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## Reforming Eve's Sin: Milton and the Mystery Cycles

Antoinina Bevan Zlatar

This paper proposes to read the Temptation and Fall of Eve in Book IX of *Paradise Lost* alongside the same episode in the Chester Mystery Cycle so as to bring Milton's choices alive. If *Chester* insistently casts Eve's sin as one of the seven deadly sins – gluttony, Milton casts her trespass predominantly as a violation of the first and second prohibition of the Decalogue – idolatry. These two tabulations of vice were not mutually exclusively but by the sixteenth century the Decalogue of Exodus had effectively superseded the patristic 7 deadly sins, especially amongst reformers keen to stress *sola scriptura*. I will argue that in subsuming Eve's gluttonous delight in the apple under the greater fault of worshipping a false god in the shape of the apple tree, Milton, wholly in keeping with his Protestant poetics, subtly subordinates the Church Fathers to the Scriptures.

To read Milton's *Paradise Lost* alongside the mystery cycles 'unknys' the eyes, to borrow Lucifer's metaphor. Miltonists have occasionally done so. Allen H. Gilbert catalogued the most obvious textual echoes in 1920. J.M. Evans dedicated a dozen pages to the English cycles in *Paradise Lost and the Genesis Tradition* (1968), and in 1980 Gordon Campbell and N.M. Davis used the *Norwich* Adam and Eve play to highlight Milton's Protestant evocation of edenic marriage. But to suggest textual interplay between Milton and the mystery plays is problematic, since we have no concrete evidence that Milton knew them.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Given that the cycles had been suppressed long before Milton's birth, Campbell and Davis think it "almost inconceivable" that he could have read or seen them (113). Prompted by a reference in *Areopagitica* to Adam in the "motions," Gilbert speculates that Milton had seen puppet shows where biblical themes survived in attenuated forms (147).

Nonetheless, the mystery plays deserve to be taken seriously by Miltonists. The *Chester*, *York*, and *N-Town* renditions of the Falls of Lucifer and Adam and Eve tell the same story but tackle the problem of representing the omnipotent differently. They create different heavens and hells and markedly different paradises, and diverge in configuring the sins of their protagonists. They make choices. To read Milton in their light brings Milton's choices alive.<sup>2</sup> This article proposes to read Milton's rendition of Eve's trespass alongside the same episode in the *Chester* cycle so as to showcase Milton's Protestant retelling. If *Chester* insistently casts Eve's sin as one of the seven deadly sins – gluttony, Milton casts her trespass predominantly as a violation of the first and second prohibition of the Decalogue – idolatry.

These two schematisations of sin are not mutually exclusive, of course. In *Christian Doctrine*, Milton asks, "For what fault is there which man did not commit in committing this sin?" (383). He then proceeds to list Adam and Eve's "faults":

He was to be condemned both for trusting Satan and for not trusting God; he was faithless, ungrateful, disobedient, greedy, uxorious; she, negligent of her husband's welfare; both of them committed theft, robbery with violence, murder against their children (i.e., the whole human race); each was sacrilegious and deceitful, cunningly aspiring to divinity although thoroughly unworthy of it, proud and arrogant. (383-4)<sup>3</sup>

Milton's indictment draws on both the Decalogue and the seven deadly sins – Adam and Eve have violated the chief Laws relating to God and to human kind, but they are also guilty of gluttony and pride. When Milton stages Eve's Fall in Book IX of *Paradise Lost*, he powerfully evokes a sense of a whole range of sins committed in a single act. Eve is guilty of pride – Satan's chief sin; she distrusts God; she is guilty of "greedily . . . engorg[ing]" (IX, 791) the apple, and she succumbs to folly.<sup>4</sup> Yet I suggest that Milton's staging subsumes these sins under idolatry, a trespass which had particular relevance for his seventeenth-century Protestant poetics.

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<sup>2</sup> Scholars who have enlivened Milton's choices by systematically reading the epics alongside textual and visual analogues include Evans, Frye, McColley and Revard.

<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of Milton's definition of sin, its origins and consequences in *De Doctrina Christiana*, see McColley (191-193).

<sup>4</sup> For an analysis which purports that Milton's Eve commits six of the seven deadly sins, see Fernandes Erickson. In *A Preface to Paradise Lost* (1942), C.S. Lewis, following Augustine and Aquinas, famously attributes Eve's Fall to pride. For a view that stresses the multifaceted nature of Eve's sin, see Evans (278-281).

