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Complementarianism in Lewis and Milton: Eve and the Green Lady

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Abstract

This thesis explores the relationship between the genders as expressed in John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667) and C. S. Lewis's *Perelandra* (1943) and the ways in which a modern understanding of gender relationships informs the literary criticism of each work. While these authors composed their works during very different periods in history, Milton and Lewis each write from a complementarian rather than an egalitarian view of gender. Each author embraces a hierarchical conception of the universe. The ramifications of this context on the criticism of the respective works means that the reader or critic must often set aside his or her own presuppositions. Disregarding the views of the text can hinder the reader from initially interpreting the work as its author intended. Since relationships between men and women have changed drastically since Milton's time, it is especially important for a modern reader to examine what he or she assumes before reading *Paradise Lost*. Lewis's extensive writing about medieval literature alerts us to the challenges in interpreting pre-Milonic texts. This writing also provides an important reference point for how Lewis drew upon *Paradise Lost* in writing *Perelandra*.¹ Understanding Lewis's complementarian presentation of the First Mother in *Perelandra* allows the modern-day reader to better interpret Milton's Eve as Milton intended.

1. Cf. Sanford Schwarz's "Reconstructing Eden: *Paradise Lost* and C. S. Lewis's *Perelandra*" in *Milton in Popular Culture*.

Eve and the Green Lady: Complementarianism in Lewis and Milton

Literary criticism has been around as long as literature has been available to read. Over the past two centuries, however, the literary community has seen the development of a plethora of new, distinct literary theories. These new theories can be applied to previously-existing texts, and this interpretive shift has led to very insightful critiques that provide a lot of value to the literary community. For example, *Wide Sargasso Sea* is an exploration of reading *Jane Eyre* from a postcolonial, reverse-gaze perspective—something that Charlotte Brontë probably never anticipated. But this perspective has led to new insights on *Jane Eyre*, as well as its own insights into the human character, that add to the literary body of knowledge.

However, the development of these new theories also creates the concern that one read a text appropriately. Reading through an opposing lens can sometimes lead to the misreading of certain works, where critics read and interpret literature “against the grain” of the writing in such a way that violates the text. Critic Lois Tyson in her seminal work on literary theory writes that “the attempt to read a text using an incompatible framework can be a relatively fruitless endeavor that risks distorting elements of the text, the theory, or both, as we try to make them fit each other” (4-5). By framework, she is referring to the literary lens through which one reads a text; reading a piece of literature through an inappropriate lens can violate the text, leading the reader to incorrect conclusions. John Crowe Ransom in his essay on criticism writes that when one reads an author from a different time period, it is imperative that the reader not “enter into an old work” with the same mind with which she “enter[s] into a contemporary work.” He argues that the reader must bear in mind what the author had available to him and “cancel a great deal” of

modern presuppositions (977). John Piper and Wayne Grudem write that criticism is at its best when the critic can *first* understand the text “in a way the author would approve” before examining the work from a different angle (35). In other words, readers must lay aside assumptions and first read the work on its own terms, which is especially vital when the work was written in a different age.

Two works that have the potential to be so misread are John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* (1667) and C. S. Lewis’s *Perelandra* (1943), which both serve as imaginative explorations of Genesis 1-3. *Paradise Lost* relates the Biblical Fall of Humanity, and *Perelandra* explores what could have happened if Adam and Eve had not sinned. In *Perelandra*, a man named Ransom is sent to the planet Venus (called Perelandra in the novel) in order to prevent a Fall. Perhaps it seems odd to compare a 17th century epic poem with 20th century science fiction. However, as Robert Brown proposes, they are interconnected. Lewis alludes to *Paradise Lost* throughout *Perelandra*; thus, it is justified to “view the Green Lady as an imaginatively portrayed Eve” (Brown 54). Lewis published *Perelandra* in 1943, and followed it with his critical work *A Preface to Paradise Lost* in 1944. Interestingly, in his essay on the medieval conception of hierarchy, an idea central to that era’s thought, Lewis points out Samuel Johnson as someone who misunderstands Milton’s thoughts on gender (“Hierarchy”). Is it reasonable to conclude that he published *Perelandra* partly to correct what he saw as certain critics’ misreading of Milton? This paper will focus on the ways that a complementarian view of gender is expressed in both *Perelandra* and *Paradise Lost* as a contextual reference for a proper understanding of these works.

