as gardeners, joint custodians of "Flowers worthy of Paradise ... / Poured forth profuse on hill, and dale, and plain" (Milton, IV.243-246, p. 142). Its beauty is authentic, not the work of "nice Art, / In beds and curious knots," but luxuriant, uncontrived, and moral in its order (Milton, IV.241-242, p. 142). Eden is more than a backdrop in *Paradise Lost*—it is Milton's prototype for how place can embody harmony, test perception, and stage the fragility of paradise.

This Miltonic lens refracts into Austen's landscapes. *Pride and Prejudice's* Pemberley, as described by James M. Scott, specifically evokes authenticity—far removed from "artificial, man-made, sculpted English gardens" (Scott, 2016, p. 6). As Scott points out, the term "delight" is often used in the descriptions of both Pemberley and Eden, but what most stands is an account of what each paradisiacal garden lacks (Scott, 2016, p. 6). Scott goes on to say that Elizabeth notes Pemberley is "without any artificial appearance ... neither formal nor falsely adorned" (Austen, 1992b, p. 163; cited in Scott, 2016, p. 5). Elizabeth's transformation at Pemberley is framed by this Edenic imagery: she sees Darcy anew, not as a proud tempter but as a responsible steward, his character reflected in the harmony of his domestic paradise. Pemberley becomes an Edenic symbolic setting, not only in its natural

abundance, but as the ground on which moral vision is clarified—an inheritance of Milton’s expansion that turns landscape into a marker of character and relational harmony. By contrast, Rosings stages the opposite: an estate of artifice and hierarchy, Lady Catherine’s “nice Art” transposed into architecture and social form (Milton, IV.241, p. 142). In Austen, as in Milton, landscape becomes the stage where abundance and authenticity reveal character, while artifice exposes its counterfeit.

Adam and Eve tend Eden’s lush landscape through the language of household intimacy. Their tasks are not husbandry but domestic care:

On to their morning’s rural work they haste,
 Among sweet dewes and flowers; where any row
 Of fruit-trees over-woody reached too far
 Their pampered boughs, and needed hands to check
 Fruitless embraces: or they led the vine
 To wed her elm; she, spoused, about him twines
 Her marriageable arms, and with him brings
 Her dower, the adopted clusters, to adorn
 His barren leaves.
 (Milton, IV.210-218, p. 180)

Pruning becomes discipline of desire, the vine’s twining figured as conjugal intimacy, its fruit a dowry. The scene fuses labour and marriage: to tend the garden is to tend the household. Work is imagined as domestic intimacy, where abundance must be trained into order, desire made fruitful through proper union. This intimacy is also moral—Edenic labour is not toil but performance of virtue, binding care to obedience. The ease of pruning and guiding the vine signals harmony between human will and divine design. To rise the morning and “haste” to rural work is to enact diligence; to check “pampered boughs” is to resist indulgence; to lead the vine in marriage is to sanctify union through discipline. The garden becomes a mirror of the household: its order evidence of virtue, its abundance testimony to care.

Eden, then, is already domesticated in Milton. Paradise is not just a grove but a household space, its plenitude secured by gardening imagined as intimate, marital, and moral work. Eliot inherits this domestic space in *Adam Bede*, where labour becomes the visible ethic in which character is recognised and disciplined. Adam’s carpentry translates Milton’s theology of work into parish timber: passion transfigured into strength through “the labour of our right arm” (Eliot, 1997, p. 178). Unlike Milton’s Eden, whose beauty flows from divine design, Hayslope is emphatically cultivated—a human-shaped landscape of property, craft, and care. Eliot makes visible the slow accumulation of ordinary work: hedges laid, fields furrowed, oak felled and planed (Eliot, 1997, p. 178). Roads, furniture, and “improvement in

farming practice” are not just utilities, but legible signs of virtue, hence Irwine’s public ratification of “humble everyday work” (Eliot, 1997, pp. 179, 226). She secularises Milton’s theology: Adam’s tree of paradise becomes parish oak, moral energy embodied in landscape, binding the worker to place and community.

The same lush abundance that delights in Milton’s Eden also proves fragile—once Satan enters, the garden’s splendour shades into vulnerability.⁵⁴ Milton’s Eden is always double—radiant with profusion, yet edged with threat, recalling mythic gardens where innocence is lost:

... Not that fair field
Of Enna, where Prosperine gathering flowers,
Herself a fairer flower by gloomy Dis
Was gathered, which cost Ceres all that pain
To seek her through the world ...
(Milton, IV.268-271, p. 143)

Eden is thus both cosmic and domestic: dazzling in its order, but always one secrecy, one intrusion, away from collapse. Its fragility lies in the fact that the seed of ruin is already planted within it—the Tree of Knowledge stands at its centre, “of this tree we may not taste nor touch; / God so commanded,” a reminder that paradise contains its own undoing (Milton, IX.651-652, p. 331).

Through this Miltonic lens, Austen’s Mansfield Park emerges not as a neutral household but as Eden under threat. Like Adam and Eve’s garden, its harmony depends on watchful order: under Sir Thomas’s patriarchal stewardship the estate flourishes, but his absence exposes its hidden vulnerabilities. Into this precarious order step the Crawfords, serpentine in their charm and rhetorical brilliance. Yet their temptations are not alien corruptions but natural delights—the “fruit” already hanging on the branch. Amusement, performance, and desire tempt by their very attractiveness, “which to behold / Might tempt alone,” that promises ruin (Milton, IX.735-736, p. 334). Austen’s stage becomes Milton’s temptation scene, where the estate is not corrupted from without but undone by the ripening of its own vulnerabilities. Mansfield Park is Eden restaged in the everyday theatre of domestic life: paradise collapsing from within.

Brontë heightens this Miltonic fragility into the Gothic register. *Jane Eyre*’s Thornfield first appears as Jane’s domestic Eden, radiant with Miltonic plenitude—the

⁵⁴ Eden is described as “fairer” than “Enna,” the meadow Persephone was abducted from in Greek mythology. By layering Eden with mythic precedent, Milton plants a warning—paradise is precarious, and innocence can suddenly be undone by intrusion.

grounds glow “a solemn purple, burning with the light of red jewel and furnace flame at one point, on one hill-peak, and extending high and wide, soft and still softer, over half heaven” as Jane walks the grounds (Brontë, 1999, p. 218). Like Milton’s Eden, this is delight on the verge of excess, a paradise staged through light and colour. Yet, as in *Paradise Lost*, its splendour conceals the seed of its own undoing. Bertha Mason, hidden on the third story, is the fruit at the centre of the garden: the forbidden knowledge already present within the estate. Rochester’s secrecy functions as the prohibition—Jane may taste everything but this. Once the truth is revealed, Thornfield’s order collapses as surely as Eden after Eve’s grasp. The fire that consumes the house literalises Milton’s logic: paradise, radiant in its abundance, harbours the conditions of its own ruin.

Milton’s Eden also serves as the site of expulsion and ruin. Once corrupted, Eden is rendered inaccessible, barred by fire and angelic guard:

The brandished sword of God before them blazed,
Fierce as a comet ...
In either hand the hastening Angel caught
Our lingering parents, and to th’ eastern gate
Led them direct ...
They looking back, all th’ eastern side beheld
Of Paradise, so late their happy seat,
Waved over by that flaming brand; the gate
With dreadful faces thronged, and fiery arms ...
(Milton, XII.633-643, p. 493)

The imagery is as beautiful as it is terrifying: a garden that still flourishes, now shimmering behind a wall of fire. What dazzled with plenitude becomes most poignant in the moment it is lost, visible only as memory and spectacle. Earth, meanwhile, “felt the wound” of original sin, “Thorns also and thistles it shall bring forth” in place of untroubled abundance (Milton, IX.782, X.203, pp. 335, 360). Expulsion thus produces a duality—Eden preserved yet barred, the world outside wounded—that structures later novelists’ Edens of loss, parody, and ruin.

Austen stages this duality most clearly at *Mansfield Park*’s Sotherton, which announces itself as wilderness but exposes itself as counterfeit. Where Milton’s Eden flourishes in the absence of artifice, Sotherton is marked from the outset by “improvements” and plantations laid out with “too much regularity,” a landscape bound by iron gates (Austen, 2005, pp. 70, 73-74). Its “wilderness” is in fact a “planted wood” of larch and laurel, meticulously designed for effect (Austen, 2005, p. 74). The chapel, too, is hollow, velvet cushions and wainscoted pews replacing sanctity with upholstery, and Mary Crawford’s

laughter trivialising devotion (Austen, 2005, pp. 69-70). The effect is not Milton's blazing gate but its parody: confinement without radiance, prohibition emptied of grandeur. Maria Bertram's Sternean quip—"I cannot get out, as the starling said"—catches the irony, reducing Milton's terrifying expulsion ("you cannot get in") into a complaint of confinement (Sterne, 1997, 'The Passport,' para.12; quoted in Austen, 2005, pp. 70, 79). The effect reduces Eden's sublime loss to petulance, yet also foreshadows her Fall: a woman pressing against boundaries not for knowledge but for indulgence.⁵⁵ At Sotherton, temptation flourishes not against innocence but within contrivance, a parody of Eden glimpsed only through artifice.

In *Jane Eyre*, Brontë translates Milton's barred garden into Thornfield's "blackened ruin" (Brontë, 1999, p. 376). What first blazed with jewel tones and furnace light collapses, after Jane's exile, into desolation: "no roof, no battlements, no chimney—all had crashed in. And there was the silence of death about it: the solitude of a lonesome wild" (Brontë, 1999, p. 376). Even vegetation has become elegiac, spring cherishing only "grass and weed" among the rafters (Brontë, 1999, p. 376). Where Milton's Eden poured forth profusion, Brontë composes its negative—a paradise undone by secrecy, its beauty overwritten by the silence of desolation. Thornfield becomes Eden glimpsed after expulsion: still hauntingly present, but accessible only as ruin. Ferndean, by contrast, embodies Milton's wounded earth. Jane arrives "ere dark on an evening marked by ... sad sky, cold gale, and continued small penetrating rain" (Brontë, 1999, pp. 380-381). The house is "deep buried in a wood," its walls "dank and green ... decaying" (Brontë, 1999, p. 381). Ferndean offers no abundance, "no flowers, no garden-beds; only a broad gravel-walk girdling a glass-plat" (Milton, IV.243, p. 142; Brontë, 1999, p. 381). The sensory intensity remains but shifts from dazzling plenitude to damp obscurity. Ferndean recalls not the garden barred but the earth endured: the ground after expulsion, scarred and diminished, yet capable of sustaining life. Like Adam and Eve leaving paradise, Jane and Rochester turn from splendour to endurance, finding reconciliation not in profusion but in humility. If Thornfield is Milton's haunted Eden, Ferndean is his postlapsarian landscape, the humbled stage on which survival and reconciliation take root.

Milton's Eden is secured in a network of vigilance. Angelic patrols prowl the borders: "the Cherubim, / Forth issuing at the accustomed hour, stood armed / To their night watches in warlike parade" (Milton, IV.798-780, p. 161). Angels patrol its borders, even intercepting Satan "close at the ear of Eve" as he whispers temptations to her while she sleeps (Milton,

⁵⁵ It is important to note that the Fall for Maria Bertram is indeed sexualised—and written with a severity as unrelenting as it is unemotional.

IV.800, p. 161). Divine foreknowledge anticipates rebellion—when Raphael is sent to Adam, the commission is not merely friendly instruction but explicit warning: “Converse with Adam ... Tell him withal his danger, and from whom” (Milton, V.230, 238-239, p. 181). Eden’s plenitude is thus hedged by constant admonition—paradise is free, but freedom is under watch; happiness is given, but always with the caveat to beware.

Brontë translates that vigilance into the parish. In *Shirley*, Eden becomes the Yorkshire countryside—scarred by unrest, threatened by machinery, and haunted by the loss of social harmony. Rebellion stirs like Milton’s fallen host, “throes of a sort of moral earthquake” shaking the hills (Brontë, 1993a, p. 23). Milton marks rebellion against heaven as ontologically futile—divine order cannot be shaken; rebellion is in vain. Brontë shows rebellion as politically futile—“nobody took much notice” (Brontë, 1993a, p. 23). The structure of power remains intact, but it permanently scars the paradise it assaults—Brontë’s Eden trembles under surveillance that is political rather than divine, provisional rather than guaranteed.⁵⁶

Eliot turns the same gaze onto domestic ground. The order in *Adam Bede* never goes unobserved; neighbours stand in place of angels, and gossip functions as secular omniscience. “An oak clock-case and an oak table ... genuine ‘elbow polish’” testify to diligence, but so too do “the latest Treddleston gossip” in the barn and the commanding glance in church: “Look at her next Sunday ...” (Eliot, 1997, pp. 59, 85). Desire and disposition are rehearsed aloud, vanity rebuked in proverbs against “the preference of ornament to utility” (Eliot, 1997, pp. 23, 60, 76, 84). Hayslope’s Eden is both cultivated and patrolled, its moral order secured not in providence but in communal watchfulness. In *Middlemarch*, the Edenic logic expands from garden to parish to town. The town is figured as a medium of surveillance—“a huge whispering-gallery”’—so that private acts become publicly legible through “curious little

⁵⁶ Brontë undercuts the grandeur of rebellion further by rendering the rioters themselves as figures of ridicule (Eagleton, 1975, p. 48). As Terry Eagleton observes, the Luddite raid is “structurally central and curiously empty,” its threat dissipating into allegory and caricature (Eagleton, 1975, pp. 47-49). Workers appear as distorted figures—a “little dapper strutting man” or a broad fellow with “a wooden leg and stout crutch”—more distortions than agents of revolution (Brontë, 1993a, p. 101; cited in Eagleton, 1975, pp. 48-49). They are not cast in the heroic mode of Milton’s fallen angels, instead their bodies are diminished into deformity and farce. Yet as Eagleton observes, in the same scene the narrative suddenly swells into epic allegory, “Discord, broken loose in the night from control, had beaten the ground with his stamping hoofs, and left it waste and pulverized” (Brontë, 1993a, p. 260; cited in Eagleton, 1975, p. 49). The sentence echoes Milton’s epic narration, where abstractions like Chaos, Sin, and Death take on monstrous embodiments. In *Paradise Lost*, Sin appears as “woman to the waist ... But ended foul in many a scaly fold,” and Chaos is described as “without bound, / Without dimension, where length, breadth, and height, / And time and place are lost” (Milton, II.650-651, 891-894, pp. 70, 78). Both Brontë and Milton personify abstraction as monstrous and amorphous, embodiments of invisible disorder suddenly made material. Sin and Chaos mark the outer limits of creation, the ever-present potential for disorder that divine law contains. In Brontë, Discord crashes through the Yorkshire landscape, a reminder that the domestic Eden is not an idyll of harmony, but a space shadowed by the threat of eruption.

links of effect” (Eliot, 1996b, p. 409). Civic judgement hardens into ritual, as when Mr. Hawley calls on Bulstrode “to resign public positions,” turning “all eyes in the room” onto “cris[es] of feeling almost too violent ... to support,” his inward turmoil made into collective spectacle (Eliot, 1996b, p. 764). Yet Eliot tempers the communal gaze with sympathy. In the *Finale*, Dorothea’s “incalculably diffusive” influence rests not on grandeur but on “unhistoric acts” whose goodness is social, not spectacular (Eliot, 1996b, p. 765). Milton’s “warlike parade” is thus transposed into Eliot’s civic ecology, a social omniscience that both dignifies labour and exposes pretence (Milton, IV.780, p. 161).

In *Paradise Lost*, Eden is at once plenitude and fragility, abundance edged with its own undoing. Milton renders paradise not as an abstract *locus amoenus* but as a recognisably domestic space, radiant with delight yet always under warning, its labour intimate, its vigilance unceasing. Through this lens, Austen refracts Eden into estates: Pemberley as the closest setting to paradise preserved, a landscape of authentic delight and moral clarity; Mansfield Park as Eden imperilled, its harmony collapsing from within; Sotherton as parody, a garden already spoiled by artifice. Brontë intensifies Eden’s precariousness: Thornfield blazes with plenitude only to burn into ruin, Ferndean strips splendour down to survival, and *Shirley* transposes the fragility of Eden into the social stage, a parish trembling with unrest. Eliot secularises Eden into the labour of households and the scrutiny of communities. In *Adam Bede*, carpentry and cultivation inscribe virtue into parish life; in *Middlemarch*, the whole town becomes Edenic, its order sustained by a civic omniscience that disciplines yet dignifies ordinary work. None of these novels reproduce Eden whole. Each writer inherits Milton’s problem: paradise imagined in abundance, shadowed by the seeds of its collapse. Pemberley may come closest to the unfallen garden, but only as vision rather than possession. Its harmony exists through Elizabeth’s clarified perception, and its permanence depends on the fragile balance of character and relation. Across Austen, Brontë, and Eliot, Eden endures—abundance glimpsed, threatened, and sustained only in the moment, always before them, never wholly theirs (Milton, XII.646, p. 494).

NARRATIVE AUTHORITY

One of the most recognisable markers of *Paradise Lost*’s style is its narrator’s assumption of authority through the epic convention of invocation. Following Greek and Latin precedent, Milton’s epic begins with the traditional appeal to a muse but adapts the form by invoking the heavenly muse of scripture rather than the classical goddesses. The gesture is both inherited and transformed: familiar in its epic register yet newly charged with

theological weight. From the outset, narration itself becomes part of the poem's argument. Where Genesis relates the Fall with sparse record, *Paradise Lost* layers the story with commentary, gloss, and moral explanation. The narrator not only recounts events but insists on interpreting them, claiming the right to justify God's ways to the reader:

Sing Heav'nly Muse, that on the secret top
Of Oreb, or of Sinai, didst inspire
That shepherd, who first taught the chosen seed,
In the beginning how the heav'ns and earth
Rose out of Chaos: or if Sion Hill
Delight thee more, and Siloa's brook that flowed
Fast by the Oracle of God; I thence
Invoke thy aid to my adventurous song,
That with no middle flight intends to soar
Above th' Aonian mount, while it pursues
Things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme.
(Milton, I.6-16, pp. 9-11)

The invocation itself is a claim of authority, sanctioned by heaven and reaching beyond classical precedent. Readers are positioned as dependent on this inspired guide. As Milton's narrator invokes a heavenly muse, Austen's invokes irony: "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife" (Austen, 1992b, p. 3). Like Milton's "Man's first disobedience," it proclaims its subject in advance, but Austen twists the claim into parody, announcing her theme by undercutting it (Milton, 1.1, p. 5). The line takes the cadence of universal law but immediately collapses into comedy, exposing convention as absurd even while dictating the lens through which the story will be read.⁵⁷ The reader is forced into complicity—to nod at the "acknowledgement" while recognising its falsity—just as Milton's invocation obliges assent to divine sanction before the story even unfolds. Authority here is never neutral: it is polemical, reminding the reader that interpretation is part of the drama.

From the opening invocation—"Sing Heav'nly Muse"—Milton frames his task as the exposition of divine justice (Milton, I.6, 26, pp. 2, 5). His commentary interprets what Adam and Eve cannot see: Eve's soliloquy at the tree, for instance, is glossed with the aside that temptation has found "too easy entrance" (Milton, IX.734, p. 334). These interventions constitute a theological guarantee, guiding the reader through temptation, error, and

⁵⁷ Austen's novel was retitled to *Pride and Prejudice* after Margaret Holford's novel, *First Impressions*, was published in 1801 (Digital Austen, n.d.). The very act of renaming her novel from *First Impressions* to *Pride and Prejudice* signals a narratorial prerogative: the narrator will not simply present events but will tell her readers how to understand them, categorising them in advance (pride and prejudice as the lenses) as structured errors of judgement. For further reading, see: <https://digitalausten.org/node/34>.

consequence. Like Milton, Austen's narratorial stance continually directs how errors should be read. Characters' faults are rarely left for the reader to infer; they are refracted through narratorial irony that exposes folly and compels moral attention. Marilyn Butler notes: "Jane Austen's achievement is to naturalize [sic] a didactic tradition; but she relies on our sharing her beliefs, or at least identifying what they are" (Butler, 1987, p. 167). Claudia Johnson sharpens this point further, arguing Austen makes irony the medium of moral perception.⁵⁸ Where Milton's narrator directs readers toward a theological framework, Austen's directs them toward moral discernment through irony. Both narrators share a didactic function, but their registers differ—Milton's is theological and declarative, Austen's is moral and ironic. This Miltonic model of narration as moral framing reappears in Brontë's *Shirley*. There, the narrator halts the plot to address the reader directly, reframing events, mocking convention, or plunging into political critique.⁵⁹ In one memorable scene, Yorkshire politics swells into biblical invective, where Jessy Yorke launches into a political tirade against the government—but it is the narrator who casts her mockery in Miltonic terms: "She made familiar mention of the names of Lord Castlereagh and Mr. Perceval. Each of these personages she adorned with a character that might have suited Moloch and Belial" (Brontë, 1993a, p. 305). The effect is Miltonic not only in diction but in structure. Moloch and Belial are the two devils who most fully embody destructive extremes in *Paradise Lost*—violence without foresight and complacency without principle (Milton, II.43-118, pp. 47-50). To apply their names to Castlereagh and Perceval is to recast parliamentary politics as a modern Pandemonium, where industrial unrest and foreign wars are debated in the same idiom as

⁵⁸ Johnson argues: "they smuggle in their social criticism ... through various means of indirection—irony, antithetical pairing, double plotting, the testing or subverting of overt, typically doctrinaire statement with contrasting dramatic incident ... centering [sic] her novels in the consciousness of unempowered characters—that is, women" (Johnson, 1988, pp. xxiii-xxiv). In other words, Austen's use of indirection both disguises and strengthens her critiques of social norms, making them part of the fabric of the narrative.

⁵⁹ At times, the narrator in *Shirley* turns to outright irony, as in the chapter titled, "Which the Genteel Reader is Recommended to Skip, Low Persons being here Introduced" (Brontë, 1993a, p. 239). The address is both mock-politeness and provocation. Brontë's ironic warning gestures toward the cultural gatekeeping exercised by circulating libraries such as Mudie's, whose selection policies effectively determined which novels reached the middle-class market (Bassett, 2017, para. 7). As Troy Bassett notes, Mudie's "exercised unabashed control over the books they bought and lent ... originally, Mudie only circulated books he himself found proper reading for a middle-class family audience" (Bassett, 2017, para. 7, 22). By warning off the genteel reader, the narrator exposes the class prejudice that assumes working-class life is beneath serious fiction, and she simultaneously dares her readers to resist that impulse. To continue reading is to accept the narrator's terms: the mill-workers, dissenters, and the poor belong inside the same narrative space as landowners and heroines. To skip would be to enact the very exclusionary logic the narrator ridicules. These narratorial moments show how Brontë adapts Miltonic authority to different targets: where Milton ridicules devils, angels, and even Adam and Eve by turns, Brontë ridicules politicians and readers alike, making the novel a theatre of judgement in which no authority—parliamentary, domestic, or literary—is immune from critique.

rebellion in Hell. The narrator thus reframes Yorkshire dinner table satire to reconstruct national politics as a recasting of epic rebellion.

Milton subverts genre expectations by recasting the identity of his invoked muse—he names Urania only to reject her (Dolloff, 2006, p. iv). Instead, he anchors inspiration in the “holy Light,” which Stallard notes, “is made before all other material creations and is associated with God himself” (Stallard, 2011, p. 86). The act of invocation becomes more than convention; it is a theological assertion that his narration is divinely licensed. As Milton turns from pagan fable to divine epic, Brontë turns from sentimental romance to social satire. The opening chapter of *Shirley* announces to the reader: “If you think, from this prelude, that anything like a romance is preparing for you, reader, you never were more mistaken” (Brontë, 1993a, p. 3). Instead of introducing heroines, romance, or sentiment, the narrator offers curates squabbling in the rectory—drab, worldly, even comic—a domestic economy of church livings and stipends “as unromantic as Monday morning” (Brontë, 1993a, p. 3). Milton’s narrator similarly begins not with the arms or armour but with “Man’s first disobedience” (Milton, I.1-26, pp. 2-5). By subject, by invocation, and by aim, his proem implicitly distances itself from fable or romance, elevating the poem’s scope from entertainment to theological explanation. In both cases, the narrator asserts authority by redefining the scope at the start—Milton’s substitutes epic theology for pagan myth, while Brontë’s substitutes social critique for sentimental romance. Brontë’s reorientation is Miltonic not in theology but in rhetorical scale, refusing convention just as Milton enlarges the sparse narrative of Genesis. Where Genesis simply notes Adam and Eve’s spousal bond, Milton narrates their love and surrounds it with councils in Hell, deliberations in Heaven, and the looming catastrophe of the Fall; Brontë entwines her heroines’ marriages with secrecy, riots, and political economy. In both, domestic intimacy is inseparable from wider struggle—cosmic in Milton, Gothic and industrial in Brontë.⁶⁰

This enlargement of scale is inseparable from Milton’s conception of narratorial authority. Having set his subject against the vast backdrops of Heaven and Hell, Milton acknowledges his own inadequacy:

... What in me is dark
Illumine, what is low raise and support;

⁶⁰ Further, Brontë’s narratorial authority aligns with her authorial stance. In refusing to revise *Jane Eyre* for George Smith, she declared, “Truth has a severe charm of its own” (The Brontës, n.d.). That refusal of embellishment echoes the narrators of her fiction, who claim the right to instruct, admonish, and satirise in the name of fidelity. For further reading, see: <http://thebrontes.net/reading/appendices>.

That, to the highth of this great argument,
 I may assert Eternal Providence,
 And justify the ways of God to men
 (Milton, I.22-26, p. 5)

Authority claimed in Milton's invocations is never simple: the narrator at once asserts divine sanction and foregrounds his own human limits, positioning himself as both inspired guide and fallible witness. Milton personifies his narrator, most memorably in the lament over his blindness: "thou / Revisit'st not these eyes, that roll in vain / To find thy piercing ray, and find no dawn" (Milton, III.22-24, p. 87). Here the narrator is not merely a conduit of divine inspiration but a figure with physical and emotional presence inside the poem. His blindness grounds the epic voice in human limitation even as he claims access to transcendent vision through a divine muse.⁶¹ This doubleness—prophetic authority shadowed by fallibility—finds its realist afterlife in Eliot. In *Middlemarch*, the narrator's ambition is Miltonic in scale:

If we had a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel's heart beat, and we should die of the roar which lies on the other side of silence. As it is, the quickest of us walk about well wadded with stupidity. (Eliot, 1996b, p. 180)

The reach for "keen vision" is the realist analogue of Milton's angelic vantage, a claim to see beyond the ordinary limits. Yet Eliot immediately tempers the claim with irony: such a perception would overwhelm mortality, and human beings in practice stumble through life muffled by "stupidity." Her narrator therefore sustains two positions at once—the Miltonic aspiration to transcendent perception, and the realist insistence on limitation. Where Milton's narrator invokes angel to guide his sight, Eliot's invokes sympathy, the imaginative enlargement of self into the lives of other. Omniscience becomes expansive but ironic, softened by the demand for compassion. Casaubon's insecurity, glossed with the aside "like the rest of us," epitomises this doubleness: extraordinary insight tethered to shared human frailty (Eliot, 1996b, p. 382).

The finale of *Middlemarch* brings this Miltonic irony full circle. Dorothea's "finely-touched spirit" produces only "unhistoric acts," yet these modest gestures constitute "the growing good of the world" (Eliot, 1996b, pp. 764-765). Domestic consequence is dignified with the teleology of epic. Where Milton's Adam is shown by Michael a prophetic panorama

⁶¹ Critics differ on whether Milton's narrative voice is wholly omniscient or pedagogically fallible. Stanley Fish argues the latter: that Milton teaches readers by letting them misread Satan, only to reframe and correct their admiration (Fish, 2001, pp. 9-12). Either way, the narrator functions as providential authority. He does not merely recount events but assures their significance within divine history. In this sense, *Paradise Lost* is as much a poem about its own telling as about the Fall.

of redemption, Eliot's reader is shown a realist eschatology of unnoticed goodness. Eliot sustains this Miltonic doubleness across her fiction. In *Adam Bede*, the narrator directs moral attention away from the marketplace, pulpit, and platform to the unnoticed care of the home:

He was one of those men, and they are not the commonest, of whom we can know the best only by following them away from the market-place, the platform, and the pulpit, entering with them into their own homes, hearing the voice with which they speak to the young and aged about their own hearthstone, and witnessing their thoughtful care for the everyday wants of everyday companions, who all take their kindness as a matter of course, and not as a subject for panegyric. (Eliot, 1997, pp. 56-57)

Where Milton's narrator justifies the cosmic justice of God, Eliot's narrator dignifies ordinary kindness. Providential meaning is relocated from divine decree to the steady texture of everyday life: the Rector's kindness is so habitual that those around him accept it without notice, "as a matter of course," rather than commemorating it in public praise. The ordinariness is exactly the point—Eliot's narrator lets the unnoticed and unhistoric acquire moral weight.

This doubleness of prophetic authority shadowed by fallibility manifests in Milton's insistence on the inadequacy of human understanding of divine truths. Acknowledging that the task has been "unattempted yet in prose or rhyme," Milton's narrator underscores the didactic purpose of the poem; he is not a neutral observer but an interpreter, framing events and guiding the reader's judgement (Milton, I.16, p. 11). Milton's epic is thus a pedagogy in how narration itself becomes moral governance. This narratorial authority is not ornamental but integral to the poem's central concern of justifying God's way to humankind. That justification depends on negotiating the tension between divine omniscience and human free will. Humanity must be free to choose, and thus to fall, in order for obedience to have meaning; the narrator frames every temptation and error so that the reader apprehends its weight within this theological logic. While Milton signals the dangers of Satan's rhetoric, reminding readers that his speeches are deceptive despite their allure, Eliot performs the same interpretive work in the domestic register. In *Middlemarch*, Dorothea's nobility is narrated with reverence, yet the voice ironises her devotion to Casaubon, alerting us to her misjudgement even before events confirm it. Lydgate's idealism is given dignity, but the narrator warns of its eventual erosion under circumstance. Catherine Gallagher's account of the eighteenth-century novel provides the groundwork for understanding what Eliot does with narratorial authority: she argues that fictionality itself emerges when novels begin to populate their worlds with characters who were "nobody in particular" (Gallagher, 2006, p. 342).

Readers are trained to approach these plausible “nobodies” with a disposition of “ironic credulity,” suspending disbelief not to mistake fiction for fact but to speculate about probability, error, and consequence (Gallagher, 2006, p. 346). Unlike scandal narratives or romances that claim thinly veiled reference to real figures, these characters are plausible yet explicitly non-referential. Eliot inherits this legacy: by the time she writes, readers have already been trained to see ordinary lives as the natural province of fiction—therefore, the ordinariness of her characters is not a defect of scale but the condition of their fictionality, and thus of their moral legibility. What Gallagher describes as the eighteenth-century discovery of fictionality, Eliot transforms into a nineteenth-century ethic: the narrator takes the plausibility of “nobody in particular” and domesticates it into the moral seriousness once reserved for epic poetry (Gallagher, 2006, p. 342). Hetty Sorrel’s provincial vanity or Dorothea Brooke’s lofty misjudgement are legible precisely because fictionality has already trained readers to see significance in the ordinary. Eliot thus inherits Milton’s scaffolding of narratorial control and recasts it within Gallagher’s framework. Her narrators in *Adam Bede* and *Middlemarch* retain omniscience but ground their authority not in heaven but in sympathy, consequence, and secular realism.

The Miltonic conception of narration—as both inspired authority and fallible presence—is a key inheritance for nineteenth-century domestic fiction. Austen adapts it into irony, her narrator guiding judgement through wit and framing rather than through providential assurance; Brontë amplifies it into testimony and satire, casting narration as moral witness and social critique; and Eliot disperses it into realist omniscience, her narrators claiming authority by interpreting webs of human consequence. Their registers differ, but the structural principle is shared. Like Milton, they treat narration not as neutral record but as interpretive governance, ensuring that readers apprehend temptation, error, and reconciliation within a moral frame. The domestic novel inherits not just the voice of epic, but its gravity—reshaping Milton’s cosmic pedagogy into the moral instruction of ordinary life.

PSYCHOLOGICAL INTERIORITY

Another defining marker of Milton’s narration in *Paradise Lost* is its commitment to rendering the interiority of its characters. This section focuses on Eve’s inward drama—briefly setting aside Adam, Satan, and the angels—not because she is the only figure rendered with psychological depth, but because her soliloquies most vividly highlight Milton’s portrayal of interiority and provide the model through which nineteenth-century writers adapt it. Genesis gives no account of Eve’s reasoning; she sees, she hears, she eats. Milton, by

contrast, dramatises her inner dialogue as a full psychological process. She appropriates Satan's rhetoric into her own thought, weighing it until it seems self-generated. Before taking the fruit, Eve debates with herself, weighing evidence and counterclaims:

How dies the Serpent? he hath eaten and lives,
And knows, and speaks, and reasons, and discerns,
Irrational till then. For us alone
Was death invented? or to us denied
This intellectual food, for beasts reserved?
(Milton, IX.745-749, p. 335)

For Eve, temptation is as much self-persuasion as external seduction. The soliloquy structure stages error as a drama of consciousness: the Fall begins not with the act of eating but with the inward persuasion that makes it possible.

Nineteenth-century women writers incorporate this engine primarily through the vehicle of free indirect discourse. Like Eve at the tree, Austen's heroines turn inward, misleading themselves by internalising persuasion into their own thought. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth's prejudice against Darcy is secured as much by her own prior assumptions as by Wickham's charm. In both Milton and Austen, the narrative voice implicates the reader by presenting error as conviction, inhabiting the very reasoning the leads astray.⁶² Irony then intervenes—Milton's theological gloss or Austen's social wit—to expose the discrepancy between perception and truth. Elizabeth's later recognition, "Till this moment, I never knew myself," becomes the domesticated form of repentance: a belated self-knowledge that echoes Eve's fallen recognition yet reorients it toward moral growth (Austen, 1992b, p. 141). Austen's narrative thus functions as a domesticated Fall, where action, "even when action is mistaken," becomes the path to growth (Markovits, 2007, p. 789). Interiority is not merely formal but ethical and pedagogical: Milton and Austen alike insist that temptation and error must be narrated from within so that judgement is trained through the experience of misperception itself.

Eve's internalisation of persuasion is dually acted out in her postlapsarian lament. After eating the fruit, she falls at Adam's feet with "tears that ceased not flowing" to seek

⁶² From Lynch: "Discriminating readers of that fiction, those who are privy to the novel's true text of free indirect discourse and who share a space of sensibility with the heroine, quickly learn to discredit as mere appearance the appearances that the supporting characters see when they look at her. Discriminating readers will accept the invitation to sympathy the text tenders each time it asks them to contrast their powers of discernment with those of the misjudging characters within the fiction, and as they do so they will locate the true meaning of the person beneath the surface, in an indescribable soul" (Lynch, 1998, p. 152). In other words, Austen's narrative style trains readers to align with the heroine, dismissing superficial judgements made by other characters.

reconciliation (Milton, X.910, p. 385). In this moment, she re-inscribes hierarchy within herself—submissive Eve, corrected from her error, re-enters her role as Adam’s subordinate, just as earlier she made the serpent’s rhetoric her own. Caroline Helstone in Brontë’s *Shirley* dramatises the same danger of such inward pliancy. On the surface, she seems Elizabeth’s opposite: where Caroline is timid, deferential, and affectionate, Elizabeth is witty, outspoken, and sharp. Yet she, too, reveals the Eve-like tendency to take persuasion inward. Her “piteous trembling” at a Sunday school tea is steadied only by Mr. Hall’s intervention, her gratitude preserved in the flowers she presses into souvenirs (Brontë, 1993a, pp. 212-213). Like Eve, Caroline does not simply obey; she internalises. What looks like meekness becomes structurally imperative: her conscience binds external authority into memory and selfhood, so thoroughly absorbed that it appears self-generated.

Eve’s interiority in *Paradise Lost* also begins with self-absorption. Her first act upon her creation is to fall in love with her own image at the lake:

As I bent down to look, just opposite
A shape within the water gleam appeared,
Bending to look on me: I started back,
It started back; but pleased I soon returned,
Pleased it return as soon with answering looks
Of sympathy and love; there I had fixed
Mine eyes till now, and pined with vain desire ...
(Milton, IV.460-466, p. 150)

Before she debates with Adam or encounters Satan, Eve is already rehearsing desire as self-regard, persuasion folding inward to her own vanity until it requires divine interruption to break the spell: “What there thou seest, fair Creature, is thyself” (Milton, IV.468, p. 150). Hetty Sorrel in *Adam Bede* inherits this danger without the safeguard. Before her mirror, she rehearses her beauty until fantasy becomes conviction, her self-persuasion hardening into self-enchancement. Unlike Eve, whose reflection is broken by providence, Hetty’s remains unbroken—no divine voice intervenes, only the silence of unchecked vanity. Milton makes interiority corrigible through divine interruption; Eliot secularises the same structure by withholding heavenly intrusion. What begins in Eden as desire redirected by God becomes, in the nineteenth-century novel, a closed circuit of self-persuasion: Milton’s drama of inward temptation persists, but without its theological counterweight.

Yet Eve’s interiority is not reducible to susceptibility and pliancy alone: she resists, debates, and renews. She argues with Adam, “for, inferior, who is free?” and (Milton, IX.825, pp. 337). This duality—the Eve who yields and the Eve who resists—finds its nineteenth-

century heirs in Shirley Keeldar and Fanny Price. Shirley, like Eve, makes her thoughts known outwardly: when the curate Donne abuses Yorkshire, she flings open the garden gates and orders him out, dismissing even a “clergyman” who proved “no gentleman” (Brontë, 1993a, pp. 215-216). Her interiority is not silent yielding but defiant resistance, refusing to naturalise persuasion as her own. In *Mansfield Park*, by contrast, Fanny embodies resistance through stillness. When pressed on all sides to marry Henry Crawford, she recognises his flattery and refuses to absorb it, rehearsing her reasons as they harden into unshakeable conscience:

... to find any charm in it, all this was unintelligible ... she told him that she did not love him, could not love him, was sure she never should love him ... and let it be considered as concluded forever. (Austen, 2005, p. 262)

Where Eve momentarily resists the serpent—“Serpent, thy overpraising leaves in doubt / The virtue of that fruit”—only to falter immediately, “But say, where grows the tree? from hence how far?,” Fanny holds her ground (Milton, IX.615-617, p. 330). She becomes Austen’s experiment in asking, “But what if Eve followed her doubtful inquiries?” Shirley and Fanny together refract Eve’s doubleness: one makes her resistance audible in public defiance, the other inwardly rehearses it into an unyielding conscience.

What emerges from these juxtapositions is not a simple inheritance of interiority, but a fractured psychology. Neither Austen, Brontë, or Eliot reproduces Eve whole; each isolates and adapts different modes of her psychology.⁶³ Austen distributes her doubleness across novels—Elizabeth’s susceptibility in *Pride and Prejudice* and Fanny’s resistance in *Mansfield Park* together refract Eve’s inward paradox of yielding and holding firm. Brontë, by contrast, dramatises both strands within a single text, setting Caroline’s pliancy against Shirley’s defiance to make Eve’s doubleness dialogic rather than sequential. Eliot pushes the pattern to its limit in Hetty Sorrel, whose self-absorption becomes a closed circuit, the Miltonic model stripped of divine interruption and thus fatally sealed. The brilliance of Milton’s Eve is that she contains persuasion, resistance, and renewal within a single consciousness; the brilliance of her nineteenth-century heirs is that they disassemble and reconfigure those modes across characters, novels, and forms. What remains constant is the

⁶³ Appendix A includes a detailed discussion of Jane’s interiority in *Jane Eyre* through her watercolour triptych.

Miltonic inheritance itself: temptation, resistance, and error are staged not at the level of action but within the theatre of the mind, where narrative seriousness is born.

RHETORICAL PERSUASION

Milton stages the Fall as a drama of words. Paradise is not seized by violence but surrendered to persuasion, rhetoric proving strong enough to undo creation. The fullest acknowledgement of that power comes not in the temptation itself but in its aftermath, when the Son chastises Adam not for weakness of body but for weakness of ear. Adam, he declares, “didst resign thy manhood” when he allowed Eve’s words to sway him (Milton, X.148, p. 356). Eve, created to attract love, not his “subjection,” has in speaking become his “guide” (Milton, X.146, 153, pp. 356-357). In seventeenth-century usage, a *guide* was “one who controls the movements of an animal or a flock; a driver, keeper,” a definition that makes Adam’s yielding not only an inversion of divine hierarchy but a descent from reason into bestial passivity (guide, n., sense I.1.d, n.d.). The loss is compounded in the charge that he has surrendered his *manhood*—a term denoting both male authority and human dignity (manhood, n., senses I.1.a, I.1.b, III.4.a., III.4.b., n.d.). To forfeit is to abdicate not only patriarchy but humanity itself.

Yet the need for this scaffolding betrays the problem it seeks to contain. If Eve’s words could move Adam, then rhetoric has real power; if Adam’s will was free, then his Fall was not brute subjection but persuasion assented to. Eve’s superiority in this moment is linguistic, not ontological: she has the power to “influence,” to sway (Milton, IX.309, p. 321). The Son’s rebuke attempts to naturalise hierarchy by redefining speech as ornament, reducing Eve’s eloquence to beauty. Adam’s “real dignity” is intellect; Eve’s “gifts” are merely aesthetic, “unseemly to bear rule” (Milton, X.153-156, p. 357). Yet the narrative proves otherwise: Eve persuades Adam not with looks but with words, and he replies in kind. Milton’s rhetoric insists on subordination, but his poem enacts persuasion as decisive. That tension—speech dismissed as ornamental yet shown to undo paradise—become the epic’s enduring bequest, echoing in later centuries when women’s domestic fiction was likewise trivialised, even as it reshaped moral vision and social words (Armstrong, 1987, pp. 8-9, 15).

That unresolved tension of the power behind speech becomes the dramatic core of temptation, where the narrator stresses Satan’s rhetoric as the site of danger:

So glozed the Tempter, and his proem tuned;
Into the heart of Eve his words made way,

Though at the voice much marveling; at length,
Not unamazed, she thus in answer spake
(Milton IX.549-552, p. 328)

The verb *glozed* suggests flattery, embellishment, even deceit.⁶⁴ Satan's proem parodies the epic's own machinery, a false invocation that turns deception into counterfeit revelation.⁶⁵ Milton makes rhetoric itself the battlefield: epic form is seized, repurposed, and corrupted, so that what once elevated the heroic deed now dignifies transgression. Satan becomes the poet of error, seducing not only Eve but the very structure of the poem's language into complicity with rebellion. Wickham's "perfectly correct, gentlemanlike address" works in the same register: the cadences of propriety and polish lending duplicity the dignity of sincerity (Austen, 1992b, p. 67). Rhetoric here is not ornamental but operative—it is the very substance of temptation. By making words sound like wisdom, Satan transforms rebellion into plausibility, much as Henry Crawford's "playful" eloquence makes indulgence itself appear rational, rhetoric polished enough to disguise temptation as wit (Austen, 2005, p. 233). Satan's strategy of persuasion even supplies Eve with arguments that seem to arise from her own thought: "will God incense his ire / For such a petty trespass, and not praise / Rather your dauntless virtue[?]" (Milton, IX.692-694, p. 332). Satan does not simply command Eve; rather, he scripts the internal monologue she might have, reading instead like Eve's own rationalisation, though it comes from his mouth. Robert Moore, by contrast, exposes the fragility of such persuasion by stripping it bare. His proposal sounds "like a brigand who demanded by purse rather than like a lover who asked my heart" (Brontë, 1993a, p. 397). Bereft of eloquence, desire hardens into mercenary demand, temptation collapsing into coercion. Moore's speech becomes the negative of Satanic oratory—his bluntness illuminates how much the power of temptation depends on words that make transgression sound like fidelity.