That Adam and Eve fell through gluttony is latent in all the cycle plays, but it is in *Chester* that it comes strikingly to the fore. The "author" of the *Chester* episode takes his cue from a series of good authorities. In the fifth century, John Cassian had construed Adam's sin, and by implication Eve's, as gluttony; much later Aquinas, proposing that we judge the severity of a sin by its punishment, reiterates Chrysostom's "By the belly's incontinence was Adam expelled from Paradise" (*Summa 2a2ae* 148, 3); clearly gluttony was a very serious offence. The fifteenth-century pastoral manual *Jacob's Well* follows suit but makes the devil a key player: "for the feend sekyth the throte of man be glotonye, as the wolf sekyth the throte of the scheep. for so he toke Adam & Eue, when thei etyn of the appyl" (141, "thorn" modernised).

In the West, it was Cassian who first classified gluttony as one of eight cardinal vices. Gregory the Great reworked Cassian's formulation into a tabulation of seven vices, which, after the Fourth Lateran Council (1215-16), came to be generally known as the seven deadly sins.<sup>5</sup> Preached from pulpits and used in confessionals, it was this Gregorian schematisation that became the dominant medieval moral system.<sup>6</sup> In his *Institutes*, Cassian identifies three types of gluttony: the urge to eat before the canonical hour (what we would call snacking); "filling the belly to repletion with any food whatsoever" (bingeing), and delighting in "more refined and delicate foods" (V. 23) (gourmandise). Cassian was addressing fellow monks, individuals who had pledged to obey communal rules. Indulging before the proper time was deemed "vanity, boastfulness, ostentation" (V. 23) because the monk was pursuing his own individual desires at the expense of his brethren. Bingeing was sinful because it inebriated the mind; it made one incapable of clear thinking and thus incapable of proper spiritual discipline. As for gourmandise, it violated the monastic ideal of simplicity: food was to be easy to prepare, cheap and adapted to the monks' needs.<sup>7</sup> In his *Moralia in Iob*, Gregory the Great developed Cassian's triad into a five-branch schema: gluttony tempts us to eat too early, to eat foods that are too dainty or expensive, to eat food that requires too much preparation, to eat too much, or to eat too greedily.<sup>8</sup> If both Cassian and Gregory advocate discretion and

<sup>5</sup> For the misnomer "deadly" sins, see Bloomfield (43-67). For the differences between Cassian's and Gregory's configuration of the sins, and Gregory's dominance, see Bloomfield (69-75) and Straw.

<sup>6</sup> Newhauser reminds us that the seven deadly sins were not static formulations of Catholic dogma, but cultural constructs, "continually in flux, both synchronically and diachronically," (*In the Garden of Evil* ix). See also Newhauser, *The Seven Deadly Sins* (1-5).

<sup>7</sup> See *Institutes* V, chapters 3-23.

<sup>8</sup> *Moralia in Iob*, XXX, xviii, 60.

self-restraint as a cure, Gregory focuses on the temptations of pleasure and, in the case of gluttony, on the difficulties involved in distinguishing between eating as a bodily necessity and eating in response to desire.<sup>9</sup> Aquinas's discussion of gluttony – its status as a sin, its different types and its related or “daughter” sins – builds on and at times distances itself from Gregory's treatment.<sup>10</sup>

Later commentators on gluttony adopted Gregory's five types but gave them a much broader, secular application. In *Jacob's Well*, eating and drinking outside the canonical hours is configured as a disruption of God's order with serious social repercussions. To make “day of nyght, and nyght of day” (142) leads to other misdemeanours – gaming and Sabbath-breaking – and tempts others to go astray. As for a fondness for dainty and expensive foods, it is condemned as uncharitable and damaging to the commonwealth: gourmandise means you spend more “at a mele than xl. men myghte lyve by” (144). This is the sin of the rich and, in anticlerical satire, of the monk, and had a direct impact on the poor.<sup>11</sup> Commentaries gave considerable attention to drunkenness – drinking too much as a counterpart to eating too much – and emphasised gluttony's proximity to *luxuria* or lechery – the other *vitia carnalia*. We remember Spenser's pageant of the seven deadly sins, where swollen-bellied Gluttony with “bouzing can” in hand rides next to “lustfull Lechery” (*The Faerie Queene* I, iv, 21-24). As for Milton, he touches upon drunkenness and gluttony in *Christian Doctrine* in a chapter entitled “Of the first kind of special virtues, connected with a man's duties towards himself.” He opens his discussion with temperance – the virtue which regulates our appetite for the pleasures of the flesh – and specifies that it includes “sobriety and chastity, modesty and decency” (II, ix, 724). Sobriety is “forbearance from over-eating and from drinking too much”; its opposite is “drunkenness and gluttony” (II, ix, 724-5).