Milton's *Paradise Lost* has been variously interpreted, specifically in terms of gender.^{2,3} Since some of these interpretations draw opposite conclusions, it is reasonable to conclude that some are more correct—are more “with the grain”—than others. C. S. Lewis posits in *A Preface to Paradise Lost* that Milton interwove the medieval hierarchical conception throughout the work. He argues that understanding the value placed on such an organizational pattern is crucial to a correct interpretation. The medieval conception of hierarchy is similar to the modern definition of complementarianism. The complementarian view of gender sees men and women as fundamentally different; that is, men and women are designed to complement each other in function, like puzzle pieces. Men and women in marriage are supposed to cover each other's weaknesses. Complementarianism holds that there is “equality” in value but “beneficial differences between men and women” (Piper and Grudem xv). Contrasted with complementarianism is the egalitarian view, which argues that “there is no legitimate difference between men and women in the home and church” (x). By examining Lewis's complementarian presentation of the First Mother in *Perelandra* (i.e. the Green Lady), the modern-day reader can better understand and interpret Milton's Eve as Milton intended.

Eve and Complementarianism

Arguably the greatest English epic poem ever written, Milton's *Paradise Lost* has been both loved and despised (sometimes in equal measure). Especially with the

2. Here referring to gender as fixed, essential qualities, not social structures, which is how Milton and Lewis viewed it. Cf. McChrystal, 505: “While the hierarchy presented in Book 4 distinguishes difference between female and male . . . the difference is not based on power or oppression.”

3. For example, cf. Al-Badarnah, who views Milton as a “pro-feminist,” and Zimmerman, who sees Milton as essentially anti-feminist.

emergence of twentieth century feminist movements it received a lot of attention for its supposedly misguided understanding of gender. However, there is also no critical consensus, as the responses range from Milton being seen as a misogynist to a proto-feminist. Abdullah F. Al-Badarneh attempts to “[absolve] John Milton from any critical and feminist accusation of being anti-feminist in *Paradise Lost*” by showing that he treated Eve as an independent, free creature (105). Coming at *Paradise Lost* from a different angle, Shari Zimmerman accuses Milton of portraying Eve “largely through a male lens which sees femininity as vain and seductive, as well as infantile and dependent” (247). Zimmerman employs a feminist critique of the work to show that Eve’s fall was a noble struggle for independence from her male counterpart, Adam. Mary Wollstonecraft in her *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, claims that Milton is inconsistent in his presentations of Eve, first presenting her as inferior and then later as equal (497-498).⁴

In contrast, Elisabeth Liebert seeks to promote a “middle ground” reading of *Paradise Lost* that “acknowledges Eve as subordinate and privileged simultaneously, at once liberated by Milton’s revision of tradition and proscribed by the limitations of that revision” (152). Thus, she argues that Milton has done feminist work in his portrayal of Eve; however, Eve is still a limited figure in the poem.⁵ Similar to Liebert, Deirdre Keenan McChrystal asks—and in her essay, seeks to answer—the question, “Is it possible to redeem Eve as a subject with her own integrity? . . . Is it conceivable that

4. This apparent confusion can be reconciled by noting that, as according to the Great Chain of Being presented by Tillyard, Eve is just below Adam—in authority, but not in importance or virtue or value.

5. It is important to note here that Adam is also limited; he depends on instructions from angels such as Raphael in Book V.

Milton, a champion of liberty, could redeem Eve from the oppressive force of this tradition and make Eve her own speaking subject, not an object of patriarchy?" (491). She portrays Milton as a proto-feminist but limited by his status as a male in a patriarchal society. Also falling between the two extremes, Patrick J. Mcgrath in his essay on gender hierarchy in *Paradise Lost* writes, "Gender hierarchy can indeed accommodate an inferior Eve who is also dynamic and thoughtful," indicating that a reading of a misogynistic Milton is not necessary to vindicate Eve from her so-called oppression (72). While *Paradise Lost* is complex and rich enough to elicit multiple interpretations or foci, it expresses a complementarian worldview; as such, it is necessary to first read the epic poem with that perspective in mind. To illustrate that Milton is writing from a complementarian viewpoint, this essay will show that it is the prelapsarian Eve who places herself under the authority of Adam; yet simultaneously, she is portrayed with reason and intellectual power, and she complements Adam, exposing Milton's view of gender as one of balance. This complementarian viewpoint also defines gender relations in *Perelandra*, justifying an analysis of the way each female character informs an understanding of the other, and highlighting how Lewis employs the same hierarchical conception employed by Milton in his space fantasy.