Satan's temptation begins not with direct address but with insinuation, whispered into Eve's dream:

close at the ear of Eve,
Assaying by his devilish art to reach
The organs of her fancy ...
... discontented thoughts,
Vain hopes, vain aims, inordinate desires,

⁶⁴ The Oxford English Dictionary defines "glozed" as "In senses of the verb: Provided with glosses, commented on; speciously adorned; specious" (glozed, adj., n.d.).

⁶⁵ The Oxford English Dictionary defines "proem" as "A prefatory part of a speech; preliminary remarks; an exordium. Now rare" (proem, n., sense 2, n.d.).

Blown up with high conceits engendering pride.
(Milton, IV.800-809, pp. 161-162)

Here temptation takes the form of implanted rhetoric, words that bypass reason and stir imagination into “discontented thoughts.” Rochester employs a similar strategy in the Thornfield arbour, cloaking his entreaty in the language of moral case study: “To attain this end, are you justified in overleaping an obstacle of custom — a mere conventional impediment which neither your conscience: sanctifies nor your judgment approves?” (Brontë, 1999, p. 192). Just as Satan breathes vanity into Eve’s sleep, Rochester scripts Jane’s conscience in advance, reframing transgression as fidelity and renewal. Eliot replays the same dynamic in *Adam Bede*, but with a subtler cruelty—Arthur persuades himself before he ever persuades Hetty. Admiring his reflection, he assures himself that his faults are only “of a generous kind—impetuous, warm-blooded, leonine; never crawling, craft, reptilian. It was not possible for [him] to do something mean, dastardly, or cruel” (Eliot, 1997, p. 86). Self-exoneration becomes a form of temptation, preparing the ground on which others will be swayed. Satan rehearses the same manoeuvre, dignifying rebellion with the claim of “courage never to submit or yield,” fortifying disobedience into a counterfeit of heroic resolve (Milton, I.108, p. 9). Self-absolution, whispered temptation, polished flattery—all show how rhetoric anticipates desire, bending the will before choice is ever made. In Milton, as in Austen, Brontë, and Eliot, words prepare the Fall before action follows; persuasion is already half-consent.

It is in this atmosphere of primed imagination and softened resistance that Eve herself turns to Adam, carrying forward the same chain of eloquence that undoes paradise: “Adam shall share with me in bliss or woe: / So dear I love him, that with him all deaths / I could endure” (Milton, IX.831-833, p. 337). Her speech enacts temptation itself: a progression from adulation to rationalisation to union, transfiguring transgression into fidelity. Flattery becomes the opening note, “Thee I have missed, and thought it long, deprived / Thy presence,” love invoked to mask disobedience (Milton, IX.857-857, p. 338). Rosamond speaks in the same key when she veils her sabotage of Lydgate’s financial remedy in the language of concern: “I ordered Trumbull not to inquire further ... I knew it would be injurious to you” (Eliot, 1996b, p. 599). From flattery Eve moves to reason, citing the serpent’s survival and powers as evidence that the fruit must be divine in effect (Milton, IX.865-871, p. 338). Rosamond, too, couches resistance in the idiom of logic, “if it were known that you wished to part with your house and furniture,” she warns, presenting defiance

as prudent insight (Eliot, 1996b, p. 599). Finally, Eve appeals to equality and intimacy: “Thou therefore also taste, that equal lot / May join use, equal joy, as equal love” (Milton, IX.880-881, p. 338). Rosamond likewise closes by asserting her will as a mutual bond: “I had a strong objection to it. I think that was reason enough,” her authority made to stand for them both (Eliot, 1996b, p. 599). Delivered with “careful calmness which was evidently defensive,” her words transform insubordination into prudence, making resistance seem ungenerous (Eliot, 1996b, p. 599). In both, persuasion flows through intimacy itself: the bond that ought to safeguard fidelity becomes the very conduit of transgression, and Adam, already stirred by love, deliberates but yields.

Rhetoric in *Paradise Lost* is never mere embellishment: it is the medium through which freedom is exercised, temptation insinuated, and paradise undone. What Milton encodes as a peril—words potent enough to sway will and invert hierarchy—becomes in the nineteenth-century novel a central dramatic resource. Austen’s drawing rooms, Brontë’s Gothic chambers, and Eliot’s provincial parlours all replay the Miltonic scene where speech masquerades as sincerity, reason, or devotion while bending desire toward error. Wickham’s polish, Rochester’s moral case study, Arthur’s self-exoneration, Rosamond’s careful calm—each shows how persuasion anticipates consent, how rhetoric prepares the Fall before action follows. In Milton as in his afterlife, language is never neutral: it is the medium of temptation itself, where intimacy, authority, and imagination are turned toward ruin.

ARCHETYPAL REFIGURATION

For the purposes of this project, the archetypal reconfigurations of *Paradise Lost* may be understood through two interlocking systems: the structural motifs that organise the Fall narrative, and the archetypal figures through which those motifs are enacted. The motifs provide the recurrent pattern—temptation, error, exile, reconciliation—that shapes both Milton’s epic and its later reconfigurations. Temptation in *Paradise Lost*, as discussed, unfolds through rhetorical persuasion, the seductions of spectacle and argument. Error follows as the act of misjudgement or transgression, whether through Eve’s deception or Adam’s deliberate solidarity. Exile emerges as the consequence of error, casting humanity into loss, displacement, or marginalisation. Reconciliation finally offers the possibility of renewal, whether through repentance, humility, or covenant, though always with the recognition that restoration is partial and the conditions of exile endure. These motifs are animated by a set of archetypal roles that nineteenth-century novelists repeatedly fracture, recombine, and redistribute.

Eve is the most generative and fractured of Milton's figures, the one upon whom the imaginative weight of temptation, error, and renewal most heavily rests. From the outset she is marked by a restless autonomy, but also a peculiar susceptibility. In her dream, Satan whispers into her ear as she sleeps, implanting the image of tasting the fruit (Milton, IV.797-809, p. 161). She recounts it as though it were her own vision, prophetic yet alien: an anticipation of transgression that belongs to her imagination and to Satan's intrusion alike (Milton, V.28-94, pp. 173-175). Eve recognises her subordination as a form of bondage:

Experience, next, to thee I owe,
Best guide; not following thee, I had remained
In ignorance..
...so to add what want
In female sex, the more to draw his love,
And render me more equal; and perhaps,
A thing not undesirable, sometimes
Superior; for inferior, who is free?
(Milton, IX.807-824, pp. 336-337)

She is aware that she is purposefully kept ignorant, less than equal to Adam, valued only for her beauty and commanded to "leave not the faithful side / that gave thee being" (Milton, IX. 265-266, p. 319). Yet Eve is not wholly submissive; she asserts her will—"Eve first to her husband thus began ... / Thus saying, from her husband's hand her hand / Soft she withdrew" (Milton, IX.204, 385-386, pp. 317, 323). She withdraws her hand from Adam's and proposes to work apart—a choice that tragically opens the path to temptation. These moments stage her as simultaneously subordinate and resistant, Adam's "other self" and his challenger (Milton, VIII.450, p. 300). Her temptation by Satan intensifies this doubleness: she is persuaded not only through appetite but through the rhetoric of freedom and exaltation. Eve fleetingly perceives Satan as unreliable: "Serpent, thy overpraising leaves in doubt / The virtue of that Fruit" (Milton, IX.615-6, p. 330). But Eve's suspicion dissolves—she is dazzled by the serpent's flattery and false story. She reasons herself toward error: "How dies the Serpent? he hath eaten and lives, / And knows, and speaks, and reasons, and discerns, / Irrational till then. For us alone ... denied / This intellectual food, for beasts reserved?" (Milton, IX.764-768, p. 335). Her logic turns the prohibition itself into doubt, and the law into temptation. At the fruit she becomes imaginatively enraptured: "Greedily she engorged without restraint, / And knew not eating death: Sate at length, / And hightened as with Wine, jocund and boon" (Milton, IX.791-794, p. 336). Only after eating the fruit does she

truly understand the serpent's deception, feeling "guilt and dreaded shame" (Milton, IX.1114, p. 346).

Eve becomes at once tempted and tempter, pleading with Adam and securing his complicity in the Fall: "Forsake me not thus, Adam! Witness Heaven / What love sincere, and reverence in my heart / I bear thee," where love is made to sanctify transgression (Milton, X.914-916, p. 386). She explains her guilt as deception, telling Adam she "unweeting have offended, / Unhappily deceived" (Milton, X.916-917, p. 386). Yet after the Fall, she is also the figure of lament and fragile hope. She goes to Adam, crying with "tresses all disordered, at his feet / Fell humble: and, embracing them, besought / His peace," her supplication both a confession of fault and a plea for renewal (Milton, X.911-913, pp. 385-386). Eve becomes not only the source of error but also the one through whom the possibility of marital reconciliation first appears. She initiates the restoration of spousal unity by offering to bear punishment alone: "with my cries importune Heaven, that all / The sentence from thy head removed may light / On me, sole cause to thee of all this woe, / Me me only just object of his ire" (Milton, X.89-92, p. 387). Because she contains within herself prophecy, resistance, susceptibility, temptation, error, lament, and hope, she is the figure most radically refracted in nineteenth-century fiction. Later writers splinter her into curious but educable heroines, fallen figures who remain unrepentant, silent Eves denied subjectivity, or even as an unfallen Eve who resists temptation altogether.⁶⁶

Adam embodies the archetype of knowing complicity. His Fall is not the result of deception but of deliberate solidarity. When Eve returns with the fruit, Milton makes Adam's logic explicit: "he scrupled not to eat, / Against his better knowledge; not deceived, / But fondly overcome with female charm" (Milton, IX.997-999, p. 342). God further punctuates that Adam and Eve enact the Fall only by their own free will: "nor can justly accuse / Their Maker, or their making, or their fate, / As if predestination over-rul'd / Their will dispos'd by absolute decree / Or high foreknowledge" (Milton, III.112-116, p. 93). They are said to be "sufficient to have stood, though free to fall" (Milton, III.99, p. 90). Adam thus actively chooses companionship over obedience, love over divine law: "How can I live without thee!

⁶⁶ Eve's role in the Fall has long provoked debate about whether Milton reproduces or critiques patriarchal assumptions (Gilbert, 1978, pp. 372-373). Eve is repeatedly denied the chance to develop her own reasoning skills because of the assumption of her inferiority at creation (Milton, VII.541-542, p. 303). Raphael's instruction to Adam frames reason as "discursive" for humankind, and "intuitive" for angels (Milton, V.485-489, p. 191). Adam benefits from divine conversation Raphael; Eve, by contrast, receives no such guidance. Her exclusion from divine conversation makes her more vulnerable to temptation, but it also unsettles divine claims of her intellectual inferiority: she errs not from lack of reason, but from lack of opportunity. Denied such discourse, she can be read as forced to seek sustenance in other forms—whether that is through the filtered discourse of Raphael through Adam, or through her dealings with the serpent.

how forgo / Thy sweet converse, and love so dearly joined, / To live again in these wild woods forlorn!” (Milton, IX.908-910, p. 339) Milton dramatises the cost of solidarity in Adam’s response to Eve:

In me is no delay; with thee to go,
Is to stay here; without thee here to stay,
Is to go hence unwilling; thou to me
Art all things under Heaven, all places thou,
Who for my willful crime art banished hence.
(Milton, X.930-931, XII.615-619, pp. 387-388, 492)

This act defines the Adamic archetype: his error is conscious, grounded in loyalty, and thus morally weightier than Eve’s deception.⁶⁷ Adam is also characterised by pride and a susceptibility to his own reasoning. Before the Fall he debates Raphael over celestial knowledge, pressing for details beyond what is safe or needful: “Solocit not thy thoughts with matters hid; / Leave them to God above; him serve, and fear!” (Milton, VIII.166-167, p. 289). His eagerness gestures toward overreaching, a strain that anticipates his later error. Yet Adam is also educable. His lament after the Fall shows the full weight of his error:

O miserable of happy! is this the end
Of this new glorious world, and me so late
The glory of that glory, who now become
Accursed, of blessed, hide from the face
Of God ... (Milton, X.720-725, p. 379)

He recognises the magnitude of the loss and voices his grief in explicitly cosmic terms. Crucially, he is moved by Eve’s supplication to compassion: “in Adam wrought / Commiseration: Soon his heart relented / Towards her” (Milton, X.939-941, p. 387). Unlike Satan, Adam can be humbled, moved from pride to empathy, and turned toward reconciliation. In *Paradise Lost*, Adam is the one who articulates the heroic ideal of the *felix culpa* that inadvertently leads to a better life:

⁶⁷ This assertion is questionable once the hierarchy of knowledge is considered: Adam and Eve are commanded to choose, but without full understanding of good and evil, their freedom is formal, not substantive. In *Areopagitica*, Milton has already argued that “reason is but choosing,” and that God “therefore left him free” (Milton, 1997a, para. 5). But within the epic, reason itself becomes the site of temptation, a medium through which desire reshapes argument. The hierarchy of knowledge—God, angels, Adam, and finally Eve as least informed—renders Eve’s first act of free will both inevitable and transgressive: she separates from Adam, asserting independence at the very point where she lacks the resources to judge rightly. This is a restrictive conception of free will, one that obliges self-government under divine law while limiting the horizon of actual choice. It suited Milton’s political vision of a people freed from corrupt institutions yet still bound by internalised obedience.

... with good
 Still overcoming evil, and by small
 Accomplishing great things, by things deemed weak
 Subverting worldly strong, and worldly wise
 By simply meek: that suffering for truth's sake
 Is fortitude to highest victory,
 And, to the faithful, death the gate of life ...
 (Milton, XII.565-571, p. 489)

The Fall, though tragic, becomes the necessary condition of redemption. In nineteenth-century fiction, Adam's archetype fractures: some figures echo his educability, humbled into growth; others linger in misplaced devotion, faltering rather than restored; still others miniaturise his tragic solidarity into domestic pride corrected by marriage.

Satan is the most rhetorically versatile of Milton's figures, and the most susceptible to loyally reprising his role in fiction. He is defined by rebellion, pride, and above all, persuasive speech. His envy recasts beauty as torment; not just at Eden's gardens but the lovers within it:

Sight hateful, sight tormenting! Thus these two,
 Imparadised in one another's arms,
 The happier Eden, shall enjoy their fill
 Of bliss on bliss; while I to Hell am thrust,
 Where neither joy nor love, but fierce desire,
 Among our other torments not the least,
 Still unfulfilled with pain of longing pines.
 (Milton, IV.505-511, p. 151)

The vision is charged not only with envy but with erotic frustration: Satan looks on Adam and Eve's embrace and feels his own lack as a kind of carnal exile. Paradise becomes unbearable precisely because it flaunts the intimacy he has forfeited. Envy turns outward into temptation, voiced as a verbal intrusion unto the object of his torment. Addressing Eve, he panegyris: "Empress of this fair world, resplendent Eve / Easy to me it is to tell thee all what thou command'st, and right thou shouldst be obeyed" (Milton, IX.568-570, p. 329). His words are a calculated seduction, a performance of reverence and obedience that cloaks corruption. This rhetorical power is matched by his colossal pride. His most famous boast, "Better to reign in hell than serve in heav'n," emphasises his defiance: rebellion is preferable to subordination, autonomy to service (Milton, I.263, p. 15). The boast is theatrical, part of the spectacle that makes Satan magnetic even in damnation. He frames his defeat as resilience: "All is not lost; the unconquerable will, / And study of revenge, immortal hate, / And courage never to submit or yield" (Milton, I.106, p. 10). Yet beneath his bravado lies

tragic self-knowledge: “Me miserable! which way shall I fly / Infinite wrath, and infinite despair? / Which way I fly is hell; myself am hell” (Milton, IV.73-75, p. 135). He knows his rebellion has trapped him inescapably, yet he cannot repent. He similarly reframes damnation as necessity and obedience as cruelty:

Shall we, then, live thus vile, the race of Heaven
Thus trampil’d, thus expell’d to suffer here
Chains and these torments? Better these than worse,
By my advice; since fate inevitable
Subdues us, and omnipotent decree,
The Victor’s will. To suffer, as to do,
Our strength is equal, nor the law unjust
That so ordains.
(Milton, II.194-201, pp. 53-54)

Just as Eve incorporates Satan’s rhetoric into her reasoning at the tree, Satan also incorporates his own bravado into a self-directed performance of persuasion. Both figures embody the Miltonic paradox that reason, designed as the faculty of discernment, becomes the very stage on which error is rehearsed and embraced. Readers, too, are drawn into these soliloquies, experiencing the lure of Satan’s rhetoric or Eve’s reasoning before encountering their collapse from within. When Satan gazes on Eden, he momentarily becomes a pastoral poet—“With what delight could I have walked thee round, / If I could joy in aught, sweet interchange / Of hill, and valley, rivers, woods, and plains”—only to turn upon himself in despair: “so much more I feel / Torment within me, as from the hateful siege / Of contraries” (Milton, IX.114-116, 120-122, pp. 314-315). The very voice that entices also unmasks its own delusion, staging temptation and recognition within the same soliloquy. These facets together—flattery, pride, theatrical resilience, and tragic self-awareness—compose the Satanic archetype that later novelists fracture into charming seducers, arrogant disruptors, or figures fatally imprisoned in their own corruption.

While Eve, Adam, and Satan form the central imaginative core of *Paradise Lost*, Milton’s poem also provides a set of secondary figures and conditions that, though smaller in role, recur later in fiction. Raphael, Michael, the Son, and even Chaos and the fruit themselves are reprised in nineteenth-century fiction, often in distorted or diffused forms.

Raphael embodies the angelic teacher, charged with instructing Adam in divine devotion, and to warn of Satan’s designs and of the dangers of disobedience. Yet as he urges modesty, his pedagogy is unstable: “till evening rise / I have at will,” he declares, a promise of abundant disclosure that soon slips into overindulgence (Milton, V.376-376, p. 186). His

long discourses on celestial warfare and creation strain Adam's comprehension, planting seeds of knowledge that make disobedience imaginable. Adam himself admits their effect: "thy words, with grace divine / Imbued, bring to their sweetness no satiety" (Milton, VIII.215-216, p. 291). What is meant as safeguard becomes provocation: excessive disclosure awaken curiosity it cannot contain. Later fiction exploits this doubleness, refiguring Raphael as the tutor whose lessons bewilder, the pedant whose authority both cautions and overwhelms, drowning rather than securing the hearer.

Michael enters as the angel of prophecy, guiding Adam through visions of human history and reframing expulsion as the condition of endurance. His instruction culminates in the reminder that wisdom lies not in sovereignty but in inward virtue:

This having learned, thou hast attained the sum
Of wisdom ... only add
Deeds to thy knowledge ... add faith,
Add virtue, patience, temperance; add love ...
... then wilt thou not be loath
To leave this Paradise, but shalt possess
A Paradise within thee, happier far.
(Milton, XII.575-587, pp. 490-491)

Michael thus converts exile into education and displacement into moral growth. In later fiction, his role is often diffused into consolatory figures or narratorial voices that interpret suffering, not as cosmic punishment, but as the ordinary ground of ethical life.

The Son embodies restoration through voluntary self-offering, joining fidelity with grace. His declaration—"Behold me then: me for him, life for life / I offer: on me let thine anger fall; Account me Man"—frames redemption not as compulsion but as covenant offered freely (Milton, III.236-238, p. 101). This archetype, however, rarely arrives intact in nineteenth-century fiction. Instead, it splinters: some characters embody fragments of his redemptive constancy, while others parody him as "false sons," demanding submission without love and replacing grace with coercion.

Milton's cosmos provides not only characters but conditions that bear archetypal weight. Chaos is figured as a woman, "the womb of Nature and perhaps her grave," and described as "A vast immeasurable Abyss, / Outrageous as a sea, dark, wasteful, wild," a volatile feminine presence, at once generative and destructive, resistant to containment but not inherently malign (Milton, II.911, VII.211-212, pp. 79, 262). The fruit, likewise, is not inherently evil but good in its creation, marked dangerous only by the boundary of command. It embodies forbidden objects, where appetite and knowledge converge: "her rash hand in

evil hour / Forth reaching to the fruit, she plucked, she eat: / Earth felt the wound.” (Milton, IX.780-782, p. 335). What corrupts is not the fruit itself but the act of transgression, the will that misuses it. In later fiction, these motifs reappears in displaced forms: the silenced or denied woman figured as Chaos incarnate, or the forbidden body objectified as fruit—objects not corrupt in themselves but rendered perilous by prohibition, destabilising domestic order while holding the potential to draw desire toward transgression.

Each Miltonic marker discussed is not a hermetically sealed box, but rather an analytic lens through which to view how Milton’s poetics are carried forward in domestic fiction. While presented as distinct for the sake of analysis, in practice they all operate together—narrative authority, psychological interiority, Edenic landscaping, rhetorical temptation, and archetypal refiguration are all interwoven features of Milton’s dramatic grammar. Each gains force when placed in relation to the arc of temptation, Fall, exile, and reconciliation. For this reason, while the previous markers can be traced across the novelists in relatively discrete sections, archetypal refiguration will be examined within the chapters on Austen, Brontë, and Eliot themselves.

Milton’s archetypes are defined not by static identity but by function within the drama of the Fall, and thus their transformations are best read through the trajectories of the individual novels. Austen relocates Satanic temptation into the ironic performances of Henry Crawford, reimagines Eve’s Fall as the epistemological near error of prejudice, and transforms Adam’s partnership into the covenant of marriage tested by humility and consent. Brontë intensifies archetypes into Gothic ordeal and communal debate: Rochester becomes the Satanic tempter, St. John the false Son, Jane the revisionist Eve. In *Shirley* the archetype of Eve fractures into a spectrum across Caroline and Shirley. Eliot further disperses archetypes into networks of ordinary error. Vanity, ambition, secrecy, and misjudgement each refract Miltonic roles: Hetty Sorrel as a provincial Eve undone by vanity, Dorothea as an aspirational Eve misled by reverence, Lydgate as Adam’s desire for higher knowledge compromised by circumstance. In each case, reconciliation is no longer angelic revelation but the fragile work of sympathy, community, or covenant. To trace these refigurations, then, is to watch how Milton’s epic personae are broken apart and reassembled within the moral and narrative logic of nineteenth-century domestic fiction. They are not abandoned but domesticated, not repeated but transformed—figures of temptation and error, exile and renewal, resized to fit the novel’s ordinary scale, and reworked to mirror the epic stakes of Milton’s vision within the intimate terms of family, community, and moral choice. The next

chapter begins with Austen, whose ironic reimaginings of temptation and Fall establish the framework for how later novelists adapted Miltonic archetypes to domestic narratives.

CHAPTER THREE: JANE AUSTEN: IRONY AND THE DOMESTICATED FALL

This thesis reads Austen not as Milton's disciple or opponent but as his translator, shifting the epic grammar of *Paradise Lost* into the idiom of drawing rooms and country houses. In her world, Satan's gleaming gloze returns as polished civility that makes falsehood sound like truth; Eve's self-pleading becomes the mind's habit of instructing desire; Adam's dangerous solidarity reappears within the marriage plot as both peril and promise. The single, cosmic Fall is broken into a spectrum: ruin that admits no return, error that chastens into wisdom, refusal that exacts cost, and settlements that parody covenant. Form follows purpose—irony takes the place of the guiding narrator; free indirect discourse becomes the novel's answer to epic soliloquy; the stage narrows from Eden to assemblies, theatricals, and proposals without shedding moral weight. This chapter traces Austen's translation through the transmission of temptation, the concealment of desire as judgment, and the reestablishment of covenant through humility. Austen emerges as an architect of the everyday epic, where domestic life carries the gravity Milton once gave to paradise.

While John Milton's influence on nineteenth-century writers like Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot has generated substantial critical attention, his presence in the work of Jane Austen has been comparatively underdeveloped as a field of sustained inquiry. Existing scholarship has tended to focus on specific moments or motifs rather than consistent structural influence. James M. Scott, for instance, offers a Miltonic reading of *Pride and Prejudice*, while Paul Stevens examines the secular displacement of grace through a Miltonic lens (Scott, 2016, pp. 1-16; Hoxby and Coiro, 2016, pp. 531-554). Carole Moses reads Mr. Collins as a figure of interpretive misreading, and Kathleen Lundeen identifies Miltonic resonances in Austen's betrothal scenes (Moses, 2002, p. 1; Lundeen, 1990, pp. 65-75). Taken together, these studies demonstrate the presence of Miltonic echoes in Austen's fiction, but they have not fully accounted for the extent to which Milton's narrative structures and theological frameworks are translated into the formal and ethical logic of the domestic novel. This chapter builds on and extends this body of work by reading Austen not through isolated allusion, but through the systematic domestication of Milton's epic grammar.

IRONY AS PERSUASION

Austen stages persuasion as a matter of rhetoric. Seductions happen in dialogue: a practised address, a plausible history, a performance of civility that feels like truth because it

sounds like truth. Where Milton gives Satan a gleaming verbal surface—gloze and polish that make vice persuasive—Austen miniaturises the same technique into drawing-room eloquence. Temptation arrives in the shape of good breeding.

In *Pride and Prejudice*, Wickham exemplifies the Satanic tempter whose charm and plausibility overwhelm judgement. When Elizabeth first encounters him, the narrator stresses his immediate appeal: “His appearance was greatly in his favour; he had all the best part of beauty, a fine countenance, a good figure, and very pleasing address” (Austen, 1992b, p. 50). Wickham’s “pleasing address” is his weapon. He offers Elizabeth a narrative about Darcy’s injustice that perfectly flatters her prejudice: “almost all his actions may be traced to pride; — and pride has often been his best friend” (Austen, 1992b, p. 56). His rhetoric works by echoing what the listener already suspects, similar to Satan’s strategy in *Paradise Lost*: persuasive not because it reveals new truth, but because it clothes suspicion in the authoritative form of testimony. Wickham’s eloquence thus reveals temptation as an epistemological snare. His charm flatters Elizabeth’s interpretive pride, confirming what she is already inclined to believe. Defined by intelligence and wit that sharpen her independence, Elizabeth is vulnerable to the seduction of seeming insight. As Markovits observes, her eventual happiness arises “not from purity ... [but] when action is mistaken,” (Markovits, 2007, p. 789). Like Satan’s parodic proem, Wickham’s tale is not idle gossip but a counterfeit history, complete with grievance, moral indictment, and an air of authority. Temptation here is inseparable from form: the narrative shape of testimony and the social polish of gentlemanly civility become the instruments of seduction. By domesticating Milton’s epic rhetoric into gentlemanly performance, Austen shows how easily eloquence cloaks falsehood. What was once Satan’s celestial oratory becomes the drawing-room address of a suitor.

Elizabeth’s complicity shows how Wickham’s rhetoric naturalises itself within Meryton society. By believing his slander about Darcy, she lends him moral credit. After hearing his tale of supposed injustice, “Elizabeth honoured him for such feelings, and thought him handsomer than ever as he expressed them” (Austen, 1992b, p. 55). What she admires is not Wickham’s appearance but his apparent sensitivity: she dignifies resentment as virtue, mistaking bitterness for honesty. Repeating his story to Jane extends his influence: “Jane heard it with astonishment and concern; but she believed it, and with a stronger impression of Mr. Darcy’s unworthiness than she had ever before felt” (Austen, 1992b, p. 59). Jane’s credulity stems from Elizabeth’s conviction, which in turn rests on Wickham’s polish. In this way, Wickham’s eloquence circulates through the Bennet family: first destabilising

Elizabeth, then persuading Jane, until his legitimacy is naturalised in their circle. The larger consequence of Elizabeth's misplaced truth is that Wickham acquires the access that will later make Lydia's catastrophe possible. Here Austen borrows directly from Milton's pattern of transmission. In *Paradise Lost*, Eve does not remain the serpent's sole victim: "She gave him of that fair enticing fruit / With liberal hand" (Milton, IX.996-997, 342). Temptation multiplies when passed along. So too in *Pride and Prejudice*: Elizabeth's endorsement lends Wickham credibility; Jane's acquiescence amplifies; Lydia, more impulsive and less reflective, acts on the attraction her sisters only entertained. The danger lies not simply in being tempted but in transmitting temptation—error radiating outward, escalating its consequences.

Lydia becomes the foil who reveals the endpoint of Wickham's seduction. Where Elizabeth errs through interpretation and later learns, Lydia embodies temptation in its raw, unreflective form. She is youthful, impulsive, and heedless, giving herself to desire without pause. Her elopement with Wickham is less an act of rebellion than a Fall, the inevitable consequence of appetite unguarded. Dialogue frames her transgression in Miltonic terms: Jane asks whether Lydia can be "so *LOST* to everything," while Elizabeth recounts that "she has no money, no connections, nothing that can *tempt* him to—she is *lost* for ever" (Austen, 1992b, p. 183, emphasis mine, capitalisation in original; Austen, 1992b, p. 185, emphasis mine). Mary's sermon highlights the resonance: "that *loss of virtue in a female* is irretrievable—that one false step involves her in endless ruin" (Austen, 1992b, p. 193, emphasis mine). Yet the narrator undercuts Mary's moralising with irony, noting that she "continued to console herself with such kind of moral extractions from the evil before them" (Austen, 1992b, p. 193). The irony gestures toward the possibility of redemption after temptation, mocking the idea of "endless ruin" (Austen, 1992b, p. 193). Elizabeth, after all, grows through misjudgement. Lydia, however, refuses that trajectory. When she returns to Longbourn to marry Wickham, she carries with her an "easy assurance ... Lydia was Lydia still; untamed, unabashed, wild, noisy, and fearless," unchanged, still heedless of her Fall (Austen, 1992b, p. 211). Her later dependence on Elizabeth for money seals the point: unlike her sister, who errs but grows, Lydia yields to temptation and never emerges.

Lydia's marriage to Wickham is a deliberate foil to Elizabeth and Darcy's union: outwardly a restoration of respectability, inwardly a perpetuation or error. Lydia and Wickham themselves undergo no transformation—Lydia remains frivolous, Wickham reckless; their marriage averts scandal but produces no moral growth. Their reconciliation is hollow precisely because it depends entirely on the agency of others. That agency belongs to

Darcy—his intervention, through which “he had taken on himself all the trouble and mortification attendant on such a research,” ensures that the Bennet family’s disgrace is averted (Austen, 1992b, p. 218). From the Bennet’s perspective, his actions appear almost providential—an act of sudden grace that rescues them from social ruin. Yet this providence is not divine but domesticated.⁶⁸ It flows from Darcy’s humility and his willingness to endure humiliation and expense “for a girl he could neither regard nor esteem,” exposing his devotion to Elizabeth in the process (Austen, 1992b, p. 218). The fact that Lydia and Wickham are reconciled only by an act of domestic providence exposes the emptiness of their marriage. They are beneficiaries of grace without repentance, recipients of reconciliation without humility. The Miltonic parallel sharpens the irony. Even Adam and Eve’s reconciliation is dependent on another: their penitence has meaning only because the Son intercedes and provide provides them guidance (Milton, XII.430-447, 645-647, pp. 477-479, 493-494). Their dependence is genuine but dignified, because repentance aligns it with grace. Lydia and Wickham’s dependence, by contrast, is empty. Without repentance, Darcy’s providential labour can restore appearances but not transform their character. If Elizabeth and Darcy model a true *felix culpa*, Lydia and Wickham enact its travesty—a fall patched over by external intervention, not inward change.

Darcy provides a further foil that underscores Wickham’s Satanic role. His first proposal—though ardent—collapses under the weight of his pride. His rhetoric alienates rather than persuades, tempting Elizabeth only to reject him. Wickham’s eloquence, by contrast, epitomises the Satanic quality of rhetoric as temptation. James M. Scott observes that “It is easy to see Austen’s sweet-talking lady’s man, whose name at least in hindsight evokes the term ‘wicked,’ as a devil. Wickham is unmistakably modelled on Satan, the most infamous seducer bar none” (Scott, 2016, p. 13). His “pleasing address” and polished flattery exploit Lydia’s naïve conviction that “they should be married some time or other” (Austen, 1992b, pp. 50, 216). His charm conceals his corruption, making falsehood plausible. Together, Darcy and Wickham illustrate the dual possibilities of rhetoric in Austen’s Miltonic reworking: it can alienate, prompting resistance, or seduce, overwhelming judgement. In *Pride and Prejudice* the consequences are contained within a comic resolution, yet Lydia’s

⁶⁸ Darcy’s intervention is also Adamic in its sense of responsibility. Darcy feels guilty for concealing Wickham’s true character and takes the crisis as a charge he must atone for. Adam likewise bears the weight of failure—Milton casts Eve as Adam’s “inferior,” so her Fall is also his lapse as her protector, dually impacted by his position as steward of Eden (Milton, VIII.540-541, p. 303). When he joins her, he does so out of love but with this knowledge he has failed her, himself, and God. Both men act from love mingled with guilt, accepting humiliations that pride alone would have rejected. Yet their outcomes diverge: Adam’s responsibility deepens exile, while Darcy’s responsibility becomes the ground of restoration.

elopement reminds readers that temptation leaves scars that cannot be erased—her Fall is patched over by marriage, but its ruin shadows the Bennet family long after the novel ends. In *Mansfield Park*, by contrast, the Crawfords' wit and the allure of the theatricals bring Miltonic temptation into darker relief, threatening the moral order of an entire household.

Mansfield Park's treatment of theatricality, persuasion, and virtue stages temptation where the central drama hinges on rhetoric: Satan's verbal seductions in *Paradise Lost* find their match in the Crawford siblings' dazzling wit and worldly allure. Austen translates Milton's heavenly Fall from disobedience into the sphere of drawing-room drama: the lapse is not in eating forbidden fruit but indulging artifice, vanity, and performance at the expense of moral order. The theatricals serve as the novel's sustained temptation scene. Like the fruit in Eden, the scheme to perform *Lovers' Vows* is attractive precisely because it is forbidden: it promises self-expression and romance but entails the breaking of paternal authority. Mary's playful provocation—"What gentleman among you am I to have the pleasure of making love to?"—casts temptation in the form of harmless amusement, but its rhetoric destabilises propriety under the cover of wit (Austen, 2005, p. 169). Henry amplifies the seduction, declaring himself willing to undertake "any character that ever was written ... Be it only a play—an act—a scene; what should prevent us?" (Austen, 2005, p. 145). His words recast performance itself as temptation, urging transgression under the cover of a play. Together, the siblings embody the Satanic intrusion of rhetoric, cloaking disobedience in glamour. As Alistair Duckworth observes, "the 'estate' in *Mansfield Park* is symbolic of a whole social and moral inheritance, a fact which explains, *inter alia*, why the theatricals are so distrusted" (Duckworth, 1971, p. 31). The theatricals imperil *Mansfield Park*'s Edenic order, revealing that the danger lies not only in performance but in the erosion of the moral structure that sustains the estate.

Mary Crawford directs her temptation most powerfully at Edmund. Like Satan, who persuades Eve by refiguring disobedience as elevation, Mary refigures irreverence as distinction. She mocks Edmund's profession: "Men love to distinguish themselves, and in either of the other lines, distinction may be gained, but not in the church. A clergyman is nothing" (Austen, 2005, p. 107). The joke dazzles where argument might fail, tempting Edmund by turning his vocational identity into a punchline. He recognises her "assertions" as irrational, but Austen's irony is clear: "The greatest degree of rational consistency could not have been more engaging" (Austen, 2005, p. 112). Like Adam, he is not deceived by reason but undone by affection, rationalising error because it comes from the woman he loves: "Certain my resolution is to die: / How can I live without thee! how forgo / Thy sweet

converse and love so dearly joined[?]" (Milton, IX.907-909, p. 339). The Adamic temptation is tender but tragic: affection outweighs reason, so error becomes chosen. Edmund lingers dangerously close to tragedy, insisting to Fanny "I cannot give her [Mary] up" (Austen, 2005, p.489). His declaration is not the blindness of deception but the wilful entanglement of devotion. His attachment enacted the complicit Fall: not ignorance, but the willing rationalisation of another's faults.

Mary's wit dazzles Edmund into compromise, but it also conceals a moral emptiness. He later recalls with disillusionment:

[T]he manner in which she spoke of the crime itself, giving it every reproach but the right, considering its ill consequences only as they were to be ... overborne by a defiance of decency ... recommending to us a compliance ... in the continuance of the sin ... [convinces him that] ... as far as related to mind, it had been the creature of my own imagination ... not Miss Crawford, that I had been too apt to dwell on. (Austen, 2005, pp. 529-530)

Mary reduces adultery to a problem of appearances, urging "defiance of decency" rather than recognition of sin (Austen, 2005, p. 529). Edmund's recognition is painful, but it clears the illusion that sustained his complicity. Like Adam lamenting his choice, "O miserable of happy! Is this the end / Of this new glorious world," Edmund laments the collapse of an imagined ideal, his Fall through infatuation becoming the necessary condition for clarity and renewal—the bitter recognition that allows him to renounce Mary at last (Milton, X.720-721, p. 379).

Like his sister, Henry Crawford delights in disruption. Where Mary mocks vocation and propriety with sparkling irreverence, Henry unsettles Mansfield Park through calculated gallantry and theatrical performance. His charm is effortful, "gallant" and "attentive" in a way that Fanny perceives as invasive: he wants "to cheat her of her tranquillity" (Austen, 2005, p. 302). The metaphor of theft casts his "attentiveness" as performative intrusion—like Satan's temptation of Eve, it is not authentic affection but a means of destabilising the equilibrium. His temptation spreads through Maria and Julia Bertram in different ways. He exploits Maria's dissatisfaction with her marriage to Rushworth, a union she entered "by the misery of disappointed affection, and contempt of the man she was to marry" (Austen, 2005, p. 236). Into this restlessness Henry intrudes, feeding her vanity and confirming her discontent, until her resentment and longing for independence make her acutely vulnerable to his attentions. As the narrator notes, "Henry Crawford has destroyed her happiness, but he should not know that he had done it" (Austen, 2005, p. 236). Maria's resentment at Mansfield

and her restless desire for independence render her an easy target for Henry's attention. With Julia, he sharpens jealousy into rivalry: "the influence of his voice was felt. Julia wavered: but was he only trying to soothe and pacify her, and make her overlook the previous affront? She distrusted him" (Austen, 2005, p. 159). Maria, meanwhile, looked on with "serenity and satisfaction, and Julia well knew that on this ground Maria could not be happy but at her expense" (Austen, 2005, p. 159). Julia's indignation reveals Henry's duplicity—his charm divides rather than soothes. In this episode, Henry's rhetoric unsettles not only individual virtue but family bonds, fuelling vanity in one sister, and jealousy in the other. Like Satan re-entering Eden, "improv'd / in meditated fraud and malice, bent / On Man's destruction ... fearless returned," Henry introduces disruption, bringing an energy that is attractive and witty, but ultimately crushes harmony under the pressures of persuasion and vanity (Milton, IX.54-57, p. 312). Henry's role of the constant tempter becomes even clearer, then, when his attentions turn to Fanny, whom he pursues with equal vanity. As Austen describes,

He had vanity, which strongly inclined him, in the first place, to think she did love him, though she might not know it herself ... and determined him to have the *glory*, as well as the felicity, of *forcing* her to love him. He would not despair: he would not desist.
(Austen, 2005, p. 376, emphasis mine)

The language of "glory" and "forcing" recasts courtship as conquest, persistence as compulsion. His persistence recalls Satan's own boast "to wage war by force or guile eternal war, / Irreconcilable, to our grand foe, / Who now triumphs ..." (Milton, I.121-124, p.10). Both figures turn resistance into fuel, mistaking obstinacy for glory and endless struggle for victory. Like Satan, who returned "improv'd / In meditated fraud and malice ... fearless," Henry reappears to pursue Fanny with renewed determination, recasting refusal not as defeat but as the very ground of temptation (Milton, IX.54-57, p. 312).

The consequences of the Crawfords' rhetoric underscore the Miltonic frame. Maria succumbs, elopes, and is effectively exiled from Mansfield, her fleeting "serenity and satisfaction" in Henry's attentions proving a false felicity that leads only to ruin (Austen, 2005, p. 159). Edmund, although spared catastrophe, wastes his devotion on Mary, his weakness akin to Adam's solidarity in error. Only Fanny remains resists. Her "felicity" in the modest comfort of a fire reworks Milton's irony: where Eve's lofty musings prepare her for error, Fanny's earnestness secures constancy (Austen, 2005, p. 379). As Butler argues, minor novelists such as Jane West cast "the unconscious mind in the worst possible terms, as wayward, selfish, and self-destructive," while Austen resists such stark moralisation (Butler,

1987, p. 103). Through the theatricals she ironises temptation rather than condemns it outright: imagination is not irredeemably corrupt but a moral testing ground, capable of revealing both weakness and constancy. This distinction is Butler's central argument—Austen reshapes a convention that equates imagination with vice into one that recognises its dangers while preserving the possibility of discernment and resistance (Butler, 1987, pp. 187-190). What in Milton is the ruin of paradise becomes, in Austen, the slow erosion of Mansfield Park's harmony: temptation spoken in wit and gallantry, error enacted in elopement and compromise, and resistance preserved only in Fanny's quiet steadfastness.

Austen's fiction, then, translates Milton's epic drama of temptation into the intimate register of the novel of manners. Wickham's polished testimony and the Crawfords' dazzling wit exemplify how rhetoric seduces not by force but by form, cloaking falsehood in civility or charm. Elizabeth and Edmund, like Milton's Adam, stumble not from ignorance but from misjudgement and misplaced devotion, while Lydia and Maria enact Eve's heedless surrender of appetite. Only Fanny resists, her modest constancy a quiet inversion of Eve's susceptibility. What was once the ruin of paradise becomes, in Austen, the disruption of households and the misalignments of marriage, yet the pattern remains recognisably Miltonic: temptation, error, and the testing of fidelity. By miniaturising the Fall into the scale of drawing-room missteps and domestic estrangements, Austen preserves its moral grammar while reframing its consequences, suggesting that even within the comic form of the marriage plot, temptation shadows human judgement and eloquence remains a dangerously double-edged gift.

DESIRE IN DISGUISE

Austen stages error as a drama of reason corrupted by desire. Temptation does not always arrive as glittering rhetoric, but often in the subtler form of self-persuasion: the mind talking itself into what the heart already wants. Milton gives Eve this role in *Paradise Lost*: she frames transgression as fidelity, reasoning herself into disobedience. Austen domesticates that pattern. She distributes Milton's Eve across her heroines and anti-heroines, showing how wit, pride, or longing disguise themselves as judgement. In *Mansfield Park* and *Pride and Prejudice*, Maria Bertram and Elizabeth Bennet map the range of outcomes: Maria enacts the catastrophic Fall that admits no return; Elizabeth performs the near-Fall that educates, chastens, and prepares reconciliation.