Turning now to the *Chester* cycle, how exactly is Eve's sin configured in the Fall of man? After the creation of Adam, God's prohibition, and the creation and naming of Eve, the scene shifts to the devil who is here characterised in greater detail than in other cycles. In a remarkable forty-eight-line soliloquy, he laments the loss of heaven and, prefiguring Iago and Milton's Satan, works out his revenge plot before our very eyes,

<sup>9</sup> The above discussion is indebted to Hill (especially 61-65).

<sup>10</sup> See *Summa theologiae* 2a2ae 148, 1-6.

<sup>11</sup> Hill (65-69). For the pulpit's understanding of the impact of the seven deadly sins on the body politic, and for gluttonous prelates and monks, see Owst (564-5; 244-266 respectively).

determining to exploit the weakness of Adam's wife.<sup>12</sup> He supposes her to be suggestible ("for shee will doe as I her saye" [183]), transgressive ("That woman is forbydden to doe / for anythinge the will thereto" [185-6]), curious ("Therefore that tree shee shall come to / and assaye which it is" [187-8]) and, lastly, lickerous or fond of dainties:

And of that tree of paradise  
shee shall eate through my contyse,  
for wemen they be full licourouse,  
that will shee not forsake. (197-200)

As for the temptation proper, we recognise Genesis but note significant differences: the devil subtly undermines God's injunction and plants in Eve's mind the idea that fruit is a "delice" – delight:

Woman, why was God soe nyce  
to byd you leve so your delice  
and of each tree in paradise  
to forsake the meate? (209-212)<sup>13</sup>

Eve corrects him – they must forsake only the fruit of one tree – but her "God sayde we should dye iwis" (219), opens the way for the serpent's counterstatement "Woman, I saye leave not this" (221). Having cast aspersions on God's wisdom a few lines above, the serpent, as will Milton's serpent, now accuses God of being "subtyle and wisse of witte" (225), charging him with forbidding the fruit so as to safeguard his superiority. God is your foe, he suggests, "therefore doe after mee" (232). Appealing to her curiosity and gourmandise, he then proffers the fruit and intimates that he has tasted it himself: "Take of this fruite and assaye; / yt is good meate, I dare laye" (233-234). Conforming to the devil's misogynistic stereotype, suggestible, lickerous, curious Eve cannot resist:

<sup>12</sup> Compare *Chester* (ii. 161-208) and *York* (v. 1-24). The devil's soliloquy appears to have originated not with the English cycles, as Evans suggests (199), but with *Le Mystère* (ll. 1046-106).

<sup>13</sup> Compare Genesis 3: 1: 'And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?' (Authorised Version).

A, lord, this tree is fayre and bright,  
 greene and seemelye in my sight,  
 the fruite sweete and much of myght,  
 that godes it may us make.  
 One apple of yt I will eate  
 to assaye which is the meate;  
 and my husbande I will gett  
 one morsell for to take. (241-248)

Unlike the temptation in the *N-Town* and *York* cycles, where it is the possibility of godhead that makes the apple irresistible, here it is the pleasant look of the tree and the sweet smell of the fruit that are initially appealing.<sup>14</sup> Godhead is relegated to the fourth line almost as an after-thought. And there she is before Adam, and her seduction takes four little lines; she does not even mention possible apotheosis:

Adam, husbande, liffe and deare,  
 eate some of this apple here.  
 Yt is fayre, my leeffe feare,  
 hit may thou not forsake.