Through her own words, Eve herself exhibits a complementarian view of male-female relations. When the reader is first introduced to Adam and Eve, Eve says:

O thou for whom

And from whom I was formed flesh of thy flesh,

And without whom am to no end, my guide

And head, what thou hast said is just and right. (Milton IV, 440-443)

Milton has Eve acknowledge Adam with her own words as her immediate superior.

Elisabeth Liebert comments that in her various addresses, Eve “opens with honorifics that stress his hierarchical superiority” (158). In other places, she refers to Adam as “Pre-eminent by so much odds” and “My Author and Disposer” (Milton IV, 447 and 635). Eve claims that whatever Adam asks, “Unargued I obey: So God ordains; / God is thy law, thou mine; To know no more / Is woman’s happiest knowledge, and her praise” (IV, 636-638). As an unfallen being, Eve obeys what God ordains *because* God has ordained it. Similarly, Adam must obey what God ordains. Eve acknowledges the hierarchy of God, then Adam, then Eve, with Adam the intermediary between Eve and God. If Eve were of an egalitarian mindset, she would put herself directly under God and equal to Adam; however, she does not view herself as level with Adam, indicating that her view of gender is complementarian.⁶

Just like Eve, Adam considers his wife as a step below him in authority (though not necessarily in value). He tells the angel Raphael:

well I understand in the prime end
Of nature her the inferior, in the mind
And outward faculties, which most excel,
In outward also her resembling less
His image who made both, and less expressing
The character of that dominion given
O’er other creatures. (XIII, 540-546)

6. While someone could argue that Milton is using Eve to uphold his own view of gender, Eve submitting herself to Adam precludes the argument that Zimmerman makes in “Eve’s Struggle for Identity” that Eve is seeking independence from Adam (and therefore promoting an egalitarian point of view).

Adam specifically refers to Eve as being below him, a step further removed from God than he is. McChrystal clarifies Adam's statement, saying that Milton distinguishes between Adam's relationship with God and Eve's relationship with God. Milton puts Adam between God and Eve, showing that Eve fits into the great chain of being below Adam (493). However, even though she is viewed as one step removed from God, this removal does not necessarily mean that Eve is servile or less human (or less important or less valuable) than her husband.

In the separation scene of Book IX, Eve asserts herself like she has not before. For the first time, Eve is the one to address her husband before being addressed.⁷ Additionally, she boldly refers to him as "Adam," with no adjoined epithets. She takes initiative and proposes a new plan:

[T]ill more hands

Aid us, the work under our labour grows,

.....

Thou therefore now advise

Or hear what to my mind first thoughts present,

Let us divide our labours. (IX, 207-208 and 212-214)

Some critics, such as Shari Zimmerman, believe that here Eve is seeking her own independence from Adam as a fight for her selfhood. Some, like Doris T. Meyers, view Eve's statements in the separation scene as somehow precipitating the Fall, as if Milton is presenting her argument for separation as a step towards falling. Myers writes that Eve's

7. Cf. Alistair Fowler's notes on *Paradise Lost* in *The Poems of Milton*, 868.

insistence on splitting up is a sign “that her fall was already beginning” (62). However, Eve as yet is unfallen and therefore not sinful in her desire to work separately. Her desire to work separately from Adam, while perhaps unwise, does not signify any sort of “pre-fall.” McChrystal argues that this line of thinking constitutes “a Catch-22 method of analysis wherein Eve is interpreted always in the worst possible light—her willingness to yield is seen as subservience; her desire for independence as recklessness. She can’t win. The victim is blamed for the attack” (496). It is important that the reader recognize Eve as a free moral being—she is not Adam’s slave, nor his servant; her opinions and ideas are just as valid as his are. Thus, the separation scene is not Milton’s way of suggesting, as Fowler suggests, that Eve is demonstrating a “dangerous individualism” in seeking to be separate from Adam (874). Milton is simply moving us towards the Fall and using rhetorical technique to heighten the suspense.

