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**POWER AND GENDER RELATIONS IN
MILTON'S *PARADISE LOST***

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TO My Precious Mother

For all her love and support

And My Lovely Brother, Mohsen

Who is everything I have in my life

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ABSTRACT

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BY

ATEFEH GHASEMNEZHAD

Milton's *Paradise Lost* is one of the canonical works which has survived the test of time. So far, there have been different studies upon this work, but in this study *Paradise Lost* is examined based upon Foucault's conception of power. Foucault ascribes a powerful system of surveillance to a modern version of punitive system. Yet, Milton in *Paradise Lost* demonstrates a strong modern version of a coercive system of power relations which is very much in line with Foucault's definition. Foucault's conception of panopticism, confession, resistance, the relation of power with other conceptions such as knowledge, discourse, and, thus, truth sheds light upon the latent power relations among the agents in this work.

Furthermore, in this study, Adam, Eve, Satan, and God are analyzed from a feminist standpoint of gender studies. In Adam and Eve, there lies a hidden struggle for gaining dominance over one another. Eve takes recourse to the pre-patriarchal tradition in which woman is worshiped in the figure of a goddess. Satan as the projection of Eve's claim to power through his transformations into animal imageries demonstrates a projection of a goddess. Foucault contends that there is not top to down bottom of relations, rather, power is disseminated into the society. Likewise, in the network of power relations, Adam, Eve as well as God are, in one way or another, entangled in a web of struggles to gain dominance.

From a feminist psychoanalytic point of view, Adam represents, in Kristeva terms, the melancholic who oscillates between abjecting the mother as well as a need for uniting with her. Eve is a projection of Adam's masculine immortality as well as a reminder of his need for a female figure outside his masculine superiority. The need for a mother figure as well as the process of abjecting the mother permeates throughout the work. Thus, Satan as a projection of Eve precedes the existence of Adam and Eve. This study represents a fresh analysis of a traditional work from the standpoint of a modern philosophical and intellectual view.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Introduction

Milton's *Paradise Lost* is one of the greatest poems in English. Milton's ambition to write an epic in English that would rival great works of antiquity, what Homer and Virgil had done for Greek and Latin, was primarily intended to be based on the material from the Arthurian legends that would be the foundation for the English national epic. Yet, in writing *Paradise Lost*, Milton takes a more ambitious step to base his work on a vaster and more comprehensive scope that would involve the human race in general. Thus, he uses the Genesis account of man's Creation and fall.

As some critics have pointed out, he is marked as a misogynist in his treatment of women in *Paradise Lost*. He makes it clear that he does not believe that men and women are equal. Alluding to the Biblical account of the story of creation, Milton stresses a superior hold for men leaving a subservient role for women. Eve's discourse and actions are overridden by Adam. Where there is Adam, Eve's actions and thoughts are put to second. When Adam is worried about his physical attraction to Eve, Raphael warns him that Eve is more beautiful than Adam on the outside, while on the inside, she is less pure and admirable than Adam.

Milton's *Paradise Lost* is a space for Adam and Eve, the male and female prototype, to learn how to compromise and adjust themselves to the aspirations, expectations, capabilities and incapacities potential in the

opposite sex. They both undergo an initiation of gaining the knowledge of the self and each other, which, though ostensibly thrusts them onto a less celestial space, renders them as more humane and realistic personalities. This initiation recreates them as the subjects of their actions from a more passive role they were originally provided with. In the process of their initiation, they undergo three stages which in William Blake's terminology begins with naïve innocence, then is pushed forward with the knowledge of sin gained out of experience which is, in turn, purged by the organized innocence achieved as a result of sufferings at the previous stage (Abjadian 2002, 212-213).

In the course of the poem, the male and female protagonists learn how to complement each other and put their intrinsic instinctual innocence into practice, so that they would achieve the god-like potentiality which was hidden in their pure and genuine nature.

As it appears, Milton is a misogynist according to the popular modern standards. Nevertheless, Milton as compared to the common ideology of his time related to women would be deemed as an avanguard from different angles. In his poetry and sonnets women are appreciated and praised. His articles and essays are dedicated to the right for divorce which propounds options based on mutual incongruities.

Thus, Milton could be regarded as a reformer, a deconstructor and a dissenter of his own time. Consequently, with these paradoxical evidences, one cannot truly conceive of Milton's works, unless his works are to be analyzed according to the historical and ideological context in which Milton's mind was shaped. Indeed, Milton's reader should approach and assess his works and ideologies while keeping in mind that though Milton might have surpassed his contemporaries in one way or another, yet, he could not reach let alone exceed the mind of his common readers in the present time.