In *Mansfield Park*, Maria Bertram enacts the darkest variant of Austen's Miltonic script: error indulged, exile permanent, no possibility of reconciliation. Her adulterous

elopement with Henry Crawford is the novel's most explicit Fall, the closest Austen comes to reproducing Milton's vision of disobedience that admits no return. Where Elizabeth Bennet's errors can be educated into growth, Maria's transgression closes the door on repentance, marking her as Eve without restoration. Austen reframes Milton's cosmic sin into the register of Maria's domestic failure. In *Paradise Lost*, Eve's eating of the fruit is not mere curiosity but rebellion against divine command (Milton, IX.651–732, pp. 331-334). In *Mansfield Park*, the "sins" of the Bertrams and Crawfords are cast not as breaches of divine law but as social and moral failures: Maria's adulterous elopement, Henry's flirtations, Edmund's compromises, and even Sir Thomas's neglect of his daughters. The vocabulary of morality is domesticated. Impropriety replaces transgression, and self-deception stands in for original sin. Within this framework, Maria's passion for Henry Crawford, intensified by the theatricals, culminates in elopement and ruin. Unlike Fanny's temporary exile, Maria's is terminal. Her passion, pride, and disregard for propriety mirror Eve's desire for self-exaltation, but Austen denies her even the possibility of penitence. Her only consolation is spite: she "carried away no better consolation ... than that she *had* divided them" (Austen, 2005, p. 537). The irony is cruel. Instead of turning inward in remorse, Maria looks outward, measuring her worth by the damage she has done to others—finding hollow triumph in having ruined Fanny's chances with the man she herself could not hold. This domestic echo of Satan's defiance, "Evil, be thou my good," reframes ruin as reward, spite as agency (Milton, IV.110, p. 136). While Eve seeks restoration when she laments her implication of Adam in the Fall—"Both have sinned; but thou / Against God only; I against God and thee,"—Maria instead relishes the destruction she believes she has caused (Milton, X.930-931, p. 386). Eve's repentance opens the way to grace while Maria's obduracy closes it. Her fate is exclusion:

It ended in Mrs. Norris's resolving to quit Mansfield, and devote herself to her unfortunate Maria, and in an establishment ... in another country—remote and private, where, shut up together ... on one side no affection, on the other, no judgment, it may be reasonably support that their tempers became their mutual punishment.
(Austen, 2005, p. 538)

Exile here is not disciplinary but terminal, the social counterpart to Edenic expulsion. Maria becomes the limit case of Austen's Fall taxonomy: Eve without repentance, Satanic in her inversion, mistaking spite for strength and damage for agency.

Where Maria's ruin closes the door on repentance, Elizabeth's pride leaves it ajar. Both channel Eve's reasoning, but Austen splits the archetype into its two possibilities: Eve without return, and Eve whose error becomes education. Elizabeth's "quickness" of judgement, praised by Mr. Bennett in the novel's opening chapters, mirrors Eve's curiosity: a strength grants independence but becomes a vulnerability when untethered (Austen, 1992b, p.4). Her wit enables her to navigate the social world with distinction, as when she resists Lady Catherine de Bourgh's imperious demands.⁶⁹ "I am only resolved to act in that manner, which will, in my own opinion, constitute my happiness, without reference to you, or to any person so wholly unconnected with me" (Austen, 1992b, p. 241). Here, Elizabeth asserts judgment as the ground of selfhood, echoing Eve's declaration that "our reason is our law" (Milton, IX.654, p. 331). Yet in both cases, the very elevation of reason prepares the ground for error.

Elizabeth and Eve are also bound by their pursuit of independence. Elizabeth insists on acting according to her own will, whether in choosing love over fortune or in defying social expectations, as when she walks three miles to Netherfield to care for her sister (Austen, 1992b, p. 22). In doing so, she openly disregards the social codes that prioritise feminine appearance over action and loyalty. Arriving with "dirty stockings and a face glowing with the warmth of exercise," Elizabeth turns her body itself into a declaration of independence (Austen, 1992b, p. 23). Her refusal to care about mud or dishevelment unsettles those who measure women's worth by outward display, yet it affirms her own moral priorities. Her independence here is framed as virtuous, even admirable, precisely because it resists a social order that would constrain women to ornamental passivity.⁷⁰ Eve too asserts independence, first by separating from Adam and later in eating the forbidden fruit. Her desire to "render me more equal; and perhaps, / A thing not undesirable, sometime / Superior; for, inferior, who is free?" signals both her awareness of subordination and her longing to transcend it (Milton, IX.823-825, p. 337). Where Elizabeth's defiance secures respect, Eve's autonomy is condemned as sin, with catastrophic consequences for humanity.

⁶⁹ For further reading: Kathryn Hughes's *Gender Roles in the 19th Century* (2017) offers a short overview of the gendered landscape in nineteenth-century England; and Lee Holcombe's *Wives and Property* (1983) provides a detailed legal history of women's property rights in this period.

⁷⁰ For further consideration: In *Sisters and the English Household*, Annie Wallace argues, "a grown sister meets her future husband while working (for pay or in the house) to help support her birth family, so that her labor [sic] seems, in terms of the plot, to lead to her marriage" (Wallace, 2018, p. 90). Elizabeth's physical exertion to support her sister participates in a wider cultural logic, where a woman's visible work for others paradoxically both unsettles social decorum (exemplified by the contempt from the Bingley sisters) and secures her place within it (Austen, 1992b, p. 23).

Yet Elizabeth's independence frequently shades into prejudice, tempting her to interpret the world through suspicion. When Darcy requests that she play piano at Netherfield, she deflects, "There is a stubbornness about me that never can bear to be frightened at the will of others. My courage always rises with every attempt to intimidate me" (Austen, 1992b, p. 118). Darcy's reserve is misread as arrogance, her wit transforming assumption into uncertainty. This confidence in her discernment leaves her vulnerable to error—not catastrophic, but epistemological: she trusts her interpretive pride until it collapses beneath contradiction. The consequence is estrangement, both relational and inward. Elizabeth's rejection of Darcy's first proposal, delivered in the heat of wounded vanity—"I felt that you were the last man in the world whom I could ever be prevailed on to marry,"—banishes them both from the possibility of immediate reconciliation (Austen, 1992b, p. 131). For a time, they inhabit a state of relational exile, as divided from one another as Adam and Eve after their first quarrel in *Paradise Lost*, when "mutual accusation" gives rise to "high passions, anger, hate, / Mistrust, suspicion, discord" (Milton, IX.1123-1124, 1187, pp. 347-348). For Elizabeth, this discord is not merely interpersonal but epistemological: she is cut off from Darcy and from the truth about herself. This relational exile is intensified by Austen's use of free indirect discourse. After the rejected proposal, "The tumult of her mind was now painfully great. She knew not how to support herself, and from actual weakness sat down and cried for half an hour" (Austen, 1992b, p. 132). The narration slips into Elizabeth's consciousness, drawing the reader into her shame and confusion. Like Milton giving Eve a soliloquy to expose her inward reasoning, Austen renders Elizabeth's interiority as the theatre of error.

What halts Elizabeth's Fall is Darcy's letter, which functions as a kind of domestic providence. Confronted with evidence that contradicts her assumptions, Elizabeth undergoes a moment of stunned self-accusation that parallels Eve's lament, examined best side-by-side:

Elizabeth's confession after reading Darcy's letter is strikingly Miltonic in cadence. Austen shapes her language of recognition into a lament that parallels Eve's postlapsarian grief. Both begin in stark self-condemnation: Elizabeth calls herself despicable, Eve names herself dishonoured. Elizabeth continues listing the faculties she trusted (discernment, abilities), Eve catalogues the virtues now lost (innocence, faith, purity). Each uses accumulation to dramatise recognition; Elizabeth through repeated "I, who ...," Eve through repeated "of ...". Finally, blindness and shame converge: Elizabeth's error is vanity mistaken for discernment; Eve's is innocence turned to shame. Set side by side, they unfold in parallel cadence—first exposure, then catalogue, then blindness.

Yet the consequences diverge. Eve's lament confirms catastrophe; Elizabeth's

'How despicably have I acted!' she cried.
I, who have prided myself on my discernment!
I, who have valued myself on my abilities!
who have often disdained the generous candour of my sister.
and gratified my vanity, in useless or blameable distrust.
How humiliating is this discovery!
Yet, how just a humiliation!
Had I been in love, I could not have been more wretchedly blind
But vanity, not love, has been my folly.
(Austen, 1992b, p.141, line spacing mine)

Which leaves us naked thus, of honor void,
Of innocence, of faith, of purity,
Our wonted ornaments now soiled and stained,
And in our faces evident the signs
Of foul concupiscence; whence evil store;
Even shame, the last of evils; of the first
Be sure then. How shall I behold the face
Henceforth of God or Angel, erst with joy
And rapture so oft beheld?
(Milton, IX.1074-1082, p. 345)

forestalls it. Milton uses lament to seal expulsion; Austen uses lament to open the way toward reconciliation. The shift in consequential scale exemplifies how Austen domesticates Milton's tragic Fall. Eve speaks of lost paradise—honour, innocence, purity—the ornaments of Eden, stripped away. Elizabeth speaks of wounded vanity, the consequence of misjudged discernment. The rhetoric of ruin is the same, but the stakes are re-situated: cosmic loss becomes comic self-knowledge. What in Milton is the recognition of humanity's Fall into history becomes, in Austen, the recognition of a young woman's Fall into self-awareness. The catalogue of lost virtues is miniaturised into the catalogue of wounded faculties, and the nakedness of Eden is reconfigured as the humiliation of vanity. Elizabeth's recognition after reading Darcy's letter exemplifies what Markovits identifies as Austen's version of the *felix culpa*. In her words, "Something strange happens to the anticipatory nature of happiness once it has been refashioned into a fallen, experienced state ... happiness has been earned by past goodness and suffering, one feels it will be enabling of future good and resistant to future

suffering” (Markovits, 2007, pp.792-793). Elizabeth’s humiliation becomes the condition of durable happiness—her judgement is chastened, and her future reconciliation with Darcy is made stronger precisely because it has passed through error. Elizabeth embodies the most hopeful variant in Austen’s taxonomy of Falls—the one where error educates, exile clarifies, and recognition forestalls catastrophe.

Austen, then, disperses Milton’s single cosmic catastrophe into a taxonomy of domestic trials. What in *Paradise Lost* inaugurates history becomes, in the novels, a spectrum of errors measured in reputations, households, and marriages. Maria Bertram enacts the catastrophic Fall that admits not return, her spiteful exclusion the nearest Austen comes to Satanic obduracy. Elizabeth Bennet performs the near-Fall that chastens and educates, her recognition transforming humiliation into durable happiness. Between these poles stretch the other variants: Darcy’s prideful estrangement, Edmund’s complicit devotion, Fanny’s resisted exile. Milton’s archetype is fractured into a series of repeatable scripts in which temptation is rhetorical, error social, exile reputational, and reconciliation—when granted—comic rather than salvific. The epic “wound” is thus redistributed across the everyday: assemblies, theatricals, and drawing rooms become the testing grounds where eloquence, vanity, and pride unsettle judgement (Milton, IX.782, 335). As Milton’s pair leave Eden “with wandering steps and slow,” Austen’s characters stand at their own thresholds—estranged, chastened, or excluded—poised not for the redemption of humankind, but for the slower work of reconciliation, humility, and growth within the domestic sphere (Milton XII.648, p. 494).

THE INTIMATE COVENANT

Austen converts Milton’s catastrophic bonds into a tender, corrective one. In *Paradise Lost*, Eve persuades Adam by appealing to love and equality; solidarity becomes complicity, and love, fatally, overrules obedience: “So forcible within my heart I feel / The bond of Nature draw me to my own” (Milton, IX.956-958, p. 340). Love transforms error into fellowship, but also multiplies its cost. Austen domesticates this dynamic into the marriage plot. She reimagines covenantal solidarity not as complicity in ruin but as the ground of reconciliation. Darcy and Elizabeth enact the Adam-Eve pattern in miniature: his pride and her prejudice produce estrangement, but reconciliation comes when solidarity is rebuilt on humility and consent.

If Elizabeth’s near-Fall is defined by prejudice, Darcy’s trajectory is marked by pride. While Elizabeth is deceived and then corrected, Darcy errs knowingly, sustained by arrogance rather than apprehension. His Fall is closer to Milton’s figures who act in full

knowledge—Satan elevating himself over God, and Adam elevating affection over obedience. Pride, in both *Pride and Prejudice* and *Paradise Lost*, is error chosen with open eyes. From his first appearance at the Meryton assembly, Darcy is “discovered to be proud, to be above his company, and above being pleased” (Austen, 1992b, p. 8). Pride here functions as isolation: Darcy detaches himself by placing himself above others. His arrogance recalls the Miltonic Satan, who, cast out of heaven, insists on remaining “still the same,” outright rejecting the possibility of joy (Milton, l.256, IV.108-110, pp. 15, 136). Both figures define themselves through refusal—their pride is in their withdrawal from fellowship, a scorn of common, shared pleasure.

Darcy, too, participates in temptation, although in a more complex form than Elizabeth or Lydia. His aloofness and arrogance tempt Elizabeth into prejudice, beginning with his slighting remark at the Meryton assembly that “she is tolerable; but not handsome enough to tempt me” (Austen, 1992b, p. 9). From the outset, his pride provokes her judgement. Like Satan in *Paradise Lost*, Darcy embodies an intense sense of superiority, dismissive of others and resistant to humility. His own self-description underscores his posture:

I cannot forget the follies and vices of others so soon as I ought, nor their offenses against myself. My feelings are not puffed about with every attempt to move them. My temper would perhaps be called resentful. —My good opinion once lost, is lost forever. (Austen, 1992b, p. 40)

His stance mirror’s Satan’s “Better to reign in hell than serve in heav’n:” both make pride sovereign over reason, isolating them from fellowship (Milton, l.263, p. 15). This pride corrodes his rhetoric at the first proposal:

‘In vain I have struggled. It will not do. My feelings will not be repressed. You must allow me to tell you how ardently I admire and love you’ ... [yet] he was not more eloquent on the subject of tenderness than of pride. His sense of her inferiority—of its being a degradation ... were dwelt on with a warmth which seemed due to the consequence he was wounding, but was very unlikely to recommend his suit. (Austen, 1992, pp.128-129)

What should persuade instead alienates. Love compels, but pride corrodes; solidarity binds, but only to his own hauteur. His arrogance manifests not only as distance, but as judgement. He lists the “want of propriety” displayed by Elizabeth’s family, and in his letter he insists he observed Jane and found no “symptom of peculiar regard” for Bingley (Austen, 1992b, p. 134). What is most striking in both cases is not merely the insult, but the confidence: he

assumes his criteria for propriety are universal and his judgements unchallengeable. Pride, here, masquerades as epistemic authority—judgement disguised as truth. Milton’s Satan similarly postures as an arbiter of truth. Surveying Adam, he declares him “Severe, but in true filial freedom placed” (Milton, IV.294, p. 142). On the surface is praise, it is coloured by envy; he interprets Adam’s filial freedom as hierarchy, another reminder of his own Fall. Like Darcy, reads the world through categories that secure his superiority, and pride distorts his perception. In both cases, judgement is less the discovery of truth than its foreclosure—error confirmed rather than corrected. Yet here Austen’s narrator marks a crucial deviation. “He was not more *eloquent* on the subject of tenderness than of pride” (Austen, 1992b, p. 129, emphasis mine). Unlike Satan, whose eloquence consistently deceives, Darcy’s pride corrodes his rhetoric—exposing rather than concealing his flaws. The proposal becomes a parody of Satanic temptation: grand speech undone by arrogance, so transparent that it defeats itself. Where Satan’s words ensnare Eve, Darcy’s words harden Elizabeth against him. His rhetoric collapses into seduction but into humiliation.

The consequence of Darcy’s pride is thus rejection. Just as Elizabeth’s prejudice leads binds her to Darcy’s worth, his arrogance ensures that her rejection is deserved. Her reply to his proposal is uncompromising:

From the very beginning, from the first moment I may almost say, of my acquaintance with you, your manners impressing me with the fullest belief of your arrogance, your conceit, and your selfish disdain of the feelings of others, were such as to form that ground-work of disapprobation. (Austen, 1992b, p. 131)

Elizabeth’s words dictate precisely the qualities that constitute Darcy’s prideful Fall—conscious superiority, habitual disdain, and isolation from community. The proposal scene is not only a personal humiliation, but a banishment. Darcy is cast out from the possibility of reconciliation, suspended in alienation until recognition can reframe his judgement; a domestic analogue to Satan’s banishment in *Paradise Lost*: “Hurled headlong flaming from th’ethereal sky / With hideous ruin and combustion down / To bottomless perdition, there to dwell” (Milton, I.45-47, p. 6). Milton’s imagery of ruin is cosmic and fiery; Austen miniaturises it into the social world of the assembly room. Darcy’s pride, which once placed him “above his company,” collapses in an instant when Elizabeth casts his arrogance back in his face (Austen, 1992b, p. 8). His combustion is not literal fire but a visible struggle “for the appearance of composure” (Austen, 1992b, p. 129). What Satan experiences as cosmic conflagration, Darcy feels as inward collapse—the once proud man is abruptly exposed, his superiority turned into shame. The Miltonic “headlong” reversal is emotional rather than

cosmic: what he expected to secure in triumph leaves him visibly undone. Darcy's Fall, like Satan's, is pride brought low; his exile is not spatial but emotional, a sudden casting-out from confidence into humiliation. Yet unlike Satan, whose ruin is permanent, Darcy's rejection is the prideful Fall contained. His exile is temporary, his humiliation educative. In this lies Austen's deviation: Satan's temptation secures catastrophe; Darcy's failure clears the ground for humility, the necessary precondition for covenant.

After the humiliation of his rejected proposal, Darcy returns to Pemberley with a softened manner, and Elizabeth recognises "that he had lost none of his recent civility" (Austen, 1992b, 170). The shift is recognisable—the aloof, self-assured man who once cloaked love in arrogance now meets Elizabeth with courtesy and restraint. The astonishment is hers as much as the reader's, for the scene reveals not only his altered conduct but her altered perception of it. As she walks with the Gardiners, she reflects anxiously on his altered manner, thinking "Perhaps he had been civil only because he felt himself at ease; yet there had been *that* in his voice, which was not like ease" (Austen, 1992b, p. 169, emphasis in original). Austen's italicisation of *that* signals Elizabeth's difficulty in naming what she perceives. The stress gestures toward something indefinable—an undertone of feeling that exceeds mere civility.⁷¹ In effect, the italics stage Elizabeth's struggle of interpretation: she cannot articulate the change, but she cannot ignore it either.⁷² In Miltonic terms, this is reconciliation through humility: Adam and Eve, after their Fall, find renewal not by regaining Eden but by softening toward each other, confessing error, and choosing solidarity even in banishment (Milton, XII.610-625, p. 491). Darcy, by contrast, enacts a domesticated

⁷¹ Milton deploys a comparable strategy in his temptation scenes, where meaning is often carried not by explicit statement but by suggestion and indirection. When the serpent's flattery reaches Eve, it does not persuade her through rational argument alone but through a phrase that captures the unnameable shift of desire: his words find "easy entrance" into Eve's heart (Milton, IX.734, p. 334). The line stages temptation as a felt infiltration rather than a fully articulated choice. The verb "entrance" implies both penetration and enchantment; its "ease" signals the absence of resistance. In Milton the bodily register belongs to temptation—Eve feels the serpent's words as an "easy entrance" into her heart, a moment of susceptibility that unsettles her resistance and anticipates her Fall (Milton, IX.734, p. 334). In Austen, the same technique of indirection surfaces not in temptation but in reconciliation. Elizabeth hears *that* in Darcy's voice as an incursion—an embodied impression that unsettles her judgement before she can name it. Where Milton figures bodily vulnerability as the threshold of peril, Austen figures bodily tone as the token of sincerity, softening Elizabeth's earlier prejudice.

⁷² In Foucauldian terms, this resembles the "juridical" paradox of prohibition: the command *not* to think or desire produces its continual return. Milton stages this openly—Eve's very prohibition against the fruit makes it the site of irresistible fixation, her thoughts circling back despite resistance (Butler, 1989, pp. 3-5; Milton, IX.650-679, pp. 331-332). Austen domesticates the same dynamic: propriety forbids direct representation of desire, but the prohibition ensures its spectral presence, resurfacing obliquely in italics, tones, and glances. The juridical paradox reading of Austen's italicised *that* might also be understood as part of her technique of sexual reticence: the absence of explicit erotic detail generates desire through tone, emphasis, and unspoken feeling. In Milton, the same bodily register is dramatised explicitly—Austen's domestication of this register lets desire surface only in those italics, glances, and tonal impressions. For further discussion of Austen's erotics of reticence, see Susan Morgan's 'Why There's No Sex in Jane Austen's Fiction' (1987).

inversion of this arc. His solidarity with Elizabeth—made visible at Pemberley—ushers them not into loss but into covenant. What is tragic complicity in *Paradise Lost* becomes the foundation of reconciliation in *Pride and Prejudice*. Adam's pledge condemns him to wander from paradise, while Darcy's pledge allows Elizabeth and himself to walk forward into renewal.

Darcy's second proposal is marked by the relinquishment of his previous pride. Where he once catalogued Elizabeth's family defects, he now insists:

If you will thank me, let it be for yourself alone. That the wish of giving happiness to you might add force to the other inducements which led me on, I shall not attempt to deny. But your family owe me nothing. (Austen, 1992b, p. 246)

Where pride once authorised him to appraise Elizabeth through her kin, humility now compels him to see her as an individual, no longer subsumed under social inferiority but addressed in her singularity. His rhetoric, once corroded by hauteur, is reconstituted through courtesy. He confesses, "You showed me how insufficient were all my pretension to please a woman worthy of being pleased" (Austen, 1992b, p. 249). The line directly inverts his earlier self-description—"My good opinion once lost, is lost forever"—for he now grounds his identity not in unassailable judgement but in Elizabeth's correction (Austen, 1992b, p. 40). Humility replaces sovereignty; he consents to be instructed. Elizabeth, too, meets him in this softened register:

Yes, you know enough of my frankness to believe me capable of that. After abusing you so abominably to your face, I could have no scruple in abusing you to all your relations. (Austen, 1992b, p. 247)

Her wit, once again sharpened against him, is now folded into intimacy, irony domesticated into play, her chastened Eve softening to his humbled Adam. Together these moments refigure the Miltonic pattern. If the first proposal parodied Satanic temptation—grand speech undone by pride—the second models covenant: words tempered by humility, wit transfigured into solidarity. Austen thus binds reconciliation not in regained paradise but in the mutual recognition that error has chastened into fidelity.

Where Elizabeth falls into prejudice only to rise chastened, and Darcy's pride collapses into humility, Fanny Price in *Mansfield Park* does not fall at all. She resists, she

endures—and in this constancy she becomes a “redemptive Eve.”⁷³ At first glance, Fanny seems far removed from Milton’s heroine: timid where Eve is eloquent, hesitant where Eve is curious. Yet Fanny’s trajectory aligns not with Eve’s prelapsarian boldness but with her postlapsarian endurance. In *Paradise Lost*, Eve’s fall does not end her story; she becomes the figure who accepts exile and embraces humility, anticipating eventual redemption (Milton, X.910–936, p. 385–387). Fanny, too, is repeatedly cast out—exiled to the margins of Mansfield and later to Portsmouth—yet she endures this exile with quiet constancy. In this redemptive role, Fanny mirrors the postlapsarian Eve who learns through suffering. Where Elizabeth’s fall leads to self-knowledge and reconciliation, Fanny’s endurance in exile functions as moral witness. She becomes the agent of restoration when the Crawfords’ charms collapse under the weight of their immorality.

Against the atmosphere of temptation in *Mansfield Park*, Fanny Price emerges as the moral centre. She refuses to participate in the theatricals, recognising that the play provides a script legitimising improper desires. She resists Henry’s attempt to seduce her, articulated with an almost Miltonic firmness:

So thought Fanny in good truth and sober sadness, as she sat ... in a nervous agitation which made nothing clear to her but the persuasion of her being never under any circumstances able to love Mr. Crawford, and the felicity of having a fire to sit over and think of it. (Austen, 2005, p. 379)

The phrase “in good truth and sober sadness” elevates Fanny’s reflections into the register of moral seriousness, yet Austen immediately deflates this by dropping into triviality: her “felicity” lies not in triumph but in “a fire to sit over and think of it” (Austen, 2005, p. 379). The narrator is not being dismissive, but ironic in the Miltonic sense: the narrator frames Fanny’s conviction with a mixture of seriousness and wit, ensuring that her earnestness is both respected and gently undercut. The effect recalls Milton’s handling of Eve’s soliloquy before temptation, when her lofty reasoning, “How are we happy, still in fear of harm?” is framed ironically by the narrator as self-deception (Milton, IX.326, p. 321). Where Milton’s irony foreshadows Eve’s Fall through exposing the fragility of her judgement, Austen’s drop into triviality secures Fanny’s resistance, grounding her virtue not in rhetoric but in the constancy of modest domestic comfort.

⁷³ Elaine Beilin’s study primarily focuses on sixteenth to seventeenth-century literature, but the phrase “redemptive eve” continues to be applicable well into nineteenth-century literature (Beilin, 2014, pp. 257–259).

Against the limit case of Maria Bertram, Fanny's arc marks the opposite pole: the resisted Fall that still incurs exile. Having refused Henry, she is expelled from Mansfield's order to Portsmouth's disorder, "The smallness of the house, and thinness of the walls, brought everything so close to her," and soon sees it is "the abode of noise, disorder, and impropriety. Nobody was in their right place, nothing was done as it ought to be" (Austen, 2005, p. 441, 450). Fanny's domestic expulsion tests rather than corrupts—punishment outward, steadfastness inward. As Milton would say, she is "sufficient to have stood, though free to fall"—she refuses temptation, and her exile proves her refusal (Milton, III.99, p.92). Her exile also exposes Sir Thomas's misjudgement. He reads Fanny's refusal of Henry Crawford as ingratitude rather than conscience, his strategy explicit and mistaken. After Henry's departure:

[Sir Thomas's] next object was, that [Henry] should be missed ... [for he] entertained great hope that his niece would find a blank in the loss of those attentions ... She had tasted of consequence in its most flattering form; and he did hope that the loss of it, the sinking again into nothing, would awaken very wholesome regrets in her mind. (Austen, 2005, p. 422)

Sir Thomas's project is corrective by design—privation meant to bend what he mistakes as a wilful spirit. But in misdiagnosing conscience as caprice, he proves nothing but Fanny's steadfastness. The phrasing rehearses Milton's taste to loss sequence in domestic miniature. In *Paradise Lost*, taste is a vehicle of temptation—Eve's tasting of the fruit precipitates her immediate deprivation, "Which leaves [her] naked thus, of honor void" (Milton, IX.1074, p. 345). Sir Thomas tries to reverse the causal order—he stages loss first, so that memory of a prior "taste" will coerce Fanny's regret and compliance. Where Eve's tasting produces loss, Sir Thomas's pedagogy wields loss to make the earlier taste sting. Austen's narratorial phrasing adopts the same vocabulary as Milton's economy of taste, but in a world where authority manufactures deprivation to bend a will that refuses to fall. But if Fanny can be read as a resistant or redemptive Eve, her exile also gestures toward the Son's redemptive pattern. Unlike Eve, she does not Fall; unlike Maria, she does not transgress. Instead, she is cast out by another's error—Sir Thomas's misjudgement—and endures displacement she did not choose. The Son in *Paradise Lost* accepts exile and suffering voluntarily, stepping forward to bear the cost of the original sin. Fanny, by contrast, submits not from choice but from necessity, her endurance imposed rather than embraced. Yet Austen's domestication of the Miltonic archetype lies precisely here: what in the epic is heroic self-offering becomes, in the novel, the quiet constancy of one who suffers wrongly and yet refuses to be corrupted. If her

banishment lacks the Son's grandeur, it nonetheless proves her conscience and secures Mansfield Park's eventual renewal.

Fanny's exile thus works through three registers—spatially, sensorially, and morally.⁷⁴ Spatially, the move from Mansfield's ample space to Portsmouth's cramped quarters recasts postlapsarian openness as claustrophobia: Milton's "world ... all before them" becomes a world all upon her, bringing "everything so close to her" (Milton, XII.646, p. 494; Austen, 2005, p. 441). Sensorially, the noise and disorder of Portsmouth supply a domestic analogue to the postlapsarian world of "Thorns also and thistles ... In the sweat of thy face"—Fanny's labour is not in fields but in cramped rooms, with domestic care and ceaseless interruption standing in for Miltonic toil (Milton, X.203, 205, p. 360). Morally, Fanny's expulsion is a test imposed by human authority, not a sentence from divine justice—a domestic trial designed to bend her resistant will. Temptation persists in her exile—Henry's attention does not cease here—so Fanny's refusal must be renewed in the even harsher conditions of Portsmouth. Her banishment thus confirms, rather than creates, virtue. In the taxonomy, this is the resisted Fall with punitive removal: exile clarifies scale (comic vs. tragic), confirms character, and prepares the ground on which other characters' errors will be measured.

Fanny's resistance to the theatricals, her refusal of Henry's proposal, and her patient endurance in Portsmouth establish her as the novel's true moral centre. These refusals save Mansfield in three senses. First, her rejection of Henry prevents his incorporation into the family, and his eventual disgrace vindicates her resistance. Second, her endurance in Portsmouth—noisy, chaotic, and spiritually barren—clarifies by contrast the value of Mansfield as a moral order worth preserving. Finally, her constancy to Edmund through his infatuation with Mary provides the ground for his eventual recognition of her worth. In each case, Fanny preserves what others imperil: the estate's moral order, the family's stability, and the possibility of a virtuous union. Fanny's redemptive role is not enacted through dramatic action but through the density of her inner life. Of all Austen's heroines, she possesses the richest and most finely drawn inner life; her silence and watchfulness sharpen her perceptions, while her insecurities intensify her emotional complexity. Unlike Darcy or even

⁷⁴ Christina Denny discusses the sensorial description of Portsmouth further, noting, "There is indeed a gritty sort of 'power' at work in the realistic details of the Portsmouth scenes—most noticeably, in Austen's uncharacteristically full engagement here of all five senses, as Fanny's months in Portsmouth gradually overwhelm her" (Denny, 2014, para. 11). Lynn Festa extends this analysis, reading Portsmouth's inescapable noise as Austen's use of free indirect discourse to "render the inchoate fragments of her mind intelligible to the reader." (Festa, 2014, p. 162).

Milton's Satan, whose pride distorts judgement into blindness, Fanny lives in anxious awareness that her judgement might be clouded by affection. Austen stages this through free indirect discourse, where the narration blends seamlessly with Fanny's self-perception:

Fanny knew her own meaning, but was no judge of her own manner. Her manner was incurably gentle, and she was not aware how much it concealed the sternness of her purpose. Her diffidence, gratitude, and softness, made every expression of indifference seem almost an effort of self-denial ...

(Austen, 2005, pp. 377-378)

Fanny's pathetic vigilance becomes her strength, keeping her conscience sharp. Precisely because she fears that her affections might cloud her discernment, she polices herself with unusual intensity, and thus conscience remains her surest guide. In this, Austen's technique parallels Milton's own exploration of interiority. Milton stages the Fall and its aftermath through epic monologues and dialogues, laying bare Adam and Eve's inward debates. Austen domesticates this mode through free indirect discourse, letting Fanny's firmness and self-doubt coexist in a single narrative voice. Both writers treat the inner life as the theatre of moral trial: for Milton, in the high poetry of soliloquy, and for Austen, in the quiet cadences of a heroine's unspoken self-scrutiny.

In this sense, Fanny represents not the fallen Eve but the repentant, redeemed Eve of *Paradise Lost*'s later books—the Eve who through humility and endurance points the way to restoration. Austen inverts Milton's plot: her “Eve” does not fall, but her virtue highlights the fallenness of those around her. The aftermath of the theatricals and Fanny's banishment dramatise this inversion. Mansfield becomes a miniature Eden: Sir Thomas reasserts order, yet the seeds of corruption remain. Maria's scandalous fall and Fanny's temporary exile echo Milton's postlapsarian world of suffering and trial. Disobedience produces a lingering landscape of pain, separation, and moral testing. What in *Paradise Lost* was humanity's primal catastrophe becomes, in Austen, the corruption of a household and the collapse of a marriage plot. Here, however, Austen also adapts the *felix culpa*, domesticating the principle. The Bertram family's errors—Maria's adultery, Edmund's complicit Fall, Sir Thomas's moral blindness—become the conditions through which virtue, embodied in Fanny, is finally recognised. Mansfield's near-destruction thus becomes the ground of its renewal. Had Edmund not wavered, he might never have perceived Fanny's worth; had Maria not been disgraced, Henry's charm might not have been fully unmasked. In this way, sin becomes error, redemption becomes recognition, and paradise regained becomes the reconstituted *Mansfield Park* household under Fanny's marital inheritance. With Maria disgraced, Julia

absent, and Tom's future uncertain, it is Fanny—the once marginalised dependent—who becomes its future mistress. Her resistance thus restores Mansfield Park twice over: symbolically, as the conscience that steadies its order, and materially, as the figure through whom its continuity is secured. Fanny thus represents the chastened variant of the *felix culpa*, where restoration is purchased not through error corrected but through error resisted, ensured, and finally entrusted with the very estate whose order she alone preserved.

In this way Austen demonstrates the power of the domestic novel to translate Milton's epic theology into the moral grammar of nineteenth-century society. In *Pride and Prejudice*, reconciliation depends on reciprocity: Darcy learns humility, Elizabeth learns self-suspicion, and together they fashion harmony out of pride and prejudice. Theirs is a comic vision, where mistakes are educable and reconciliation culminates in marriage. *Mansfield Park* offers a more severe vision. Maria's fall admits no reconciliation, only exile. Edmund's lapse into infatuation with Mary Crawford is recoverable, but his recognition of Fanny is belated and subdued. Reconciliation, where it exists, depends less on mutual correction than on Fanny's constancy—her quiet endurance steadies what other imperil, making renewal possible but never complete. Across the two novels, Austen reshapes Milton's cosmic Fall: the comic reconciliation of *Pride and Prejudice*, where error becomes the seed of happiness, and the chastened reconciliation of *Mansfield Park*, where error leaves scars and restoration is partial, provisional, and hard-won.

TRANSLATOR OF EPIC TEMPTATION

Austen's engagement with *Paradise Lost* demonstrates how Milton's epic could be reconfigured with the idiom of the domestic novel. Rather than echo or reject, she conducts a dialogic reworking that rebuilds temptation, error, exile, and reconciliation inside the structures of courtship, propriety, and family life. Three features make Austen's Miltonism distinctive. First, she miniaturises the cosmic. The drama of cosmic rebellion becomes, in Austen, the drama of misjudgement and persuasion, and recognition: Darcy's pride, Elizabeth's prejudice, Edmund's lapse. Around them, Wickham lies, the Crawfords tempt, and Fanny steadies. The scale shrinks, but the moral weight remains. Second, she diversifies the Fall. Milton stages one primal catastrophe; Austen presents a taxonomy of errors—some educative, some ruinous, some resisted altogether, and others complicit or recoverable. The singular event becomes a set of repeatable scripts. Third, she domesticates reconciliation. In Milton, reconciliation is partial and providential; in Austen, it is graduated and civic. Elizabeth and Darcy achieve a comic union; Edmund and Fanny arrive at a quieter, chastened

recognition; Lydia and Wickham settle into a hollow restoration; and Maria, lost entirely. Reconciliation is not guaranteed but possible, contingent on humility and discernment rather than on cosmic intercession.

Austen's irony functions as her analogue to Milton's guiding narrator. Where Milton invokes the muse to "justify the ways of God to men," Austen opens *Pride and Prejudice* with "a truth universally acknowledged," directing her readers with comparable authority (Milton, I.26, p. 5; Austen, 1992b, p. 3). Irony exposes folly and tutors judgement, ensuring that readers, like Elizabeth, participate in the cycle of error and recognition. Where Milton externalises Adam and Eve's inner trials through epic monologue, Austen achieves the same moral visibility through free indirect discourse, making her characters' consciousness the stage on which temptation, error, and vigilance unfold. In this, Austen domesticates Milton's didacticism into a pedagogy of everyday discernment.

The larger implication here is a redefinition of genre: as Armstrong argues, the domestic novel was where modern subjectivity, especially female moral agency, was negotiated (Armstrong, 1987, p. 15). Austen shows that such negotiation could bear epic weight. Pemberley represents Eden re-ordered; Mansfield Park, Eden under threat. Drawing rooms, proposals, and theatricals become the new theatres of temptation and trial. The result is an everyday epic, in which ordinary error becomes the crucible of wisdom. Within the nineteenth-century arc, Austen provides the ironic and comic foundation of this domestic Miltonism. She demonstrates that Milton's categories can be reimaged at a domestic scale, where error is constructive, reconciliation educative, and irony the guiding voice. Brontë takes up this framework and amplifies it to Gothic extremes: temptation becomes ordeal, reconciliation is haunted by exile and fire, and passion tests the soul as severely as obedience tests Adam and Eve. Eliot, in turn, diffuses the same motifs into realist causality: error becomes systemic, and reconciliation becomes partial and fragile within the networks of provincial life. Thus, Austen establishes terms that later women writers will amplify, revise, or resist. The domestic novel emerges as a central site where Milton's epic concerns—temptation, error, exile, reconciliation—are adapted, reweighted, and pared back. In Austen, paradise can be lost and tentatively regained in assemblies and country estates; in Brontë, in the wilderness and the ruinous manor; in Eliot, in the thick web of provincial life.

CHAPTER FOUR: CHARLOTTE BRONTË: GOTHIC TEMPTATION AND THE COMMUNAL EVE

Charlotte Brontë inherits Milton's great drama of temptation, but she does not leave it in Eden. She carries its cadences into Gothic estates and parsonages of the mill-yard, letting the serpent speak through sermons, proposals, and the clang of new machinery. In *Jane Eyre*, temptation becomes a trial of conscience, concentrated in Rochester's eloquence and St. John's severity. In *Shirley*, it disperses outward, echoing across fields, estates, and communities until the Fall is less an isolated act than a condition shared by classes and genders alike. Brontë's novels thus remake Milton's grammar of sin and persuasion, transposing the cosmic into the domestic, the epic into the social, and showing how words themselves can wound, compel, or redeem.

PERSUASION AS ORDEAL

In Brontë, temptation is a contest of tongues before it is a clash of bodies. Across *Jane Eyre* and *Shirley* she restages Milton's drama of speech at two scales: the intimate theatre of proposals and sermons, and the civic noise of mills and magistrates. In both, rhetoric is the serpent, and the fruit becomes the act of succumbing to the rhetoric of temptation. Milton supplies the grammar of temptation—Satan's insinuation, Adam's complicity, the Son's freely chosen obedience—but Brontë forces those energies through Victorian forms: passion, piety, and ambition. Brontë's dialogue with Milton in *Jane Eyre* is staged as a pilgrimage of temptation and resistance. Ian Emberson suggests the novel recalls *Paradise Regained*, where Christ resists loneliness and peril to win heaven (Emberson, 2017, p. 214). Yet Jane's pilgrimage also bears strong resemblance to Eve's trial in *Paradise Lost*, where autonomy is tested through temptation and choice, desire navigated without surrender. Temptation is the testing ground; refusal becomes the path to equality. Edward Rochester stages the arena through his polished rhetoric. As Michael Wheeler observes, his speeches are purposefully cast in Satanic cadence, mixing grandeur and self-pity (Wheeler, 1979, p. 34). He insists:

Then take my word for it, —I am not a villain: you are not to suppose that—not to attribute to me any such bad eminence; but, owing, I verily believe, rather to circumstances than to my natural bent, I am a trite commonplace sinner, hackneyed in all the poor petty dissipations with which the rich and worthless try to put on life. (Brontë, 1999, pp. 118-119)

Wheeler notes the allusion to Satan's "bad eminence" (Milton, II.6, p. 46; cited in Wheeler, 1979, p. 34). By naming himself "trite," Rochester collapses the elevation of the quotation

into self-deprecation. The blend of grandeur and grievance mirrors what Wheeler identifies as Satan's own self-pity: "I could reform ... but where is the use of thinking of it, hampered, burdened, cursed as I am?" (Brontë, 1999, p. 119, cited in Wheeler, 1979, p. 34). In Milton, such affliction seduces by soliciting sympathy. Rochester's speeches operate the same way, dramatising himself as cursed yet heroic, luring Jane into compassion.⁷⁵ Brontë then subverts the model by giving Jane Miltonic counter-speech. As Wheeler points out, she replies, "You intimated that to have a sullied memory was a perpetual bane," recalling Milton's description of the fallen angels' torment as a "perpetual (sometimes recorded as precious) bane" (Brontë, 1999, p. 120; Milton, I.692, p. 40; both cited in Wheeler, 1979, pp. 34-35). Their dialogue becomes a verbal duel in Satanic cadence—his rhetoric a blend of self-revelation and misdirection, hers a re-reading that punctures the spell. Speech itself is the battleground of temptation: seductive in rhythm, suspect in motive.

Rochester fuses Miltonic roles to make temptation harder to read. He is Satanic in eloquence, Adamic in dependence, and Eve-like when he pleads for complicity. His Satanic inheritance appears in his anticipatory persuasions: long before revealing Bertha, he plants the idea of bigamy in Jane's mind.⁷⁶ After Bertha's revelation, he pre-empts her objection to his proposal—"I will answer for you ... I guess rightly?," ventriloquising her conscience for her (Brontë, 1999, p. 264). Rochester employs the Satanic tactic of blurring the boundary between his own argument and Jane's reasoning process—the logic feels like her own thought, foreclosing her independent articulation. He also deflects blame—Jane's refusal becomes cruelty, her departure "scheming to destroy" him; he paints Jane as a cruel mistress, regarding him as "a plotting profligate—a base and low rake who has been simulating disinterested love in order to draw you into a snare deliberately laid" (Brontë, 1999, p. 264). The irony lies in Rochester's actual laying of such a snare—he conceals Bertha's existence to secure Jane. Yet instead of owning this deception, he reframes the charge—his argument instead insisting that Jane misjudges him because his love was sincere. Like Milton's Satan, who admits rebellion but reframes it as heroic necessity ("Better to reign in hell than serve in heav'n"), Rochester acknowledges Jane's suspicion only to redefine its terms (Milton, I.263,

⁷⁵ His arguments recall Satan's reframing of damnation as necessity and obedience as cruelty. Satan amplifies misery, "chains and torments," just as Rochester evokes the despair of his "headlong nature" if Jane abandons him (Milton, II.196, p. 53; Brontë, 1999, p. 280). Satan then proposes apparent mercy, "Better than worse," echoing Rochester's claim that transgression is kinder than cruelty. Finally, Satan appeals to law itself, insisting "nor the law unjust / That so ordains" (Milton, II.200-201, p. 54). Rochester's claim that "mere human law" may be broken for compassion is the same sleight of hand—temptation recast as moral necessity (Brontë, 1999, p. 280). Both figures construct despair as a rationale for disobedience, and both aim to bind another into their error.

⁷⁶ See section: Rhetorical Persuasion for a deeper analysis of Rochester's grooming as Satan's dream-whispering.

p. 15). What Jane condemns is not his affection but his lie; Rochester uses rhetorical sleight of hand to make the opposite case, turning his passion into defence and her perception into cruelty.