Not only is Eve blameless in seeking separation from Adam, but Adam consents to Eve’s absence, warning her to take care, but not forbidding her departure. Eve, in response, acknowledges his concern. She does not recklessly abandon him in a fit of individualistic pique. Adam also emphasizes his blessing on her free choice, saying, “Go; for thy stay, not free, absents thee more” (Milton IX, 372). Even though he is reluctant to see her leave, Adam allows her to go—he is not her slave master, and he is not a tyrant, to make every decision for the two of them. Fowler insinuates that Adam acts in the role of God in that “to keep Eve in passive obedience would be to lose her,” and it is thus Eve’s fault as she “has put Adam in an impossible position” (876).⁸ However, Adam is

8. Also cf. Milton, *Paradise Lost* Book III, lines 100-105: “Such I created all the ethereal powers / And spirits . . . Freely they stood who stood, and fell who fell.”

free unto himself, and Eve is free unto herself, and they are both unfallen. Eve has every right to suggest that they work separately. The narrative does not suggest that Eve was in any way disobedient to leave. They discuss her idea rationally, each listening to the other and each presenting logical arguments. It is not so much of a struggle, one against the other, as it is a reasonable discussion between two free, moral agents. Al-Badarnah emphasizes the mutuality of the decision, arguing that “each of the couple shares the responsibility of the Fall equally. It is not only Eve who first suggested the separation nor Adam who consents to let her go alone, but both of them” (109). Significantly, Milton presents Eve as “yet submissive” at the end of this argument, subtly pointing out that despite her argument against Adam, she is still cognizant of his authority (IX, 377).

Before the Fall, Adam and Eve’s relationship is one of freedom within the structure of God’s creation and design for the universe. Their relationship is a working out of what the Apostle Paul says about wives and husbands in Ephesians 5:22-28: “Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord,” and “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her” (ESV).⁹ Adam loves Eve, and she lovingly submits to his authority. His position of authority does not mean that he does not allow her to make her own decisions or that he orders her around. This picture of submission and authority is one that emphasizes both freedom and responsibility.

9. “[22] Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. [23] For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. [24] Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. [25] Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, [26] that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, [27] so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. [28] In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.” (ESV).

McChrystal writes that “though Eve . . . yields to Adam as guide and head, she remains absolutely free, and Adam does not exercise power over her” (505). Eve willingly submits herself to Adam’s authority, and he, loving her, never asks her to do anything of which God or she would not approve. Diane K. Mccolley argues that *Paradise Lost* “celebrates the problematically complex original and regenerable excellence of both sexes,” while defining them as essentially different (178). McChrystal also posits an inherent difference between masculine and feminine. She writes about how Milton constructs “a genuine feminine subject and discourse,” claiming that Eve “develops from birth into a genuine feminine subject,” not a masculine subject, with approval (497). While she does not argue that a hierarchical view of gender is correct, she does distinguish a difference between the feminine and the masculine. As this essay will demonstrate, according to a hierarchical view, as the feminine is subordinate to the masculine, so is Eve subordinate to Adam, who is himself subordinate to the angels who are subordinate to God.

Even though Eve is under Adam’s authority, however, throughout *Paradise Lost* she is portrayed as a being with great reason and intellectual power. Adam throughout the poem praises her virtues and intellect. He remarks:

so absolute she seems
And in her self complete, so well to know
Her own, that what she wills to do or say,
Seems wisest, virtuousest, discreetest, best;
.....

Greatness of mind and nobleness their seat

Build in her loveliest. (VIII, 547-550 and 557-558)

Hence Adam admits that Eve possesses aspects that he greatly admires, aspects that, to him, resemble his own—and by extension, God’s own, as he created both man and woman in his image (cf. Genesis 1:27). McChrystal writes, “Milton emphasizes . . . their mutual capacities—for truth, wisdom, sanctitude, and freedom—and subordinates all other distinctions. These primal and fundamentally important qualities are not gender specific” (492). In defense of this view, God calls Eve Adam’s “likeness,” his “fit help,” his “other self” (Milton VIII, 450). Adam, in turn, describes her as his “Sole partner,” as “Manlike,” as his “associate sole” (IV, 411; VIII, 471; IX, 227). Eve is created because Adam sees all the animals and cannot find anything that is like himself. Hence, he uses the descriptor “Manlike,” which means similar to him, not identical. Eve fills the lack in his life, indicating that she is valuable. The descriptions in *Paradise Lost* hint that Eve is an intellectual figure, and that she is endowed with many of the same gifts that Adam is. Additionally, when Adam comforts Eve after her dream in Book V, he emphasizes that she, like him, in her soul has “Reason as chief” (V, 102). Thus there exists in Adam and Eve “a paradoxical state of unlike likeness. . . . In making Eve, the Creator is providing Adam with a partner who complements him in every conceivable way” (Liebert 154-155). Before Eve is even created, Adam feels a God-given lack, a need, for someone like to himself. He does not seek an exact replica of himself; rather, his response shows the human need for both the masculine and feminine.