Mccolley (1999) claims that Milton decides on the theme of his great epic as the disobedience of man and regards the affectation of godhead as the essence of man's disobedience. The question of women in Milton is a controversial issue. Milton was radical in making Eve a fervent custodian of the natural world, a passionate, intense, and pure erotic partner, a spontaneous composer of exquisite lyric and narrative poetry, participant in numerous kinds of conversations including political debates, and the leader in peacemaking after the Fall from grace (1999, 188).

The question of Adam, Satan, Paradise and God should be taken into account as important agents in forming the mind and the action of Eve throughout the setting of the story of creation Milton has personalized. Satan and Eve both share at least one issue in common that is the questioning of authority.

Some critics object to Eve's derivation from Adam, in spite of her truth, beauty, wisdom and sanctities; some resent Eve's service to God and Adam which is confined to self-service rather than the ardent interest in service of God. Moreover, Milton is denounced by some as unfaithful to some scriptural ideas (Mccolley 1999, 179).

Milton draws on the conception of light in his portrayal of the deities as light or vision. Accordingly Milton has thought of his Seraphs as "ardors" or fervent flames and his devils as degenerating from that fiery essence and changing their constitution to that of earthly fire and even of others of the four elements of the universe" (Hughes 1935, xxi).

Another noteworthy issue in this great piece of work is that Adam who enjoys a perfect state in his prelapsarian bliss in Heavens observes the reality of the actual world that is the worlds of Ideas; the function of which is to stress the sense of loss which occurs after the Fall.

The light with which the domain of Heavens is associated with in contrast to its very opposite, the Floating Chaos, suggests a more complex feature. In other words, light is a means of the transmission or exertion of

power on the agents. God as the omnipotent and omnipresent being is the one responsible for power division. Satan, who functions as mimicry to God's power goes through a series of mocked degrading heroism in order to exploit and colonize the power. On the other hand, while Satan pursues his ambitious practices to gain godly power over Adam and Eve, both Adam and Eve have given way to their fancies.

1.2. Objective and Significance

Milton has long been characterized as a misogynist by many critics. His treatment of women as it is portrayed in *Paradise Lost* makes it clear that his role as the author of the work is to give women an inferior position leaving the superiority to men. He makes it clear that when a man falls, it is usually the fault of a woman. His works frequently allude to women as the weaker sex both morally and spiritually.

Thus far different critics of *Paradise Lost* have examined the text from different angles; yet, little has been discussed to shed enough light upon the basic structure of the work and the significance and motivations beneath the individual's actions.

One of the objectives of this study is to analyze Milton's *Paradise Lost* based on Michel Foucault's conception of Power. Another objective which contributes to the power plays in this study is a feministic approach of the issue of gender and its contribution to power relations among the agents in this work.

In this study, a new light is shed on the portrayal of Eve. It is argued that Eve's unconscious sense of inferiority leads her to exploit the issue of the knowledge with which she craves to acquire supremacy over Adam, challenging his spouse and companion for the missing power she ever craved for. The delusive power she would gain to find supremacy over Adam is gained through the tree of knowledge. Indeed, the kind of power she craves for is a repetition of the female prototypes of which we observe in *Hezar o Yekshab (One Thousand and One Nights)* with the character of

Shahzad who exerted power in story telling and intoxicating the King, or, in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* in which Macbeth and Lady Macbeth were doomed to failure as a result of Lady Macbeth's ambition. Obviously, Milton's treatment of women originates not from a sense of absolute misogyny; rather, this is a part of his unconscious internal conception of women as it had been handed down to him as a cog in a patriarchal system.

John Milton has always been regarded as an integral part of the literary canon. Yet, it is just in recent decades that more attention has been paid to the old and precious literary heritage of the past. The application of the theories of the recent philosophers and thinkers to the texts of the elder generations sheds light on the intentions and motivations of the authors through the text which, in turn, serves as a vent for the writer to pour out his ideological and psychological complexities.

This thesis covers an analysis of the character of Eve and her function in the overall legendary atmosphere of the story of creation which Milton expects his reader to believe in as an aspiratory fact conveyed to him through God's grace. According to his treatment of women, Milton is renowned as a misogynist by many critics. His great epic work *Paradise Lost* is a good example of the lower state he allocates for Eve in *Paradise Lost*. This study speculates on the origins and causes of rebellion in terms of breaking the patriarchal framework. Therefore, the first assumption is to have a profound analysis of Eve's motives to gain power and the approaches she undertakes to exert it as a weapon for taking control over the masculine patriarchal hierarchy.

1.3. Review of Literature

1.3.1. Review of Literature on John Milton

In his essay "God, the Flesh, the Devil: 'Why *Paradise Lost* Matters'" John Ottenhoff (1993) challenges the issue why Milton should be examined given that his works are a part of the fossilized canon and the case against it

seems to have been opened and shut. He argues that it raises issues still relevant for our culture – questions about creation, war, pride, relationships, nature, progress, technology and freedom (638).