Rochester's shifting archetypal identity unsettles the Miltonic order. Beneath Rochester's Satanic eloquence lies Adamic dependence—he mirrors Adam's fear of parting from Eve, insisting that Jane's absence will annihilate him: "you are scheming to destroy me ... you intend to make yourself a complete stranger to me" (Brontë, 1999, pp. 264-265). Yet he also echoes Eve, urging complicity: "Every atom of your flesh is as dear to me as my own ... You are my sympathy—my better self—my good angel" (Brontë, 1999, pp. 266-278). Like Eve, he claims victimhood in deception: "My father and my brother Rowland knew all this ... they joined in the plot against me" (Brontë, 1999, p. 270). When Jane confronts his concealment, he shifts the charge from deceit to love: "It was not my original intention to deceive ... you know now that I had but a hideous demon" (Brontë, 1999, pp. 276, 279). In his doubleness—tempter and tempted, deceiver and deceived—Rochester becomes Eve-like, and Jane assumes Adam's role. But unlike Milton's Adam, Jane refuses complicity. When he pleads, "Just this promise—I will be yours, Mr. Rochester," Jane replies, "Mr. Rochester, I will *not* be yours" (Brontë, 1999, p. 279, emphasis in original). The typography (*not*) does theological work—italics that in sermons might stress scripture now sanctify Jane's resistance (Broadus, 1870, p. 389). Brontë unsettles Milton's gendered hierarchy: Milton codes Adam as superior reason, and Eve subordinate passion; Adam yields, and Eve tempts.⁷⁷ Brontë flips this coding: Rochester becomes Eve-like, deceived and deceiving, while Jane takes Adam's role as arbiter of conscience. Yet Jane's authority is recognisably domestic: she preserves the integrity of the household, a role associated with women as moral guardians in Victorian culture (Armstrong, 1987, p. 107). As Gilbert and Gubar note, "both Satan and Eve are in some sense alienated, rebellious, and therefore Byronic figures," a doubleness that extends to women writers who feel the "paradoxical double consciousness of guilt and greatness" (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000, p. 203). Rochester inherits this multiplicity—Satanic in eloquence, Eve-like in his plea for complicity, Adamic in his dependence—while Jane becomes Adam reenvisioned, refusing solidarity in sin. The Miltonic hierarchy is thus destabilised, leaving its reconciliation to Ferndean, where Rochester will be remade as a humbled companion and Jane's refusal will yield not exile but true covenant.

⁷⁷ On Brontë's adaptation of biblical style, see David Norton's *A History of the English Bible as Literature*, which argues that *Jane Eyre* not only quotes but is "shaped by" the King James Bible, its rhythms and emphases integrated into Brontë's prose (Norton, 2004, pp. 295-296).

Rochester's ruin extends his Miltonic multiplicity: he is both Satan, the eloquent sophist, and Eve, the tempter whose offer of forbidden fruit is, in Brontë's revision, refused. Like Eve with the fruit, he holds out passion as salvation, asking Jane to share in his culpability. But Jane denies him, reversing Milton's scene of complicity. Rochester is left as the fallen tempter whose error is his own: his bigamous deception, his attempt to bend law into mercy, and his pride in believing he could control the terms of covenant. Exile inevitably follows this error. When Bertha sets Thornfield ablaze, his secret erupts into apocalyptic judgement. The household Eden collapses, and Rochester loses house, sight, and power, driven into Ferndean as a chastened outcast. His blindness and ruin embody Miltonic logic that error must end in exile—yet Brontë reworks the pattern. This exile is not annihilation but preparation. In his diminished state Rochester can no longer tempt, command, or conceal; he can only receive. Error leads to exile, exile to humility, and humility to the possibility of a true covenant.

As a foil to Rochester, St. John embodies the opposite temptation: where Rochester seduces through romantic (and Romantic, in the Byronic sense) passion, St. John constrains through doctrinal law. Rochester's "flaming and flashing eyes" contrast with St. John's "ice of reserve" (Brontë, 1999, pp. 254, 312). He admits himself to be "a cold hard man," a judgment Jane affirms: "he had spoken truth of himself, when he said he was hard and cold" (Brontë, 1999, pp. 332, 347). His sermons, with their "stern allusions to Calvinist doctrines—election, predestination, reprobation," align him with Milton's austere theology of providence—but in Brontë's reworking, that severity becomes distorted: covenant without intimacy, zeal without affection (Beer, 2008, p. 245; Brontë, 1999, p. 311). Jane criticises his preaching as springing from "a depth where lay turbid dregs of disappointment—where moved troubling impulses of insatiate yearnings" (Brontë, 1999, p. 311). For her, St. John is no more enlightened than she is if his discourse is so poisoned by bitterness.

St. John thus emerges as a distorted image of the Son. In *Paradise Lost*, the Son embodies obedience joined with love: he freely offers himself to redeem humankind, fusing submission with grace. St. John retains the obedience but strips away that love, demanding submission without consolation. The result is a false redeemer—zealous, devoted, even admirable, but devoid of the grace that defines Milton's Son. This makes him a deeply ambiguous archetype—Jane can respect his integrity while simultaneously refusing his authority. This dissonance culminates at the novel's close, where despite Jane's resistance the narrator exalts him as "A more resolute, indefatigable pioneer ... Firm, faithful, and devoted: full of energy, and zeal, and truth" (Brontë, 1999, p. 400).

The dissonance of St. John's characterisation mirrors Brontë's unsettled relationship with Calvinist doctrines. Milton is often identified as Calvinist for his emphasis on providence and theodicy, though his stress on free will complicates that label (Doerksen, 1995, para.6; Myers, 2004, p. 22). Brontë herself feared the "Ghastly Calvinist doctrines" that left her "darkened ... by the very shadows of Spiritual Death," (Smith, 1995, p. 156; cited in Griesinger, 2008, p. 43). Her father Patrick Brontë, by contrast, explicitly rejected "the appalling doctrines of personal Election and Reprobation" in his parish (quoted in Pollard, 1984, p. 4; cited in Griesinger, 2008, p. 44). This double inheritance—personal dread of Calvinist severity alongside paternal rejection of it—surfaces in St. John Rivers. His sermons sound like "sentences pronounced for doom," his Calvinism reducing faith to compulsion and grace to absence (Brontë, 1999, p. 311). In him, Brontë isolates the obedience of Milton's Son and discards the love, creating a theological shadow of the redeemer. Admired yet unliveable, he embodies the Calvinist severity Brontë could neither embrace nor fully ignore.

While Rochester's rhetoric cloaks temptation in dangerous passion, St. John Rivers does not flatter Jane's pride but presses on her conscience, clothing his proposal in the mantle of divine command. When he urges her to marry him for missionary work, St. John insists not in the language of love but of sacrifice:

You cannot—you ought not. Do you think God will be satisfied with half an oblation? Will He accept a mutilated sacrifice? It is the cause of God I advocate: it is under His standard I enlist you. I cannot accept on His behalf a divided allegiance: it must be entire. (Brontë, 1999, pp. 359-360)

St. John's rhetoric is stripped of passion—he cloaks despotism in piety, enlisting Jane not as a partner but as a sacrifice. The language is recognisably Miltonic—sermonic in cadence, echoing the narrator's own claims to divine sanction in *Paradise Lost*. Brontë turns the idiom into coercion—divine command is warped into human domination. But Jane resists. She parries his appeal with irony, "Oh! I will give my heart to God. You do not want it" (Brontë, 1999, p. 360). This is less direct resistance than ironic exposure—she punctures the grandiosity of St. John's rhetoric by taking his logic literally, revealing its hollowness. She narrates this moment as one of unveiled recognition: "I sat at the feet of a man, erring as I. The veil fell from his hardness and despotism ... I was with an equal—one with whom I might argue—one whom, if I saw good, I might resist" (Brontë, 1999, p. 360). Critics like Griesinger note that Jane recognises this as false covenant, "an abuse of spiritual authority," resisting even though she is tempted by the nobility of his mission (Griesinger, 2008, p. 51).

What changes here is not the power of St. John's rhetoric but Jane's interpretation of it.⁷⁸ She ceases to hear him as divine authority and begins to hear him as merely a man, subject to error. Where Milton's Eve is undone by misreading Satan's words as truth, Jane secures her autonomy by re-reading St. John's words as rhetoric, not revelation.

There is a quality to St. John often overlooked that is nonetheless important to Jane—the unbending will to do what one thinks is right. Jane herself is self-sacrificing when she leaves Rochester and nearly dies from exposure, all in the name of conscience. It is not a surprising, then, that while Jane sees that St. John “may be stern; he may be exacting,” she also identifies in him a kindred spirit of moral resolve (Brontë, 1999, p. 400). His refusal to marry Rosamond Oliver epitomises this resolve. Rosamond is beautiful, wealthy, and affectionate—the very image of an “earthly angel” (Brontë, 1999, p. 321). Jane describes her as possessing “a face of perfect beauty” with “no charm ... wanting, no defect perceptible” (Brontë, 1999, p. 321). Such radiance recalls Milton's Eve, who moves with “Grace ... in all her steps, Heaven in her eye” (Milton, VIII.488, p. 301). Yet where Adam embraces Eve as the crown of creation, St. John turns away, fixing his gaze instead on “a humble tuft of daisies” (Brontë, 1999, p. 321). In Jane's eyes, Rosamond embodies the beauty and felicity of earthly love; for St. John, she embodies temptation. His desire for her is undeniable—Jane remarks he would have “given the world” to recall her—but he defines her love as Elysium, a pagan counterfeit of heaven, and refuses it for the “true, eternal Paradise” of missionary duty (Brontë, 1999, p. 325). Rosamond thus becomes his forbidden fruit; the earthly joy he must renounce to preserve his sense of calling. This act of refusal epitomises St. John's moral resolve, but also its severity—he reclassifies love itself as sin, turning Eve's companionship into a perilous distraction rather than a gift. Jane respects his passion for principle, recognising in him a reflection of her own self-sacrificial will. This distinguishes him from Milton's Adam—instead of knowingly sharing Eve's transgression rather than endure separation, St. John will not risk even the appearance of complicit passion. In Brontë's revision, this reversal strips his piety of its supposed heroism. Where Milton presents Adam's choice as tragic yet profoundly human, St. John's refusal is a distortion of humanity, a piety that denies rather than affirms the bonds of earthly companionship.

⁷⁸ As discussed, a part of Milton's heterodoxy lies in his refusal to submit to ecclesiastical authority, insisting on the primacy of individual conscience in interpreting God's will. Jane's rejection of St. John's proposal echoes this stance: she denies his claim to speak with divine sanction and asserts her own interpretive authority in discerning God's demands. Brontë thus uses Milton not just for rhetorical colour or allusion, but as a model of dissent, making Jane's resistance part of a larger Miltonic tradition of freedom through refusing coercion by authority, especially under the guise of religion.

For many Victorian Evangelical readers, St. John's resolve would have seemed admirably self-denying. Missionary biographies and hagiographic accounts of figures like Henry Martyn celebrated precisely this renunciation of love for the divine calling of missionary work (Lopez, 1929, pp. 112-118; Stock, 1899, pp. 421-426). As Poovey further notes, for the Evangelicals, "the Victorian angel ... In her proper sphere, of course ... was held to be an accessible image of God's most sacred mystery: the miracle of one who, like Christ, finds supreme self fulfilment in absolute self-denial" (Poovey, 1985, pp. 34-35). Brontë's novels deliberately unsettle such piety and self-denial by presenting it not as admirable but as coercive. When St. John turns his will upon Jane, he recasts her as his substitute for Rosamond—not a partner in love but the instrument of his self-denial. His proposal is couched as necessity: "God and nature intended you for a missionary's wife. It is not personal ... you are formed for labour, not for love ... I claim you—not for my pleasure, but for my Sovereign's service" (Brontë, 1999, p. 356). This is the language of vocation rather than desire (*ah, romance*). The irony is deliberate: what St. John frames as holy calling is, in fact, the erasure of affection, reducing Jane to the instrument of his piety. Brontë rewrites the Miltonic Adam-Eve dynamic: Jane is asked not to tempt but to absorb St. John's temptation, to be the Eve whose very presence secures his refusal of earthly love. In effect, she becomes his anti-Eve, the token of renunciation rather than companionship. The implication is deeply unsettling—Jane is cast as a sacrifice to his self-denial. Brontë exposes this as an abuse of piety, an inversion of covenant that masquerades as holiness while negating love. Further, in refusing St. John, Jane denies finding "self fulfilment in self-denial," a reversal of expectations that rails against self-erasure (Poovey, 1985, p. 35). In Milton's epic, covenant binds heaven and earth; in Austen's fiction, such categories are miniaturised into the ironies of courtship. Brontë instead magnifies them, holding the lens of epic language over the seemingly ordinary terrain of marriage. Under that magnification, the proposal is revealed in its full stakes: covenant rhetoric becomes coercion, salvation language collapses into the demand for self-erasure.

This is Brontë's domestication of the epic—not reduction but exposure, showing how Miltonic motifs resurface in the intimate contracts of domestic life. St. John's exile is thus not of Gothic ruin but eschatological barrenness. He is cast as a false redeemer, a parody of Milton's God who commands obedience without love. His self-imposed wandering to India is narrated in tones of heroic mission: "he went to India. He entered on the path he had marked for himself; he pursues it still ... Firm, faithful, and devoted, full of energy, and zeal, and truth, he labours for his race, he clears their painful way for improvement" (Brontë, 1999, p.

400). Brontë casts him as the postlapsarians, carrying the curse of labour as vocation: “labour calls us, now with sweat imposed ... Here let us live, though in fallen state” (Milton, XI.172, 179, pp. 407-408). Unlike the postlapsarians, whose exile sustains earthly life, St. John’s exile empties earthly ties in anticipation of eternity: “My Master ... has forewarned me. Daily He announces more distinctly, —‘Surely I come quickly!’ and hourly I more eagerly respond, —‘Amen; even so come, Lord Jesus!’” (Brontë, 1999, p. 401). These are the novel’s final words—the last voice heard is not Jane’s triumphant marriage announcement, but St. John’s apocalyptic prayer. The closing is deeply ironic. While the narrative has traced Jane’s struggle for true covenant with Rochester, Brontë displaces that domestic reconciliation with St. John’s eschatological exile. The effect is double-edged—it dignifies his vocation with biblical gravity, but it also leaves readers in the chill of his loveless devotion. While Adam and Eve soften their exile with companionship, St. John embraces it alone, his pursuit joyless. His self-imposed wandering transforms Milton’s shared vocation into sterile heroism. Placed at the novel’s conclusion, St. John’s exile becomes its counterpoint to Jane’s *felix exilium*.⁷⁹ Her chosen journey of solitude produces life and love, while St. John’s solitude anticipates death and eternity. By letting St. John’s voice conclude the novel in the same cadence as the Bible’s closing lines, Brontë aligns the conclusion of her novel with the conclusion of scripture (Revelation 22:20-21).

Jane’s story of knowledge, exile, and reconciliation seems to culminate in domestic fulfilment, yet Brontë denies her the last word. This destabilising conclusion reminds readers that Eden is yet provisional. Jane avoids Eve’s unknowing Fall and forges a covenant through knowledge and humility, yet the covenant remains partial, dependent on Bertha’s obliteration and St. John’s ascetic erasure. As Susan L. Meyer argues, “the figurative use of race relations in Bronte’s fiction reveals a conflict between sympathy for the oppressed and racism, one that becomes most apparent in *Jane Eyre*” (Meyer, 1990, p. 250). The novel deploys colonial discourse figuratively to structure domestic and gender relations themselves, transforming colonial domination into a metaphor that organises interpersonal power (Meyer, 1990, pp. 247-250). Seen in this light, Bertha’s destruction and St. John’s self-erasure are not narrative accidents but structural conditions enabling Jane’s settlement. Thus Brontë’s true covenant is not utopian equality but fragile negotiation: renewal achieved through choice and suffering, yet still shadowed by the figures it cannot reconcile and the laws and ideologies it cannot

⁷⁹ A phrase borrowed from Ovid’s *Fasti*: “Felix, exilium cui locus ille fuit!” or “Happy for that to be his place of exile!” (Kline, 2004, I.540).

overturn. Where *Paradise Lost* ends in exile softened by companionship and providential hope, *Jane Eyre* ends in apocalyptic urgency, the eschatological horizon eclipsing the domestic scene, earthly covenant haunted by its incompleteness.

Shirley begins where *Jane Eyre*'s incompleteness leaves off, transposing Miltonic temptation from the intimacy of courtship to the tumult of industrial conflict. Here Satanic voice belongs not to the lover nor the preacher but to Robert Moore, whose ambition remakes paradise in the idiom of industrial progress. Through Moore, *Shirley* interrogates the darker side of ambition and positions industrial capitalism as a Miltonic temptation. From his first introduction, Robert Moore is cast in terms of cold ambition: "it perhaps rather agreed with Moore's temperament than otherwise to be generally hated, especially when he believed the thing for which he was hated a right and expedient thing" (Brontë, 1993a, p. 23). He is determined to modernise his mill with new machinery, even as it provokes violent opposition from the workers. His rhetoric—emphasising necessity, efficiency, and sacrifice—recalls Satan's in *Paradise Lost*, which twists beauty into a target for destruction. When Satan first beholds Eden, its loveliness becomes a stage for his revenge against God. Moore, too, looks upon a paradisiacal landscape only to imagine utilitarian conversion:

The copse shall be firewood ere five years elapse. The beautiful wild ravine shall be a smooth descent; the green natural terrace shall be a paved street. There shall be cottages in the dark ravine, and cottages on the lonely slopes. The rough pebbled track shall be an even, firm, broad, black, sooty road, bedded with the cinders from my mill; and my mill, Caroline—my mill shall fill its present yard.
(Brontë, 1993a, p. 481)

Both speak with an ethic of utility: Satan out of envy, seeking to unmake God's work; Moore out of mercenary ambition, seeking to expand his industry. In each case, paradise is stripped of intrinsic value and reimagined as material to be consumed in the service of pride.⁸⁰ Like Milton's Satan, Moore also inspires loyalty and fear. After the Luddite attack on his mill, the narrator notes:

Only half of Moore's activity and resolution had been seen in his defence of the mill; he showed the other half (and a terrible half it was) in the relentless way in which he pursued the leaders of the riot ... The magistrates of the district dreaded him ... he liked both to frighten and rouse them.

⁸⁰ There is an erotic charge to note: just as Satan's envy springs in part from carnal exile, Moore's capitalist ambition can be read libidinally, recalling Walter Benjamin's "sex appeal of the inorganic" (Benjamin, 2008, p. 102). The Foucauldian juridical framing of nineteenth-century erotic discourse is expansive—but here, beside the point. These desires are implicitly carnal because they are *desires*—felt mentally and bodily in full, that embodied intensity is what makes temptation for each character so poignant.

(Brontë, 1993a, p. 287)

Moore thrives on crisis, relishing the hunt more than his trade: “he liked it better than making cloth” (Brontë, 1993a, p. 287). Brontë inverts the ideal of industrial vocation: the manufacturer who should create instead takes greater pleasure in pursuit and intimidation. Moore’s power is rooted not brute force alone, but the ability to cast his pursuit as necessary, even salutary: he “rouses” as much as he frightens. This dynamic is mirrored in Milton’s Satan, whose Miltonic stature rests less on his martial exploits than on his speeches. In *Paradise Lost*, Satan transforms ruin into resolve through rhetoric, calling out to the fallen angels, “have ye chos’n this place / After the toil of battle to repose / Your wearied virtue ... Awake, arise, or be for ever fall’n” (Milton, I. 318-320, 330, p. 18). Satan mocks rests as cowardice, transforming defeat into renewed struggle. Moore performs the same manoeuvre with the magistrates, using fear of assassination as a spur to action. Both figures channel exhaustion into energy, binding others to them through the compulsion of crisis. Brontë recasts Satanic rhetoric into the idiom of industrial capitalism—the vocation not making but unmaking, preferring destruction over creation: “These persons he hunted ... and well he liked the occupation” (Brontë, 1993a, p. 287).

Just as Satan tempts Eve by appealing to her desire for elevation, Moore seeks Shirley not primarily for love but for her wealth. He admits this openly, “I wanted to marry her for the sake of her money ... That is the plain truth, whether you like it or not” (Brontë, 1993a, p. 447). His temptation of Shirley becomes a parody of Milton’s garden temptation. Where Satan couches his appeal in the language of godlike ascent, Moore’s rhetoric is stripped of grandeur, baldly mercenary. In both cases, Eve or her reconfiguration is cast as a channel to power beyond the tempter’s reach. Brontë rewrites the scene by refusing Moore success: Shirley will not be his fruit to pluck. Instead, her fortune resists being reduced to industrial capital.

Yet Brontë complicates the Satanic analogy. Like Milton’s Satan, Moore is charismatic, intelligent, and at times sympathetic—but he is not wholly villainous. His ambition is driven not only by pride but also by a felt burden of familial obligation: “She inherited only debts—which her son Robert accepted, in his turn, as a legacy, saying that one day he would discharge them, and rebuild the fallen house of Gérard and Moore” (Brontë, 1993a, p. 21). This inherited debt is what fuels his desire to succeed at any cost. Unlike Satan, however, Moore is not irrevocably damned. Failure and illness temper his ambition, softening him into a partner capable of affection. In one of his gentler moments, he teases Caroline,

“You talk in such a way about ‘mamma’ it is enough to make one jealous of the old lady” (Brontë, 1993a, p. 446). The remark signals a new Moore—playful, affectionate, even vulnerable. Brontë does not offer him theological redemption, but she reframes him within the domestic and communal sphere, where his ambition is moderated by attachment and pride gives way, in part, to intimacy and communal regeneration. His arc is contradictory: the Satanic entrepreneur is tempered and domesticated but not wholly redeemed—Brontë does not cleanse him of his earlier severity, nor does she dismantle the industrial system he embodies. Through Robert Moore, *Shirley* interrogates the nature of industrial ambition: is it the engine of progress or the seed of destruction? Brontë reshapes the Satanic archetype to examine and critique the costs of industrial capitalism, imagining how its energies might be tempered into social repair.

In Brontë’s industrial domestication of Milton, such cosmic temptation is refracted through the rhythms of local life: mills unsettle households, reshape estates, and even intrude into the marriage plot, where choices of love and livelihood intertwine with machinery and commerce. It is through this domesticated landscape of temptation that Robert Moore encounters his own trial. His new machinery promises prosperity but introduces discord, echoing the fruit of Milton’s Eden: for Brontë, the fruit of advancement is intertwined with loss; for Milton, the knowledge that leads to expulsion (Milton, IX.679–732, pp. 332–334). Moore is tempted by the promise of progress, yet also becomes tempter himself, insisting that economic compulsion is inevitable. This same mercenary logic governs his role in the marriage plot—his initial pursuit of Shirley is not born of love but of calculation, her wealth and land a parallel of temptation, prosperity disguised as affection. In both cases, Moore is not only the tempter who cloaks exploitation in the language of necessity but also the tempted, drawn to promises of prosperity that threaten to corrupt both industry and intimacy. Brontë underscores this ambivalence by showing Moore’s devotion to his machines: “Mr. Moore loved his machinery. He had risked the last of his capital on the purchase of these frames and shears ... Speculations most important to his interests depended on the results to be wrought by them” (Brontë, 1993a, p. 24). Tempted by both frames and fortune, Moore embodies Brontë’s Miltonic revision: a figure in whom Eve’s seduction and Satan’s sophistry converge, showing how the rhetoric of necessity can corrupt not only the mill-yard but the courtship plot.

Moore’s private temptations spill outward: through free indirect discourse, Moore’s outlook expands into economic philosophy. “All men, taken singly, are more or less selfish, and taken in bodies, they are intensely so. The British merchant is no exception to this rule”

(Brontë, 1993a, p. 127). Here economic self-interest is cast as universal law, leaving no room for sentiment or chivalry. By filtering Moore's outlook through the narrator, Brontë emphasises the ideological force of inevitability: commerce must expand, principle cannot resist. In both machinery and commerce, Moore advocates for pragmatism—better to embrace the course of fate than to resist it in vain. Like Milton's Satan, who justifies rebellion "with necessity, / The tyrant's plea," Moore cloaks economic compulsion as inevitability: to embrace the course of fate rather than suffer the shame of delay (Milton, IV.393-394, p. 147). What for Milton is sophistry—Satan's self-justifying claim that evil is compelled by necessity—Brontë reworks as the language of industrial progress. Moore, like Satan, insists that he is bound by forces beyond his control—yet where Milton unmasks the deceit, Brontë shows how such rhetoric becomes persuasive in the industrial age, naturalising exploitation as inevitability.

Brontë's text repeatedly reaches for Miltonic diction to register political and social conflict amidst the backdrop of industrial progress and unrest. Mr. Yorke, for instance, denounces the nation's leaders as "Madmen like Pitt, demons like Castlereagh, mischievous idiots like Perceval ... tyrants, the curses of the country" (Brontë, 1993b, p. 41). Here Miltonic invective is directed upward, against authority rather than labour: the ministers figured as demonic tyrants dragging England toward ruin. The effect translates industrial discontent into epic terms, where even parliamentary policy becomes part of a cosmic struggle of rebellion and oppression. Milton's Satan deploys the same idiom, railing against "the tyranny of heav'n," a charge that masks ambition as liberty until he himself is unmasked as tyrant (Milton I.124, p. 10). As Michael Bryson observes, Milton uses Satan to push Protestant theories of resistance further than their authors were willing to go: "Through Satan, Milton takes the arguments of Protestant theologians ... into much more radical territory ... For Milton, the people ... do not need a representative body of magistrates to rid them of a tyrannical king" (Bryson, 2004, p. 132). The claim is politically explosive: it places the power to rest not in magistrates or princes, but in individuals themselves. Yet Milton also shows how precarious such rhetoric can be. As Bryson further notes, Satan's error is not rebellion but its rationale: he "does not go on from rejecting the 'Tyranny of Heav'n' to rejecting all tyranny ... Satan merely sets himself up as an alternate monarch, another tyrant, another king" (Bryson, 2004, p. 142). Satan's language of liberty is therefore sophistry, tempting both his followers and Milton's readers to mistake ambition for freedom and domination for resistance. Brontë inherits this doubleness—in *Shirley*, the rhetoric of

necessity becomes a modern “tyrant’s plea,” tempting characters to read exploitation as fate and rebellion as freedom.

This communalisation of Eden refracts Milton’s double legacy of the Fall. On the one hand, Eve’s error brought about the curse of women’s labour and subordination: “Thy sorrow I will greatly multiply / By thy conception; children thou shall bring / In sorrow forth; and to thy husband’s will / Thine shall submit; he over thee shall rule” (Milton, X.193-196, p. 360). (*Thanks, Eve*). In *Shirley*, the burden of labour is not only childbirth or subordination within marriage, but the alienation of women and communities under industrial capitalism. Adam’s punishment, “Curs’d is the ground for thy sake, thou in sorrow / Shalt eat thereof all the days of thy life ... In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, / Till thou return unto the ground,” is transposed into the industrial present: a social condition, dispersed across mill strikes and poverty (Milton, X.201-206, p. 360). The women of the novel bear Eve’s lot—constrained, silenced, or forced to negotiate their subordination—while the workers bear Adam’s, toiling under the crushing weight of exploitation and industrial displacement. Brontë makes visible what Milton only implied: the Fall is no longer a theological myth of individual inheritance but a communal one, shaping gender and class alike. The result of industrial progress becomes an idiom for collective expulsion from Eden, a social exile of labouring bodies under the shadow of history. The communal curse finds its image in a confrontation between William Farren and Robert Moore outside Moore’s Mill. Farren pleads in desperation in reasoned testimony, almost Miltonic in its seriousness:

Ye see we’re ill off—varry ill off; wer families is poor and pined. We’re thrown out o’ work wi’ these frames; we can get nought to do; we can earn nought. What is to be done? Mun we say, wisht! and lig us down and dee? Nay; I’ve had no grand words at my tongue’s end, Mr. Moore, but I feel that it wad be a low principle for a reasonable man to starve to death like a dumb cratur. I willn’t do’t ... Them that governs mun find a way to help us, they mun make fresh orderations. Ye’ll say that’s hard to do. So mich louder mun we shout out then ... (Brontë, 1993a, p. 104)

The plea is Miltonic in form: error has already been committed in the machinery that has displaced their labour, and exile follows in the form of lost jobs, leading to starvation and poverty. Like Eve after the fall, who declares “Labour calls us,” Farren accepts the curse of toil but refuses to collapse into silence or death (Milton, XI.172, p. 407). His voice transposes Eve’s acceptance of exile into the idiom of industrial Yorkshire.

Yet Brontë can only stage this testimony through the marked use of eye-dialect, both authenticating and marginalising his speech. Farren’s words carry moral authority, but their form others him, a figure genteel readers might hear as provincial or even comic. Brontë

struggles to portray working-class activism with dignity rather than caricature. The dynamic recalls Bertha Mason—the racialised colonial other, denied voice—but Farren’s otherness is produced not by race but by class, his speech marked as alien to polite society even as it carries the truth of communal exile. Exile is multiplied in different registers of exclusion—racialised chaos in *Jane Eyre*, classed activism in *Shirley*. In *Paradise Lost*, Adam and Eve’s Fall is universal: they speak in blank verse, their plight elevated to the scale of cosmic history. Brontë fractures that universality—the truth of exile is voiced (or silenced) from the margins. She reworks Milton’s epic pattern into the social hierarchies of the nineteenth century—error and exile fall unevenly, along the axes of race, class, and gender. Milton presents this unevenness as Eve’s condemnation to sorrow in childbirth and marital subordination, and Adam’s punishment to toil in the fields. Brontë extends that division to the nineteenth century: Bertha Mason inherits exile as racialised otherness in silence and obliteration; William Farren, and by extension the working class, inherits exile as classed otherness, his testimony framed in dialect that marks him as provincial. Milton’s universal narrative of the Fall and expulsion is refracted through these Victorian hierarchies, so that the voices articulating the truth of their exile are marked as marginal, unequal, or excluded.

Farren’s Miltonic plea, however, meets only hardness. Moore replies, “Worry the Parliament-men as much as you please; but to worry the mill-owners is absurd, and I for one won’t stand it” (Brontë, 1993a, p. 104). His response is itself an error—prideful refusal to recognise the justice of communal suffering, insisting his own independence from the workers’ plight. Like Rochester, who tempts Jane into complicity, Moore seeks to insulate himself from accountability, imagining that error can be borne privately. He will not yield even a word of sympathy—Brontë underscores Moore’s error by showing the opportunity he squandered. The narrator comments that he had “failed in the disposing of a chance he was lord of.”⁸¹ By speaking kindly to Farren, “a very honest man, without envy or hatred ... thinking it no hardship and no injustice to be forced to live by labour,” Moore might have secured a friend (Brontë, 1993a, p. 105). Instead, his dismissal leaves a “bad, harsh impression,” casting him as selfish and unfeeling (Brontë, 1993a, p. 105). This is his Fall: not a sudden crime, but the error of hardness, of Byronic self-reliance that refuses solidarity. This

⁸¹ Brontë’s narrator quietly borrows the cadence of *Hamlet*’s reflections on squandered opportunity: “There’s a divinity that shapes our ends, / Rough-hew them how we will” (Brontë, 1993a, p. 105; Shakespeare, 1993, V.2.10-11). Moore, like Shakespeare’s tragic figures, misses the moment when a kind word to Farren might have redeemed him. The phrasing recalls Hamlet’s tragic sense of wasted agency, but Brontë overlays it with Miltonic consequence: Moore’s error of pride must issue in exile, his later ruin and near-death functioning as chastened expulsion. Shakespeare supplies the idiom of tragic opportunity lost, Milton the logic of error and exile.

retrospective judgement turns Moore's hardness into a Miltonic error of pride—the refusal to recognise truth when it speaks. Like Adam, who knowingly chooses solidarity in transgression, Moore knowingly refuses solidarity in suffering.

Exile follows immediately—not for Moore, whose isolation gradually deepens—but most visibly for Farren and his family. Returning home to a dinner of thin porridge, “too little of that” for the children, Farren embodies the material reality of exile—honest labour displaced, survival stripped to hunger. (Brontë, 1993a, p. 105). His attempt to whistle cheerily, only to be betrayed by tears, recalls Milton's vision of Adam and Eve leaving Eden in grief, sustained only by enduring providence. But Moore's exile happens gradually, unfolding in stages. First comes social exile: Moore isolates himself from workers, neighbours, and kin, earning only suspicion and resentment, rendering him “one of the most unpopular” of the mill-owners (Brontë, 1993a, p. 52). Next comes economic exile: the mill is attacked, “now a mere blot of desolation ... the mill yawned ruinous with unglazed frames,” and he is left stripped of the mastery he claimed (Brontë, 1993a, p. 260). Finally comes bodily exile: Moore is shot and left near death, his body broken and his vigour ruined, “the tall straight shape prostrated in its pride across the road ... laid low in the dust ... pallid, lifeless, helpless” (Brontë, 1993a, p. 417). Moore's fall is narrated in Miltonic idiom: pride struck down, the strong laid low, the body broken. The trajectory recalls Adam and Eve after the Fall, suddenly conscious of their exposure, “naked left / To guilty shame;” the once-divine figures reduced to frailty and disgrace (Milton, IX.1057-1058, p. 344). Moore's Fall is made more poignant by these accumulating stages of exile. His social exile leaves only Mr. Yorke there to care for him, the “utter dependence of this speechless, bleeding youth” resting solely on Mr. Yorke's “benevolence” (Brontë, 1993a, p. 418). The proud master of the mill, who earlier dismissed Farren with harshness, now lies speechless and dependent, his survival hanging on the charity of one neighbour. It is the opposite of mastery: exile into vulnerability, a man “prostrated in his pride.” Moore's exile is Adam's guilty shame replayed in industrial Yorkshire—stripped of mastery and chastened into humility, he is made capable of reconciliation only by being laid low. Like Rochester blinded at Ferndean, Moore's suffering humbles him, forcing him into dependence and new bonds. His Fall is Miltonic in form: error leads into exile, exile strips away pride, and only through that diminishment can covenant be reimagined.⁸²

⁸² The parallel of Rochester's and Moore's respective ruins also recalls Milton's *Samson Agonistes*, where bodily mutilation becomes the crucible of spiritual recognition: “Eyeless in Gaza, at the mill with slaves, / Himself in bonds under Philistian yoke” (Milton, 1997e, 41-42).

Temptation in Brontë is first and last a matter of speech. Like Milton, she shows how rhetoric tempts: passion, piety, propriety, progress, and pragmatism all speak in the serpent's voice. In *Jane Eyre*, the drama is concentrated. Rochester's eloquence tempts by romance and concealment, St. John's by vocation without love. Jane's resistance of both turns refusal into the ground of autonomy—but only because Bertha has been silenced into the role of forbidden knowledge that structures Jane's trial. *Shirley* disperses the same Miltonic motifs across a whole parish. The mills roar like a local apocalypse; the drawing room becomes an altar of quiet internal persuasion. Moore is tempted by progress and tempts others with the "tyrant's plea" of economic inevitability, his courtship rehearsing the same bargain as his frames and shears—prosperity at the price of parity (Milton, IV.394, p. 147). Across both novels, Brontë domesticates the epic: the fruit is succumbence, and the testing ground is as much a proposal, a sermon, or a balance sheet as a garden. In this transposition, Milton's cosmic drama becomes Brontë's Gothic ordeal, where the stakes of heaven and hell are measured in the fragile terms of conscience and community.

COVENANT UNDER FIRE

Brontë magnifies Milton's Fall into Gothic ordeal and communal drama. Where Austen miniaturised Miltonic motifs into irony and epistemological missteps, Brontë intensifies them into temptation, crisis, and ruin. In *Jane Eyre*, error splinters across a spectrum of figures. Jane becomes a revisionist Eve: tempted by both passion and law, she resists, choosing exile rather than complicity. Her wilderness wandering reframes expulsion as a *felix exilium*, where solitude grants discernment rather than despair. Bertha Mason thus becomes her counterpart—denied reconciliation, she is cast as a colonial Eve and as Miltonic Chaos: silenced, racialised, and confined. Her fiery destruction of Thornfield is her most notable act of agency, an apocalyptic Fall that consumes both Edenic household and imperial order.

Jane Eyre may be the most Miltonic in its reconfiguration of *Paradise Lost*'s archetypes—its Gothic and domestic forms reconfigure Milton's characters into new moral and emotional trials. At the centre is Jane herself, Brontë's revisionary heroine. Like Eve, she reasons, debates, and asserts her independence; but unlike Eve, who finally yields to temptation, Jane refuses the Fall. Viewed through Miltonic archetypes, Jane emerges as a new Eve—imbued with experience, self-knowledge, and the ability to resist temptation, although still constrained within a patriarchal system that seeks her subservience. Like Milton's Eve, Jane is pressed to occupy a subordinate role. Others demand she be self-

sacrificing and silent, even when she is intellectually, morally, and eventually financially their equal. Jane's assertion of independence recalls Eve's desire to separate from Adam, but with a revisionary twist—her exercise of free will does not culminate in a Fall. When St. John attempts to bind Jane into a loveless missionary marriage, Jane resists: "It was *my* time to assume ascendancy. *My* powers were in play, and in force" (Brontë, 1999, p. 372, emphasis in original). Brontë's italicisation of *my* doubly emphasises selfhood at the very point St. John demands its erasure. The typography once again does theological work—her autonomy is not an accident of circumstance, but a force consciously owned, her individuality sanctified. This revisionary emphasis sets Jane apart from Milton's Eve, whose assertion of independence ends in temptation and loss. Jane's *my* marks the opposite trajectory—individuality inscribed, not effaced.

Jane's insistence on selfhood carries through her encounters with Rochester. When he attempts to bind her into a bigamous marriage, she recognises the temptation as eloquent but false, and she refuses: "Mr. Rochester was not to me what he had been; for he was not what I had thought him ... and from his presence I must go; that I perceived well" (Brontë, 1999, p. 261). Jane's perception gives her an epistemological advantage to Milton's Eve. Brontë grants Jane what Milton withholds—the ability to not only perceive, but "perceive well," temptation before transgressing. Unlike Eve, who only fleetingly doubts Satan's deception, Jane perceives truly in advance—recognising Rochester as "not what [she] had thought him," and withdrawing before the Fall (Brontë, 1999, p. 261). Brontë transforms perception into a moral faculty, rewriting Milton's belated vision of guilt into a foresight that secures resistance. Jane's exile after leaving Rochester mirrors Eve's expulsion from Eden, but again, with a revision—Jane departs not from punishment, but as proof of her refusal. Her exile is transformed into an escape, recasting Eve's error as Jane's integrity.

Brontë's retelling of the Fall is both more sympathetic to Eve and more radical in its consequences. For Jane, temptation does not culminate in inevitable error but in a struggle of conscience where knowledge, principle, and autonomy alter the outcome. The aborted wedding at Thornfield is her Edenic crisis—her moment with the forbidden fruit—when joy and fulfilment suddenly reveal corruption. Yet while Milton's Eve succumbs, Jane resists—instead of reasoning herself into compliance, she reasons into refusal. Rochester presses Jane with a plea that sounds like Satan's sophistry: "Is it better to drive a fellow-creature to despair than to transgress a mere human law?" (Brontë, 1999, p. 280). Brontë sets Jane's refusal against this Satanic rhetoric, showing her conscience strained but not seduced:

‘Think of his misery; think of his danger ... remember his headlong nature; consider the recklessness following on despair—soothe him; save him; love him; tell him you love him and will be his. Who in the world cares for *you*? ... [but] *I* care for myself ... Laws and principles are not for the times when there is no temptation: they are for such moments as this, when body and soul rise in mutiny against their rigour ... (Brontë, 1999, p. 280)

Brontë dramatises the temptation as dialogue within Jane’s own conscience—first in the pleading echo of Rochester’s words, then in the self-assertion that refuses them. Here, rhetoric is pitched like a courtroom plea and passion is strained through legal and theological idioms: this is Brontë at her most Miltonic. Jane calls herself to the stand, feeling as though Rochester’s words had “charged me with crime in resisting him” (Brontë, 1999, p. 280). Jane’s words are not a private lament but a closing argument. She casts herself as both advocate and defendant, “*I* care for myself” opens not in selfishness but as the first line of a plea for dignity. Her repeated vocabulary of “law,” “principles,” “sanctioned,” and “inviolable,” turns conscience into a courtroom where passion is acknowledged only to be restrained by precedent and principle. The structure again recalls Milton’s juridical scenes—but where Milton’s epic imagines cosmic law, Jane uses the same idiom in the domestic sphere, treating her desire for Rochester as “madness” to be contained by “foregone determinations,” as though citing case law against temptation. She then pronounces her verdict, “there I plant my foot,” she declares, rendering her decision in the form of irrevocable action. The trial produces not paralysis but resolution, a verdict whose authority binds the narrative as firmly as a judge’s decree (Brontë, 1999, p. 280). Brontë renders interiority as trial, complete with self-arraignment, weighed arguments, and pronounced verdicts. Like Eve, Jane’s speech becomes an act of autonomy, a counter-exegesis that transforms Eve’s curiosity—condemned in *Paradise Lost* as sin—into a virtue of moral discernment. The very structure of Miltonic reasoning in Satan’s temptation and Eve’s soliloquy is preserved—a voice testing the law, a voice answering back—but the conclusion is reversed. Jane reasons herself not into transgression but into autonomy, not into the Fall but into chosen exile. Where Eve bends law into doubt, Jane insists that law has its worth precisely in the moment of her greatest temptation. Set alongside Adam, who prefers companionship in error to obedience in solitude, her refusal of solidarity with Rochester’s transgression shows her allegiance is not to a fallen partner but to her own conscience. Where Adam embraces exile as punishment shared, Jane transforms it into the *felix exilium* of resistance chosen.

Her departure from Thornfield replays Eden's expulsion in structurally Miltonic terms. Adam and Eve leave paradise "hand in hand with wandering steps and slow," (Milton, XII.648, p. 494). Jane, by contrast, leaves alone, the threshold scene stretched into a night-long ordeals of farewells, locked doors, and suppressed passion: "'Farewell!' was the cry of my heart as I left him. Despair added, 'Farewell for ever!'" (Brontë, 1999, p. 282). The authority that directs her expulsion, "My daughter, flee temptation," is Jane's dead mother—not Milton's patriarchal angels, but a maternal apparition. Conscience speaks in a female voice, transposed into dream-vision, and Jane obeys it not as an imposed command but as an inwardly ratified truth. Yet the image also plays into the Victorian ideal of woman as "angel in the house," here, quite literally, an angelic female presence who preserves moral law (Woolf, 1995, pp. 237-238). Brontë bends that ideology in a different direction—the maternal angel safeguards not Rochester's virtue but Jane's autonomy, instructing her to leave even at the cost of her beloved's despair. The drama is staged as both Gothic and Miltonic. Where Milton's Eve is driven out by divine commands, Jane interprets and enacts her own expulsion. She recalls the temptation to return, "There was a heaven—a temporary heaven—in this room for me, if I chose: I had but to go in and to say—'Mr. Rochester, I will love you and live with you through life till death'," and admits her longing "to be his; I panted to return: it was not too late" (Brontë, 1999, p. 283). Yet she restrains herself, whispering private farewells to Mrs. Fairfax and Adèle, gathering a few coins and clothes, and slipping out into the darkness.

Her flight culminates in collapse: "A weakness, beginning inwardly, extending to the limbs, seized me, and I fell: I lay on the ground some minutes, pressing my face to the wet turf" (Brontë, 1999, p. 284). The scene recalls Milton's *felix culpa*, the Fall as both agony and beginning—but Brontë refigures it as a *felix exilium*, the chosen exile through which Jane perseveres to preserve her selfhood. The narrative renders her choice in Miltonic imagery of wilderness and exile. The "dim dawn" and the "awful blank ... like the world when the deluge was gone by" give her departure cosmic resonance, as though like Adam and Eve she were not merely leaving Thornfield but entering history itself (Brontë, 1999, p. 284). The image is biblical, recalling Genesis after the Flood, yet Brontë's phrasing also resonates with Milton's cosmic prophetic panorama in Michael's visions (Genesis 9:11). He shows Adam the devastations of their sin, but also the promise of redemption; exile becomes the space where covenant is remade (Milton, XI.472, p. 422). Jane's "awful blank" works in the same prophetic key: the emptiness is terrifying precisely because it holds the potential of a new

beginning. Brontë refigures exile as both judgement and possibility, ruin and renewal, the threshold where a true covenant might be founded.