Adam falls within four further lines:

That is soothe, Eve, withouten were;  
 the fruite is sweete and passinge feare.  
 Therefore I will doe thy prayer –  
 one morsell I will take. (249-256)<sup>15</sup>

The tragedy of this terrifyingly swift Fall depends on our proper reading of Eve's "Adam, husbande, liffe and deare . . . my leeffe feare." Like *Le Mystère* and *Norwich*, *Chester* stages a wedding in paradise: echoing God in Genesis, Adam declares that because woman was made of man's flesh and bone, "Therefore man kyndely shall forsake / father and mother, and to wife take" (157-8).<sup>16</sup> Eve is well aware of the strength of her bond to Adam and knows that she can easily get him to eat ("and my husbande I will gett / one morsell for to take" [247-8]). Adam falls through uxoriousness in *Chester*, and, tragically, marital strife and misogyny are the immediate consequences. No sooner has Adam taken a bite of the apple than he blames Eve, claiming that he had a premonition

<sup>14</sup> See *N-Town* (ii. 113-114) and *York* (v. 91-99).

<sup>15</sup> For a different reading, see Lumiansky and Mills who suggest that, unlike in other cycles where Adam eats knowingly, here Adam is unaware of the nature of the fruit and is deceived. *The Chester Mystery Cycle* (vol. II 24).

<sup>16</sup> See *Le Mystère* (ll. 810-825) and *Norwich A* (ll. 19-23).



when she was created that she would bring woe to man and so named her *woman*. This is a flat lie – Adam's first lie – he had ceremoniously named her “virago” a few lines earlier. After Deus metes out punishments, Adam resumes the vilification of woman:

My licorouse wyfe hath bynne my foc;  
 the devylls envye shente me alsoe.  
 These too together well may goe,  
 the suster and the brother.  
 His wrathe hath donne me muche woe;  
 hir glotonye greved mee alsoe.  
 God lett never man trust you too  
 the one more then the other. (353-360)

By echoing the devil's misogyny verbatim, Adam unwittingly shows his own kinship with the devil.

In *Chester*, Eve's predominant sin is gluttony. Her trespass is not overeating or eating before the canonical hour; her fault is delighting in dainties. Invoking Gregory the Great, we can say that Eve ate out of desire, not necessity. For Adam and Eve had plenty. In *N-Town*, in the “greenest” paradise in the cycles, God draws attention to the delightfulness of the garden by itemising its delicacies: Adam may enjoy as much “pepyr, pyan, and swete lycorys” (ii, 35) as he pleases. In *Chester*, when Deus presents paradise to Adam he explicitly designates it “a place of deyntee and delite” (110). We remember that *Jacob's Well* condemns such gourmandise as an act against charity with direct consequences for the poor, and if this was representative, as a study of medieval sermons suggests, then *Chester* may have had a socio-political agenda in harping on Eve's lickerousness.

The scheme of the seven deadly sins was the predominant moral system in the Middle Ages, but it of course interacted with other tabulations of vice – Augustine's or Bernard of Clairvaux's as well as with the Decalogue, to cite the most obvious. In “Moral Arithmetic: Seven Sins into Ten Commandments” (1988), John Bossy argued that by the sixteenth century the Decalogue had effectively replaced the seven deadly sins. If the seven deadly sins taught an effective social or community ethics, they downplayed man's obligation to God and had no scriptural foundation. The Decalogue, in contrast, was scriptural and gave due prominence to offences against God. Championed by Ockham and then by Jean Gerson in fifteenth-century France, the Decalogue was hailed as the only viable system by reformers who insisted on *sola scriptura*. In England this had begun with the Lollards and was consolidated by Tynedale, who, following Luther, launched a process by which the Ten



Commandments became one of three requisites of Christian knowledge, achieving pre-eminence over the Creed and the Lord's prayer by being painted above altars – now stripped – in English Churches.<sup>17</sup>

For Protestants, the first two commandments – the proper worship of God – were key to all the rest:

And God spake all these words, saying,  
 I *am* the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.  
 Thou shalt have no other gods before me.  
 Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness *of any thing* that *is* in heaven above, or that *is* in the earth beneath, or that *is* in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them:  
 . . . Exodus 20: 1-5 (Authorised Version)