According to Robert C. Martin (2000) in his article "How came I Thus? : Adam and Eve in the Mirror of the Other", Milton's *Paradise Lost* explores human experiences at different levels, one of which is the origin of human psychological development. In other words, this work displays overtones of narcissism in the character of Adam and Eve. Martin believes that Milton draws on a tradition in which all creatures are encountered with a narcissistic system in their copying and multiplying of God's self image (307).

Larry L. Langford (1994) in his essay "Adam and the Subversion of Paradise" examines the treatment of certain complexities in Adam's relationship with the patriarchal order that spreads throughout the poem (119). In "Milton and Modernity: Politics, Masculinity and *Paradise Lost*", Joad Raymond (2003) argues that Milton's writings are haunted with a certain type of masculinity and "a series of unconscious female agency which are in Jordan's Lacanian account the core of modern masculinity" (536).

Greg Smith (1996) in his "Binary Opposition and Sexual Power in *Paradise Lost*" traces the most controversial discussion that pertains to the depiction of sexual relations and gender roles. He examines Milton's depiction of Adam and Eve as "an attempt to come to terms with male-constructed binary opposition and the failure of these binary oppositions to define and control human sexuality" (383).

Wilma G. Armstrong (1992) in her essay titled "Punishment, Surveillance, and discipline in *Paradise Lost*", traces the Foucauldian treatment of power structures and relates it to Milton's *Paradise Lost* (91). In "Rewriting the Protestant Ethic: Discipline and Love in *Paradise Lost*", Knoppers (1991) examines the idea of discipline in Milton's *Paradise Lost*

in which all characters help in maintenance of the whole structure through self-disciplinary. He argues that the failure Adam and Eve arrive at completes the disciplinary system of surveillance.

John Rumrich (1995) in his essay "Milton's God and the Matter of Chaos" challenges the conception of chaos which in Milton's words is regarded as God's womb. Considering Milton's view of the notion of God as pure materialistic, Rumrich asserts that the formation of chaos in *Paradise Lost* has a touch of masculine anarchy (1043).

Douglas Anderson (1986) in "Unfallen Marriage and the Fallen Imagination in *Paradise Lost*" traces the sexual hierarchy as a result of his adherence to biblical tradition of sexual hierarchy in *Paradise Lost* that culminates in the subordination of women (132). Miller Timothy (1989) contends that the sort of portrayal of Eve we are given is thoroughly through the perspective of Adam. Thus the passage leaves us uncertain about Eve's actions (12).

In "Language and Knowledge in *Paradise Lost*" John Leanard (1999) contends that language and knowledge seems to have been granted to Adam. He does not 'need to acquire language laboriously'. Indeed, Adam names the creatures all of which are under man's command. Though this issue of knowledge is extended to Eve's naming of the flowers; yet, unlike Adam, whose immediate knowledge is dedicated to him without any prior awareness Eve's knowledge is not as comprehensive as Adam's. This lack of knowledge leads her to be drawn to the forbidden tree of knowledge which leads her to be insinuated by Satan's misleading remarks (1999,130-4).

In a collaborative interesting essay by Wendy Furman-Adams and Virginia James Tufte (1993) it is discussed that the image of serpent has its ambivalence and multivalencies. Snake's multidimensional features become problematic due to its several functions. Serpent is a place in which many various often paradoxical definitions come together that join feminine

masculine, sinuous images of death and destruction while depicting it as a wise entity capable of healing and resurrections (89).

In "An Introduction to Milton's Poems" (1910) Charles Williams assumes Eve and Satan's transgressions due to their choice between the two states of beings i.e. derivation-in-love and self-loving spirit from which they chose the former (qtd. in Thorpe 1965, 252).

Douglas Bush in "Milton" (1945) regards *Paradise Lost* as Milton's attempt to put the "simple biblical story on partly humanistic and rational basis, in making it a many sided conflict between reason and unreason, 'knowledge' and 'ignorance', temperance and excess, hierarchic order and anarchic order" (qtd. in Thorpe 1965, 289).

Mary F. Norton (1995) in her essay titled as "'The Rising Worlds of Waters Dark and Deep': Chaos Theory and *Paradise Lost*" applies the Chaos theory as a result of the correlations between Milton's Eden and Earth and their general symmetry. She asserts that according to this theory, chaos as a principle contains an inherent proclivity to change which serves in Milton's *Paradise Lost* to generate a complex system of morals. Hence, she regards chaos theory as a means of displacing the poem's primary focus from good and evil dichotomy to a non moral one (93).