In *Jane Eyre*, reconciliation comes in the form of a true covenant.⁸³ Once an Eden-like place, Thornfield has been reduced to desolation following Jane's discovery of Bertha. However, unlike the loss of Eden for Adam and Eve (or perhaps, exactly like it, when read as the *felix culpa*) this destruction leads to more happiness for Jane and Rochester. In *Paradise Lost*, Milton stages the *felix culpa* through Michael's vision of salvation history: expulsion is disaster and gift, sin and providential opportunity intertwined. When the *felix culpa* is applied to Thornfield, the ruin ceases to be merely Gothic punishment and becomes a necessary burning-down so that a new form of covenant can emerge. What it inaugurates is not simply a covenant of equality in the modern sense, but something closer to covenant in the biblical sense: a true covenant; a vow remade after betrayal and loss, grounded in humility and mutual need.⁸⁴ In this she departs from Milton's hierarchical reconciliation, offering instead a model of restoration that looks less like a return to Edenic innocence than the renewal of a bond once broken. Rochester is no longer the Byronic master who names and tempts; Jane no longer the dependent governess or fairy-object. Both are chastened—he through blindness and diminishment, she through wandering and discovery of independence. What emerges at Ferndean is not an un-shadowed partnership of equals, but a covenantal bond in which each depends on the other and each chooses freely to remain. Brontë thus revises Milton not by abolishing hierarchy into flat parity, but by reimagining reconciliation as covenant stripped of domination and grounded instead in mutual need and consent.

The covenantal union for Jane and Rochester is possible only after his Fall and her insistence on truth over illusion. Upon Jane's arrival to Ferndean, Rochester initially lapses into the same supernatural idiom that once objectified Jane, calling her "You mocking changeling—fairy-born and human-bred," doubting even her substantiality (Brontë, 1999, p.

⁸³ In his *Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* (1643) Milton advances the radical claim that marriage without mutual love and intellectual companionship is a kind of bondage. He argues for the right to dissolve such unions on the grounds of "unfitness, or contrariety of the mind," so that individuals might seek a stronger covenant founded on true spiritual and emotional equity (Milton, 1997b, I.3).

⁸⁴ "Thy time *was* the time of love ... I sware unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord God, and thou becamest mine ... I will deal with thee as thou hast done, which hast despised the oath in breaking the covenant. Nevertheless I will remember my covenant with thee ... and I will establish unto thee an everlasting covenant." (Ezekiel 16:8, 59-62). These verses depict Jerusalem as an unfaithful spouse who has broken God's covenant. God recalls both the vow of love that inaugurated the covenant and the betrayal of its oath—theologically, this frames covenant not as static law but as a vow remade through rupture, forgiveness, and restoration. Brontë's Ferndean resonates with this paradigm: Jane and Rochester's bond is not a return to untouched innocence but a covenantal renewal, forged through fire, exile, and humility. In this context, biblical order itself is destabilised: where God forgives fallen humanity, in Brontë's retelling, the woman assumes this authority of restoration.

388). Yet Brontë scripts this relapse as the moment of transformation. Jane refuses to be confined to the role of vision: she counters with humour, bluntness, and domestic imagery. She teases his appearance (“Very, sir: you always were [hideous], you know”), demands a comb for his hair, and promises him eggs and ham at breakfast (Brontë, 1999, p. 388). Through this banter she reasserts herself as embodied, ordinary, and undeniable: “you will cease to entertain doubts of my substantiality” (Brontë, 1999, p. 388). Rochester’s fairy language is undercut by her playful realism until, the next morning, his question is simply, “Is Miss Eyre here?” (Brontë, 1999, p. 388). The covenant that follows depends on this demystification. Jane will not be imagined into existence; she narrates herself into the scene as Jane, not elf or changeling. Their reconciliation becomes true covenant precisely because it is forged in this transition—from fantasy to recognition, from objectification to truthful presence.

It is important to note that Jane’s return to Rochester is her own free choice—she is economically independent and has found emotional support through her discovered family at Moor House. Her choice to follow her passion—what once threatened to undo her—now becomes the ground of renewal, leading to salvation for both herself and Rochester. When Jane recounts her reunion and marriage to Rochester, she declares:

I hold myself supremely blest—blest beyond what language can express; because I am my husband's life as fully as he is mine. No woman was ever nearer to her mate than I am: ever more absolutely bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh ... To be together is for us to be at once as free as in solitude, as gay as in company.
(Brontë, 1999, p. 399)

In declaring that she is “bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh,” Jane draws on Genesis, where Adam names Eve as derivative of himself:

This *is* now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.
(Genesis 2:23, emphasis in original)

Milton preserves this hierarchy when Adam proclaims of Eve:

Bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh, myself
Before me: Woman is her name; of Man
Extracted: for this cause he shall forgo
Father and mother, and to his wife adhere;
And they shall be one flesh, one heart, one soul.
(Milton, IX.914-915, p. 301)

Brontë inverts the Adamic pattern—Jane speaks the words herself, not to mark subordination but to affirm a bond freely chosen. She claims her own voice in articulating the covenant, remaking the biblical vow as an act of renewal rather than possession. As a new Eve, Jane has the intelligence, experience, and means to choose this covenant. The temptation that once threatened catastrophe is now embraced on her own terms, transformed by the knowledge she has gained through exile. In her first engagement, ignorance of Bertha nearly precipitated disaster; armed with knowledge, Jane avoids collapse and returns only when she can narrate the bonds as truth. Eve is never afforded this such foreknowledge: she falls because knowledge is withheld; the source of her temptation being the very thing that leaves her decision fatally unprepared. Brontë's Jane is revisionary—instead of requiring the Fall as the gateway to renewal, she imagines a covenant secured by knowledge, humility, and choice—a true covenant in which restoration arises not from submission but from truth.⁸⁵

Jane's temptation by Rochester is inseparable from Bertha Mason. Rochester's Byronic eloquence flatters Jane's longing for equality, but it is grounded in concealment: Bertha, his living wife, is hidden away on Thornfield's third story. The knowledge of Bertha is the forbidden fruit at the centre of Jane's trial: to accept Rochester's proposal without that knowledge would be to Fall as Eve through ignorance; to continue after the revelation, an Adamic Fall of conscious transgression. In either case, Jane's union with Rochester at this point in the narrative repeats the Fall. Rochester's rhetoric heightens this bind. He presses biblical authority into his temptation, paraphrasing "judge not, that ye be not judged, as if scripture itself sanctions his concealment."⁸⁶ Rochester's passion is eloquent but duplicitous, like Satan's "glozing" promise of "dauntless virtue" (Milton, III.93, IX.694, pp. 92, 332).

⁸⁵ The union at Ferndean cannot be read as wholly equitable. Under Victorian marriage law, Jane still legally subsumes her identity under Rochester's as *feme covert*, her property and rights absorbed into his (Doggett, 1993, p. 86). Critics like Gilbert and Gubar famously read Rochester's blindness as symbolic castration that reverses hierarchy, allowing Jane to assume dominance (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000, p. 272). Others like Armstrong emphasise how the "good marriage concluding fiction" of the nineteenth century functioned ideologically, resolving deep social conflicts by enclosing them in the domestic sphere (Armstrong, 1987, p. 65). As Armstrong notes, such endings turned the household into "the 'counterimage' of the modern marketplace, an apolitical realm of culture within the culture as a whole" (Armstrong, 1987, p. 65). Brontë's Ferndean participates in this cultural pattern: reconciliation is narrated as covenantal renewal but is also contains and obscures the inequities—gendered, colonial, and legal—that the novel had laid bare.

⁸⁶ "Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye." (Matthew 7:1-5). Rochester paraphrases, "judge me, priest of the gospel and man of the law, and remember with what judgment ye judge shall be judged" (Brontë, 1999, p. 259).

Jane's resistance, then, is Brontë's Miltonic revision: a refusal that converts temptation into the ground of autonomy. This revision, however, depends on Bertha's exclusion. Jane's temptation can be staged as a drama of choice only because Bertha has been silenced, hidden on the third floor as the secret knowledge that defines the trial. As Patricia Akhimie argues in *Shakespeare and the Cultivation of Difference*, early modern ideas of "cultivation," or self-improvement, were tied to racial thinking (Akhimie, 2018, p. 5). While society claimed anyone could refine themselves, it simultaneously marked certain bodies as incapable of improvement. The contrast between Brontë and Milton's Eves is sharpened here—Jane is allowed to resist and recover. But for Bertha, that autonomy is denied through her framing as uncultivable: faced with death or a return to the prison her husband has constructed for her, her only moment of self-determination is her fatal leap from Thornfield's roof. Reading Bertha through Akhimie's concept of cultivation clarifies how Brontë naturalises racial hierarchy through moral discourse, revealing how racial difference emerges not solely through phenotype but through judgements about governability and refinement and positioning Bertha as a body incapable of Victorian self-regulation. If Jane is granted a Miltonic pilgrimage—temptation, exile, and return—Bertha is left without the same resources of knowledge and narration.

Bertha's arc is instead overwritten by Rochester's rhetoric, which frames her very otherness as her error. His narration casts Thornfield in Miltonic hues: "this accursed place—this tent of Achan—this narrow stone hell ... with its one real fiend, worse than a legion" (Brontë, 1999, p. 265). The allusion to Achan recalls the Israelite whose concealed sin brought destruction for his people, "for Achan ... took of the accursed thing: and the anger of the Lord was kindled against the children of Israel" (Joshua 7:1). By branding Thornfield the "accursed place," Rochester cloaks personal transgression in biblical register, transforming the house into the bearer of sin (Brontë, 1999, p. 265). Brontë's diction here recalls the Miltonic language of doom—Thornfield becomes an "abominable, accursed, the house of woe" in miniature (Milton, X.465, p. 370). Like Satan, who remakes his surroundings as Hell because "Myself am Hell," Rochester remakes his surroundings as cursed to displace his guilt (Milton, IV.75, 135). Thornfield thus appears as Pandemonium, a false Eden whose corruption Rochester projects onto Bertha. The curse he pronounces proves self-fulfilling: the house burns not because Bertha is a "fiend," but because Rochester's rhetoric has already marked it for ruin. Within his narrative her difference becomes pathology, her sexuality madness—"intemperate and unchaste"—and her resistance as violence, "haunted" by a "fiend worse than a legion of such as we imagine" (Brontë, 1999, pp. 265, 270). His

description of Bertha as “an inmate” resonates with the Victorian carceral system of institutionalising “fallen women” in rescue homes, Magdalen institutions, and workhouses for reform (Romero Ruiz, 2010, p. 145). Bertha’s otherness is rewritten as criminality—she becomes the postlapsarian Eve punished not for an act of choice but for a state of being.

Yet Rochester’s narration of Bertha betrays his own temptation. He admits he could have lodged her at Ferndean, where “damp walls would soon have eased me of her charge,” but spares himself the crime of “indirect assassination” (Brontë, 1999, p. 265). As Gilbert and Gubar observe, this rhetoric allows him to present himself as a victim while turning her resistance into monstrous violence (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000, p. 360). This is moral theatre—he imagines Bertha’s death not as unthinkable but as temptingly convenient, then dismissed in a flourish of conscience. The self-congratulatory staging recalls Satan’s soliloquy in *Paradise Lost*, where he briefly contemplates repentance only to dismiss it with the bleak farewell (Milton, IV.79-80, 105-110, pp. 135-136). Like Satan, Rochester rehearses repentance only to transform it into a self-exonerating scene. He dramatises his self-image as Adamic—tempted yet unfallen—while Bertha is condemned as both cause and embodiment of the Fall. His speech is also a temptation to Jane, who must resist believing his deception and entering a bigamous marriage. In Miltonic terms, Rochester embodies Satan’s role even as he claims Adam’s—but in narrating Bertha as the fiend, he makes her both Eve and Satan at once: the temptation and the Fall, the rebel and the ruin. Bertha’s silenced arc exposes the limits of Brontë’s revision: one woman is allowed to err and recover, the other is shackled as prelapsarian, cast as postlapsarian, and condemned without the possibility of choice.

Gilbert and Gubar now-canonically designate Bertha Mason as the “Madwoman in the Attic” (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000, pp. 339-340). They cast her as Jane’s “mad double,” the embodiment of repressed rage and female anger (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000, p. 368). If Gilbert and Gubar cast her as Jane’s mad double, this Miltonic frame recasts her less as a fallen Eve than as Chaos itself—the great uncontainable. Milton describes Chaos as “Of neither sea, nor shore, nor air, nor fire, / But all these in their pregnant causes mixed / Confusedly” (Milton, II.912-914, p. 79). This description maps uncannily onto Bertha’s role. She is not easily categorised, existing as wife yet not partner, human yet described in monstrous, animalistic terms, and present yet hidden and silenced. Like Chaos, she is “pregnant” with possibility and destruction, the force that unmakes order. Her fire reduces Thornfield to rubble, mirroring the perpetual battle Chaos “must ever fight” (Milton, II.914, p. 79). She exists in a liminal space—the “third storey” of Thornfield, neither part of the household’s ordered space below nor open to the world above (Brontë, 1999, p. 258). This positioning recalls Milton’s

geography of Chaos, “the vast abrupt” between heaven and hell, the unstable expanse Satan must cross, seething with elemental strife (Milton, II.409, p. 62). Brontë relocates that abyssal space into the architecture of the English country house. Bertha’s chamber becomes a space sealed off yet always threatening eruption—each of her escapes brings Chaos down into the house: tearing the veil, setting Rochester’s bed aflame, and finally burning Thornfield to the ground. Like Milton’s Chaos, Bertha must be kept apart to preserve Eden’s illusion. Milton situates Chaos outside heaven and Eden’s “verdurous wall” of trees, where its perpetual battle cannot contaminate paradise (Milton, IV.142, p. 137). Brontë inverts Miltonic architecture, bringing the outside inside: the third floor becomes Miltonic Chaos domesticated, a reminder that Eden is never secure when disorder is housed above it.⁸⁷ Rochester’s narration of Bertha further reinforces her framing as Chaos—he describes her as “wholly alien,” “her tastes obnoxious,” and “her cast of mind common, low, narrow, and singularly incapable of being led to anything higher” (Brontë 1999, p. 270). His diatribe fuses misogyny with racism—Bertha’s Creole identity becomes evidence of madness, her difference pathologised into disorder. As Moya Bailey notes in *Misogynoir Transformed*, there is a specific intersection of anti-racism and misogyny, which she describes as “the uniquely co-constitutive racialised and sexist violence that befalls Black women as a result of their simultaneous and interlocking oppression at the intersection of racial and gender marginalisation” (Bailey, 2021, p. 1). Bailey’s term “misogynoir” in the context of *Jane Eyre* describes Bertha’s representation—racialised femininity perceived as excessive, dangerous, and sexually uncontrolled—participating in a longer cultural logic that misogynoir helps to name (Bailey, 2021, p. 1). Bailey’s concept of misogynoir clarifies how Bertha’s violence and sexuality are framed not merely as madness but as a gendered racial threat produced through Rochester’s authority to narrate and interpret her body, aligning her with cultural stereotypes historically imposed upon racialised women (Bailey, 2021, p. 3). Thus, in Rochester’s racialised and gendered rhetoric, Bertha becomes Chaos domesticated—a wife who is no wife, a woman figured as monstrous, a colonially racialised and gendered other forced to embody uncontrollable disorder.

⁸⁷ Jane herself explicitly evokes Charles Perrault’s *Bluebeard* (1697) during her first tour of Thornfield, noting the third floor looks “like a corridor in some Bluebeard’s castle” (Brontë, 1999, p. 94). As critics have noted, the Bluebeard myth—a story of a man who preys on his wives, hiding his truth behind a forbidden chamber—becomes a recurring Gothic shorthand for patriarchal authority and its hidden violences (Tatar, 2017, p. 238; Warner, 1995, p. 265). Brontë’s use of the trope situates Bertha’s locked third story both within Gothic genre convention and within a Miltonic archetype; the Gothic forbidden room as the domestic analogue to Milton’s Chaos. Brontë slyly inverts the Gothic convention to have a Miltonic slant of Satanic rhetoric—Bertha’s Gothic chamber functions less as prohibition than misdirection; Rochester does not forbid Jane entry, but instead deceives her by concealing Bertha’s presence within.

If Bertha's confinement makes her the Gothic analogue of Miltonic Chaos, it also exposes the imperial foundations of Brontë's domestic Eden. Recent historical work further complicates readings of Bertha as purely symbolic. As Keshia N. Abraham and John Woolf demonstrate in *Black Victorians: Hidden in History*, Black presence in nineteenth-century Britain was neither marginal nor exceptional but woven into the social and cultural fabric of Victorian life (Abraham and Woolf, 2022, pp. 24-31). They further note that "white Victorians more generally became aware of their own racial identity in an evolving 'racial Anglo-Saxonism' that assumed moral, intellectual, and racial superiority" (Abraham and Woolf, 2002, p. 29). Bertha's racialisation therefore does not emerge from imaginative excess alone but reflects contemporary efforts to manage imperial proximity within the domestic sphere. Thornfield's attic becomes not simply a Gothic abstraction but a spatial response to an empire whose subjects were already present within Britain itself. Rochester's rhetoric does more than vilify his wife and position her as Miltonic Chaos—it reproduces wider structures that silenced women and racialised colonial difference. His account of Bertha echoes nineteenth-century discourses that medicalised female disobedience and otherness as hysteria and the legal doctrine of coverture, under which a wife's legal and economic rights were subsumed into her husband's (Showalter, 1985, pp. 55-64; Stretton and Kesselring, 2013, pp. 1-5, 15-22). His rhetoric also resonates with Poovey's paradigm of the "Proper Lady" whose passivity and relational identity defined female "nature" (Poovey, 1984, p. x). While Jane can negotiate this paradigm—eventually revising it into moral authority—Bertha is excluded from it altogether. Her "alien" status, as marked by Rochester, marks her incapable of being a "proper lady;" her difference written as monstrosity (Brontë, 1999, p. 270; Poovey, 1984, pp. 35-38, 52-53). If Jane is Brontë's revisionary Eve, Bertha in this way becomes her colonial double. She occupies the role of Eve blamed for ruin, yet her position is more radical; she is denied even the dignity of temptation. Milton's Eve debates, reasons, and speaks; Bertha is silent, her only words incoherent shrieks and "wolfish cries" (Brontë, 1999, p. 272). Rochester describes her cries in Miltonic terms, as "the sounds of the bottomless pit! ... This life is hell."⁸⁸ Gayatri Spivak highlights how this hellish register fuses with imperial ideology: "Through Bertha Mason, the white Jamaican Creole, Brontë renders the

⁸⁸ Initially, "bottomless pit" comes from the biblical book of Revelation: "I saw an angel ... cast [Satan] into the bottomless pit, shut him up, and set a seal upon him" (Brontë, 199, p. 272; Revelation 9:1-2, 20:1-3). Milton amplifies this imagery in *Paradise Lost*, where Chaos and Hell are repeatedly described in "bottomless" terms (Milton, I.46, VI.866, pp. 6, 247). He populates this "unbottom'd" pit with demonic cries and endless strife (Milton, I.52-56, II.405, pp. 7, 62). Rochester's rhetoric borrows the Miltonic register, casting Bertha as a both a shrieking demon and Miltonic Chaos, the abyss intruding into the domestic space.

human/animal frontier as acceptably indeterminate, so that a good greater than the letter of the Law can be broached” (Spivak, 1985, p. 247). Bertha is thus produced by what Spivak calls “imperialist axiomatics,” her body inscribed as the site where law collapses into conquest (Spivak, 1985, p. 248). Rochester reads her difference as bestiality, while the narrative makes her silence the necessary ground for Jane’s voice. Bertha’s figure unites Brontë’s Miltonic and imperial inheritances: she is the Chaos within the household and the colonial other, a shackled Eve who is never granted the chance of independence. Eve in *Paradise Lost* asserts her will when she separates from Adam, and in her postlapsarian state recognises that inequality itself is a form of bondage, “For, inferior, who is free?” (Milton, IX.825, p. 337). Bertha’s position makes that bondage literal: shackled through marriage, transported across the empire, and locked away on the third floor of Thornfield. Unlike Eve, she has no freedom, even to err. Her only act of self-determination is her final one—burning Thornfield and casting herself from the roof—suicide as the sole escape from enforced subordination.

The exclusions—Bertha’s fiery death and St. John’s missionary work—are stark in this light. Bertha’s destruction secures the conditions for Ferndean but denies her any possibility of reconciliation, exposing the colonial and marital violence that underwrites the covenant. If Jane’s exile is chosen, Rochester’s chastened, and St. John’s eschatological, Bertha’s is catastrophic—obliterating the household Eden and consuming her with it. Already locked in perpetual exile without voice or agency, she enacts her Fall not by reasoning or vocation but by fire; her destruction recalling Milton’s most catastrophic exile—Satan hurled into “bottomless perdition” (Milton, I.47, p. 6). Her fiery leap is less a passage into providence than a terminal Fall. She is at once Miltonic Eve denied restoration and without the promise of providence, and the Miltonic Chaos as the realm outside that providence, the abyss without renewal. She marks the outer limit of Brontë’s redemptive pattern: the reminder that some errors end not in covenant or prophecy but in final obliteration, their Fall an ending without return. Bertha’s obliterating Fall marks the end of Brontë’s Miltonic spectrum: error without redemption, exile without return.

Across these figures Brontë retains Milton’s sequence of Fall and expulsion, but she multiplies its registers. Jane’s free exile and Bertha’s obliterating fire dramatise how error tips into exile, and how exile becomes the crucible in which error is tested and transformed. For Milton, expulsion from Eden was punishment tempered by recognition; for Brontë, exile is paradox—ruin that enables covenant, wilderness that births autonomy, and sometimes the only remaining ground on which solidarity or freedom can take root.

A FRACTURED EVE

Shirley expands the sphere of temptation outward: what is tested in marriage proposals and personal conscience in *Jane Eyre* becomes, in the industrial novel, a struggle written across mills, estates, and communities. Industrial unrest and gendered expectation become the serpents that whisper in many ears at once. The result is pluralised temptations: multiple Eves (Shirley and Caroline), multiple tempters (economic panic, paternalist authority, and reformist rhetoric), and several fruits (compromise without conviction, marriage without love, and progress without structural change). These temptations are not confined to the private sphere: they reverberate outward, inscribed onto the very landscape of Yorkshire. Brontë's descriptive passages heighten this Miltonic resonance. Pastoral fields and woodlands, initially depicted with Edenic calm, become sites of violence and fear as workers sabotage mills and resist authority (Brontë, 1993a, pp. 287, 481). Industrialisation itself is figured as a Miltonic force of temptation—the landscape serving as temptation objectified. The temptation Milton staged in Eden resurfaces in the Yorkshire countryside: fields that first appear pastoral now resound with the “thundering mill and its rushing watercourse,” the roar akin to the “the sulphurous hail ... and the thunder” of Milton's storm of judgement (Brontë, 1993a, p. 78; Milton, I.169-175, p. 12). The industrial soundscape takes on Milton's apocalyptic register—the thunder of machinery tempts characters to hear inevitability in its “clang” and “clamour,” as though progress were as irresistible as divine judgement (Brontë, 1993a, p. 25). Yet Brontë complicates this demonisation by portraying the workers' desperation sympathetically. The Miltonic parallel allows her to question not only the morality of rebellion but also the justice of the system that provokes it—just as Milton's Satan can be read both as villain and tragic rebel (Forsyth, 2002, p. 18).

Milton's legacy is thus not singular but refracted: Brontë invokes his archetypes while translating them into the terms of female selfhood, industrial capitalism, and social authority. Shirley Keeldar, the novel's eponymous heroine, embodies the rebellious Eve. She speaks with the articulate confidence of Milton's prelapsarian Eve—inquisitive, desirous of intellectual freedom, and unwilling to accept patriarchal readings of female subordination. Brontë endows her with visionary scenes of near-Edenic delight, where the world itself seems newly created for her: “The still parlour, the clean hearth, the window opening on the twilight sky ... suffice to make earth an Eden, life a poem, for Shirley” (Brontë, 1993a, p. 290). The Eden is hers alone—fashioned through imagination rather than male or divine authority. Her

wit further underscores her independence, as in an exchange when she ridicules the prospect of marrying Sir Philip Nunnely:

[Shirley:] ‘Suitability of age.’ We were born in the same year; consequently he is still a boy, while I am a woman—ten years his senior to all intents and purposes ...
 ‘Contrast of temper.’ Mild and amiable is he; I—what? Tell me.
 [Louis:] Sister of the spotted, bright, quick, fiery leopard.
 [Shirley:] ‘And you would mate me with a kid— ... being yet, indeed, an archangel high in the seventh heaven, uncommissioned to descend? Unjust barbarian!
 ‘Harmony of intellectual taste.’ He is fond of poetry, and I hate it ...
 (Brontë, 1993a, pp. 460-461)

Shirley is indeed not the tame, pastoral Eve: she is the sister of the leopard—wild, quick, dangerous—coded as unmanageable and predatory. Her quick wit enables her to escalate the imagery in the catalogue of marital compatibility. First, she builds on her position as a predator to jab at the social logic that would treat her as tameable and Sir Philip, as a baby goat, an appropriate suitor—she does not wish to prematurely hasten the utopia of that “millennium.”⁸⁹ She then shifts registers into a Miltonic echo: Milton’s angels descend only by commission, bearing divine sanction, but Shirley fashions herself as archangelic—too exalted to warrant such humiliating condescension. Finally, she undercuts the whole edifice with parodic deflation with her blunt, almost childish proclamation of hating poetry—heightening rather than lessening the cosmic scale of her prior self-casting. This rhythm of elevation and deflation recalls Milton’s epic style, where the high idiom of celestial rebellion is continually tethered to the mundane: Pandemonium “rose like an exhalation ... Built like a temple” only for the fallen angels to be reduced moments later to bees: “thick swarm’d, both on the ground and in the air / Brushed with the hiss of rustling wings, as bees / In spring time.” (Milton I.711-713, 767-769, pp. 42-43). The sublime palace collapses into the image of insects, epic grandeur deflated into pastoral naturalism—a comic recoil Brontë echoes

⁸⁹ Here, Shirley refers directly to the utopia described in the biblical book of Isaiah: “The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid” (Isaiah 11:6). Milton refers to this in his description of Eden: “Sporting the lion ramped, and his paw / Dandled the kid” (Milton, IV.333-334, pp. 145-146). By rejecting the “kid” and claiming kinship with the leopard, Shirley can be read as refusing both versions: she will not be the passive Eve who accepts her place in either Eden not prophetic concord; she will not be domesticated into Isaiah’s millennium nor Milton’s Eden—she insists on remaining untamed, unruly, and disruptive to patriarchal order. Brontë ties this knot with Shirley’s eventual marriage—though she is reinscribed within the domestic framework of marriage, it is not like Sir Philip’s offer of genteel harmony. Her union with Louis redirects her wildness into a relationship that channels her rebellion into intellectual sparring and mutual recognition. While Shirley rejects the Edenic model of passive Eve, Brontë still writes her into marriage—suggesting that even rebellious Eves in the domestic novel are drawn back into the structures they resist, though on renegotiated terms.

when Shirley pivots from leopard and archangel to her blunt “I hate it” (Brontë, 1993a, p. 461).

Where Milton dramatises temptation on a cosmic scale, Brontë reconfigures temptation to fit the pressure of domesticity and social expectation. In this context, Shirley is not simply Milton’s Eve rewritten. She is also a revision of Eve, a figure who refuses to accept subordination as natural:

If men could see us as we really are, they would be a little amazed; but the cleverest, the acutest men are often under an illusion about women. They do not read them in a true light, they misapprehend them, both for good and evil. Their good woman is a queer thing, half doll, half angel; their bad woman almost always a fiend.
(Brontë, 1993a, p. 264)

Here, Brontë lets Shirley’s interior consciousness crystallise as a critique. She diagnoses the gap between women’s lived interiority and the reductive categories imposed upon them: angel or fiend, doll or demon. Gilbert and Gubar would identify this same binary as the “angel in the house” versus the “madwoman in the attic,” roles into which women are forced rather than chosen (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000, p. 19). What they identify as a critical pattern, Brontë stages as lived frustration: Shirley recognises the caricatures and rejects them aloud. Her interior life becomes legible through this act of resistance, a refusal to be misread into silence. At times, this resistance takes the form of imagining herself in masculine roles: “Shirley Keeldar, Esquire, ought to be my style and title. They gave me a man’s name; I hold a man’s position. It is enough to inspire me with a touch of manhood ... really, I feel quite gentlemanlike” (Brontë, 1993a, p. 153). By styling herself as esquire, magistrate, even captain of yeomanry, she dramatises both her frustration with exclusion and her desire for authority (Brontë, 1993a, p. 153). These moments do not erase her femininity but translate her independence into the only vocabulary her culture associates with power. In Miltonic terms, Shirley recalls Eve’s moments of dialogue where she contests her prescribed role. Eve does not passively accept her inferiority. Instead, she presses Adam on why their happiness should depend on her constant proximity, and she argues for her own independence even when it puts her at risk (“How are we happy, still in fear of harm?”) (Milton, IX.205-405, pp. 317-323). Similarly, instead of leaving her discontent unspoken, Shirley voices it as critique—she resists caricature, styles herself “gentlemanlike,” and demands recognitions in the idioms of power. Both Eve and Shirley figure inferiority not as silent endurance but as a pressure that must find articulation in speech.

Shirley's temptations are not tawdry seductions but invitations to accept half-measures: to play "Lady Bountiful" while leaving masculine authority intact, to marry for stability rather than conviction, and to smooth over unrest without altering the structure that causes it (Brontë, 1993a, p. 139). Miltonic in structure, these temptations work by flattering reason into mistaking prudence for submission. In *Paradise Lost*, Satan flatters Eve's discernment, praising her beauty and wisdom as signs of judgement, only to redirect that judgement toward eating the fruit (Milton, IX.679-732, pp. 333-334). Admiration becomes the level of persuasion—her intelligence is not denied but co-opted, turned into the very means of her submission. In Brontë's novel, the same pattern recurs when social reasonableness tempts Shirley to accept compromise as prudence. Shirley's position as a wealthy landowner heightens her Miltonic resonance—in the Edenic structure of *Paradise Lost*, Eve is defined in relation to Adam and God; she has no independent claim to authority. Shirley, however, inherits land and capital, placing her in a position of quasi-Adamic power within her community. She becomes the steward of her own Eden, exercising authority over her staff and managing her own financial decisions. This inversion destabilises Milton's patriarchal model, where Adam's authority is naturalised. By giving her property and power in her own right, Brontë makes Shirley the kind of Eve who cannot be subdued by Adam's authority; yet that same independence reframes temptation in social and economic terms. Her trial is not whether she will yield to a husband's commands, but whether she will consent to play roles—benefactress, ornament, prudent wife—that preserve the very hierarchy her position unsettles. In this way, Shirley's status as landowner sharpens the Miltonic structure of temptation—the danger is not dramatic disobedience but quiet capitulation. That trial is staged in Robert Moore's proposal, where, as he later recounts, Shirley meets him not with submission but with wit and defiance:

Instead of a faltering sweet Yes, or maintaining a soft, confused silence ... [she] ejaculated, 'God bless me!' ... in that shocked, indignant, yet saddened accent. 'You have made a strange proposal ... You spoke like a brigand who demanded my purse rather than like a love who asked my heart' ... Her words were a mirror in which I saw myself. (Brontë, 1993a, p. 397)

In one fell swoop, she unmasks the economic coercion beneath the veneer of romance, forces Moore to acknowledge the corruption of his own rhetoric and refuses the role of a passive Eve who consents or submits by silence. In refusing him so directly, Shirley exposes the fragility of patriarchal control. This resistance is how Brontë renegotiates Milton's temptation motif for her rebellious Eve: Shirley embodies Eve's eloquence and curiosity but transforms

them into weapons of empowerment rather than causes of downfall. Her provocation—"Milton was great; but was he good?"—announces her status as a rebellious Eve, the woman who speaks back to the patriarchal exegete and insists on re-reading the script (Brontë, 1993a, p. 240).

In Miltonic terms, Shirley's rhetoric and self-casting align her with both Eve's eloquence and Satan's rebellious grandeur. In Romantic terms, the same qualities mark her as Byronic—she resists taming, scorches suitors with sarcasm, and revels in her own difference (Palfy, 2016, pp. 112-114). The "sister of the leopard" image pushes her toward Byron's predatory, untamed figures, and the "archangel high in the seventh heaven" moment recalls the Romantic hero's defiant self-placement against the cosmos. In Brontë's design, that Byronic posture is refracted through Eve's archetype. She is a hybrid figure—a rebellious Eve given Satan's rhetoric and Byronic temperament—dramatising how dangerous and magnetic female eloquence could appear within the domestic sphere. The tensions of her role as a rebellious Eve, Satanic rhetorician, Byronic heroine, and Victorian wife are what make her such a rich and contradictory Miltonic archetype: a rebellious Eve whose voice dares the epic scale but is finally bound within the marriage plot.

By contrast, Caroline Helstone embodies the restrained, dependent Eve, caught between submission and yearning for a larger existence. In *Shirley*, this ambivalence surfaces repeatedly. Caroline Helstone represents the postlapsarian Eve, defined by passivity, dependence, and the longing for relational wholeness. Caroline's story is less about intellectual independence than about survival within the constraints of a patriarchal order, echoing the vulnerable Eve whom Milton depicts at Adam's feet (Milton, X.942, p. 387). Brontë thus places her two heroines in dialogue, each rewriting different dimensions of Milton's archetype and together illuminating the contradictions at the heart of Victorian gender ideology.⁹⁰

Caroline is repeatedly described in language that emphasises fragility, obedience, and restraint. Early in the novel, she is described as "modest and unassuming" (Brontë, 1993a, p. 50). Hortense Moore, her "preceptress," describes her pupil with both faint praise and suspicion—Caroline is acceptable when "sufficiently girlish and submissive," but whether

⁹⁰ Ben Griffin identifies the political structures that underline "the fear that giving married women any kind of legal rights would cause discord in the home" in more detail in *The Politics of Gender in Victorian Britain* (Griffin, 2012, p. 37). Brontë's multiplication of Eve in *Shirley* stages precisely this contradiction: Shirley Keeldar embodies the disruptive possibility of female authority, while Caroline Helstone embodies the costs of dependence, together dramatising the tension between imagined domestic harmony and the realities of female subordination.

she shows flashes of impatience or passion, they are pathologised as signs of an “ill-regulated mind” in need of correction (Brontë, 1993a, pp. 50-51). Hortense recalls chiding Caroline for curling her lip at Racine and Corneille, and when she delights instead in Chénier’s *La Jeune Captive*, her enthusiasm is dismissed as evidence of “unsettled hurry” (Brontë, 1993a, p. 50). Hortense concludes, “I will give her a system, a method of thought, a set of opinions; I will give her the perfect control and guidance of her feelings” (Brontë, 1993a, p. 51). In this dynamic, Caroline’s submission echoes Milton’s representation of Eve as needing Adam’s guidance, yet here that Adamic role is filtered through another woman—Hortense becomes the surrogate guide, reproducing patriarchal codes under the guise of female tutelage (Milton, IV.442, p. 149).

Brontë even stages the mechanism of this discipline: when Robert returns home, Caroline instinctively withdraws “by way of leaving the coast clear” and waits at the banisters until she is summonsed by Hortense, who formally presents her with “agitation and formality, as though they have been utter strangers” (Brontë, 1993a, pp. 309-310). Robert is her cousin, yet intimacy is displaced by ceremonial distance, and Caroline becomes an object in a performance of introduction. She does not enter the scene on her own initiative—she is displayed. In *Paradise Lost*, Eve is first introduced to Adam in precisely these terms: “On she came / Led by her heavenly Maker, though unseen, / And guided by his voice” (Milton, VIII.484-486, p. 301). She arrives already prepared for her role, “not uninformed / Of nuptial sanctity, and marriage rites,” and Adam immediately defines her presence, “Grace was all in her steps, Heaven in her eye, / In every gesture dignity and love” (Milton, VIII.486-489, p. 301). Eve’s identity is mediated, led, and framed for Adam’s recognition rather than declared by her own voice. But where Milton’s Eve first inclines toward her own image, only to be redirected by God toward Adam, Caroline’s self is mediated before it can even surface (Milton, IV.460-475, p. 150). Hortense pre-empts her initiative, leading her forward so that Robert, like Adam, becomes the one who defines. Brontë reconfigures Eve’s archetypal pattern through Hortense: like the divine voice that guides Eve, she stages Caroline’s entrance and authorises her presence, turning kinship into formality and collapsing intimacy into ritual, thus dramatising not only the subordination of Eve but the erasure of the possibility of self-recognition. Caroline is, in this moment, Eve rewritten—brought forward, silent, defined by another’s hand and gaze.

This disciplining leaves Caroline voiceless and fragile, her dependence literalised in illness when Robert’s attentions seem to tilt toward Shirley. Returning from Hollow’s, she wakes “oppressed with unwonted languor ... Palatable food was as ashes and sawdust to her”

(Brontë, 1993a, p. 311). Soon, “a languor of long conflict and habitual sadness, had fanned the spark to flame,” and she visibly “wasted like any snow-wreath in thaw ... faded like any flower in drought” (Brontë, 1993a, pp. 312-313). Like Milton’s Eve after the fall, who lies prostrate in despair, Caroline embodies the consequences of a woman’s identity defined by subordination. Brontë heightens Caroline’s Miltonic resonance by situating her within Edenic imagery of enclosure and seclusion. Caroline is often described in domestic spaces—gardens, parlours, windows—spaces that recall Eve’s bower “With flowers, garlands, garlands, and sweet-smelling herbs ... her nuptial bed” in Eden (Milton, IV.689-719, pp. 157-158). Milton’s bower fuses intimacy with confinement: a sacred nuptial space, but one defined by seclusion and Eve’s role as bride. Caroline’s space is likewise enclosed, described in Edenic words:

If she dared, too, she would have declared how the very flowers in the garden of Hollow’s Cottage were dear to her; how the little parlour of that house was her earthly paradise; how she longed to return to it, as much almost as the first woman, in her exile, must have longed to revisit Eden. Not daring, however, to say these things, she held her peace; she sat quiet at Robert’s side, waiting for him to say something more. (Brontë, 1993a, p. 187)

The flowers and parlour are infused with Edenic significance, but only through Caroline’s unvoiced attachment to Robert. What she experiences as “earthly paradise” remains locked within her, unspoken, while she sits in silence at his side. Her Eden, like Milton’s postlapsarian one, is already marked by loss: it is defined less by joy than by longing, more by absence than by presence of delight.

Caroline’s temptation is not capitulation but the slow suasion of resignation—to accept deprivation as destiny and to read silence and invisibility as safety and goodness. Where Shirley debates aloud, Caroline internalises conflict. Her voices of temptation are quieter but no less insidious. Internally, her mind catechises her into silence:

... a lover feminine can say nothing; if she did, the result would be shame and anguish, inward remorse for self-treachery. Nature would brand such demonstration as a rebellion against her instincts, and would vindictively repay it afterward by the thunderbolt of self-contempt smiting suddenly in secret ... ask no questions, utter no remonstrances; it is your best wisdom. You expected bread and you have got a stone: break your teeth on it, and don’t shriek ... if you survive the test ... you will be stronger, wiser, less sensitive. (Brontë, 1993a, p. 79)

The voice of convention seeps into the text, tempting Caroline to swallow rejection as wisdom and to equate silence with virtue. Like Milton’s Eve, whose temptation is staged as a

solitary soliloquy that persuades her into error, Caroline's trial comes through an inward rhetoric that masks repression as prudence. Yielding to such counsel, she turns inward, retreating further until she held "a funeral inward ... the mind's soil and its treasures were freezing gradually to barren stagnation" (Brontë, 1993a, p. 141). As Gilbert and Gubar note, Caroline's inner thoughts expose the cruelty, and the danger, of her inner counsel—"withdrawing first into and then, more dangerously, into herself until she begins literally to disappear from lack of food ... Caroline has nothing left but to attempt the rights and duties of the lady" (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000, pp. 377-379). They further note that "she has been rewarded only for her compliant attractiveness ... so her self-starvation is, ironically, an acceptance of the ideal of self-denial" (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000, pp. 388-391). What looks like patience is really resignation, a Miltonic Fall into self-erasure rather than rebellion. In Caroline, Brontë rewrites Milton's Eve not as the rebel who overreaches, but as the dutiful woman persuaded into effacement—a temptation that is garnered over time not through action but through acquiescence.

Her passivity contrasts sharply with Shirley's mobility, reinforcing the novel's dual vision of female possibility: submission or defiance. Caroline's crisis of illness and isolation becomes a turning point, a moment of death and rebirth that recalls Milton's fallen Eve's appeal for reconciliation: "Forsake me not thus, Adam! Witness Heaven / What love sincere, and reverence in my heart / I bear thee ..." (Milton, XI.914-916, p. 386). Caroline, too, looks outward for reassurance, but her words are softened by the decorum of Victorian restraint. "It will be such comfort to know you are in the house, to see you sometimes in the room" (Brontë, 1993a, p. 312). This is not raw supplication but a carefully polite request, revealing need without admitting desperation. Where Milton dramatises conjugal dependence in a cosmic register, Brontë domesticates the gesture into a muted negotiation of presence and care. The moment deepens when Mrs. Pryor reveals herself as Caroline's mother, and the restrained appeal unfolds into recognition: "My mother—my own mother!" (Brontë, 1993a, p. 321). Brontë stages Eve's reconciliation as a Victorianised echo of Eve's plea, then its transformation into the maternal bond. Cosmic dependence is rewritten as quiet domestic recovery, relocating Milton's drama of the Fall into the registers of female kinship and care.

In *Shirley*, rhetoric functions not as private insinuation but as public provocation. Shirley Keeldar, far from the overwhelming passion of Rochester and piety of St. John, floods the scene with visionary eloquence. Her speech to Caroline on the moor reimagines Eve not as Adam's submissive wife but as a Titaness:

The first woman was heaven-born. Vast was the heart whence gushed the wellspring of the blood of nations, and grand the undegenerate head where rested the consort-crown of creation ... a woman-Titan. Her robe of blue air spreads to the outskirts of the heath, where yonder flock is grazing; a veil white as an avalanche sweeps from her head to her feet ...
(Brontë, 1993a, p. 240)

This is rhetoric at its most performative—a veritable torrent of imagery that rivals Milton’s own epic cadences. As Penny Boumelha argues, Shirley and Caroline “rewrite canonical male texts between themselves ... as a means of escape into ... freedom, in place of the tomb-like domesticity that traps them” (Boumelha, 2014; summarised in Ingham, 2014, p. 10). Here, Shirley rewrites Milton’s Eve. Her catalogue of sublime attributes, “vast ... grand ... undegenerate,” parodies Milton’s technique of elevation, where abstract qualities are piled on until the figure becomes larger than life. Milton layers descriptors onto Satan, “his form had not yet lost / All her original brightness, nor appear’d / Less than Archangel ruin’d, and th’ excess / Of glory obscur’d” (Milton, I.591-594, p. 37). As Milton builds the imagery of Satan through brightness, Archangel, and glory, Shirley layers vast, heaven-born, and Titan form to refashion Eve into epic magnitude. Shirley’s oratory tempts not for deception or instruction, but to envision a new form of womanhood—not diminished to “doll” or “fiend,” but magnified into epic stature (Brontë, 1993a, p. 264). Temptation here is not anticipatory of the Fall but imagines an alternative—the possibility of an emancipated Eve.