These prohibitions, subsumed under one commandment for the Catholics, were split into two separate commandments in Zwingli's Zurich, thus giving the prohibition on graven images particular force.<sup>18</sup> These two commandments were the foundation upon which the Protestant attack on Catholic worship was built, particularly with regard to the use of images and the veneration of saints. If Catholic theologians argued that images were the layman's Bible and deserved to be honoured as prototypes, as memorials of Christ and the saints, Protestants working in the Zwinglian and Calvinist tradition retorted that images of God the Father and the Son were heinous because they tempted the fallen mind to substitute the semblance, the likeness, for the one true God who was beyond representation. The one true God had shown himself to us in the Scriptures, not in stocks and stones. As for images of the Virgin and saints, these were heinous because they distracted the fallen mind, tempting it to worship human beings when worship was to be reserved for God alone. Many felt driven to break graven images, and bouts of iconoclasm erupted. But idolatry was not confined to externals; it was not limited to iconolatry and hagiolatry but construed as any process of thought which turned the mind away from God. The fallen mind's capacity to create internal idols was endless. Breaking statues of Christ and the Virgin was merely an external manifestation of our perpetual need to break internal idolatrous images. Idolatry was a sin of the eye and of the eye of the mind. The strength of the drive to commit idolatry was compared to the fallen body's proclivity to sexual desire. Idolatry was spiritual fornication.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> See Bossy (215-228).

<sup>18</sup> See Euler (16-20).

<sup>19</sup> This discussion is indebted to Gilman (31-45), Aston, *passim*, and Collinson (94-126).

In England, the debate on images and idolatrous ecclesiastical ceremonial continued into the seventeenth century; indeed, it was iconoclastic rioting that contributed to the outbreak of civil war in 1640-1.<sup>20</sup> If Archbishop Laud with strong royal approval felt that England was sufficiently educated in the danger of images to withstand a refurbishment of the churches, Puritans and dissenters vehemently disagreed. This is where Milton comes in. Milton had penned virulent attacks on the prelates and their idolatrous ceremonial, and in *Christian Doctrine* we find a lengthy exposition of idolatry and hagiolatry placed in antithetical relation to the section on the invocation and adoration of God. Milton defines idolatry as "making or owning an idol for religious purposes, or worshipping it, whether it be a representation of the true God or of some false god" (II, v, 690-1).<sup>21</sup> He furnishes prolific biblical proofs, and on two occasions explicitly takes the "Papists" to task for their "mistake" in claiming images to be laymen's books, and for their "subterfuges" in defending the worship of saints.<sup>22</sup> He too draws attention to the connection between fornication and idolatry.<sup>23</sup> Idolatry, I suggest, is no less on his mind in his biblical epic. If *Chester's* Eve sins predominantly through gluttony, Milton's Eve sins by succumbing to idolatry.

In Book IX, Satan is portrayed as an instrument of idolatry in that he makes Eve worship a false god in the shape of an apple tree, a tree whose fruit she hopes will give her godhead. If the devil in the *Chester* play worked on the premise that women are lickeros, Satan, having overheard Eve's account of her first awakening and her potentially narcissistic delight in her own reflection (Book IV), assumes that Eve is generally susceptible to the power of images and particularly susceptible to her own allure.<sup>24</sup> He himself is vulnerable to the lure of images. We remember that now in reptilian disguise Satan "spies" Eve alone tending

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<sup>20</sup> Aston (11).

<sup>21</sup> In *The Abridgment of Christian Divinitie*, John Wollebius distinguishes two kinds of idolatry: "one is, when that which is not God, is accounted and worshipped for God . . . the second kinde is, when the true God indeed is worshipped; but either in idols, or in Saints, Angels, or dead men." Quoted in *Christian Doctrine* (691 n.16).

<sup>22</sup> *Christian Doctrine*, II, v. 690-696, especially 693 and 695.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, II, v, 694.

<sup>24</sup> McColley argues that as a monist, Milton presents Eve in the scenes before the Fall as fully sufficient in virtue and not predestined to Fall. In this reading, Eve's encounter with her own image in the lake is a "good temptation" and results in a rejection of narcissism (77-85).

her roses. "Spies" initiates a veritable semantic field of verbs of seeing in this section. We are told that Satan follows her, "admiring" the place and the person. Indeed, her "look," "her heavenly form/Angelic" stupefies him:

That space the evil one abstracted stood  
From his own evil and for the time remained  
Stupidly good, ... (IX, 463-465)

He is momentarily distracted from his diabolical purpose, as his mind is turned by the heavenly image of Eve. Eve's image is a memory of the divine and reminds us that images per se are not reprehensible. Indeed, as Gregory the Great and Catholic theologians through the ages would argue, as memorials, images of Christ and the saints could be beneficent. The Protestant retort was that the human propensity to idolatry had made images dangerous. Indeed, Eve's heavenly image might have done Satan and us good. Eve might have been "a conduit of grace" (McColley 189), but Satan quickly reverts to his depraved self and puts his experience of the power of images to diabolical ends.