What Exactly is a Hierarchy?

In “Hierarchy,” a chapter of *Preface to Paradise Lost*, Lewis argues for reading Milton through a complementarian lens. He explains the medieval principle of hierarchy, arguing that while Samuel “Johnson has complained that Milton thought men made only for rebellion and women only for obedience,” a better reading of Milton requires an understanding of a medieval “Hierarchical conception” (or in today’s terms, a complementarian view) of the universe. A complementarian understanding is essential because “A failure to understand [this thought] entails a false criticism not only of *Paradise Lost*, but of nearly all literature before the revolutionary period” (Lewis, “Hierarchy”). Lewis understands that reading into Milton a thought which he never conceived is fatal if one desires to properly critique the poem.

Lewis defines the Hierarchical conception as a view in which “degrees of value are objectively present in the universe,” from “unformed matter” all the way upward to God. According to this view, “The goodness, happiness, and dignity of every being consists [sic.] in obeying its natural superior and ruling its natural inferiors” (Lewis, “Hierarchy”). Milton places Adam and Eve in a universe in which this hierarchical order is omnipresent; Lewis calls it “the indwelling life of the whole work [that] foams or burgeons out of it at every moment” (“Hierarchy”). E. M. W. Tillyard defines this “Chain of Being” in *The Elizabethan World Picture*:

This metaphor served to express the unimaginable plenitude of God’s creation, its unflinching order, and its ultimate unity. The chain stretched from the foot of God’s throne to the meanest of inanimate objects. Every speck of creation was a

link in the chain, and every link except those at the two extremities was simultaneously bigger and smaller than another: there could be no gap. (23)

The relation of inferior to superior is seen in Eve's interactions with Adam, as shown above; it is ALSO shown through Adam's interactions with Raphael; and it is further demonstrated through the Son's interactions with the Father.¹⁰ It is important, however, to bear in mind that an object's place on the chain does not describe its value; according to Tillyard, every piece of the chain has importance; the chain "enhanced the dignity of all creation, even of the meanest part of it" (28).

Satan himself offers the greatest example of how this order can be destroyed, which Lewis says can happen "By ruling or obeying natural equals, that is by Tyranny or Servility," or "By failing to obey a natural superior or to rule a natural inferior—that is, by Rebellion or Remissness" ("Hierarchy"). Satan saw that God had set the Son in authority over him, and he rebelled against that authority.¹¹ The first evil entered the world through rebellion to the natural order. Milton describes Satan after being cast out of heaven as suffering "from sense of injured merit" (I, 98). Lewis humorously writes that Satan's mindset is seen often in "domestic animals, children, film-stars, politicians, or minor poets" ("Hierarchy"). It is laughable that Satan, who was uninjured in any way save in his (foolish) pride, would rebel because of a "sense" that he was being treated unfairly. Lewis expresses the petulance of Satan in *Perelandra* through the character of Weston or the Unman, who blatantly disregards Maleldil's (God's) orders and the

10. Cf. Milton, *Paradise Lost*, V 358-360: Although Adam is not "awed," still he bows to Raphael "with submiss approach and reverence meek / As to a superior nature."

11. Cf. Milton, *Paradise Lost*, V 659-665: Satan, "great in power, / In favour and pre-eminence," is recorded by Milton as desiring to be above the Son, his natural superior.

sanctity of life.¹² Lewis writes that the Unman is “the union of malice with something nearly childish,” with the “petty, indefatigable nagging . . . of a nasty little boy at a preparatory school” (123). This picture is totally different from the image that Satan wishes to present in *Paradise Lost*. He wants to be seen as a noble and tragic hero, like Prometheus. Lewis argues that the “same process [that Satan went through] is at work in Eve” (Lewis, “Hierarchy”). Satan is trying to convince Eve that she deserves more. While Milton’s Eve does not sin before the Fall, she is tempted by the idea—brought to her mind by Satan—of rising above her place in the created order.