Milonic inflation meets domestic contraction in this scene. As Shirley sweeps Caroline into a narrative where the first woman becomes a Titaness, Caroline withdraws into reverie. She cannot match Shirley’s oratory; her interiority folds her into silence, her presence defined by what she withholds rather than what she proclaims. Her silence itself is a rhetorical stance. For her, the word “mother” suggests not Shirley’s mystical parent but a “gentle human form,” the longed-for mother who might one day call her “Caroline, my child” and offer her a loving home (Brontë, 1993a, p. 241). Brontë deliberately stages these two modes side by side: Shirley’s Milonic elevation, a rhetoric that tempts toward grandeur, and Caroline’s rhetorical negative, a temptation toward contraction and retraction. Together, they act as alternative re-imaginings of Milton’s Eve—alternately magnified into archetype and diminished into grief—into two competing registers of women’s interiority.

For both Shirley and Caroline, exile is not flight into wilderness or ruinous isolation but the collective condition of a community labouring under the curse of toil. Milton’s account of the Fall had always been double—two personal acts of disobedience that reshape labour, gender, and history. *Shirley* seizes that shared dimension through pluralising Eve,

translating Miltonic exile into the alienation of workers and women alike, and staging the Fall not as a catastrophic end but as social barrenness demanding solidarity. While Moore and Farren show how Milton's logic of error and exile plays out across class, Shirley and Caroline show how it is refracted across gender. Neither woman commits an error in the Miltonic sense; rather, they inherit exile as their condition. Shirley Keeldar, as the rebellious Eve, converts Milton's soliloquy of inferiority into political rhetoric: she refuses to be "mated with a kid" and claims the leopard's fierceness instead (Brontë, 1993a, pp. 460-461). Caroline Helstone embodies the suffering Eve, wasting away in silence and sorrow, her near-fatal illness an enactment of "Thy sorrow I will greatly multiply" (Milton, X.193, p. 360). Together they pluralise Eve as inheritor of fallenness—one resisting subordination, the other internalising it. Their voices expand Brontë's communal vision of Miltonic exile, showing that in the industrial present, even without error, women live within the shadow of Eve's curse.

Shirley takes the true covenant of *Jane Eyre* and disperses reconciliation into a wider, social register. Rather than concentrating renewal in a single household, Brontë multiplies the possibilities of repair across marriages, friendships, and communities. The novel closes with the unions of Shirley and Caroline, but these are framed less as triumphant romance than as modest restoration after suffering. *Shirley*'s ending embodies what Brontë elsewhere denies: a closure without grandeur. While *Paradise Lost* closes with the voice of the epic narrator, guiding readers to see Adam and Eve's expulsion as providential, Brontë, once again, does something strikingly different in *Shirley*. The narrator moves briskly from the double marriage, almost as if it were a newspaper announcement: names, officiants, attendants, and little more. Unlike *Jane Eyre*, where "Reader, I married him," elevates marriage into covenantal climax, *Shirley* deflates the moment into bureaucratic reportage (Brontë, 1999, p. 397). The effect is deliberately anti-romantic. Marriage here is not an apotheosis of love but a matter-of-fact social arrangement, folded into the same narrative breath that records parish politics, industrial schemes, and war news from Spain (Brontë, 1993a, p. 481).

Caroline and Shirley enter this closure not as Milton's singular Eve but as divided figures of endurance and rebellion. Gilbert and Gubar highlight how reconciliation in *Shirley* is shaped by female constraint (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000, pp. 392-395). They locate both Caroline and Shirley's reconciliations in relation to Mrs. Pryor, "the prior woman," who, having endured a "man-tiger" whose soft speech concealed violence that "split the nerves and curdled the blood," Mrs. Pryor exemplifies the tragedy of marriage in a patriarchal society (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000, p. 392). Her withdrawal and reticence perpetuate the split between

Caroline and Shirley: Caroline inherits suicidal passivity from the lack of maternal recognition, while Shirley channels masculine self-assertion (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000, p. 393). Caroline, the patient Eve who suffers long illness and near death, is healed and finds reconciliation not through marital bonds but by maternal recognition (Brontë, 1993a, pp. 321-325). Her marriage to Robert offers dignity and care, yet the narrator's curt announcement frames it as a social arrangement rather than a triumph of passion. Instead, her reconciliation is maternal, not marital: her near-fatal illness is resolved through recognition and reunion with Mrs. Pryor, who emerges as the faithful mother long withheld. This restoration of maternal love gives Caroline the stability to marry Robert, though the marriage itself is framed in the narrator's flat register as social fact rather than romantic destiny. The narrative register punctuates how Caroline's restoration folds her into the same cycle of endurance, preparing her to "take faithful care" of Robert, her role shaped by her mother's survival strategy (Brontë, 1993a, p. 478).

Shirley enters reconciliation along a divergent but complementary path. She begins as a rebellious Eve, rebuking Milton's blindness to female power (Brontë, 1993a, p. 240). Gilbert and Gubar observe that she grows increasingly reserved, her visionary energies muted until she returns to the "rhetoric of the classroom" (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000, p. 393). In her marriage to Louis, they argue, she finds not a partner who liberates but a master who values her precisely because she requires his discipline—by the novel's close she is rendered a "bondswoman" in the hands of her "captor," "a hero and patriarch" (Brontë, 1993a, pp. 450-451, cited in Gilbert and Gubar, 2000, p. 395). Yet even as she tempers her defiance, Shirley never fully capitulates. Her marriage is not figured as utopian submission but as pragmatic partnership, a rebellious spirit accommodated rather than extinguished. Brontë allows her to remain a revisionist Eve—rebellious, critical, sharp-tongued—but one whose energies are channelled into the modest settlement of domestic and communal repair. The dual reconciliations of Caroline and Shirley demonstrate how Brontë domesticates Milton by splitting Eve into plural roles. Caroline becomes the patient Eve, reconciled through maternal renewal and endurance, while Shirley remains the rebellious Eve, still critical and defiant, yet tempered into pragmatic partnership by social constraint. Together they revise Milton's archetype not through utopian transcendence but through modest domestic settlement. The narrator's anti-romantic announcement of the marriages underscores this domestication: where Milton's reconciliation carries epic grandeur, Brontë reduces it to parish notice. Milton's Eve is thus rewritten into multiple, socially embedded women whose reconciliations are partial, communal, and pragmatic.

In the novel's close, after the brief announcement of the two marriages, the narrator turns briefly to the partial fulfilment of Robert Moore's industrialist dreams. His reconciliation is explicitly tethered to Caroline and then refracted through industry. "I suppose Robert Moore's prophecies were, partially at least, fulfilled," the narrator observes, before describing the altered Hollow: "once green, and lone, and wild," now remade into "the manufacturer's day-dreams embodied in substantial stone and brick and ashes—the cinder-black highway, the cottages, and the cottage gardens ..." (Brontë, 1993a, pp. 481-482). Robert is reconciled through Caroline's quiet endurance, but the narrator quickly subsumes that renewal into the domesticating logics of marriage and manufacture. His benevolence as husband is measured not by passion but by his schemes as an employer. The Edenic Hollow, once haunted by fairies and radicals, is now industrialised and domesticated into cottages, gardens, and the rhythms of mill labour: a space remade for household order rather than enchantment or revolution. Reconciliation is refigured not in providence but in soot and stone, where ambition and benevolence coexist uneasily. Brontë grants Robert restoration, but only as partial fulfilment—an industrial, Babel-like domestication that collapses covenant into economy (Brontë, 1993a, p. 482).

Shirley concludes with Martha's recollection of a countryside stripped of its fairies. The last moment of dialogue does not belong to a prophet or omniscient sage—but to Martha, a housekeeper. She recalls how the Hollow once held "oak and nut trees," and even a "fairish," before mills and chimneys remade the land (Brontë, 1993a, p. 482). Her anecdote of the "last fairy" is at once comic, nostalgic, and quietly tragic (Brontë, 1993a, p. 482). The closing images recall Shirley's earlier memory of the Hollow before the mills, when her nurse told tales of fairies haunting the ravine (Brontë, 1993a, p. 177). Then, enchantment still clung to the landscape, mingling with the dangerous radicalism of night-weavers and poachers. By the end, Martha can only remember what has vanished: the Hollow is altered, industrialised, and disenchanted. Where Milton's Eden remains a garden haunted by angelic voices, Brontë's Eden is a Yorkshire valley emptied of fairies. Both enchantment and dissent have been stripped away—the Hollow survives as soot-blackened cottages and towering mill: a modest restoration, but also a profound disenchantment.⁹¹ Reconciliation here is modest

⁹¹ "I saw a mighty mill, and a chimney ambitious as the tower of Babel" (Brontë, 1993a, p. 428). Brontë's modest restoration is also cast under a biblical shadow: the tower of Babel represents human ambition and technological striving; humanity attempts to build a tower to heaven, God confounds their speech and scatters them for their pride (Genesis 11:1-9). This allusion marks industrial ambition as both powerful and perilous: reconciliation survives, but the landscape is remade not into Eden but into Babel, a monument to human striving rather than providential design.

restoration, but also industrial disenchantment—community survives, the price is loss of mystery and imaginative possibility. The narrator then steps in only to disavow moral authority in the final lines:

The story is told. I think I now see the judicious reader putting on his spectacles to look for the moral. It would be an insult to his sagacity to offer directions. I only say, God speed him in the quest! (Brontë, 1993a, p. 482)

These final lines offer no theological or providential assurance, only a cautious wish. The juxtaposition is deliberate—where Milton’s narrator interprets the Fall for his readers, Brontë refuses to dictate meaning. She hands interpretation to the “judicious reader,” and her final remembered voice is not divine but domestic, not patriarchal but working-class, not epic but local. By denying explicit moralisation, Brontë underscores that reconciliation is not providential here but contingent, inviting the reader to measure the costs of modest restoration for themselves. Reconciliation in *Shirley* thus becomes modest and plural, told through the memory of a servant, haunted by vanished fairies and shaped by the slow work of community. If Jane and Rochester’s Ferndean is Brontë’s Miltonic covenant, Martha’s anecdote is her counter-epic ending—substituting homely testimony for grand providence and leaving her readers to weigh what restoration really means. In letting *Shirley*’s ending speak in the modest tones of memory and locality, Brontë rewrites Milton’s providential closure into something deliberately smaller: reconciliation without epic assurance, survival without enchantment.

MAGNIFYING THE GOTHIC AND THE COMMUNAL

Taken together, these readings suggest that Brontë not only subjects Milton’s epic to the trials of class and gender but also reshapes its very architecture. Like Austen, she uses the Fall to probe morality and redemption. Yet Austen’s plots inscribe the genteel reader into a world where marriage proposals hinge on the delicate machinery of rank—*Pride and Prejudice*, for example, depends on Mrs. Bennet’s pragmatic pursuit of advantageous matches. Brontë, by contrast, strips the veneer from that machinery and shows the raw edges of class constraint. In *Jane Eyre*, Mrs. Fairfax recoils from Jane’s engagement, believing she has “forgotten [her] station.” (Brontë, 1999, p. 232). Rochester’s impassioned reply, “Station! Station! - your station is in my heart,” both exposes the cruelty of such hierarchies and attempts to unseat them (Brontë, 1999, p. 232). Where Austen hints at class restraint through scenes like Darcy’s insult to Elizabeth’s family, Brontë dares the reader to confront class

directly—scathingly—even in her chapter titles that parade curates, mill-hands, and provincial spinsters, all of which refuse to let the working class remain invisible (Brontë, 1993a).

Charlotte Brontë's two major novels examined in this thesis, *Jane Eyre* and *Shirley*, both bear the imprint of *Paradise Lost*, yet they mobilise Milton's epic in sharply contrasting ways. *Jane Eyre* reconfigures the Fall as a private, spiritual crisis resolved through individual integrity and equitable union, while *Shirley* recasts Miltonic imagery in the social and political sphere, dramatising the Fall as a condition of modernity shaped by industrial upheaval and gender conflict. What unites these novels is Brontë's persistent interrogation of Miltonic gender politics. In *Jane Eyre*, she reimagines Eve as Adam, masculinising the fall to assert female epistemological self-discovery. In *Shirley*, she stages dialogue—characters explicitly debate Milton's portrayal of women, rehearsing arguments about authority, blame, and temptation. *Jane Eyre* absorbs Miltonic imagery to fuel a Gothic romance of temptation and redemption, while *Shirley* uses Milton as a cultural touchstone through which to contest patriarchal ideology in public discourse. The contrast illustrates Brontë's evolving use of Milton. In *Jane Eyre*, Milton provides an epic framework for a personal story of temptation, exile, and redemption; in *Shirley*, Milton becomes a reference point for industrial history, gender politics, and social critique.

Brontë's novels also show how Milton's epic motifs could be reinterpreted within the Gothic, colonial, and communal registers of the domestic novel. In *Jane Eyre*, reconciliation emerges as a true covenant, yet only through Rochester's diminishment, Jane's narrative authority, and the absence of Bertha and St. John. In *Shirley*, the reconciliation is plural and social, embodied in the solidarity of Shirley and Caroline as communal Eves. This fractured pattern is Brontë's signature contribution: she retains Milton's four-part arc of temptation, Fall, exile, and reconciliation, but disperses each stage across multiple characters and outcomes. Milton's concentrated drama is refracted across narratives: revisionist Eves, hybrid Adams, false redeemers, colonial chaos, communal solidarities. Reconciliation is never total but partial. Placed between Austen's ironic miniaturisation and Eliot's realist dispersal, Brontë magnifies Milton into Gothic ordeal and communal strife. Her domestication does not render Milton as merely "bogey" nor authority, but a symbolic reservoir to be adapted, resisted, and refunctioned (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000, p. 187). By stretching Milton until his motifs splinter into many forms, Brontë demonstrates the domestic novel's extraordinary capacity: it can sustain epic theology in the registers of the Gothic and Romantic, the social and the industrial. Brontë's splintering of Miltonic motifs prepares the ground for Eliot. What

Brontë magnifies into Gothic ordeal and communal strife, Eliot disperses into the realist web of relations. In *Adam Bede* and *Middlemarch*, temptation, fall, and reconciliation cease to cluster around single figures and instead ripple across entire communities, reframed as patterns of error, misjudgement, and partial repair.

CHAPTER FIVE: GEORGE ELIOT: THE PROVINCIAL EPIC

Eliot's allusions to *Paradise Lost* in *Adam Bede* and *Middlemarch* align commonplace nineteenth-century figures with Milton's epic characters. In *Paradise Lost*, Adam articulates the heroic ideal of the *felix culpa* that inadvertently leads to a better life. Eliot transposes this Miltonic ideal into nineteenth-century provincial life—her protagonists are shaped by trials of vocation and marriage that lead, not to paradise regained, but to moral growth or human sympathy. This domestic heroism is continuous with Milton's own emphasis on small and humble deeds as the highest victories—epitomised in Christ's self-sacrifice for mankind. In Eliot's realist idiom, heroism is enacted through interpersonal tribulation, refracting Miltonic paradigms into ordinary lives. The narrator's prelude in *Middlemarch* frames this transformation:

With dim lights and tangled circumstance they tried to shape their thought and deed in noble agreement; but after all, to common eyes their struggles seemed mere inconsistency and formlessness; for these later-born Therasas were helped by no coherent social faith and order which could perform the function of knowledge for the ardently willing soul. (Eliot, 1996b, p. 4)

These “later-born Therasas” become Eliot's unsung provincial heroes, “who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs” (Eliot, 1996b, p. 765). Their influence is diffuse, their struggles ordinary, yet their marriages and aspirations are rendered with epic seriousness. The domestic novel becomes Eliot's stage for a provincial *Paradise Lost*, where error is not rebellion against God but misjudgement, compromise, or vanity, and reconciliation is not eschatological promise but the fragile work of sympathy.⁹² This is the realist epic: a narrative form that disperses Milton's grandeur into ordinary acts, dignifying even failure as part of the moral drama of human life: “to speak paradoxically, the existence of insignificant people has very important consequences in the world” (Eliot, 1997, p. 54). To trace how Eliot reworks the Fall into the everyday epic, this thesis will narrow her sprawling provincial network to examine three figures—Hetty Sorrel, Dorothea Brooke, and Tertius Lydgate—whose temptations show how the epic seriousness of *Paradise Lost* is domesticated into the everyday trials of the domestic novel.

⁹² Eliot herself may have resisted the label “domestic novel” for her fiction, preferring to align her works with broader moral and philosophical traditions (Atkinson, 2013, pp. 340-341). Yet the term is used here in the critical sense as developed by Armstrong and extended by subsequent scholarship: the domestic novel as a form in which private life and moral subjectivity become central to cultural debates (Armstrong, 1987, pp. 28-30). Under this definition, Eliot's provincial fictions participate fully in the genre, while extending the boundaries of the domestic novel.

SYMPATHY FOR THE ORDINARY

Hetty Sorrel is perhaps one of the most overtly Miltonic character in *Adam Bede*.⁹³ Like Eve, she is defined by beauty, vanity, and a susceptibility to temptation, longing for the love of a man that is socially above her station. Hetty Sorrel's temptation unfolds not in argument but in image: a silent soliloquy enacted before a mirror. Eliot stages her absorption with devastating precision:

The midday sun was streaming into Hetty's bedchamber, and there was no blind to temper the heat with which it fell on her head as she looked at herself in the old specked glass ... Hetty would not care to put the large coloured glass earrings into her ears now; for see! she has got a beautiful pair of gold pearls and garnet, lying snugly in a pretty little box lined with white satin. Oh the delight of taking out that little box and looking at the earrings! Do not reason about it, my philosophical reader ... only watch the movements of this pretty round creature as she turns her head on one side with an unconscious smile at the earrings nestled in the little box.
(Eliot, 1997, p. 210)

Like Eve at the pool in *Paradise Lost*, Hetty is transfixed by her own image, drawn inward by the shimmer of ornament.⁹⁴ The genius of this scene lies in Eliot's elevation of trivial objects—earrings, lace, the shimmer of a mirror—into vessels of epic moral weight. Vanity becomes Eliot's realist version of Milton's soliloquy, provincial temptation staged in miniature. The narrator even frames the moment with a mock-ethnographic aside—"do not reason about it, my philosophical reader"—which invites sympathy even as it marks Hetty as an object of study rather than simple moral condemnation. As Anna Nardo observes, Eliot deliberately recalls Eve's narcissistic reflection and Satanic dream to expose Hetty's "loveless narcissism and social climbing" (Nardo, 2003, p. 155). The parallel underscores how vanity, long before any overt act, prepares the ground for temptation. Just as Eve's self-delight in her own image makes her receptive to Satan's later praise, Hetty's self-regard predisposes her to Arthur's flattery.

Like Milton's Eve, Hetty longs not only for trivial objects and finery, but feeling like she is in a position of power. When Adam offers his arm, "she knew he cared a great deal

⁹³ Critics have often read Hetty as a provincial Eve (Chase, 2006, p. 25; Gilbert and Gubar, 2000, p. 491; Nardo, 2003, p. 153).

⁹⁴ Milton shows Eve gazing into the pool, "Pleased it returned as soon with answering looks / Of sympathy and love," entranced by a self-image that seemed to love her back. Only God's intervention leads her back to Adam, yet the susceptibility remains. When Satan later comes to Eve, he not only seduces with flattery but with power, placing her in a position of command (Milton, IX. 568-570, p. 329). The rhetoric offers a role reversal: not the one commanded, but the one obeyed. Eve's "more amazed, unwary" reply—"thy overpraising leaves in doubt"—shows she recognises the excess, but the seduction works precisely because it offers power as well as praise (Milton, IX.614-615, p. 330).

about having her arm through his, and she wished him to care” (Eliot, 1997, p. 304). The gesture means little to her in itself—“it was nothing to her—putting her arm through Adam’s”—but she is exhilarated by the knowledge that it mattered to him. What excites her is not affection but the confirmation of her beauty’s power. This echoes Eve’s first encounter with her reflection, when she mistakes surface for substance and beauty for being. Hetty enacts the same drama: she does not value Adam as companion but as a mirror, reflecting her desirability back to her. Both scenes dramatise the danger of self-regard that collapses substance into appearance. For Milton, such self-delight foreshadows Eve’s susceptibility to Satan’s flattery. For Eliot, it paves the way for the Satanic tempter to “too easy into her heart entrance [win]” (Milton, IX.734, p. 334).

Arthur Donnithorne thus steps into the role of tempter. His seduction of Hetty is not diabolical but indulgent; yet, like Satan, he initiates a chain of events that precipitate tragedy. Eliot underlines the banality of his weakness:

... there are certain alternative doses which a man may administer to himself by keeping unpleasant consequences before his mind: this gives you a sort of smoked glass through which you may look at the resplendent fair one and discern her true outline; though I’m afraid, by the by, the smoked glass is apt to be missing just at the moment it is most wanted. (Eliot, 1997, p. 144)

Arthur tells Irwine that a man can protect himself from the “witchery from a woman” by deliberately holding “unpleasant consequences before his mind,” but he discards this “smoked glass” when temptation arrives (Eliot, 1997, p. 144). Satan, too, recognises the futility of his rebellion against God, but pursues it anyway (Milton, IV.75, p. 135). Both prescribe resistance but refuse the cure. Arthur’s Fall, like Satan’s, is not ignorance but wilful evasion. But Arthur is no grand rebel, merely weak—yet his weakness proves catastrophic.

His letter to Hetty completes the analogy. His confession arrives like a rhetorical lever applied to Hetty’s inwardly prepared heart:

Dear, dear Hetty, sweet as our love has been to me, sweet as it would be to me for you to love me always, I feel that it would have been better for us both if we had never had that happiness, and that it is my duty to ask you to love me and care for me as little as you can ... I ought to have resisted my feelings ... I should have done so, if I had been a better fellow than I am; but now, since the past cannot be altered, I am bound to save you from any evil that I have power to prevent ... You know nothing, dear Hetty, of the world in which I must always live, and you would soon begin to dislike me, because there would be so little in which we should be alike. And since I cannot marry you, we must part - we must try not to feel like lovers any more. I am miserable while I say this, but nothing else can be. Be angry with me, my sweet one, I deserve it; but do not believe that I shall not always care for you ...

(Eliot, 1997, p. 282).

Arthur's letter tries to translate passion into duty and to enact withdrawal. Like Belial in *Paradise Lost*, he cloaks weakness in the language of responsibility.⁹⁵ He admits fault—"I ought to have resisted my feelings"—but couches indulgence as if it were nobly overcome (Eliot, 1997, p. 282). Hetty, however, hears only tenderness. Arthur's words, like Satan's glozing, soothe even as they wound, dignifying desire while concealing abandonment. The ambiguity is strategic: phrases that sound protective also betray. Temptation succeeds not only by promise but by concealment.

Arthur's letter thus performs several things at once: it appears magnanimous, it frames their separation as moral necessity, and crucially, it addresses a Hetty who has already scripted herself as deserving of ornaments and attention. His paternal tone, which frames their separation as duty, collides with Hetty's fantasy of finery and romance, turning his words into betrayal rather than warning. As with Satan's persuasive moves on Eve, external rhetoric succeeds when it finds an inward logic already in place. Arthur's appeals to duty and station might have failed on an unmoved heart, but Hetty's fantasy of finery makes his renunciation a catastrophe rather than relief. The dramaturgy is important: Eliot shows desire as pre-verbal and the narrator as complicit—observing, diagnosing, ironically reproving—so that moral responsibility becomes diffuse. The domestic scale does not cheapen the seriousness; it translates Miltonic interior temptation into the grammar of provincial tragedy. Hetty is not solely pleased by Arthur's admiration; she is intoxicated by the fantasy that she could command his devotion and, through him, rise into a different life. Eliot writes that Hetty "hates everything that is not what she longs for," a disposition that renders her unable to measure her own fantasies against reality (Eliot, 1997, p. 113). In this sense she is Milton's Eve translated into a provincial key: captivated by her own reflection, enthroned by another's praise, and left vulnerable to temptation precisely because she cannot endure anything that contradicts her longing. With Hetty, as with Eve, the stage is set for a counter voice—an angelic figure whose warning will try, and fail, to pull her back from the brink of the Fall.

Dinah Morris enters the scene as Eliot's analogue to Raphael. If Arthur's rhetoric inflates Hetty's fantasies, Dinah's words try to deflate them, urging humility, patience, and

⁹⁵ Belial's Pandemonium speech—language wrapped in "reason's garb"—urges ignoble ease and sloth disguised as prudence (Milton, II.226, p. 54). Mammon further counsels building a rival empire, his rhetoric grounded in pragmatism but laced in self-interest (Milton, II.290-309, pp. 56-57). Milton underscores that persuasion, even among demons, is a weapon: argument dressed as reason, speech that seduces rather than clarifies. Eliot replays this structure in *Adam Bede* through Arthur's letter.

fidelity. She counsels Hetty not to seek happiness in outward show but in inward faithfulness; she refers to her as a “poor wandering lamb,” and later interrupts Hetty at her mirror with words of care and counsel (Eliot, 1997, p. 26). Her presence embodies a turning from vanity to humility, from ornament to substance. Yet Hetty, absorbed in her fantasies of finery, refuses the intervention. As Nardo observes, Hetty “was not called away from the mirror in her bedchamber by the voice of Dinah’s warning, and now in a garden she is not led beyond her narcissistic fantasies by Adam’s devotion” (Nardo, 2003, p. 155). The rebuff exposes the imbalance built into Eliot’s Miltonic reworking: just as Raphael’s sober admonitions could not prevent the Fall, Dinah’s earnest words cannot pierce Hetty’s dream of elevation. The counter voice is present, even insistent, but it is structurally too weak to outweigh the seductive force of vanity confirmed by flattery. Eliot sharpens Hetty’s temptation by embedding it within the watchful fabric of community. Eve’s encounter with Satan unfolds in solitude, unseen until its consequences spill into the world; Hetty’s flirtations, by contrast, are witnessed, whispered about, and judged by her neighbours. Gossip replaces providence, functioning as the social mechanism of moral scrutiny. As Gillian Beer observes, *Middlemarch* operates through a “determined secularism in the portrayal of provincial life,” offering “no recourse to faith or to any other transcendental signifier” (Beer, 2006, p. 28). Divine providence is absent, but the social gaze is omnipresent. In this sense, Hetty’s temptation is doubly perilous. The mirror rehearses her self-delight, Arthur’s flattery affirms her fantasies, and gossip hovers as the constant reminder that indulgence cannot remain hidden. It is the pressure of being seen, not just the desire to be loved, that makes her susceptibility feel irresistible.

Hetty’s Fall occurs on the heath where she abandons her and Arthur’s child. Hetty’s Fall is not narrated in real time on the heath, however, it is exposed at Stoniton. A town that is not described in much detail outside of the fact that it is “grim,” it stands in stark contrast to Hayslope; a postlapsarian earth, removed from the pastoral haven of Eden to stage the Fall of Hetty (Eliot, 1997, p. 314). These choices—the trial and setting shift—are Miltonic in nature. In *Paradise Lost* the decisive act, “So saying, her rash hand in evil hour / Forth reaching to the fruit, she plucked, she eat,” is followed by a juridical scene that names, frames, and sentences the transgression (Milton, IX.780-781, p. 335). Eliot domesticates that structure. Hetty’s act—concealment and burial of the infant—is reconstructed through witness testimony, prosecutorial stitching, and communal gaze. The Fall happens again in language, under judgement. As Gillian Beer has argued, Eliot reconfigures providence into secular causality, where acts are revealed not by divine vision but through the social

mechanisms of gossip, evidence, and law (Beer, 2006, p. 28). This makes Hetty's trial function as Eliot's version of Milton's judgement scene: sin is doubled by its narration, private lapse becoming communal spectacle. The trial sets the tone by withholding the details from both Adam and from the readers. It is revealed that "the doctor's evidence is heavy on her," that Hetty "stood like a white image," and that her plea of "not guilty" is entered by others because she cannot speak (Eliot, 1996a, p. 365). The narrator dwells on the trial's publicity: a hall dense with faces, "foolish women in fine clothes" making the moral theatre visible, and the "sob" of the room when Martin Poyser is told to look upon his niece (Eliot, 1997, pp. 364-367).

Hetty's Fall itself is then narrated within this spectacle. Mrs. Sarah Stone gives the domestic prelude—lodging, child-bed, the baby's clothes—and then John Olding's testimony does the Miltonic work of unveiling: a cry in the coppice, "a little baby's hand," a shallow grave of "chips and turf," a head visible through "a hole left in one place" (Eliot, 1997, pp. 369-371). Eliot's staging is precise. The audience, including Adam, is made to "hear" the cry before seeing the body; sound precedes sight, grief precedes proof. Raymond Williams underscores this collective dimension: his account of cultural materialism emphasises how meaning is forged through the participatory process of collective creation (Williams, 2005, pp. 37-39). The court thus assumes the function Milton assigns to his epic tribunal: it renders private act into public Fall, making sin legible as judgement. Two consequences follow. First, the courtroom fuses act and judgement. The reader does not watch Hetty place the child in the grass; instead, her actions are staged through her judgement. The language of exposure becomes the medium of calamity. In *Paradise Lost*, God's interrogation ("Hast thou eaten ...?") gives the Fall its juridical shape; in Eliot, the judge's black cap and the jury's "Guilty" give the Fall its social shape (Milton, X.122, p. 355; Eliot, 1997, p. 372). The different metaphysics still preserve the same dramatic grammar: desire, to action, to exposure, to sentence.

While the courtroom renders Hetty's act through public exposure, Dinah's vigil renders it through private confession. Her presence with Hetty in the prison is described as "the pitying love that ... looked like a visible pledge of the Invisible Mercy" (Eliot, 1997, p. 392). Dinah's prison vigil is Eliot's angelic ministry translated into pastoral realism—no flaming sword, but a presence that unlocks speech. She refuses haste, lets her silence do moral work ("as if God did not manifest himself by our silent feeling"), and only then presses Hetty past obstinacy to confession (Eliot, 1997, p. 382). This is precisely the kind of intercessory role Milton gives to Raphael and Michael in *Paradise Lost*—figures who, by

their presence, assure Adam and Eve of divine pity and guide them toward repentance. Dinah kneels with Hetty and exhorts her, “Let us pray, poor sinner: let us fall on our knees again together, and pray to the God of all mercy” (Eliot, 1997, p. 388). In these moments, Dinah functions not as a stern judge but as a mediator of compassion, her very face read as a “visible pledge” of invisible grace. Her compassion does not erase consequence—Hetty is still condemned—but it creates a fragile space of renewal within judgement. Dinah’s voice displaces Milton’s angelic hierarchy with a recognisably human form of consolation, grounded in sympathy and the courage to speak in public.

Critics emphasise her archetypal resonance. Knoepfelmacher identifies Dinah as a Christ-figure within *Adam Bede*, a placing “the redemptive power of Christ in the mouth of a Methodist woman,” and later likens her to “Milton’s Michael ... appear[ing] only after the course of events can no longer be halted” “(Knoepfelmacher, 1967, pp. 529-532). Gilbert and Gubar read her as Madonna, countering Hetty as Lilith (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000, p. 496). Both accounts stress her alignment with Milton’s mediator—Raphael, Michael, even the Son—who console and redeem the fallen. Yet rather than simply reasserting the Madonna/Lilith polarity or casting her as a male angelic presence, Eliot complicates the archetype by locating Dinah’s authority not in divine mandate but in her contested role as a female preacher (Anderson, 1969, pp. 340-341).

Dinah’s authority as a preacher is itself framed in terms consonant with Victorian ideals of feminine sympathy: her power rests on pity, consolation, and spiritual tenderness. In this sense Dinah both inhabits and stretches the “angel in the house” ideal, embodying its selfless devotion while also relocating it into the pulpit and the prison (Langland, 1992, pp. 290-291). Eliot negotiates between continuity and critique: Dinah fulfils the archetypal role of consoling angel, but in a way that exposes how even within patriarchal constraints, female voices could claim redemptive authority. Knoepfelmacher observes that “Dinah’s intuition cannot prevent the full force of George Eliot’s deterministic ‘Nature,’ a power severer even than Milton’s Hebraic God” (Knoepfelmacher, 1967, p. 532). Dinah’s theology matters narratively even if it cannot erase guilt: she reframes fear of death into fear of sin—not to terrorise, but to make Hetty’s confession possible: “Don’t shut God’s love out ... by clinging to sin” (Eliot, 1997, p. 383). That pivot yields the confession and, crucially, a different form of exposure—not the court’s accusatory narration, but Hetty’s own voice. Where Milton gives divine interrogation, Eliot gives human accompaniment. The juridical and pastoral, set side by side, are Eliot’s two realist versions of epic judgement and mercy.

Eliot then gives readers the scene Milton cannot give: the intimate, broken confession before execution. When the dam breaks, Hetty's inner logic is revealed: the thought "dated into me like lightning" on seeing a "little grave" of chips and turf; the bifurcated feeling about the child—"like a heavy weight," yet its crying "went through me"; the wish for contradiction at the heart of the crime—covering "not quite up," as if to leave the possibility of another's rescue; and finally, the terrible aural haunting, "I heart it cry ... all night," "shall I allays see it?" (Eliot, 1997, pp. 386-388). Eliot refuses both sentimental exculpation and crude demonisation. The confession is ethically unflinching—"I did do it ... I buried it in the wood"—yet psychologically exact about desperation, shame, hunger, and the fantasy of undoing (Eliot, 1997, p. 385). Hetty's "rash hand" is not grasping at transcendence but at disappearance; nonetheless, in both Milton and Eliot that hand seeks an impossible good—wisdom without loss, return without consequence—and catalyses catastrophe (Milton, IX.780, p. 335).

Throughout these chapters, Adam undergoes his own "baptism of fire" (Eliot, 1997, p. 363). His vigil with Bartle Massey includes one of Eliot's most important refusals of easy consolation: "Good come out of it! That doesn't alter th' evil: her ruin can't be undone ... somebody else's good doesn't alter her shame and misery" (Eliot, 1997, pp. 390-391). That sentence is the novel's anti-theodicy: providential arithmetic—compensation through later acts of good—cannot unmake harm. It is also Eliot's ethical ground for treating Hetty's crime with tragic seriousness: sympathy may console, law may commute, but nothing alters the original evil. In Miltonic terms, there is no painless *felix culpa* here; if later goods emerge, they do not retroactively justify the Fall.

Eliot completes the Miltonic arc by recoding expulsion from Eden as banishment by law. The ritual is meticulously staged. After the jury's guilty verdict, the judge dons the black cap and pronounces death; Hetty's shriek answers the sentence (Eliot, 1997, p. 372). The "fatal cart" becomes the novel's gates of Eden: a threshold with crows in place of cherubim, a sheriff in place of an archangel (Eliot, 1997, pp. 393-395). When Arthur thunders through with a last-minute reprieve, the epic pathos spikes—not because grace has undone the Fall (it has not), but because the sentence has been commuted to exile. No paradise restored; only the penalty translated from gallows to transportation.

Transportation is the most literal form of exile in Eliot's fiction. Hetty is cut off from parish, kin, and narrative: an exile as absolute as Milton's expulsion, but without providence to soften it. The exile is double. First, she faces immediate social banishment. The court's gaze turns her into a public object; even before she is physically exiled, she is outside the

circle of community. The communal silence before the verdict and the charged hush when the black cap appears are ritualised acts of exclusion. Second, she is geographically and narratively removed. The commutation exiles her body overseas and her story from the novel. Where Milton's Adam and Eve leave hand in hand with providence as their guide, Hetty leaves alone, with no narrative horizon—no companion, no authorial future (Milton, XII.646-649, p. 494). The plot itself enacts expulsion by letting her vanish beyond the page. Dinah remains the lone angelic trace in this realist dispensation: she accompanies Hetty to the threshold, "praying without ceasing" as the cart moves through the crowd (Eliot, 1997, p. 393). But her ministry can only humanise Hetty's passage; it cannot unwrite the sentence, and it cannot accompany her across the ocean. Eliot preserves the epic structure—act/judgement/exile—while refusing epic restoration.

The consequences of Hetty's Fall echo Milton's tragic vision. Her pregnancy, abandonment, and eventual infanticide parallel the devastating ripple effects of Eve's act. Eliot, like Milton, insists that choices carry inescapable consequences, that sin (or error) cannot be erased but only endured. Yet whereas Milton grounds consequence in divine justice, Eliot grounds it in social reality: Hetty is condemned not by God but by the rigid moral codes of her community and the punitive structures of the law. For Gilbert and Gubar, this pattern repeats Milton's gendered Fall: Eve bears the full burden of transgression, while Adam's complicity is softened. They note that "Hetty ... declines after her fall in the chase into a kind of Lilith who must wander outside the human community, until she is banished" (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000, p. 496). Nardo nuances this picture by stressing that Hetty "never had paradise in the first place:" the Hall Farm's routines are for her "an endless round" rather than Eden, and her attempt to "escape from a life that offers only labor [sic] and endurance" results in her expulsion from a paradise "that Eliot's realism is not quite paradise" (Nardo, 2003, p. 162). As Eliot relocates Eden's moral charge into the cultivated textures of ordinary labour, Nardo's point underscores that Hetty cannot see this cultivation as paradise: the very work that gives the parish its ethical substance appears to her as drudgery. Where Adam finds moral dignity in craft, Hetty sees only confinement. Nardo reads Eliot's Miltonic echoes as "artillery" directed at Hetty's vanity (Nardo, 2003, p. 155). While the narrator's irony—"poor Hetty"—does register vanity and shortsightedness, it also underscores the social conditions that render her vulnerable to Arthur's advances. Unlike Milton's Eve, who falls from plenitude in her desire for knowledge, Hetty begins in the drudgery she perceives as confinement, as Nardo notes (Nardo, 2003, p. 162). If her Fall is not the loss of Eden but the revelation that Eden was never hers to inhabit, the Eve archetype is transformed from one of

plenitude-turned-loss into one of exclusion and dispossession, exposing how Eliot critiques the injustice of a myth that burdens women with collective sin while denying them the very paradise from which they are said to Fall.

Placed against Dorothea and Lydgate, Hetty's arc is the tragic edge of Eliot's domestic Miltonism. The Fall is criminal, exposed under the narration of judgement, irreversible, and leads to literal transportation out of the town and narrative. Eliot domesticates epic catastrophe—chips and turf instead of Eden's boughs, a black cap instead of a flaming sword—without diluting its gravity. The court replaces divine judgement; Dinah replaces angelic counsel; transportation re-enacts expulsion. But the moral weight is recognisably Miltonic. A small movement—turning away from a child laid in deep grass—carries the consequence of a world lost. Eliot complicates the Miltonic framework by embedding Hetty's temptation in the social realities of class and gender. Eve's disobedience is framed as an epic transgression, while Hetty's is tragically ordinary: a young dairymaid dazzled by wealth and status. Hetty's choices are shaped less by inherent sinfulness than by the limited horizons available to her. As Eliot insists, "Poor Hetty's vision of consequences" was "a narrow fantastic calculation of her own probable pleasures and pains" (Eliot, 1997, p. 289). By emphasising Hetty's ignorance, vanity, and vulnerability, Eliot critiques the social structures that render her susceptible to Arthur's advances, just as Eve's ignorance leaves her vulnerable to Satan's persuasion. Where Milton makes Eve's temptation a universal parable of free will, Eliot reconfigures it as a critique of social inequality and the precariousness of female virtue in a patriarchal order.

For Milton, reconciliation rests on mutual penitence and divine providence: Adam and Eve confess, receive angelic consolation, and leave Eden together. Hetty's tragedy in *Adam Bede* is not redeemed; her exile to the colonies is permanent. Yet the novel refuses to leave suffering meaningless. Redemption is re-imagined as endurance, pastoral sympathy, and communal education. Dinah Morris, entering Hetty's prison cell, functions as a provincial analogue to Michael or Raphael (Knoepfelmacher, 1967, p. 532). Like Milton's angels, Dinah acknowledges error while seeking to infuse it with meaning. Her mode of consolation, however, is realist rather than visionary. Her presence offers comfort, yet it cannot undo infanticide, erase guilt, or restore Hetty within the community. Hetty departs not accompanied, as Adam and Eve are, but in silence. Eliot underscores the asymmetry of this scene: Dinah reframes mercy in terms of divine love that exceeds human comprehension: "the brethren sometimes err in measuring the Divine love by the sinner's knowledge" (Eliot, 1997, p. 389). Dinah's words shift the weight of salvation away from Hetty's own inadequate

penitence and toward the inexhaustibility of compassion. Dinah's words offer some dignity to Hetty's Fall even as the law condemns her—but dignity is not restoration. Consolation is granted, but reintegration is denied. The prison and courtroom settings intensify this gap: pastoral speech softens judgement but cannot alter its outcome. This is Eliot's limit case of reconciliation—the point where sympathy can no longer substitute for grace. In place of Milton's eschatological hope, Eliot offers the quiet realism of pastoral presence—a recognition that some falls, once enacted, cannot be undone.

EVERYDAY COMPLACENCY

Rosamond Vincy and Tertius Lydgate refigure Adam and Eve in realist terms, their Fall transposed into the domestic and vocational realm. Lydgate's temptation lies in the excess of his own aspiration for exceptionalism. He begins as an ambitious Adam, rational and reforming, determined to bring new medical science into provincial life as “the grandest profession in the world” (Eliot, 1996b, p. 417). From his first arrival in Middlemarch he imagines his destiny: “his profession ... wanted reform, and gave a man an opportunity ... to be the possessor of genuine though undemanded qualification” (Eliot, 1996a, p. 136). His vocation is his Eden, his dream of medical innovation his tree of knowledge. Yet the very grandeur of this self-conception renders him vulnerable.

Rosamond Vincy becomes his persuasive Eve, her rhetoric of affection and display entwining her desire for luxury with his desire for recognition. Her speech is not fiery but persistent, appealing to Lydgate's sense of affection, shame, and status. She dreams of “a first-rate position elsewhere than in Middlemarch” for Lydgate, and even secretly writes to his uncle Godwin to solicit money and preferment without his knowledge (Eliot, 1996b, p. 324). Her persuasion echoes Eve's rhetorical force, but Eliot refigures it in domestic idiom, where the temptation is to gentility rather than godhead. At first Lydgate bristles when she praises him while slighting “the medical man in [him],” but like Milton's Adam, he yields knowingly.⁹⁶ He sees how her desires corrode his vocation, yet complicity feels easier than resistance. The narrator captures this erosion:

⁹⁶ The irony of persuasion and capitulation is captured in a light domestic exchange: “‘Don't say that again, dear, it pains me.’ ‘Very well, Doctor Grave-face,’ said Rosy, dimpling, ‘I will declare in future that I dote on skeletons, and body-snatches, and bits of things in phials, and quarrels with everybody, that end in your dying miserably.’ ‘No, no, not so bad as that,’ said Lydgate, giving up remonstrance and petting her resignedly” (Eliot, 1996b, p. 417). The scene encapsulates in miniature the Miltonic structure of persuasion and consent: Rosamond's charm masks corrosive undertones, while Lydgate's affectionate resignation mirrors Adam's knowing complicity.