We note that he begins his temptation of Eve as a silent appeal to her eye. Milton's *enargia* presents us with a tableau where Satan in the serpent advances as "a surging maze . . . / With burnished neck of verdant gold, erect" (499-501), curling his train into "many a wanton wreath in sight of Eve/ To lure her eye" (517-8). But Eve goes on gardening until

He bolder now, uncalled before her stood;  
But as in gaze admiring: oft he bowed  
His turret crest, and sleek enamelled neck,  
Fawning, and licked the ground whereon she trod.  
His gentle dumb expression turned at length  
The eye of Eve to mark his play; . . . (523-528)

Satan in the serpent pretends to worship her as a goddess ("But as in gaze admiring"), his "gentle dumb expression" mimicking his own stupidly good transportation of a few lines earlier. He then begins to speak: "Wonder not, sovereign mistress, if perhaps / Thou canst, who art sole wonder" (532-3). Drawing attention to his "gaz[ing] insatiate," he explains that he is merely doing as all earthly creatures do and as all universal beings should, for she "shouldst be seen / A goddess among gods adored and served / By angels numberless" (546-8). Critics have often commented that Satan's temptation is cast as a sexual seduction. Indeed, as shown above, it begins with the serpent's wanton advance neck erect,

and continues here in his courting Eve with the hyperbole of a Petrarchan lover. This is not unique to Milton, but in injecting the scene with sexual energy, idolatry as spiritual fornication is subtly intimated. Milton marks Eve's susceptibility to the devil in the serpent by having her echo his words – words that would have had a polemical ring to Puritan ears. This speaking, friendly snake is “a miracle,” “a wonder,” she exclaims.<sup>25</sup>

In *Chester* the devil as serpent has wings like a bird, the feet of an adder and a girl's face, all features of longstanding in medieval iconography and commentary.<sup>26</sup> In *N-Town*, although there is no description of the serpent, Eve tells Adam that a “fayr aungell” (ii, 156) informed her that the apple would make her wise. The girl's or angel's face would thus seem to lend the serpent credibility. Here Milton is scriptural in making his serpent fully reptilian, but he still needs to make this speaking serpent believable: he has Satan explain his “miraculous” powers of speech by claiming to have eaten of the forbidden fruit.<sup>27</sup> Significantly, in Satan's wholly fictitious account of his metamorphosis, his attention was first drawn to the tree by its appearance: a goodly tree “Loaden with fruit of fairest colours mixed / Ruddy and gold . . .” (577-8). The eye was then aided by “a savoury odour blown / Grateful to appetite” (579-580), which in turn was compounded by hunger and thirst. He yields to the “sharp desire” (584) and eats his fill. This is eating too greedily (bingeing) – the fifth type of gluttony according to Gregory. “[S]uch pleasure till that hour / At feed or fountain never had I found,” he claims. And the result of his eating the forbidden fruit is reason, speech and the capacity to speculate. But his “speculations,” as their root in Latin, “specere” (to look), announces, merely make him better able to see the world and to rate the superiority of Eve's physical attractions. Satan ends his fable as he began by pretending to worship Eve. However, Satan is promiscuous in his affections, and we soon hear him worshipping the tree in a parody of Adam and Eve's earlier hymns of praise to God: “O, sacred, wise and wisdom-giving plant” (679).<sup>28</sup>

Having heard the serpent praise the tree for opening his eyes to God's jealous ways, having heard him posit his own alleged metamorphosis as proof of her “need” of the fruit, Eve stands before the tree:

<sup>25</sup> For a reading which minimises the power of the devil in this scene, and postpones Eve's susceptibility to idolatry, see McColley (195-198).

<sup>26</sup> *Chester* ii, 195. See Frye (102-4).

<sup>27</sup> See Evans for the rabbinical and contemporary sources for the serpent's claim to have eaten the fruit (277).