Lewis argues that it is necessary to lay down our presuppositions before we read the poem—presuppositions which may include an egalitarian view of gender. He writes:

It would not be surprising if we, who were mostly brought up on egalitarian or even antinomian ideas, should come to the poem with minds prepossessed in favour of Satan against God and of Eve against Adam, and then read into the poet a sympathy with those prepossessions which is not really there. (“Hierarchy”)

Lewis’s argument is that critics should shy away from an against-the-grain reading of *Paradise Lost*. Instead, reading with the grain of *Paradise Lost* means setting aside presuppositions and submitting—at least for a time—to the thought of Milton. Thus, critics need to (temporarily) adopt a hierarchical or complementarian view of gender in order to fully grasp just what Milton is saying.

Some critics like Phillip Pullman contend that Lewis, like Milton, is a misogynist, claiming that his portrayals of “emancipated women” are distasteful (Bartels 324). Still

12. Cf. *Perelandra*, 108-110, where Weston/the Unman is killing froglike creatures out of malice, like a cruel little boy.

others claim the opposite, citing examples from Lewis's personal life of intellectual women whom he respected. Bartels in her article on C. S. Lewis and gender asserts that Lewis is for the most part viewed either as "a misogynist or . . . a product of his time" (324). She concludes, however, that Lewis was neither of these. Lewis was inclined to look on the genders of Feminine and Masculine as fixed essentials. His portrayal of women in his fiction is not based on misogynist beliefs; rather, Bartels points out what she calls his "problematic portraits of women" as instances where his "preoccupation with theological symbolism causes him to overlook social realities"—that he generally adopts "types and generalizations" instead of examining individuals (325, 326). Adam Barkman agrees that Lewis relates the relationship between masculine and feminine to that defining God and his Creation, respectively; yet he defends Lewis's opinion, stating that it aligns with what Scripture teaches (415, 416).¹³ While the goal of this paper is not to define Lewis's view on women in general, exploring his portrayal of Eve will inform the reader's understanding on Lewis's beliefs about gender, and about the female gender in particular; examining the Green Lady will also clarify Milton's presentation of Eve.

Lewis and Complementarianism in *Perelandra*

At first glance, Lewis's presentation of the First Mother in *Perelandra* seems radically different from Milton's. For example, throughout the first interactions the reader has with the Green Lady, the King of Perelandra is elsewhere, giving the impression that the Green Lady is independent and free of masculine authority. However, Bartels claims that Lewis "build[s] on the biblical image of the relationship of God and humanity as one

13. Of course, Scripture itself has been variously interpreted, so this is Barkman's *interpretation* of what Scripture teaches.

of a marriage, [casting] his fictional couples as representations of the relationship between the masculine divine and the feminine mortal” (324). It is this representation that the reader witnesses in *Perelandra*. A close reading of *Perelandra* indicates that Lewis, like Milton, writes from a complementarian perspective.

When Ransom meets the Oyarsa of Perelandra for the first time and compares it to the Oyarsa of Malacandra, he sees “the real meaning of gender” (*Perelandra* 200). Fitting in with Lewis’s view of the value of myth and legend, the Oyarsa of Malacandra and Perelandra, of Mars and Venus, are assigned gender just as Ares and Aphrodite are assigned gender—but this personification of them is higher than the “follies that have been talked of them on Earth” (202). Ransom realizes that “Gender is a reality, and a more fundamental reality than sex,” which he says is “merely the adaptation to organic life of a fundamental polarity which divides all created beings” (200). Ransom learns to view the universe as gendered; that is, he takes what Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen calls a “quasi-Platonic” view of Masculinity and Femininity as ideals that are manifest in the material world—a view that Lewis, as a gender essentialist, held (36). This idea of forms is strengthened by Ransom’s conclusion that when it comes to male and female, “Their reproductive functions, their differences in strength and size, partly exhibit, but partly also confuse and misrepresent, the real polarity” (Lewis, *Perelandra* 200). Hence, the differences that are embodied by male and female characteristics on Earth are only shadowy images of the true Masculine and Feminine. This “polarity” leads Lewis to present a fundamentally complementarian viewpoint in *Perelandra*.