Still, early in March his affairs were at that pass in which men begin to say that their oaths were delivered in ignorance, and to perceive that the act which they had called impossible to them is becoming manifestly possible ... He deferred the intention from day to day, his habit of acting on his conclusions being made infirm by his repugnance to every possible conclusion and its consequent act.
(Eliot, 1996b, p. 868)

Here interiority is not rational conviction but paralysis. The very habit that once marked Lydgate's intellectual confidence, "acting on his conclusions," is undone by the counter-pressure of circumstance. The hesitation becomes a Miltonic soliloquy: an inward debate suspended between principle and concession, knowledge and repugnance.⁹⁷ The narrative voice in *Middlemarch* similarly sharpens Lydgate's hesitation through free indirect discourse, where Lydgate's self-justification blends with intrusive commentary: "But who among us ever reduced himself to the sort of dependence in which Lydgate now stood, without trying to believe that he had claims which diminished the humiliation of asking?" (Eliot, 1996a, p. 868). The "who among us" broadens Lydgate's soliloquy into a general human failing, while also ironising his attempt to rationalise dependence. Both narrators universalise the moment of inward wavering—Milton through the language of "one flesh," Eliot through the intrusive "who among us,"—making hesitation not just a private lapse but a paradigmatic drama of fallible human reasoning.

Although Lydgate "would have despised any ostentation of expense," Rosamond's beauty and charm continually divert him from the "diligent use of spare hours which might serve [him] to make the great, imminent discovery" (Eliot, 1996a, p. 317). Instead of devoting himself to science, he finds his time and energy absorbed in maintaining the comforts and attentions of married life. The narrator makes clear that Lydgate perceives this danger: "Certainly, being in love and being expected continually by someone who always turned out to be prettier than memory could represent her to be, did interfere" with the "great, imminent discovery" (Eliot, 1996a, p. 317). His defence to Farebrother—"a better order will begin after"—resembles Adam's conscious rationalisation of eating the fruit for Eve's sake: both accept the loss of integrity for the sake of love (Eliot, 1996a, p. 317). The Miltonic resonance intensifies the weight of his concessions. Rosamond's presence is not demonic but

⁹⁷ Adam's hesitation takes the form of a soliloquy, a literal pause before he Falls in which he holds an internal debate, circling the choice before him and turning it into self-justification. He does not frame his decision as a private lapse but casts it in terms of "the bond of Nature" and "one flesh" (Milton, IX.956, 959, pp. 340-341). By appealing to the scriptural axiom of "one flesh," he universalises his weakness into a principle of human love, suggesting that his own inability to part from Eve is not merely personal but grounded in the very fabric of creation (Genesis 2:23-24). He knows obedience is possible, but delays long enough to persuade himself that fidelity to Eve is the higher law.

persuasive, yet her charm functions like Eve's rhetoric, softening resistance until ideals dissolve into complicity. The tragedy of Lydgate's temptation lies in his clarity—he is not deceived, but persuaded, his lofty ideals eroded by the ordinary persuasion of marriage and debt. His temptation is ambitious rather than sensual or reverential, but it follows the same epic pattern—an Eden of vocation, a persuasive voice, and a knowing consent that transforms aspiration into error.

Tertius Lydgate's Fall is thus the incremental attrition of vocation. He enters *Middlemarch* aflame with reformist ambition; his Eden is not a garden but the promise of scientific discovery, his tree of knowledge the vocation to which he feels called. Where Hetty enacts the rash hand and Dorothea the misjudged covenant, Lydgate enacts the Miltonic pattern of knowing complicity: aware of what fidelity to his calling requires, he abandons it through compromise. Like Adam, Lydgate understands the cost of his concessions but prefers domestic peace to vocational rigour. Rosamond's desires, her dread of social inferiority, become the fruit he cannot refuse: "There was gathering in him an amazed sense of his powerlessness over Rosamond ... his superior knowledge and mental force ... was simply set aside on every practical question" (Eliot, 1996b, p. 532). The serpent's rhetoric here is not grand or cosmic but domestic: coaxing for a carriage, resistance to economies, and the constant pressure of genteel appearances. Each concession is minor, but cumulatively they corrode his vocation. Gilbert and Gubar stress that Rosamond embodies the angelic surface of Victorian femininity that proves fatally destructive beneath, "the destructive angel in the house" whose beauty and charm conceal and "implacable will" (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000, p. 503). Lydgate, who imagined her the submissive "goose" complementing his reformist "gander," finds instead that her will is the net in which his vocation is caught (Eliot, 1996b, p. 324). Like Adam, he knows the consequences of yielding, yet he prefers acquiescence to rupture. His Fall is not error in ignorance but knowing concession to persuasion.

Debt crystallises Lydgate's Fall. When he proposes returning plates and jewellery, Rosamond retorts with detachment: "It is useless for me to look, Tertius; you will return what you please" (Eliot, 1996b, p. 542). She leaves Lydgate "helpless and wondering. Was she not coming back?" (Eliot, 1996b, p. 542). Adam shapes his Fall through his refusal to be parted from Eve, "How can I live without thee," and so too does Lydgate fear Rosamond's abandonment (Milton, IX.908, 339). His fear of separation outweighs his fidelity to vocation, just as Adam knowingly yields out of dread of estrangement. Lydgate's fear of Rosamond's absence—literalised in her leaving the room—undoes his resistance. This domesticated Adamic Fall has epic resonance in its ordinariness, and Lydgate's concessions, small in

themselves, accumulate into ruin (Miller, 2006, p. 134). The exile that follows is estrangement not from society but from self. Lydgate continues outwardly respectable, yet the Finale closes with the Miltonic weight of wasted promise: “he always regarded himself as a failure: he had not done what he once meant to do” (Eliot, 1996b, p. 761). Gilbert and Gubar read this as Eliot’s most chilling portrait of male ambition undone, where Rosamond’s destructive beauty is paradigmatic of domesticity rather than exceptional (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000, p. 504). Yet this reading risks reproducing the very gendered asymmetry Eliot’s novel critiques. In their account, Rosamond becomes the emblem of feminine destructiveness, the force that cancels Lydgate’s grand designs. But within the Miltonic framework, Eliot disperses responsibility more subtly. If Lydgate, like Adam, is not deceived but knowingly complicit, his Fall is not imposed by Rosamond’s will but precipitated by his dread of separation—the fear of losing intimacy outweighing fidelity to vocation. To emphasise Rosamond’s fatal power alone is to miss how Eliot domesticates Milton’s model of error into cumulative compromise: the tragedy lies not in feminine destructiveness but in the ordinary repetition of concessions that erode vocation. Rosamond’s beauty is not paradigmatic evil but one node in the broader realist web that renders vocation vulnerable to persuasion, debt, and domestic alienation. Their Fall is accordingly diminished but no less tragic: not expulsion from Eden but the slow undoing of vocation, the narrowing of ambition, and the disintegration of mutual trust. Where *Paradise Lost* casts Adam and Eve’s error as cosmic, *Middlemarch* renders its consequences in provincial scale—a realist Fall that moralises the ordinary. In Rosamond and Lydgate, the archetypes of Adam and Eve are fractured and diminished, dispersed into the compromises of marriage and the erosion of vocation.

While Dorothea’s reconciliation is renewed, Lydgate’s is foreclosed. His life closes not with consolation or growth in anticlimax. He is afforded moderate professional success, for all appearances, but his ambition remains unfulfilled. The narrator delivers an epitaph at once brutal and ironic, with devastating brevity:

As the years went on he opposed her less and less, whence Rosamond concluded that he had learned the value of her opinion ... In brief, Lydgate was what is called a successful man. But he died prematurely of diphtheria, and Rosamond afterwards married a wealthy physician ... He once called her his basil plant; and when she asked for an explanation, said that basil was a plant which had flourished wonderfully on a murdered man’s brains. Rosamond had a placid but strong answer to such speeches ... thus the conversation ended with the advantage on Rosamond’s side. (Eliot, 1996b, pp. 761-762)

The passage is startling in its restraint. The death of a central character is dispatched in a few lines, almost as narrative surplus. No crescendo, no tragic climax—only a parenthesis within Rosamond’s prosperity. That brevity is the cruelty. The wasted promise of a whole life is collapsed into a footnote, as though his ambition never mattered. This is Eliot’s most devastating gesture: the realism of foreclosure. Where Milton gives Adam an angelic vision, Eliot gives Lydgate nothing. No redemption. No providence. Only contraction, silence, and erasure.

Like Adam, Lydgate is complicit in his Fall, choosing complicity—time and time again, opposing Rosamond “less and less.” Unlike Milton’s Adam, who departs Eden under angelic vision, Lydgate dies without fanfare, his ambition dissolved and his vocation of reform unfulfilled. The basil plant represents the logic of foreclosure: Rosamond thrives on the ruin of his hopes, while his own story withers into irrelevance. Lydgate’s marriage and his submission to expediency are his own choices—he freely consents to a bond that undoes him—but instead of preluding to a providential future, Lydgate’s consistent choices lead only to diminishment and death. In *Lydgate*, Eliot refuses the teleology that human error, however grave, becomes enfolded within divine redemption. For him there is no angel to disclose meaning and no Christ to ensure renewal. His complicity in his Fall is real, but it yields only contraction, not transformation. By narrating his end as both chosen and unredeemed, Eliot strips the Fall of eschatological comfort and presents instead the realist tragedy of wasted potential. Lydgate’s story thus exemplifies a harsh edge of Eliot’s domestic Miltonism: reconciliation is not guaranteed, and the gravity of human freedom lies precisely in its capacity to close off the possibility of renewal.

RENEWAL IN THE UNHISTORIC

In *Middlemarch*, Eliot explores the issues of choice and free will for women in nineteenth century British society, but she does so by dramatising these pressures inside her heroines’ consciousness. Early in the novel, the narrator remarks with cutting irony:

The betrothed bride must see her future home, and dictate any change that she would like to have made there. A woman dictates before marriage in order that she may have an appetite for submission afterwards. And certainly, the mistakes that we male and female mortals make when we have our own way might fairly raise some wonder that we are so fond of it. (Eliot, 1996b, p. 68)

The sarcasm stages not only a social critique but also a paradox of interior freedom: the bride seems to exercise choice, yet the very act of decision prepares her appetite for later

submission. Here Eliot speaks directly in the narrator's ironic voice—but elsewhere she stages the same paradox inside consciousness itself, allowing characters like Dorothea to reason their way into temptation in passages of free indirect discourse. Dorothea's reverence for Casaubon, for instance, becomes her soliloquy: she persuades herself that his learning is vast compared to her "little pool," imagining his scholarship as the lake into which her mind might pour (Eliot, 1996b, p. 24). The moment recalls Eve at the pool in *Paradise Lost*, entranced by the answering beauty of her own reflection (Milton, IV.449-466, pp. 149-150). In both cases, aspiration turns inward, binding desire to an image that delays or misdirects judgement. Dorothea does not simply repeat the social rhetoric that venerates male scholarship; she internalises it, reshaping such logic into her own devotion. What begins as cultural commonplace hardens into personal conviction, a soliloquy of self-persuasion. The narrator layers irony over these interior scenes, much as Milton's speaker interrupts Eve's reasoning with warnings. The reader overhears Dorothea's reverence as both noble desire and misguided temptation. Virginia Woolf, reflecting on Eliot's heroines, observes:

The ancient consciousness of woman, charged with suffering and sensibility ... [has] brimmed and overflowed and uttered a demand for something - they scarcely know what - for something that is perhaps incompatible with the facts of human existence. (Woolf, 1919, p. 658)

Dorothea embodies precisely this tension. Her soliloquies are the articulation of that demand, inward dramas in which desire exceeds the structures that confine it. Eliot does not soften the truth: her heroines reach for enlargement but find only the narrow corridors of "an imperfect social state, in which great feelings will often take the aspect of error" (Eliot, 1996b, p. 764). The pattern echoes Milton: noble aspirations collapse into error because the act of reasoning itself is already bounded by ignorance or constraint. The novel's genius lies in turning this social confinement into interior temptation, a realist equivalent of Miltonic fallenness, in which the self persuades itself into error while reaching toward greatness.

Early in *Middlemarch* Dorothea must decide whether to inherit her mother's jewels or renounce them as unworthy luxury. Neither option leaves her satisfied, yet she persuades herself into piety. Like Eve, she rehearses freedom by choosing, but the structure of the choice already narrows her horizon. This episode sets the pattern: time and time again she finds herself in hallways with only two doors, rarely glimpsing the possibility of stepping outside. Her two-suitor plot is structured in the same way. The novel presents her with Casaubon and Ladislav, but never with the option of remaining unmarried—a path Eliot

herself chose in her lifelong union with George Henry Lewes.⁹⁸ The irony is that Dorothea's loftiest impulses are continually channelled into socially permissible outlets, so that her apparent choices are in fact rehearsal of conformity. Eliot's narrator makes this point with characteristic irony: the mistakes humans make are not those of unlimited freedom, but those committed when offered only partial and blinkered choices. The narrator's retrospective judgement on Dorothea confirms this logic:

Certainly those determining acts of her life were not ideally beautiful. They were the mixed result of young and noble impulse struggling amidst the conditions of an imperfect social state, in which great feelings will often take the aspect of error, and great faith with the aspect of illusion. For there is no creature whose inward being is so strong that it is not greatly determined by what lies outside it.
(Eliot, 1996b, p. 764)

Here interiority and society meet: noble impulse bends into error not because the self is weak, but because the social state has already shaped the framework of choice. Eliot's revisions to the finale of *Middlemarch* underscore how Dorothea's interior struggles were always entangled with social structures, even as Eliot gradually muted the sharpness of her critique. In the original manuscript, Dorothea's "determining acts" are "the mixed result of young and noble impulse struggling with imperfect conditions," and the narrator directly blames a society that smiled on marriages between "a sickly man" and "a girl less than half his own age," rewarding women for accepting the ignorance and folly of others (quoted in Lerer, 2003, p. 134). The first edition intensifies this critique: Dorothea is "struggling under prosaic conditions," and her "mistakes" are linked not only to marriage customs but also to modes of education that left women's knowledge "another name for motley ignorance" and to rules of conduct "in flat contradiction with [society's] own loudly-asserted beliefs" (quoted in Lerer, 2003, p. 134). By the 1874 edition, however, Eliot pares the passage down: Dorothea now struggles "amidst the conditions of an imperfect social state," and the language of "mistakes" disappears (Eliot, 1996b, p. 764; quoted in Lerer, 2003, p. 135). The tone becomes aphoristic, almost universal: "great feelings will often take the aspect of error, and great faith the aspect of illusion" (Eliot, 1996b, p. 764; quoted in Lerer, 2003, p. 135). What began as a direct indictment of specific social hypocrisies is transformed into a more general reflection on the

⁹⁸ In 1854 Eliot began her partnership with George Henry Lewes, who was still legally married. They "eloped" to Berlin and lived together for twenty-four years, Eliot calling herself "Mrs. Lewes" and dedicating her novels to her "Husband." Though the relationship scandalised her contemporaries, she embraced it as her deliberate choice, describing it as "this double life, which helps me to feel and think with double strength" (Carlise, 2023, p. 11).

limits of human action. As Seth Lerer notes, these revisions mark a shift from explicit social critique to a more aphoristic mediation, moving the reader's attention from external structures to inward paradox (Lerer, 2003, p. 135). The effect is to make Dorothea's predicament not just a social critique but a Miltonic soliloquy: like Eve, she reasons within conditions she cannot fully perceive, her aspirations becoming the very medium of her temptation.

Dorothea's choices are not wholly her own, but neither are they simply imposed from the outside. They emerge from the collision between her noble impulses and the narrow social air she breathes, where interiority itself becomes the site of constraint. Eliot, then, turns social constraint into interior temptation: characters reason themselves toward error inside frameworks they did not choose. Dorothea's choices feel free because they are argued for in her own voice; they are constrained because the arguments come pre-loaded with the era's assumptions. It is within this logic of choice-within-constraint that Ladislav must be read. His gaze both frees and frames: it opens a path beyond Casaubon's prohibition even as it recasts Dorothea as an ideal.

Like Milton's Eve, Dorothea becomes the object of idealisation, her complexity reduced to the fantasy of the ideal wife. That process of idealisation is most visible in the Naumann episode, where Will Ladislav attempts to explain Dorothea's "true" image to the painter:

Language gives a fuller image, which is all the better for being vague. After all, the true seeing is within; and painting stares at you with an insistent imperfection. I feel that especially about representations of women. As if a woman were a mere coloured superficies! You must wait for movement and tone. There is a difference in their very breathing: they change from moment to moment. – This woman whom you have just seen, for example: how would you paint her voice, pray? But her voice is much diviner than anything you have seen of her. (Eliot, 1996b, p. 177)

Ladislav dismisses painting as inadequate, elevating Dorothea into abstraction and turning her into a figure of breath and voice rather than a living, flawed woman. In doing so, he repeats the Miltonic tendency to exalt Eve into an ideal—"The grace and quiet domestic honor [sic] of Eve before the fall" and the "the glorification of the ideal marriage of Adam and Eve" (Hunter, 1978, p. 84). Both Milton and Ladislav elevate female figures above ordinariness, yet in doing so they fetishise specific traits and obscure humanity.⁹⁹ Eliot

⁹⁹ The same can be said for many male Victorian authors, whose female characters are at once elevated and fetishised through forms of idealisation—Catherine Robson's *Men in Wonderland* (2001) explores this paradigm through the lens of "girl worship," while Qureishi's article 'Gender Roles and Female Characters in Victorian Literature' (2024) surveys the development of female characters in the Victorian era, observing how archetypes were formed and transformed through socio-cultural expectations.

deliberately resists this idealisation: her narrator ensures that Dorothea's flaws, mistakes, and outspoken nature are visible, refusing to let her dissolve into the archetype of the perfect wife. In this refusal, Eliot fractures Miltonic archetypes, exposing how easily they collapse into idealisations that erase complexity.

Dorothea's union with Casaubon is Eliot's most sustained rewriting of Milton's drama: a false covenant, entered in hope of wisdom, that yields only sterility and alienation. As critics note, both Dorothea and Casaubon carry multiple Miltonic roles (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000, pp. 491-495; Lindley, 2013, pp. 132-134). Dorothea Brooke embodies both Eve's curiosity and Adam's complicity: like Eve, she yearns for knowledge and reveres her guide; like Adam, she binds herself in loyalty even when that loyalty proves destructive. Casaubon, meanwhile, condenses multiple archetypes—would-be Raphael in his role as instructor, sterile Adam in his incapacity for true companionship, and Satan in his jealous attempt to bind Dorothea through the codicil. The archetypes are not assigned singly but fractured and recombined, absorbed into the textures of provincial character. As *Adam Bede* re-stages Milton's gendered drama in the rural Midlands, *Middlemarch* disperses Milton's archetypes into multiple figures, intersecting across the social web of provincial life and resisting the fixity of the epic model.

Casaubon, by contrast, embodies the danger of archetypes stretched past their limits: he becomes instead a grotesque hybrid of Miltonic figures. As would-be Raphael, he postures as Dorothea's guide, offering her instruction in the form of his *Key to All Mythologies*, yet his discourse is lifeless pedantry that closes off rather than opens knowledge. As sterile Adam, he labours endlessly, but his labour is barren—yielding neither intellectual nor relational fruit. Indeed, it is only in death that Casaubon does anything of consequence. The codicil is his Satanic flourish, the moment when his will exerts narrative force. Yet even here, the act is sterile: not creation but prohibition, not instruction but jealous foreclosure. His envy transforms jealousy into legal domination—like Satan, who “fraught / with envy ... could not bear / Through pride,” Casaubon cannot endure a glory greater than his own (Milton, V. 662-665, p. 199). What he cannot equal, he will foreclose. His bequest is the small provincial parody of Satan's cosmic envy, a sterile attempt to exert control when true creation has failed.

Casaubon's solemn promises to Dorothea—“sincere devotion”—mask sterility under the guise of care (Eliot, 1996b, p. 51). His proposal letter is lifeless, presenting Dorothea not as beloved but as helper, praising her “fitness to supply that need,” her “rare combination of elements both solid and attractive, adapted to supply aid in graver labours and to cast a charm

over vacant hours” (Eliot, 1996b, pp. 49-50). He casts himself as “the earthly guardian of your welfare,” while even his gestures toward affection are formulaic: “thus evoking more decisively those affections to which I have but now referred” (Eliot, 1996b, pp. 50-51). Like Raphael, he positions himself as teacher, offering Dorothea access to a grand design through his *Key to All Mythologies*. Yet his rhetoric is abstract and obstructive: promises of guardianship and aid that mask sterility. Where Raphael’s over-disclosure inadvertently stirs Adam’s curiosity, Casaubon’s codicil intended to subordinate Dorothea awakens her to the possibility of life beyond him. Both men wield rhetoric as instruction, but both reveal its hollowness: divine messenger and pedant inadvertently tempt with rhetoric where they mean to guide.

Chapter three of *Middlemarch* begins with the epigraph, “Say, goddess, what ensued, when Raphael, / The affable archangel ... Eve / The story heard attentive, and was filled / With admiration, and deep muse, to hear / Of things so high and strange -*Paradise Lost*, Book VII” (Eliot, 1996b, p. 23). This moment in *Paradise Lost* frames Eve listening raptly as Raphael relates divine information to Adam, taking on a pedagogical role. Dorothea expects the same from Casaubon—what she considers “the higher knowledge gained by her in that companionship”—yet, like Raphael’s discourse, his *Key to All Mythologies* is fragmented, incoherent, and ultimately fruitless (Eliot, 1996b, p. 73). Dorothea, like Adam, is entranced, believing that through his learning she might reach the knowledge she craves. The irony is that Casaubon’s authority, like Raphael’s, tempts rather than secures: it awakens desire while offering nothing that can truly satisfy. Casaubon and Raphael both provide too much information, disclosures that unsettle rather than secure.

Raphael’s attempt to explain free will and angelic acts of disobedience inadvertently arms Adam with the very idea of transgression—Casaubon’s *Key to All Mythologies* functions in the same key—to Dorothea, it appears as a gateway for intellectual enlargement, yet its fragments and contradictions reveal only sterility. His codicil extends this dynamic into juridical form: before its issue, “it had never before entered [Dorothea’s] mind that [Ladislaw] could, under any circumstances, be her lover” (Eliot, 1996a, p. 448). By forbidding her marriage to Ladislaw, Casaubon conjures the very possibility he seeks to exclude. As Foucault observes, prohibition is productive—it names, and thereby creates, the desire it denies (Butler, 1989, pp. 35-36). Casaubon’s prohibition tempts Dorothea in precisely this way, echoing Raphael’s counterproductive revelations. Both figures show how authority that aims to bind can instead seduce, producing temptation not despite law but through it.

Casaubon's and Dorothea's intellectual appetites reinforce this dynamic. In *Paradise Lost*, Raphael warns that "Knowledge is as food, and needs no less / Her Temperance over Appetite, to know / In measure what the mind may well contain" (Milton, VII.126-128, p. 257). Knowledge must be consumed with caution, yet temptation lies precisely in overindulgence. In *Middlemarch*, "appetite is almost entirely absent" (Beer, 2006, p. 31). When food is discussed, it is referred to passively, as more of a character descriptor than an action. Casaubon, whose spoon-scraping irritates even Celia ("I shall not hear him eat his soup so ... can't you hear how he scrapes his spoon?"), embodies this gluttony of intellect (Eliot, 1996a, p. 45). His over indulgence in intellect, "the usual tendency to unsoundness in intellectual men," is mirrored in his graceless eagerness at the dinner table (Eliot, 1996b, p. 422). Dorothea, too, is marked by appetite, but hers is more elevated: she longs for knowledge as one longs for fragrance or sweetness. Looking at jewels with Celia, she exclaims, "It is strange how colors [sic] seem to deeply penetrate one, like scent ... They look like fragments of heaven" (Eliot, 1996a, p. 14). Her desire is not simply for adornment but for transcendence, a hunger for more than she is given. Yet Casaubon withholds, retreating to his library to dine alone, excluding her from both the table and from the feast of knowledge. Dorothea's predicament matches Adam's response to Raphael: "thy words with grace divine / Imbued, bring to their sweetness no satiety" (Milton, VIII.215-216, p. 291). The more she tastes of Casaubon's learning the more insatiable her appetite becomes. Appetite itself, figured through food and knowledge, becomes the form of temptation; an endless craving that entices by promising fullness while ensuring dissatisfaction. As Erik Gray has shown in his discussion of *Middlemarch*, Eliot's engagement with Milton often operates through such subtle formal and symbolic echoes, where bodily imagery—particularly hands, appetite, and gesture—reworks the epic's language of fall and expulsion within a realist framework, recasting Miltonic expulsion not as cosmic exile but as a condition of social and emotional estrangement (Gray, 2009, pp. 141-145).

Casaubon's gradual deterioration clarifies his Satanic parallel. Like the archangel's rebellion, his ambition overreaches, curdles, and collapses into impotence. His codicil, forbidding Dorothea to marry Will Ladislav, becomes the poisoned fruit of his envy. As Gilbert and Gubar observe, like Satan's own diminishing stature throughout *Paradise Lost*, Casaubon diminishes from worldly academic, to frustrating dogmatist, to nothing but a piece of paper imposing his volition after his death (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000, p. 218). Like Satan's internally lived Hell, Casaubon's "lifelong bias" toward "petty anxieties of self-assertion" damns him to a mental hell from which even death cannot free him (Milton, IV.75, p. 135;

Eliot, 1996b, p. 387). Dorothea's role is subtler but no less Miltonic. Her "Eve-like curiosity" leads her to venerate Casaubon's learning as if gazing into a lake (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000, p. 216). This image, recalling Eve's own enchantment at her reflection, exposes the self-regard beneath her wifely submission. As Casaubon is revealed to be a "dried-up pedant," he realizes that her "capacity for worshipping the right object" is a capacity for "presumption" (Eliot, 1996b, pp. 185, 189). As David Lindley notes, Dorothea's presumption lies in assuming Casaubon's erudition could serve her self-enlargement, an error born of egoistic desire for knowledge (Lindley, 2013, pp. 360-361). Like Adam and Eve who grasp fruit without thinking of consequences for their descendants, Dorothea clings to Casaubon without reckoning with the sterility it will impose on her future.

The Rome honeymoon crystallises their Fall. The grandeur of antiquity, which Dorothea expects to enlarge her life, instead sharpens her sense of confinement. Rome becomes her Eden lost: not through expulsion, but through the recognition that she has bound herself to sterility. Casaubon's library then becomes her exile, a space of dust and silence where her hopes for intellectual enlargement are stifled. Unlike Hetty's exile, Dorothea's is internal: a suffocation within the very home that was meant to nurture her. Yet Eliot refuses to cast this error as mere culpability. In their final scene together before Casaubon's death, Dorothea and her husband become recognisably postlapsarian figures, bound together not in harmony but in mutual diminishment. Milton closes *Paradise Lost* with Adam and Eve "hand in hand with wand'ring steps and slow, / Through Eden took their solitary way" (Milton, XII.648-649, p. 494). After despair and recrimination, Eve restores Adam by begging him not to abandon her, reaffirming companionship as the one remaining good on earth after the Fall (Milton, X.910-913, pp. 385-386). Eliot recasts this moment when Dorothea "put her hand into her husband's, and they went along the broad corridor together" (Eliot, 1996b, p. 390). Casaubon's words are the kindest he has ever offered, and Dorothea receives them with an Eve-like devotion, waiting for him even as she recognises the sterility of their bond. Gillian Beer observes that "many of George Eliot's contemporaries were perturbed by the work's determined avoidance of transcendence," yet the parallel with Milton complicates that claim (Beer, 2006, p. 26). In *Paradise Lost*, Adam and Eve do not find transcendence after their Fall; they are bound to the ordinary world of labour and mortality, left to follow "Providence their guide" (Milton, XII.647, p. 494). Similarly, Dorothea and Casaubon are bound to the ordinary domestic sphere. Their reconciliation is not divine redemption but the minimal grace of companionship: walking side by side down a corridor instead of through a garden. Eliot

thus secularises Milton's immanence—but God is not wholly absent; instead refracted into ordinary gestures of patience, forgiveness, and waiting (Beer, 2006, p. 27).

The corridor at Lowick becomes Dorothea's Eden lost. Where Milton's couple steps into the wide world, Dorothea's steps lead deeper into confinement. The corridor is long, narrow, and lined with books that have failed to yield fruit. Casaubon himself is already falling into shadow, "more haggard" with every step (Eliot, 1996b, p. 389). The walk is both a literal movement and a metaphor of exile: not departure from Eden, but entrapment within the sterile space of Casaubon's learning. The gesture of taking hands is poignant because it is belated—it is the reconciliation of companions who are already past renewal, their shared life more an acknowledgement of loss than a promise of beginning. By placing Dorothea and Casaubon in this postlapsarian posture, Eliot makes the domestic Fall visible not only in rash error or sterile covenant, but in the lived alienation of marriage itself. Dorothea's exile is thus marital: a life in which devotion and aspiration have been misapplied, and where the gestures of kindness arrive only when all possibility of growth has been foreclosed. Yet in that very alienation Eliot locates immanence. The domestic world of *Middlemarch* still carries Miltonic weight: fallenness narrated not in cosmic rebellion, but in the quiet devastation of wasted potential and ordinary fidelity.

Dorothea's story concludes with renewal. Her second marriage to Ladislav reconfigures Milton's *felix culpa*—error as the ground of growth—into realist terms. The failure of her first marriage to Casaubon becomes the necessary prelude to sympathy, humility, and eventual happiness. Eliot stages Dorothea's first marriage as a revision of Eve's attempt at marital reconciliation. She approaches him, the narrator observes, as if she "might have represented a heaven-sent angel," yet insists inwardly, "It is his fault, not mine ...' In such a crisis as this, women begin to hate" (Eliot, 1996b, pp. 387-388). Casaubon is not forgiving Adam, and Dorothea will not enact Eve's penitence. As Nardo notes, this moment "call[s] into question the efficacy of Eve's wifely submission as a solution to marital woes in *Middlemarch*" (Nardo, 2003, p. 120). Eliot rewrites Milton's pattern: this fragile moment of marital dissonance resembles Adam's fidelity to Eve, but in Casaubon's sterility this devotion becomes destructive rather than redemptive.

Yet Casaubon's death and his codicil, meant to bind her, clear the ground for her renewal. His prohibition becomes disclosure, much like Milton's ironic over-disclosures through Raphael. Freed from his jealousy, Dorothea finds companionship with Ladislav. This choice constitutes her "Fall" from social esteem but also her rebirth into sympathy and love. The Rector's defence, "we are rather apt to consider an act wrong because it is

unpleasant to us,” aligns narrator (“he had the knack of saying a home truth”) and reader against provincial judgement, affirming the legitimacy of Dorothea’s renewal (Eliot, 1996b, p. 746). Reconciliation here is modest but real: Dorothea’s “finely-touched spirit” persists in “unhistoric acts,” her influence diffused through ordinary life rather than public achievement (Eliot, 1996b, p. 765). Eliot transposes Milton’s epic closure into the quiet persistence of sympathy, showing that error, though tragic, can open into growth. Dorothea’s second marriage thus exemplifies Eliot’s boldest domestication of Milton’s narrative arc: divine pardon becomes human covenant; epic redemption becomes provincial renewal.

Nowhere is Eliot’s fracturing method of archetypal dispersion in *Middlemarch* clearer than in the triad of Dorothea, Casaubon, and Will Ladislaw. Dorothea embodies both Eve’s curiosity and Adam’s complicity, Casaubon becomes a grotesque hybrid of Miltonic figures—failed Raphael, sterile Adam, envious Satan—and Ladislaw unsettles the Miltonic structure by refiguring the tempter not as producing the Fall but as liberation. Ladislaw offers the inversion of Casaubon’s amalgamation of archetypes—his role toward Dorothea resembles Satan’s in just one sense: he is the “other man,” the presence Casaubon most fears, the figure whose vitality threatens sterile authority. Yet Eliot tempers the tempter archetype by detaching it from sin. In *Paradise Lost*, temptation is always ruinous. Satan’s seduction of Eve is solely an attempt to hurt God by dragging others into his own loss. But where Satan’s persuasion aims at ruin, Ladislaw’s admiration unsettles prohibitions and opens possibility—“movement and tone”—rather than exile (Eliot, 1996b, p. 177). Like Eliot’s other everyday personae, Ladislaw is not without flaws—his idealisation of Dorothea is as unsettling as it is inaccurate, reinscribing Milton in his fetishisation while simultaneously unsettling the pattern of temptation to ruin. For Ladislaw, “It was beautiful to see how Dorothea’s eyes turned with wifely anxiety ... she would have lost some of her halo if she had been without that duteous occupation” (Eliot, 1996b, pp. 201-202). Yet unlike Satan’s calculated flattery of Eve’s beauty, Ladislaw’s idealisation is naïve rather than envious, springing from Romantic excess rather than malice. When Dorothea does lose that halo in the eyes of others—“Those who had not seen anything of Dorothea usually observed that she could not have been a ‘nice woman’—their relationship is no longer cast in terms of idealised sanctity but of mutual recognition (Eliot, 1996a, p. 764). In her life with him, Dorothea’s vitality becomes like “that river of which Cyrus broke the strength, [which] spent itself in channels which had no great

name on earth.”¹⁰⁰ The image marks a decisive inversion of Miltonic scale: where *Paradise Lost* is cosmic, Dorothea’s influence flows through hidden channels, sustaining ordinary lives without grandeur. Casaubon dammed her energies into sterility; Ladislaw releases them into dispersed but living courses. His role as tempter is thereby reconfigured—he resembles Satan in unsettling the structures of authority, but where Satan’s envy leads to destruction, Ladislaw’s Romantic dissent becomes the channel through which Dorothea’s “full nature” flows into unhistoric but enduring good (Eliot, 1996a, p. 764). Between Casaubon’s prohibition and Ladislaw’s abstraction, Dorothea learns that liberation can arrive in the same breath as idealisation; Eliot’s realist Miltonism lives in that tension—where a woman’s selfhood is at once opened and framed. The same gaze that releases her also confines her; freedom flows, but only in carved channels.

REALIST WISDOM AND DOMESTIC PROVIDENCE

While *Adam Bede* and *Middlemarch* retain the Miltonic arc of temptation, Fall, exile, and reconciliation, they strip it of providence, recasting it as sympathy, consequence, and social causality. Where Austen miniaturises and Brontë magnifies, Eliot disperses Milton into the everyday fabric of provincial life. Her distinctive achievement is to show that ordinary missteps—a vanity indulged, a marriage misjudged, a vocation compromised—can bear the same moral weight as the Fall of humankind. Eliot thus does not discard Milton’s structure but translates it into provincial realism. Temptation becomes persuasion in the dairy, the library, and the drawing room; Fall becomes crime, misjudgement, or compromise; exile becomes transportation, marital suffocation, or mediocrity; and reconciliation becomes pastoral consolation, second chances, or foreclosed possibility. Beer observes that “God is absent in *Middlemarch*,” yet the shape of providence remains: choices have consequences, error leads to alienation, sympathy offers renewal (Beer, 2006, p. 26). The narrator functions

¹⁰⁰ The reference is to Herodotus’s *Histories*, where Cyrus the Great punishes the river Gyndes by dividing it into 360 channels, thus breaking its strength before his conquest of Babylon (Herodotus, 2013, I.189-190). Eliot invokes this classical episode to figure Dorothea’s energies as diverted into many modest currents rather than one grand course. These hidden channels are framed against Dorothea’s own epic self-conception: she is figured as “a new Antigone,” or “Theresa,” but the “medium in which their ardent deeds took shape is forever gone” (Eliot, 1996a, p. 764). Her “determining acts” are not “ideally beautiful” but the “mixed result of young and noble impulse struggling amidst the conditions of an imperfect social state” (Eliot, 1996a, p. 764). This is the irony of Dorothea’s Miltonic inheritance: she aspires to the cosmic, but her energies are redirected to the ordinary. Ladislaw becomes the condition through which those energies can freely flow, even if “in channels which had no great name on the earth” (Eliot, 1996a, p. 764). His disruption enables Dorothea’s vocation, not as epic heroine but as provincial woman whose vitality diffuses quietly into the world.

as realist providence, contextualising without divine sanction, enlarging the scope of the ordinary into the moral gravity of the epic (Miller, 2006, p. 134).

One of Eliot's most radical contributions is her revaluation of Eve's desire. In Milton, Eve's curiosity brings transgression; in Eliot, Dorothea's curiosity for knowledge is dignified, even when misapplied. Gilbert and Gubar see Dorothea as trapped within Miltonic hierarchy, yet Postlethwaite argues that Eliot reframes aspiration as noble even in failure: transcendence is "embedded in the redemptive rituals of human relationship" (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000, p. 513; Postlethwaite, 1990, p. 218). Dorothea's misjudgement becomes the ground of sympathy, her Fall the condition of renewal. Eliot thereby turns Milton's condemnation into a domestic *felix culpa*, where error is not sin but the beginning of wisdom. Lydgate, by contrast, embodies Adam's complicity. His vocation is undone not by deception but by concession—a realist rewriting of Adam's solidarity with Eve. Miller notes that Eliot "domesticates the epic," making Lydgate's incremental errors as weighty as Milton's primal Fall (Miller, 2006, p. 134). The scale is diminished—his failure blights only his own life, of little consequence in comparison to the condemnation of humanity (and epitaphs, apparently)—but the moral structure remains. Eliot demonstrates how Miltonic complicity can be refracted into modern professional fallenness: ambition undone by persuasion, ideals eroded into mediocrity. Eliot further refigures Milton's angels in pastoral sympathy in Dinah Morris, who counsels and consoles. She comforts Hetty in prison, offering compassion where grace is absent. Yet Dinah's words cannot undo Hetty's exile; sympathy replaces divine promise, but sympathy itself is fragile, unable to erase error. Knoepfelmacher notes that Dinah cannot "prevent the full force of George Eliot's deterministic 'Nature'," resulting in consolation without restoration (Knoepfelmacher, 1967, p. 532). Eliot acknowledges the limit of human sympathy—a recognition that not all errors can be repaired. Thus by dispersing reconciliation across renewed, foreclosed, and partial models, Eliot refuses providential disclosure. Her realism insists that endings are multiple, uneven, and contingent.

Placed beside Austen and Brontë, Eliot completes a triad of domestication. Austen miniaturises Milton into ironic epistemology; Brontë magnifies him into Gothic passion and communal unrest; and Eliot disperses him into networks of choices, error, and consequence. Her mode is not rebellion or homage but absorption and moderate secularisation: Milton's motifs become the grammar of domestic life. The domestic novel becomes a realist epic, carrying the weight of Milton's moral categories while shedding their theological frame. The result is a realist theology: a narrative system in which error is intelligible, exile inevitable, and reconciliation contingent. Eliot replaces providence with consequence, grace with

sympathy, and divine decree with narratorial omniscience, yet she preserves the moral seriousness of the pic, showing how provincial choices can carry epic consequence. In Hetty, Dorothea, and Lydgate, Eliot refracts Milton's arc in a domestic key: their stories dignify error as the condition of growth, even when growth is foreclosed.

CONCLUSION: REFRAMING THE FALL IN DOMESTIC FICTION

Few works of English literature have been so persistently formative as John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (Leonard, 2013, p. 1). By the early nineteenth century, the poem functioned less like a single text than like a shared cultural lexicon, invoked across pulpits, classrooms, political speeches, art, and drawing rooms (Knoppers and Colón Semenza, 2006, pp. 1-3; Gill, 2017, p. 4-10). Its lines were memorised in grammar schools, its characters appeared in engravings and children's primers, and its rhetoric underpinned debates about liberty and obedience from the pulpit to Parliament.¹⁰¹ As Bishop Welldon observes, Milton's theology "seemed to have drifted surely, if slowly, away from orthodox or established Christianity into a Christian belief and habit of his own"—and yet the poem still carried the aura of scriptural authority (Welldon, 1912, p. 901). The paradox is telling—*Paradise Lost* was "revered as if it were a sacred text," even as its heterodoxies made it endlessly adaptable (Knoppers and Colón Semenza, 2006, p. 1).

To grapple with Milton, then, is not an antiquarian exercise or a practice in writing a *Key to All Mythologies*, but a cultural necessity. His characters and images become a symbolic shorthand. Satan's forensic eloquence becomes a touchstone for understanding political rhetoric; Adam's solidarity with Eve embodies both noble self-sacrifice and culpable weakness. Nineteenth-century writers could assume that readers recognised these figures instinctively, as readily as they knew biblical archetypes. *Paradise Lost* was part of the cultural atmosphere: to allude to Eve's mirror or Satan's Fall was to summon a ready-made cluster of associations about error, ambition, or desire.

Importantly, Milton's ubiquity coincided with an age of cultural transition. The publication of *De Doctrina Christiana* in 1825 reopened debate about his heterodox theology, while eighteenth-century Romantic admiration for Satan had refigured him as a proto-revolutionary. Milton could be claimed simultaneously as defender of liberty and stern Puritan moralist, as radical icon and establishment authority. That malleability is what made him indispensable to novelists. Unlike Shakespeare, whose plays were equally canonical, Milton offered not only characters and language but a full cosmological architecture that could be transferred, translated, and domesticated into other forms. *Paradise Lost* becomes the crucial site of literary inheritance for the English novel because Milton does what neither

¹⁰¹ For further discussion, see: Campbell and Corns, *John Milton: Life, Work, and Thought* (2008); Parker, *Milton: A Biography. Vol. 1-2* (1999); Raymond, *Milton's Angels: The Early-Modern Imagination* (2010); Robson, *Men in Wonderland: The Lost Girlhood of the Victorian Gentleman* (2015).

the classical epics not the Bible could: he both legitimises the English language as an epic medium and transforms Genesis into literature. By replacing Homeric and Virgilian dactylic hexameter with English blank verse, Milton naturalises epic form within the vernacular, making English itself a stage fit for heroic grandeur (Loewenstein, 2010, p. 9). At the same time, he expands the stark narrative of Genesis into a literary performance that entertains, critiques, and instructs—political allegory, psychological interiority, and ethical pedagogy interwoven into one text. This dual innovation—formal and narrative—provides the structural baseline from which the domestic novel adapts. The Miltonic narrative arc of temptation, Fall, exile, and redemption is reinscribed into everyday life: narrative authority as invocation, interior longing as epic conflict, flirtation or ambition as temptation, social disgrace as the Fall, estrangement as exile, and reconciliation—whether partial or foreclosed—as resolution. As Armstrong, Homans, Poovey, and Gallagher argue, the domestic novel’s power lies in this transformation: it critiques social custom, instructs ethics, and inscribes heroism into ordinary lives by reworking the very epic scaffolding Milton built. For this reason, *Paradise Lost*—not Homer, not Virgil, not even the Bible—anchors the genealogy of the novel, fusing epic form with vernacular narrative to create the literary inheritance of English domestic fiction.

The critical story of Milton’s afterlife has historically been told through the language of struggle. Harold Bloom cast Milton as the archetypal patriarchal literary forebear, against whom all later writers wrestled with in agonistic rivalry (Bloom, 1997, p. 19). Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, reframing the picture for women, imagined Milton as the patriarchal bogey whose Eve epitomised female subordination, with women novelists cast as rebellious daughters locked in symbolic combat (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000, pp. 187-188). While these frameworks have been highly influential in studying Miltonic inheritance, more recent Milton criticism has increasingly moved beyond purely agonistic models, emphasising instead forms of continuity, adaptation, and what John T. Shawcross describes as the “sweet influence” of Milton’s works (Duran, 2011, p. 38). What the domestic novel demonstrates is something different: a more ordinary but more generative process by which Milton’s epic is domesticated.