<sup>28</sup> As Fowler notes, Satan moves from endowing the tree with “virtue” to animating it; the step to Eve's worship of the tree is a short one (*Paradise Lost* 478).

Fixed on the fruit she gazed, which to behold  
 Might tempt alone, and in her ears the sound  
 Yet rung of his persuasive words, impregned  
 With reason, to her seeming, and with truth;  
 Mean while the hour of noon drew on, and waked  
 An eager appetite, raised by the smell  
 So savoury of that fruit, which with desire,  
 Inclenable now grown to touch or taste,  
 Solicited her longing eye; . . . (735-743)

This long Miltonic line begins with Eve's gaze fixed on the fruit and ends with her longing eye. In between, we learn that the allure of the fruit's appearance (which to behold / Might tempt alone) is exacerbated by Eve's natural appetite (the hour of noon drew on) roused by the fruit's smell. Desire and necessity are perilously intertwined. We notice that Eve's temptation replicates Satan's fictitious account of the 'keen' urges awoken by the fruit.<sup>29</sup> Like the serpent in Satan's fable, Eve commits gluttony in the fifth degree by greedily engorging the apple.

But before her rash hand does reach out, Eve soliloquizes on the superiority of the fruit. While she begins somewhat hesitantly – "Great are thy virtues, doubtless, best of fruits, / Though kept from man, and worthy to be admired" (745-6) – some forty lines later she can boldly declare

Here grows the cure of all, this fruit divine,  
 Fair to the eye, inviting to the taste,  
 Of virtue to make wise: what hinders then  
 To reach, and feed at once both body and mind? (776-9)

It is now that we get the famous lines "So saying, her rash hand in evil hour / Forth reaching to the fruit, she plucked, she ate" (780-1). It is now that she succumbs to gluttony by eating too greedily. The serpent slinks away unseen, since Eve "Intent now wholly on her taste, nought else / Regarded" (786-7); "Greedy she engorged without restraint" (791). Indeed, Milton describes her immediately afterwards as being "heightened as with wine, jocund and boon" (793), reasserting the association between eating too much and drunkenness but also evoking the

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<sup>29</sup> *Paradise Lost* (IX, 575-612).

consequences or "daughters" of gluttony in terms reminiscent of Gregory and Aquinas.<sup>30</sup>

Yet, unlike in *Chester* where godhead is something of an afterthought, even as Eve succumbs to gluttonous delight apotheosis is never out of her mind:

...such delight till then, as seemed,  
In fruit she never tasted, whether true  
Or fancied so, through expectation high  
Of knowledge, nor was Godhead from her thought. (785-790)

Indeed, the narrator intimates that her delight in the taste of the fruit is coloured by her idolatrous thoughts.

Idolatry-worshipping a false god in the form of an apple tree – is the immediate consequence of Eve's Fall in Milton. She pays homage to the tree in satanic hyperbole, echoing Satan's adoration of both herself as "goddess humane" and of the tree in his fabled account:

O sovereign, virtuous, precious of all trees  
In Paradise, of operation blest  
To sapience, hitherto obscured, infamed,  
And thy fair fruit let hang, as to no end  
Created; (795-799)<sup>31</sup>

She promises to venerate the tree with hymns of praise each morning – worship that should be reserved for God alone:

... but henceforth my early care,  
Not without song, each morning, and due praise  
Shall tend thee, and the fertile burden ease  
Of thy full branches offered free to all; (799-802)

Before she departs, she actually bows down to the tree: "But first low reverence done, as to the power / That dwelt within" (835-6).

Through the devil's agency, the tree has moved from being God's "signature on the works of creation" (McColley 198), a testament to his being the divine Creator, to being wisdom-giving in and of itself. It becomes an idol, and by worshipping it, Eve flagrantly violates the first two commandments. By staging Eve's sin thus, Milton, wholly in keep-

<sup>30</sup> Aquinas lists 5 "daughters of gluttony": unseemly joy, scurrilousness, dirtiness, loquaciousness, and dullness of wit (*Summa theologiae* 2a2ae. 148, 6).

<sup>31</sup> See *Paradise Lost*, IX 532-548 and 679-683 for Satan's hyperbole.



ing with his Protestant poetics, subordinates the Church Fathers to the Bible.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> The key word here is “subordinate.” Protestants accorded the scriptures supreme authority but nevertheless respected and used biblically grounded patristic theology.

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