Perhaps counterintuitively, Lewis’s complementarianism, as in Milton, appears even as the Green Lady—just like Eve—is portrayed as intelligent, perceptive, and

virtuous, just like her male counterpart. In fact, the Green Lady is constantly referred to in queenly terms. One of Ransom's most-used descriptive words is awe—she is “overwhelming,” and he is “unnerved” in talking to her (60). When he first meets her, he says that “Opposites met in her and were fused in a fashion for which we have no images . . . she was obviously a goddess” (64). Even though he thinks her responses childlike and nonsensical, Ransom, compared to the Green Lady, is portrayed as childish. At one point, he is “surprised at the sulkiness of his own voice” (70). Then, after he tells her a little white lie, the Green Lady is described as “looking at him with a new and more judicial expression,” which implies that she has authority, since one can only judge another person if that person is equal to or lower than oneself (70). Ransom wonders if “in the presence of the first mother's son she had ever seen, she was already dimly forecasting the problems that might arise when she had children of her own,” casting the Green Lady as a mother, who has authority over her children (70). Later, when she remarks on a meaningless comment that Ransom utters, he retorts, “‘*I had* something to say,’ . . . almost under his breath” (75). This remark is more characteristic of a schoolboy than a wise adult male. This juxtaposition of the adult male and the First Mother of Venus shows that Lewis does not believe a woman's intellect is less than that of a man. The Green Lady is able to comprehend ideas that Ransom struggles to grasp. Despite Ransom's evident wisdom and ability to comprehend ideas that the Green Lady does not, the reader cannot help but see him as the student, and the Green Lady as the patient teacher. When they travel to the fixed land, Ransom is awed by the Green Lady's physical prowess: he is “amazed at her strength” (78). She is able to gracefully climb the rocks and walls in their passage, while Ransom is left to scramble up in an undignified

manner; hence she is also shown to have superior physical qualities—at least on her home planet of Perelandra.

The Green Lady's queenly aspect is most explicit when Ransom reveals that he is not the King of Thulcandra, or the first Father of his race (Adam). The Green Lady realizes "that she was not addressing an equal. She was a queen sending a message to a queen through a commoner, and her manner to him was henceforward more gracious" (67). She is the ruler of her world, under the King and Maleldil, and she treats the animals of her world with "authority" and a certain "condescension, which by taking seriously the inferiority of her adorers made them somehow less inferior" (65). While she does submit herself to the King of Perelandra, she has more authority than Ransom, who is a man. Thus, Lewis is not saying that every woman must be subject to every man, which would represent a distortion of complementarianism. Instead, the only man in authority over her is her husband. She seems to Ransom to be crowned with splendor of a sort, something that he understands but does not necessarily physically see. The narrator remarks that Ransom "knew now what the old painters were trying to represent when they invented the halo. Gaiety and gravity together, a splendor as of martyrdom yet with no pain in it at all, seemed to pour from her countenance" (68). She is powerful, motherly, queenly. She appears to be the image of human femininity at its highest.

Interestingly, as Robert F. Brown puts it in his article on the temptation in Perelandra, Lewis never hints that the Un-Man targets the Green Lady because she is weaker than the king; she is just the nearest when he lands, and thus the more convenient target (55). Additionally, Brown posits that the Green Lady's fall would have constituted the fall of all future inhabitants of Perelandra, signaling her importance in the narrative.

One key theological aspect of the Fall is that there was no “process” of falling. Lewis masterfully combats the argument that Eve went through a process or progression of maturation that led to the fall through the gradual maturation of the Green Lady and the fact that, though she is tempted, she does not sin. Through the complete lack of sin of the Green Lady, even as she listens to the Un-Man—Lewis’s manifestation of Satan—Lewis disqualifies critics’ interpretations that Eve’s supposed desire to be independent from Adam is contingent to her fall (cf. Zimmerman). Lewis suggests through the Green Lady that Eve was capable of resisting temptation, despite her separation from Adam. According to Brown, Lewis’s presentation “makes the Green Lady’s attitude neither a source of culpability nor an ineluctable cause of her falling”; therefore, it is a mistake to assume that Eve’s independence is to blame for her fall (56). Even though the Green Lady can imagine what it would be to sin, and even though Ransom can detect a difference in her as a result of the Un-Man’s temptation, Lewis is careful to continually say that she remains unfallen: Ransom notes that “She was still in her innocence. No evil intention had been formed in her mind” (*Perelandra* 134).