1.3.2. Review of Literature on Foucault's Concept of Power

Foucault is certainly the central figure of French philosophers since Sartre. Foucault's contribution to philosophy lies in his practical application of his theories to feed on the human sciences in a range of fields, i.e. linguistics, anthropology, sociology and Freudian psychology. The main reason for the significance and influence of Foucault lies in the content of his books. Foucault draws on power as the pivotal basis for subjugation of man which is exercised in mental, ideological structure of scientific, political and theological practices.

Colin Gordon (1980) argues that Foucault's conception of power is capable of taking "the form of a subjectification as well as objectification". To put it in this context, the self is deemed as "a tool of power, a product of domination rather than an instrument of personal freedom (Merquior 1985, 108).

Foucault's pursuit of the problems of modern modes of domination unravels the horizon where knowledge and power are so enmeshed and inextricable that he deploys the hyphenated power-knowledge conception (*pouvoir-savoir*).

Foucault demonstrates that discourse is directly related to the conception of power. He argues about the sort of discourse which is privileged, exclusive and suppressed subject. In his article titled as "Ordre du Discourse" ("The order of Discourse" 1971), Foucault argues that:

It does not matter that discourse appears to be of little account, because the prohibitions that surround it very soon reveal its link with desire and with power. There is nothing surprising about that, since as psychoanalysis has shown, discourse is not simply that which manifests (or hides) desire it is the object of desire ... discourse is not simply that which translates struggles or system of domination, but is the thing for which there is struggle. discourse is the power to be seized (240).

In his *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of Prison* (1997), in his examination of the history concludes that there has occurred a shift in exercising power as a means of control and repression so that the control over the body and physical punishment has been converted into the control over the soul:

It would be wrong to say that the soul is an illusion, or an ideological effect. On the contrary, it exists, it has reality, it is produced permanently around, within the body by the functioning of power that is exercised on those

punished – and in a more general way. On those one supervises, truis and corrects ...(*Discipline and Punish* 29).

Foucault also draws on Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon which is an architectural structure, a circular prison which reinforces the authorities' domination to put the prisoners under a close and constant surveillance. This system of disciplinary mechanism permeates throughout human institutions in the society. In this regard, *Panoptic Worlds of Lord Jim* by Zolfagharkhani (2002) is a good example of the application of the system to the works of literature.

According to Foucault, the same conception of surveillance and control is stressed in the Christian tradition with its radical manifestations in Puritanism. Foucault declares that the spirituality which lies within the structure of Christianity reinforces the physical mechanism of control through an internalization of the carceral architecture. It renders a reflection of self-examination which results in an internal perfection.

1.3.3. Review of Literature on Feminism

The question of gender and its influence on literature has always been a great and hot debate to the feminists. As Goodman (1996) asserts as we write and read we do so as gendered individuals not just as women and men, but as people who have been taught that there are values assigned to their sex. Women's liberation has indeed helped us greatly to raise our consciousness about the way gender influences our perceptions.

Since all of literature has been handed down from the masculine heritage, woman's voice has been dramatically silenced or ignored in the writings of previous generations. A considerable body of writings belongs to the generation of men's writings whose stereotypical approach to women had rendered them as predictable and banal entities with flat characters which serves as a mere space in which men exerted their political, economic, ideological and social superiority and dominance.

In ancient Greek Aristotle defined reason by stipulating what distinguishes man from animals. Humans are defined as animals yet they depart from the rest through their capability of reasoning in the context of the community (*polis*). Aristotle also distinguishes the ability to reason as both divine and male. This form of reasoning which eliminates female from the context of reasoning is discussed in depth by Pamela Anderson in her book *A Feminist Philosophy of Religion* (1998) in which she draws on Aristotle who denounces emotions as womanish and rejects fears as female emotions as his mentor and predecessor Plato did; still, regards women as the defect male.

It seems that the female gender has suffered from male definitions and division which has been ascribed to all categories including women: "Hegel restates the Pythagorean list of opposites as limit and infinity; unity and multiplicity; masculine and feminine, light and dark, good and evil. Lloyd represents a same list of male/female, rest/motion, straight/curved, light/dark, good/bad, square and oblong" (Anderson 1998, 9).

The main concern of the feminist movement is to seek equal opportunities, expectations and freedom for social, economic, and cultural freedom. Feminist criticism seems not to have a beginning. In the seventeenth century Esther Soweram and Bathsua Makin asserted that in classical tradition, there were many identified powerful deities and influential muses as women. Mary Wollstonecraft, at the end of the 18th century denounced the sentimental novels as forcing women to regard themselves silly and helpless (Besley 1997, 1).

Simon De Beauvoir, the French critic in her famous book, *The Second Sex*, 1949, illustrates women's cultural identification with the "Other"; the negative object to man as the defining and dominating subject. Virginia Woolf, an important precursor of the movement, elucidates the woman's disabilities within what she calls a "patriarchal society" that has hindered or thwarted women from realizing their potentialities.