Domestication here means not dilution, but translation. It is the re-situating of Milton’s cosmic drama into the scale of households, communities, and interior lives. The Fall narrative becomes the structuring arc of courtship and marriage. Milton’s archetypes are recharacterized: the Satanic rhetorician appears as the charming but deceptive suitor; Eve is reimagined as the heroine whose curiosity and missteps become conditions for growth; Adam

is rewritten as the complicit partner, torn between solidarity and error. What was once the story of cosmic catastrophe is domesticated into the ordinary dramas of pride, prejudice, passion, and ambition. As Nancy Armstrong argues, the domestic novel was never a trial form but the cultural arena where subjectivity and morality were made legible; its narrative scaffolding was therefore ready-made to absorb Milton's categories (Armstrong, 1987, pp. 8, 15). Novelists quote Milton directly, parody his grand style, or draw on the ambient familiarity of his imagery. Yet these gestures take their deepest meaning when folded back into the domestic novel's narrative machinery. The courtship plot is the engine: it absorbs Miltonic motifs, stretches or compresses them, and redistributes their weight across irony, Gothic intensity, and realist causality.

Austen exemplifies this dynamic. She does not cite Milton explicitly in her novels, but her free indirect discourse echoes Milton's soliloquies: Elizabeth Bennet's misjudgements implicate readers just as Eve's interior reasoning draws Milton's audience into complicity. Margaret Homans highlights how women novelists, even when constrained by patriarchal forms, developed innovative linguistic strategies; Austen's irony is precisely such a strategy, transforming Milton's soliloquy into free indirect discourse (Homans, 1986, pp. 112-113). Brontë, by contrast, amplifies Milton overtly: Jane Eyre resists a Satanic Rochester, and Shirley Keeldar explicitly interrogates whether Milton was "good" as well as "great" (Brontë, 1993a, p. 240). Gilbert and Gubar interpret this move as rebellion against a patriarchal Milton, but later critics like Griesinger complicate that binary, showing how Brontë reworks Miltonic archetypes in ways that are adaptive as well as resistant (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000, pp. 187-188, 513; Griesinger, 2008, pp. 46-47). Eliot disperses Milton most thoroughly, weaving his categories into realist webs where temptation and error recur not once but repeatedly, embedded in the fabric of social life. Miller captures this shift in noting that Eliot "domesticates the epic" (Miller, 2006, p. 134). These strategies—compression, amplification, diffusion—are variations on domestication. Each brings the epic into the register of ordinary experience, reshaping theological drama into domestic ethics. To domesticate Milton is neither to capitulate nor to overthrow; it is to translate. That translation is itself creative—it expands the scope of the novel, dignifies domestic error with epic seriousness, and recasts women's choices as morally and narratively central.

Taken together, Austen, Brontë, and Eliot reveal the extraordinary adaptability of Miltonic motifs once they enter the terrain of the domestic novel. Each novelist demonstrates a different strategy of domestication, but the power lies not in their separateness but in their complementarity. Austen's irony establishes the miniature scale on which Milton's categories

can still carry moral weight. Her heroines stumble into prejudice and misjudgement, yet error functions as education, a domestic *felix culpa* where growth depends upon mistakes. By shrinking the Fall into the space of drawing rooms and dances, Austen proves that ordinary life is no less serious than Eden. Brontë's intensity magnifies Miltonic temptation until it threatens annihilation. Jane Eyre's refusal of Rochester's bigamy, or Shirley Keeldar's sceptical rebuke of Milton's patriarchal authority, show how the epic can be recast as trial, secrecy, and social upheaval. Brontë distributes Milton's archetypes across multiple figures—Jane as revisionist Eve, Bertha as Chaos, St. John as a false Son—so that the Fall becomes a collective drama rather than a single transgression. Eliot's realism further expands Miltonic error into the very fabric of causality. Fallenness is no longer a singular event but a condition of human life, repeated in vanity, misplaced reverence, and ambition. Hetty, Dorothea, and Lydgate exemplify different registers of error; reconciliation comes partially, if at all, through sympathy or second marriages. Eliot's wide dispersal means these archetypes are not only played out through these exemplary characters, but through densely populated parishes and towns. Eliot completes the domestication of Milton, replacing providence with history and psychology.

Read together, these authors demonstrate that domestication is not a single act but a spectrum. Austen shows that error can be comic and instructive; Brontë insists on its danger and its Gothic charge; Eliot reveals its diffusion in everyday compromise. Where one leaves gaps, another supplies emphasis. Their collective achievement is to dignify domestic life as an epic of contemporary ordinariness: not angels and demons, but women and men negotiating pride, passion, compromise, and sympathy. Historically, the triad also charts the evolution of the domestic novel itself. Austen's early nineteenth-century irony set the courtship plot as a form capable of moral weight. Brontë's mid-century fiction stretched it into Gothic and industrial registers. Eliot's later realism absorbed it into panoramic social critique. Seen in sequence, the triad narrates not just Milton's afterlife but the growth of the domestic novel in Britain's literary culture. As Mary Poovey makes clear, this growth was inseparable from the disciplining of gender roles, while Catherine Gallagher shows how the novel made the lives of "nobody" characters morally legible—precisely the ground where Milton's epic seriousness could be re-situated (Gallagher, 1994, pp. 145-165; Poovey, 1985, pp. 3-24).

The implication is not only that Austen, Brontë, and Eliot domesticated Milton's categories, but that they did so in the genre most often dismissed as trivial (Armstrong, 1987, p. 8). To locate *Paradise Lost* within the marriage plot is to reframe the cultural function of

the domestic novel—it was not just a form for telling stories about courtship and etiquette, but the genre through which Milton’s epic seriousness was carried into nineteenth-century modernity. This matters because it redefines the cultural reach of both Milton and the novel. For Milton, it shows that his epic endured not as theology but as narrative architecture, transposed into secular settings. For the novel, it shows that what critics once treated as marginal—drawing rooms, provincial towns, the moral education of young women—was in fact the arena where epic categories were re-situated and made newly consequential. Temptation, Fall, and reconciliation did not vanish with domestication; they were rewritten into the plots that shaped nineteenth-century reading culture. In this sense, the domestic novel becomes not simply one more genre in the period but the arena of Milton’s afterlife. It is where readers encountered his archetypes, not in sermons or theological treatises, but in the guise of Elizabeth Bennet’s prejudice, Jane Eyre’s refusal, or Dorothea Brooke’s disillusionment. To study the nineteenth-century reception of Milton is therefore also to study the domestic novel, because the two histories are inseparably entwined.

If *Paradise Lost* positioned Eve as secondary, derivative, and culpable, the domestic novelists who inherited Milton reconfigured not only her role but also the very structure of narrative authority. Milton’s epic narrator speaks with a heavenly sanction, invoking divine inspiration to aid him in his narrative of theodicy. Milton’s Eve is given a complex role in her voice and interiority. She is not simply a silent adjunct to Adam but a speaker of extraordinary eloquence, capable of soliloquy, persuasion, reason, and reconciliation. Her debates with Adam and her self-justifications grant her a depth that distinguishes her wholly from her counterpart in Genesis. Yet this voice, however rich, is ultimately framed within the hierarchies of *Paradise Lost*: her insights and errors alike are situated in relation to Adam’s authority, the narrator’s commentary, and God’s providential order. Through Eve, Milton bequeaths to later writers both a gift and a conundrum—Eve as a figure of astonishing linguistic and psychological vitality, but one whose authority is repeatedly curtailed.

Austen, Brontë, and Eliot seize this paradox. Austen’s free indirect discourse becomes in her hands a consistent and defining technique—one of the first sustained explorations of the mode’s potential (Hegele, 2021, p. 33). It allows women’s errors and misjudgements to be narrated from within, without immediate external correction. Elizabeth Bennet’s prejudice is allowed to unfold as a recognisable Miltonic Fall, but the recognition arises through the narrative’s own structures of irony rather than divine or patriarchal judgement. Brontë goes further by granting Jane Eyre full narratorial control. Jane is not merely a character with interiority but the very voice that addresses the reader, claims authority over her own

biography, and reframes Miltonic temptation in terms of autonomy and moral agency. Eliot transforms narrative authority yet again, adopting the stance of a secular providence: her narrator resembles Milton in omniscient gravity, but speaks without divine sanction, urging readers instead toward sympathy, reflection, and ethical seriousness.

In each case, the Miltonic inheritance of Eve's voice is preserved but redirected. Where Milton grants Eve eloquence but circumscribes her authority, the domestic novelists recast that eloquence as the ground of narrative power itself. To domesticate Milton is therefore not only to translate his epic into the registers of household and community, but also to shift who speaks and who is authorised to interpret. Austen's irony and interiority, Brontë's confessional intimacy, and Eliot's reflective realism each demonstrate that the epic weight of voice could be claimed by women writers and their heroines. The domestication of Milton is inseparable from the reconstitution of narrative authority: Eve's complex voice becomes the template through which nineteenth-century women writers established their own authority to narrate error, judgement, and reconciliation.

This dissertation has concentrated on Austen, Brontë, and Eliot through a select group of texts in which Milton's presence is most visible—*Pride and Prejudice* and *Mansfield Park*, *Jane Eyre* and *Shirley*, and *Adam Bede* and *Middlemarch*. Yet one important avenue for further work lies in moving beyond these exemplary texts to consider each author's corpus as a whole. To isolate only the most explicitly Miltonic novels is to risk overstating their uniqueness, when in fact *Paradise Lost* was a cultural scripture that permeated the imaginative fabric of their wider writing. Anna Nardo's *George Eliot's Dialogue with John Milton* already offers a model of what such a corpus-wide study might look like, tracing Eliot's engagement with Milton across a "lifelong dialogue" in which she adapted Milton's themes of temptation, salvation, and knowledge (Nardo, 2003, p. 3). Nardo shows how Eliot re-gendered Milton's models of heroism, reframing figures such as Eve and the Comus heroine through her own female characters, and how she transformed Miltonic epic into a vehicle for modern ethical and narrative experimentation. In Austen's case, a corpus-wide approach might trace how Miltonic arcs of temptation, error, estrangement, and reconciliation shape the moral dynamics of *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) or *Emma* (1815). *Persuasion* (1817b) offers a particularly rich site for this inquiry: Anne Elliot's quiet resilience, her long exile from Wentworth, and her eventual reconciliation mirrors a Miltonic arc of Fall, alienation, and restoration, but reframed in the subdued, autumnal key of late style. To read *Persuasion* through the lens of domesticated Milton is to see how even Austen's most restrained novel carries epic resonances beneath its quiet surfaces. Brontë's later *Villette*

(1853), with its emphasis on solitude, temptation, and ambiguous reconciliation, suggests further avenues for understanding how Eve's complex role was reimagined across her career.

While Austen, Brontë, and Eliot anchor this argument for the domestic novel as a vehicle for Miltonic reinterpretation, they are not the only nineteenth-century writers to deeply engage with Milton's legacy. *Paradise Lost* is a cultural text of such ubiquity that its imagery, themes, and archetypes resonate far beyond the confines of the marriage plot. Novelists, poets, and artists across the nineteenth-century rework Milton's narrative structures to grapple with questions of identity, morality, and modernity. Thus, there remains much work to be done. Beyond the authors examined in this dissertation, other prominent writers of domestic fiction—Elizabeth Gaskell, Margaret Oliphant, Mrs. Henry Wood—invite sustained study. Each of these figures occupied a crucial position in nineteenth-century literary culture, commanding large readerships and shaping popular understandings of domesticity (Armstrong, 1987, pp. 8-9; Fryckstedt, 1987, pp. 11-13). Gaskell's fiction, for instance, displays striking affinities with Milton's categories. In *Ruth* (1853), the figure of the "fallen woman" resonates against the backdrop of Eve's culpability and expulsion, though Gaskell softens the Miltonic severity by insisting on the possibility of redemption through sympathy and social reform. *North and South* (1855), meanwhile, reworks exile and reconciliation on a collective scale: Margaret Hale mediates between capital and labour in a narrative arc that mirrors the movement from estrangement to fragile concord. Reading Gaskell through the lens of the domestication of Milton would illuminate how Miltonic paradigms persist not only in questions of individual morality but also in industrial and communal life. Oliphant, who produced an enormous body of fiction and criticism, provides another fertile case. Her recurring interest in the supernatural and in moral testing—visible in novels like *The Chronicles of Carlingford* (1863)—suggests an engagement with Miltonic structures of temptation and providence, though refigured in suburban and ecclesiastical settings. Mrs. Henry Wood's *East Lynne* (1861) also bears traces of Miltonic inheritance. Its notorious themes of adultery, concealment, and return echo the Fall, exile, and partial reconciliation of *Paradise Lost*. Yet in Wood's version, the drama is refracted through sensationalism and sentimentality, making Miltonic structures available to a mass readership. Studying Wood alongside Gaskell and Oliphant would therefore not only broaden the corpus but also underscore the reach of Milton's afterlife across literary hierarchies—from the canonical to the popular. In all three cases, attention to Miltonic domestication promises to shift understanding of the domestic novel's cultural work. Rather than treating Gaskell, Oliphant, and Wood as merely adjacent to Austen, Brontë, and Eliot, they can be seen as

participants in the same larger project: translating the epic seriousness of *Paradise Lost* into the moral and social dramas of nineteenth-century Britain.

While this dissertation has focused on *Paradise Lost* as the central site of Milton's nineteenth-century afterlife, future research could also profitably extend the field of inquiry to Milton's wider corpus. For Victorian readers, Milton is not only the poet of Eden but also the author of *Paradise Regained*, *Samson Agonistes*, and a body of political prose that circulated widely in school anthologies and religious debates (Campbell and Corns, 2008, pp. 364-366; Knoppers and C  lon Semenza, 2006, pp. 1-3; Parker, 1999, vol. 2, pp. 900-902). Each of these works carries motifs that could be domesticated into the frameworks of nineteenth-century fiction. *Paradise Regained* (1671a), with its emphasis on renunciation, self-discipline, and the rejection of worldly temptation, offers rich parallels to the moral testing of domestic heroines. The narrative arcs of refusal and delayed gratification resonate with figures like Fanny Price in *Mansfield Park* or Lucy Snowe in *Villette*, whose integrity depends upon resisting seductive but destructive choices. *Samson Agonistes* (1671b) provides another avenue. Its preoccupation with failed vocation, compromised strength, and belated redemption parallels the storylines of Lydgate in *Middlemarch* or Arthur Donnithorne in *Adam Bede*. The Samsonic model of entrapment, downfall, and partial recovery could be traced across Victorian domestic fiction as a gendered counterpoint to Eve's story. Milton's shorter poems, too, were far from marginal in nineteenth-century culture (Nardo, 2003, p. 13). The chastity allegory of *Comus* (1673) haunts Victorian debates about female virtue, and its heroine's struggle against rhetorical temptation offers a proto-domestic model of resistance that Austen, Bront  , and Eliot repeatedly rework (Nardo, 2003, p. 15). *Lycidas* (1638), with its fusion of private grief and public vocation, also resonates with novelists exploring the ethics of sympathy and loss within provincial communities. Even Milton's prose could be brought into dialogue with domestic fiction. His *Areopagitica* (1644) could be further examined, as it frames debates about freedom and censorship that reverberate in the novel's concern with moral education and the circulation of print, while his *Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* (1643) intersect with the novel's preoccupation with the fragility and reform of marriage. Studying the domestication of Milton through this broader corpus would thus demonstrate that nineteenth-century novelists engaged not only with the Fall narrative but with a whole repertoire of Miltonic themes—temptation, refusal, vocation, chastity, liberty—that could be scaled down into the intimate spaces of domestic fiction.

By tracing how Austen, Bront  , and Eliot reworked the motifs of temptation, error, exile, and reconciliation, this study has argued that the domestic novel became a central site

of Milton's nineteenth-century afterlife. Austen miniaturises Milton into epistemological comedy, where error educates rather than damns. Brontë magnifies Milton into Gothic and communal dramas, recasting Eve as a heroine of autonomy. Eliot diffuses Milton across realist webs of causality, granting epic seriousness to ordinary hesitation and compromise. By relocating the Fall narrative from Edenic gardens to drawing rooms and country estates, these authors made discursive debates about obedience, transgression, and restoration recognisable within the everyday registers of courtship and marriage. Temptation becomes misjudgement; disobedience becomes social or moral error; redemption arrives not through divine intervention but through humility, growth, and mutual recognition. Elizabeth Bennet's prejudice, Jane Eyre's passionate autonomy, Dorothea Brooke's intellectual yearning—all stage Miltonic dramas of error and redemption within the domestic sphere. What this reveals is that Milton's afterlife was not confined to pulpits or political rhetoric but flourished in the domestic novel. The genre emerges as the epic of nineteenth-century modernity—not a retreat into the small scale of courtship and etiquette, but a form that absorbed the structures of *Paradise Lost* and re-cast them in secular, social, and psychological terms. To domesticate Milton is to redefine what counts as serious literature. For Austen, Brontë, and Eliot, this work means more than literary play. It is a way of claiming epic seriousness for women's choices, voices, and errors. Eve's curiosity becomes the ground of education; her exile becomes the space of autonomy; her reconciliation becomes the possibility of sympathy and repair. Where Milton sought to "justify the ways of God to man," these novelists justify the ways of ordinary lives to their readers, insisting that the dramas of women in drawing rooms or provincial towns carry the same moral gravity as the cosmic Fall of humankind (Milton, I.26, p. 4). Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë, and George Eliot together show that the epic did not die with Milton: it was reborn in the novel, in the everyday, in the moral weight of error and the fragile hope of renewal. In the end, paradise was not lost at all; it was simply redecorated with antimacassars and clad in crinoline.

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APPENDIX A: JANE'S WATERCOLOURS

Brontë underscores Jane's interior life visually as well as verbally. Her three watercolours—the cormorant, the Evening Star, and the veiled head—function as Gothic soliloquies, prophetic allegories externalising her Miltonic imagination (Brontë, 1999, pp. 109-110). Much like Eve's dream in *Paradise Lost*, where she “dream'd ... of offense and trouble, which my mind / Knew never till this irksom night,” Jane's images prefigure temptation, exile, and revelation (Milton, V.31-35, p. 173). But unlike Eve's dream, ominous and unheeded, Jane's painted visions are prophetic, foreshadowing her own story with Rochester. When viewed as a triptych, these drawings come to represent the story of Jane's Fall.

The first drawing is striking for its depiction of the cormorant, (Figure 5). As Robin St. John Conover notes, in *Paradise Lost*, Satan makes an appearance as a cormorant in book four: “Thence up he flew, and on the Tree of Life, / The middle tree and highest there that grew, / Sat like a cormorant; yet not true life / Thereby regained, but sat devising death / To them who lived” (Milton, 1667, IV.194-198, p. 140, cited in Conover, 1996, p. 177). The irony is sharp: Satan chooses the emblem of life not to renew but to corrupt. Jane's painting captures the same paradox. Her cormorant, “dark and large,” clutches a jewelled bracelet while beneath it a woman's body sinks into the water (Brontë, 1999, p. 109). Beauty and value are transformed into objects of appetite;



Figure 5: Jane's painting of the cormorant, from the 1973 BBC adaptation (reproduced in *The Eyre Guide*, 2022).

adornment turned to predation. The vision externalises Jane's interior apprehensions about love and marriage—the drowning figure her threatened selfhood, the bracelet the emblem of vows that could be stolen or tainted. Read prophetically, the scene anticipates Jane's attempted marriage to Rochester. The bracelet becomes the wedding ring snatched from her at the revelation of Bertha's existence; the drowning woman mirrors Jane's near submersion

in Rochester's desire. Rochester himself emerges as the cormorant; the greedy presence whose concealment of Bertha nearly robs Jane of her integrity. Just as Satan perched on the Tree of Life seeks not to restore life but to seize it, Rochester's selfishness threatens to strip Jane of her beliefs in love, marriage, and her inviolate moral code. This is the first step of Rochester's fall: and Jane's recognition of it becomes her first act of resistance.

The second drawing is of a woman crowned with stars, the peak of a hill rising into the night sky (Figure 6). Rochester immediately recognises it as Latmos: "Where did you see Latmos? For that is Latmos" (Brontë, 1999, p. 110)). In Greek myth, Endymion slept on Mt. Latmos, visited each night by Selene. Conover notes that this mythic frame resurfaces in Rochester's own dreams, where Jane, imagined as an elf fairy "informs Rochester that she has been sent to make [him] happy. Towards that end, he must follow her to the moon" (Conover, 1996, p. 180). Yet the painting does not present Jane as Rochester's fantasy saviour. Instead, it externalises her inner desire for love and belonging, as well as her fear of being objectified by it. One might argue that the Latmos reference centres Rochester's perspective—that the myth casts Jane as Endymion's Selene, a celestial visitor defined by her power to beautify and to save. But Brontë complicates that reading: the mythic gloss belongs to Rochester, but the image itself originates in Jane's imagination. What matters is not his projection but her interior conflict—her longing for love alongside the dread that love will lead to her objectification. The star above the figure's brow shines less as Rochester's fantasy than as Jane's own symbol of the fragile line between desire and autonomy.

When Jane arrives at Moor House after fleeing Thornfield, she resembles the figure in her second illustration—wild, exhausted, yet luminous in the night. The star above

the woman's brow recalls the Evening Star, Venus, mythologically associated with the goddess of love. For Jane, it becomes an emblem of her own search: not for domination or dependence, but for a union of equals. The star guides her towards the light of Moor House, where she finds not romantic fulfilment but moral clarity, the strength to resist St. John, and



Figure 6: Jane's painting of the Evening Star, from the 1973 BBC adaptation (reproduced in *The Eyre Guide*, 2022).

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the unexpected gift of family. There is a duality of this representation—Venus as both temptation and guiding light—mirrors Jane’s divided interiority. Rochester sees her modesty as a kind of irresistible temptation:

She heard me thus, and though divinely brought,
Yet innocence, and virgin modesty,
Her virtue, and the conscience of her worth,
That would be wooed, and not unsought be won,
Not obvious, not obtrusive, but retired,
The more desirable, or to say all,
Nature herself, though pure of sinful thought,
Wrought in her so, that seeing me, she turned ...
(Milton, VIII.500-507, p. 302)

When Eve hears Adam, she turns to him, but he observes that her modesty makes her seem as if she might flee—that very possibility intensifies his desire. Adam’s attraction is not sparked by deliberate seduction but by innocence that can be misread as resistance. This duality—virtue becoming its own temptation—shapes the dynamic between Jane and Rochester as well. Rochester frames Jane’s modesty and bluntness as the source of his attraction. For example, when Jane tells Rochester she does not find him handsome, Rochester replies:

... you have the air of a little *nonnette* ; quaint, quiet, grave, and simple, as you sit with your hands before you, and your eyes generally bent on the carpet (except, by-the-bye, when they are directed piercingly to my face; as just now, for instance); and when one asks you a question, or makes a remark to which you are obliged to reply, you rap out a round rejoinder, which, if not blunt, is at least brusque.
(Brontë, 1999, p. 114)

Jane holds no pretence of false manners, has no vanity to assume she is in position to be on the receiving end of such manners, and is described as Rochester as “quiet, grave, and simple,” yet paradoxically, it is this simple and brusque manner that Rochester most appreciates. Much like Adam with Eve, Rochester is tempted not by coquetry but by unselfconscious honesty. Brontë complicates this attraction by grounding it in Jane’s interior fears—Jane’s modesty cannot be separated from her vulnerability. Jane is “poor and obscure, and small and plain,” she has no family protection, and is therefore particularly susceptible to Rochester’s bigamous deception (Brontë, 1999, p. 224). Rochester insists she is his “equal ... and my likeness,” yet in the same breath underscores her lack of wealth, family, and beauty—the very conditions that make her susceptible to exploitation (Brontë, 1999, p. 224). What he praises as purity and independence is entangled with what society codes as powerlessness. The Evening Star drawing externalises this ambivalence. For Jane it signifies both her desire

for love and her dread that such love will render her powerless, reduced to Rochester's "unearthly thing" rather than a partner (Brontë, 1999, p. 224). The image records not Rochester's fantasy but Jane's interior struggle: her longing for connection bound up with the fear of being consumed by inequality. In this way, Brontë reworks Milton's motif of prelapsarian temptation into a psychological, internalised allegory of female desire—where temptation is morally ambiguous, both alluring and perilous.

The third drawing is of a colossal head against an iceberg, with two hands drawing a dark veil against it (Figure 7). This is the most obvious connection to *Paradise Lost*, as Jane directly Milton in describing Death as, "The other shape, / If shape it might be called that shape had none ... what seemed his head / The likeness of a kingly crown had on" (Milton, II.65-72, p. 71). The phrase marks the

figure of Death itself, shapeless yet crowned, a place where destruction and birth overlap, a paradox of majesty and annihilation. Jane's illustration takes up the Miltonic paradox, a "pale crescent ... 'the likeness of a Kingly Crown'; what is diademed was 'the shape which shape had none'" (Brontë, 1999, p. 110). Jane's veiled head borrows the Miltonic

doubleness. On one level, it is terrifying—a crowned skull-like head rising out of an



Figure 7: Jane's painting of the veiled head, from the 1973 BBC adaptation (reproduced in *The Eyre Guide*, 2022).

iceberg, anticipating Rochester's ruin at great fire at Thornfield. Conover notes that the "colossal head, then, crowned and despairing, is Rochester's, 'seeing' through blind eyes what destruction he has wrought by his arrogant behaviour" (Conover, 1996, p. 183). After Bertha sets Thornfield alight, Rochester is left blinded and loses one of his hands. Yet death here also carries an obscure promise of transformation. The veil suggests both concealment and revelation: Rochester's blindness as punishment, but also the unveiling of truth once pride and deception are stripped away. Placed within Jane's interior world, the image becomes more than a prophecy of Rochester's Fall. It externalises her fear that intimacy with him may obliterate her—death as annihilation of selfhood within an unequal marriage—but also her intuition that ruin might clear the way for renewal. The "death" she imagines is not only Rochester's but also the death of a false union founded on concealment, a collapse that might make possible the partnership she longs for. In this reversal, much like Brontë turns

Milton's terrifying Death into an allegory of psychological struggle: Jane foresees that only through destruction—of Rochester's pride, of Thornfield's false Eden, and of her own illusions—can she achieve a love that safeguards her integrity.

Jane's drawings are a startling interruption the novel's realist surface—a sudden venture into a more fantastical world, where the morose and solemn tones of the narrative lift into a vivid, symbolic register. This departure draws attention to the fact that Jane, like Eve, experiences her own dream-like prophecies. The drawings themselves are difficult to picture, wrapped in ambiguous language, and this indeterminacy is what makes them so Miltonic. Consider Milton's description of Satan, "in bulk as huge / As whom the fables name of monstrous size": no exact scale is given, only an invitation for the reader's imagination to strain against its own limits (Milton, I.196-197, p. 13). Brontë uses a similar tactic in Jane's descriptions by using phrases like "beamless cloud," abstract and immeasurable, suffusing the images with a mystical and subjective light (Brontë, 1999, p. 110). As Jane sees her future play out in her dreams, she translates them into this triptych: the cormorant externalising her fear of predatory desire, the Evening star expressing her ambivalence between love and objectification, and the veiled head embodying both the dread of self-annihilation and the possibility of renewal. Together, they chart her interior landscape of temptation, exile, and revelation. Unlike Eve, whose dream is dismissed by Adam as an "uncouth dream," Jane's visions are taken seriously: Rochester lingers over them as signs of her inner life (Milton, X.98, p. 175). The act of painting becomes a form of self-knowledge, a way for Jane to apprehend what her conscious self cannot yet name. These paintings anticipate Rochester's Fall and gesture toward the possibility of a more (relatively) equitable union, one that is only realised after destruction clears the false Eden of Thornfield.

APPENDIX B: A DINNER, IN WHICH MILTON IS SERVED ALONGSIDE THE PHEASANT

This appendix presents a creative-critical pastiche that extends the arguments of the dissertation into a different register. By staging a fictional Victorian dinner party in which “critics” debate the domestication of Milton, the piece dramatises in miniature the processes traced throughout the thesis: the relocation of Miltonic categories into the household, their negotiation across genres of domestic realism, Gothic, and social fiction, and the critical discourse that accompanied these transformations. Written in the idiom of nineteenth-century satire, the pastiche is not intended as primary evidence but as a performative illustration, showing how Milton could be “consumed” as argument, allegory, and even as supper.

It has been observed, by those with leisure to observe such things, that no dinner at Mr. Errett’s house was ever permitted to conclude without the sacrifice of someone’s personal regard. He insisted upon literary disputation with the same inevitability as pudding, and he was equally fond of both. His guests arrived with the understanding that, however comfortable their repast might be in other households, here it must be risked in the service of writers such as Shakespeare, Shelley, or — on unlucky evenings — Dickens.

The dining-room was set aglow by candles that carried themselves with a gravity the company refused to match. Lady Durand was seated, as always, at Mr. Errett’s right hand, for she would not have endured any other position; opposite her, Miss Paske shone with such with such anticipatory voltage one might have sworn she dressed explicitly for some imminent display of atmospheric indulgence; Mr. Soren, the clergyman, was placed at some distance from the pudding, lest he mistake it for an omen; Mrs. Penitente, whose philanthropy was as constant as it was exhausting, occupied herself with approving the wine for its charitable qualities; and Miss Gadling had been placed far too near the candles, much to everyone’s apprehension.

Miss Gadling’s seat was, in fact, the subject of much private complaint. Lady Durand had objected to her proximity on grounds of flammability, while Miss Gadling herself resented being pushed so far from Mr. Errett, whom she suspected — with reason — of secretly enjoying Miss Paske’s extravagances. Mrs. Penitente thought any complaint about seating

vulgar and beneath Christian resignation, though her own satisfaction with being placed beside the wine was perhaps not wholly disinterested.

Mr. Errett, satisfied that the company at hand was thus arranged for maximum vexations, announced the topic with *almost* too much excitement: whether Mrs. Gaskell or Miss Brontë had more successfully domesticated Milton.

Lady Durand began with the air of a woman who had just defended her own personhood. “*Ruth, Wives and Daughters, North and South*: These are domestic novels, pure and entire. Kitchens, parlours, sickrooms, sewing circles — all realistic, all recognisable. Mrs. Gaskell holds the crown by birthright.” She looked around with such composure that one would have thought she had already won.

Miss Paske, however, was not a woman to be cowed by composure. She leaned forward, her smile perilously polite. “And yet Miss Brontë does not leave the domestic sphere. Thornfield, Lowood, Moor House — households all. But charged with voltage. The governess becomes Eve, the master Satan in disguise. If Mrs. Gaskell gives us sewing circles, Miss Brontë sets them aflame.”

Lady Durand looked horrified, as if her sewing circle might ignite at any moment. “The domestic novel is rooted in realism,” she declared firmly. “Not allegory. Not thunder.”

“Realism?” Miss Paske echoed with exasperating serenity. “Milton himself was never a realist. His Eden was allegory, his Adam and Eve cosmic. Miss Brontë merely restores his scale to the household.”

Here Miss Gadling made her first imposition: “That reminds me. Austen, at least, knew how to miniaturise Milton with irony. Her Elizabeth Bennet reworks Eden over a dinner-table, without thunder yet without dilution. So, I suppose, yes — Miss Brontë Gothicises the household, setting Eden aflame. But between them, Milton is kept alive in domestic comedy and domestic fire. Yet Mrs. Gaskell? She stitches him into sermon — the needle without the sparkle, the household without the blaze.” Lady Durand bristled, unwilling to let Mrs. Gaskell be painted less witty than Austen and less blazing than Brontë, though the likeness was too tempting to deny.

Mr. Errett, eager to bolster her point, declared: “Why, you’re right — Lewes himself has said it — Austen’s execution is as perfect as Milton’s, though without any grandeur of story. *The Quarterly* may call her too slight, but Lewes would have her beside Milton for craftsmanship alone.”¹⁰²¹⁰³ — Mr. Errett seemed to forget, of course, that Miss Brontë had written Austen off as a passionless garden, carefully fenced and entirely without storm — the comparison to Miss Jane Austen was sure to have her simmering.¹⁰⁴

The soup plates were removed at this moment — a providence for Lady Durand, whose cheeks had taken on the hue of a ripened tomato.

The company, however, had trouble attending, for the carving of the pheasant had become its own small Miltonic struggle. Mr. Errett, with much display, flourished his knife and, in tones far too sublime for poultry, declared the dish “so divine in taste, that all before now seems flat and harsh.”¹⁰⁵ He clearly meant the pheasant, though his manner suggested he was offering fruit from Eden itself. Lady Durand, displeased to see the choicest slice travel to his own plate, whispered that Milton ought not to be quoted when serving oneself. Miss Gadling, who received the smallest portion, muttered that Milton was always unfair to women — in paradise, as in supper.

It was in the midst of this small injustice that Mr. Soren chose to raise his voice, apparently convinced that the silence left by sauce boats and carving knives was a summons to theology. He pronounced, with all the gravity of a sermon, that Mrs. Gaskell’s *Ruth* was Milton retold: a fallen woman, yet redeemed — and surely that, he concluded, was the true purpose of the domestic novel’s venture in recovering Milton.

Miss Paske permitted him the dignity of finishing, then answered in a tone that carried no sermon at all, but was perfectly designed to unsettle his digestion. “Most edifying, sir,” she said sweetly, “yet *Ruth* is narrated into saintliness, silenced beneath society’s hand. Jane

¹⁰² Richard Whately, ‘Northanger Abbey and Persuasion,’ *The Quarterly Review* 24(48), pp. 352-376

¹⁰³ George Henry Lewes, ‘The Novels of Jane Austen,’ Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine 86(529), pp.99-113

¹⁰⁴ Charlotte Brontë, Letter to G. H. Lewes, 12 January 1848, in Margaret Smith (ed.), *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995)

¹⁰⁵ John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (London: Peter Parker, Robert Boulter, and Mattias Walker, 1667)

Eyre, by contrast, speaks. ‘I am no bird; no net ensnares me.’¹⁰⁶ That is Milton’s Eve alive, demanding her soul for her own.”

She continued, unperturbed or otherwise unaware of the colour gradually draining from Mr. Soren’s already-pale countenance: “Why, *The Quarterly* called *Jane Eyre* volcanic, even Satanic,” she reminded them, “and Rochester a figure of Milton’s rebel angel. Mrs. Rigby would have it that the novel was unfeminine — ‘a proud and violent temper, only not Satanic because it is unsexed.’¹⁰⁷ They meant it as censure, but I claim it as proof. Better a Miltonic blaze than a sermon stitched with silent, moral thread.”

At this, Mr. Soren choked on his pheasant, convinced *The Quarterly* had intended such fire to be extinguished. His eyes searched the overly-polished floor for hints as to why no one at the table seemed inclined to fetch the water.

Miss Gadling, who had been listening with malicious glee, now added her venom. “But Ruth’s silence is itself a revelation. Milton muted Eve beneath Adam’s theology. Mrs. Gaskell shows how society repeats that muting. That is not flattening; it is exposure.”

Miss Paske, yet unfazed, replied: “And yet Milton’s Eve was singular, not Everywoman. Jane, too, is singular — her voice a thunderclap against male machinations. Ruth is a tract; Jane is a soul alight.”

Mrs. Penitente, ever anxious not to see the debate stray too far from propriety, reminded the company that Eliot, too, had her claim on Milton. “Consider the dear Dorothea,” she said earnestly. “Here is Eve, but demythologised, made human. Miss Eliot strips Milton of allegory to reveal moral psychology. Surely that belongs beside Miss Austen and Miss Brontë.” Mr. Errett, who liked nothing better than the prospect of a trio, nodded with delight at this orderly arrangement.

Miss Gadling, with a sly look, added: “And the reviewers agree — I remember Hutton saying of *Adam Bede* that it carried ‘the moral weight of Milton’s poetry.’¹⁰⁸ That is more than mere

¹⁰⁶ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1847)

¹⁰⁷ Elizabeth Rigby, ‘Vanity Fairy and Jane Eyre,’ *The Quarterly Review* 84(167), pp. 153-185

¹⁰⁸ Richard Holt Hutton, review of *Adam Bede*, *The Spectator* 32(1617), p. 313

sermon; that is philosophy. And have we not read Miss Eliot's own essay on silly novels? She holds up Austen's delicate finish as the pattern, and yet admits Charlotte Brontë has the spark of genius — though, she admits, too narrow in scope.¹⁰⁹ Eliot would make herself the synthesis: Austen's finish, Brontë's fire, bound with moral breadth."

Lady Durand refused to let the matter end so comfortably. "But — is that not what Mrs. Gaskell attempts in *Ruth* — using such moral realism to show Eve in the seamstress, fallen and redeemed?"

Miss Paske pounced. "No, madam — that is the distinction. It is not just pedagogy that we seek to identify — anyone can argue Gaskell makes Milton into a sermon, exemplary and instructive. Eliot, by contrast, makes Milton into consciousness itself. Dorothea's struggles are not morality tales but inward battles of vision and desire. Milton's Eve becomes not tract but psychology — which is why Eliot sits securely beside Austen and Brontë, and why poor Mrs. Gaskell, for all her virtue, remains in the schoolroom with her copybook."

Lady Durand looked affronted at this slight upon her favourite, but the others could not help but acknowledge the neatness of the scheme: Austen, Brontë, Eliot — three ways of pulling Milton into the parlour without reducing him to sermon.

The company, being more invested in pudding than theology, might have let the matter drop. But Mrs. Penitente, who never allowed pudding to be served without philanthropy, steered them back toward reform. "Mrs. Gaskell campaigns for fallen women, illegitimacy, the poor. She ties Milton's Eve to social reform. That is more consequential than Miss Brontë's Gothic indulgences."

Miss Paske sipped her wine as if it were brimstone. "But Miss Brontë reforms imagination itself. *Jane Eyre* overturns Milton's cage — no longer subordinate, but lawgiver herself. Systems may change by committee, but souls change only by fire."

At this Mr. Soren looked so distressed that one might have thought *Jane Eyre* had personally denounced his last sermon in its introduction.

¹⁰⁹ George Eliot, 'Silly Novels by Lady Novelists,' *Westminster Review* 66(130), pp. 442-461

The pudding was placed on the table, blazing with brandy flames. Miss Paske, with a smile that was altogether too pleased, observed that the pudding had the good sense to imitate Thornfield. Lady Durand declared the flames vulgar. Miss Gadling declared them accurate.

When the brandy had been extinguished and eaten, Mr. Errett, always eager to extend an evening beyond its natural life, leaned back and inquired casually, “And what of the Brontë sister, Emily?”

This, as expected, produced chaos. Miss Gadling seized on it first. “*Wuthering Heights* is domestic — two families, two houses, inheritances. Why exclude it?”

Lady Durand nearly choked on her custard. “Domestic? It is nothing but storms, curses, and ungovernable passions. I assure you, madam, my parlour has never contained a single ghost.”

Miss Paske looked positively radiant. “But that is its genius! Heathcliff as Satan, Catherine divided between passion and law, the moors echoing Milton’s sublimity. Emily detonates the household into myth.”

Mr. Errett, delighted to moderate, declared: “Emily engages Milton tonally, atmospherically. But she does not domesticate him. She blows out the windows. Charlotte, by contrast, keeps Milton tethered to the frame, even when she sets it ablaze. Emily belongs to the storm; Charlotte belongs at this table.”

Mrs. Penitente, ever fair-minded, interposed: “And what of *Shirley*? Surely it is domestic too — rectories, households, the marriage market.”

Lady Durand, though reluctant, conceded. “Less Gothic, more social. Yes ... domestic.”

Miss Paske was quick to claim the advantage. “And Milton runs through it. Caroline Helstone, timid and obedient, the angel in the house — Eve as Milton imagined. Shirley Keeldar, independent and commanding, almost Adam in skirts, naming and ordering. The novel stages Milton’s binaries: must women be helpmeets, or may they command?”

Miss Gadling, unable to resist, murmured: “Adam in skirts — I look forward to the sermon.”

Mr. Soren now turned a delightful shade of near-transparent, but Mr. Errett pressed on. “Precisely. Where *Jane Eyre* plays the Fall as Gothic temptation, *Shirley* recasts it as political exclusion — women fenced off from Adam’s dominion, denied creative agency. It is Milton as social theory, tested in the domestic novel’s frame.”

Miss Paske could not resist a final thrust: “And do not forget, Eliot reviewed Brontë’s *Villette* herself.¹¹⁰ She praised the vivid power, yes — but complained of narrowness, all passion and no architecture. She would rather build the cathedral than strike the match,” — a preference very proper, though not half so amusing at dinner — “and that is why she must be included: Austen the miniaturist, Brontë the storm, Eliot the philosopher. Poor Mrs. Gaskell is left with her sermonising, and Emily with her tempest...ising,” she concluded after a moment’s hesitation for attempted symmetry. A tidy trio no doubt — though each lady in question would likely be horrified to be categorised into such a neat trinity with the others.

The company fell into a thoughtful silence, broken only by the clink of spoons. Here Mr. Errett could not resist tightening the proposed scheme: “Austen, Brontë, Eliot. Three who keep Milton tethered to the household, though each in her own key. Austen miniaturises, Brontë Gothicises and historicises, Eliot demythologises. But Mrs. Gaskell softens him into tract, and Emily explodes him into myth. No, no — the triad shows Milton truly domesticated over decades.” Lady Durand looked wounded by this demotion of her favourite Gaskell; Miss Paske looked vindicated; Mrs. Penitente looked gratified that her Eliot had been included; Mr. Soren slowly seemed to vanish; and Miss Gadling looked entertained at the prospect of the squabbles that would follow in their respective carriages.

Lady Durand, who could not bear to be bested, privately considered whether Mrs. Gaskell might yet be rescued by reference to her *Life of Charlotte Brontë*; but she suspected even that stratagem would be pronounced a concession.¹¹¹ Miss Gadling, meanwhile, entertained herself by imagining Mr. Soren forced to preach beside Shirley Keeldar. Mrs. Penitente was

¹¹⁰ George Eliot, ‘Belles Lettres,’ *Westminster Review* 61(120), pp. 198-225

¹¹¹ Elizabeth Gaskell, *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* (London: Smith, Elder & Co, 1857)

already planning an asylum in her head, though she had not yet decided whether it would serve fallen women or Milton scholars.

At last, Mr. Errett raised his glass. “The lineage is clear. Austen miniaturises Milton into domestic comedy; Charlotte Brontë bends him Gothic in *Jane Eyre* and historicises him in *Shirley*; Eliot demythologises him into realist psychology. Together they tether Milton to the household. Emily Brontë, brilliant though she is, storms outside with Heathcliff; Mrs. Gaskell, for all her virtue, domesticates him into tract. Charlotte alone makes him burn in the parlour.”

Miss Gadling murmured that she had read much the same already: Austen praised for form, Brontë condemned as Satanic, Eliot hailed for moral weight, Gaskell reproached for leniency.¹¹² The critics had laid the table long before, though the company here had eaten the pheasant more noisily.

It must be confessed that more sherry than argument had been consumed, which perhaps explained why Mrs. Gaskell appeared to have served the soup while Miss Brontë carried off the tablecloth. Austen, Brontë, Eliot: a perfect domestic trinity, through which Milton is miniaturised, Gothicised, historicised, and demythologised. Emily might rage upon the moors, and Mrs. Gaskell tidy the kitchen, but it was in the drawing rooms of these three that Milton lived on — ironic, blazing, and solemn by turns.

And thus the dinner concluded, with the candles guttering, the guests quarrelling over carriages, and Thornfield still, somehow, aflame.

¹¹² Anonymous, ‘Contemporary Literature’ *Westminster Review* n.s. 68(2), p. 295