Throughout the narrative, the Green Lady takes in and assimilates new information quickly, and while her innocence and “youngness,” as she terms them, tend to put her at an intellectual disadvantage, she is able to synthesize new experiences and relate them to experiences that she has already had, showing that she is rational and intelligent. For example, when Ransom introduces to her the idea of disappointment, she is able to connect it to searching for a meal with one type of fruit in mind and instead finding another. She realizes then that “it is I, I myself, who turn from the good expected to the given good” (Lewis, *Perelandra* 69). This is how she first conceives of evil, as a

heart “which clung to the good it had first thought of and turned the good which was given it into no good” (69). Through her ability to conceive of evil, as well as through the later temptation scenes, the Green Lady clearly has a powerful intellect and is able to grasp even abstract concepts. Her intelligence is important because it shows that the Green Lady does not have an inferior intellect; she is a strong female character who still submits herself to the King. It is not, therefore, blind obedience.

While his treatment of the Green Lady is with utter respect, however, Lewis does present a distinction between the masculine and feminine. The Green Lady submits to the King as her authority, saying, “The King is always older than I, and about all things” (105). This submission is even more striking because the King is not present in the narrative at this point. However, just because she submits to him does not mean that she seeks his permission or approval for all things. She is perfectly confident to interact with Ransom and the Un-man on her own, though she is alone. In contrast, the Un-man seeks to encourage the Green Lady to think of herself as higher than the King. He encourages her to make herself older than the King and therefore more desirable.

Lewis consistently uses his antagonists as mouthpieces through whom to reveal truth, or rather, anti-truth. For example, Weston in Lewis’s *Out of the Silent Planet* presents the very naturalistic arguments that Lewis would reject. But because the argument is coming from a character portrayed as evil and wrong, it constitutes anti-truth—that is, it is presented as lies. Lewis uses the Un-man as another such mouthpiece—in other words, since the Un-man is the antagonist of the novel, most of what he says is the opposite of what Lewis wants to promote. Hence when the Un-man tells the Green Lady stories about “noble pioneers,” women who risked it all “to do for

others what those others forbade [them] to do yet needed to have done,” it is Lewis’s way of discrediting that vein of thinking (126). By examining what the Un-man says about gender, the reader can see what Lewis believes by pointing out what Lewis does not believe. It is similar to the artistic technique of drawing the blank space around the object instead of depicting the object itself; once the blank space is drawn in, the object appears. Ransom reports the Un-man as giving the Green Lady a false representation of men on Earth:

The speaker was building up a picture of the other sex. . . as a huge, dim multitude of creatures pitifully childish and complacently arrogant; timid, meticulous, unoriginating; sluggish and ox-like, rooted to the earth almost in their indolence, prepared to try nothing, to risk nothing, to make no exertion, and capable of being raised into full life only by the unthanked and rebellious virtue of their females. (126)

The Un-Man urges the Green Lady to view the masculine as lower than the feminine, desiring that the Green Lady flip the male/female binary to form a new power structure, creating a matriarchy in lieu of a patriarchy. He describes men on earth as those who have “continuously laboured to keep women down to mere child-bearing and to ignore the high destiny for which Maleldil had actually created her” (132). The Un-man is trying to inspire in the Green Lady a sense of injustice—a sense that men do not deserve the respect of women—something which she does not experience. The Green Lady is satisfied with what she is—as an unfallen being, she accepts her divinely established position in the universe, as subordinate to her unfallen husband. Acknowledging that the Green Lady is content in her position under Adam leads the reader to a better

understanding of Eve's psyche in *Paradise Lost*, as prelapsarian Eve is content in her situation. It is only when Eve tries to step out of place in the created order as conceived by Milton that she falls.

Comparing and Contrasting Eve and the Green Lady

Because their genres are so different, what is said in *Paradise Lost* is said differently in *Perelandra*. However, both works approach gender from a complementarian, hierarchical viewpoint. Still, there are some important—and revealing—distinctions between Eve and the Green Lady, including each woman's relationship to God, the way in which each First Pair separates, and the state of the universe prior to the temptation.

Eve's relationship with God is significantly different from the Green Lady's relationship with Maleldil. While Eve hears God's voice once before the Fall and for the remainder of their time in Eden receives God's truth almost exclusively from Adam, the Green Lady is spoken to directly by Maleldil as she speaks with Ransom (cf. Milton IV, 467-475). When they are discussing the difference between laws on Thulcandra (Earth) and Perelandra, the Green Lady receives word from Maleldil: "Maleldil Himself has told me now" (Lewis, *Perelandra* 75). He also speaks to her at various other times throughout the narrative, except for when she is being tested, meaning that the Green Lady had direct access to Maleldil.¹⁴ While surely Lewis takes as his precedent God speaking to Eve in *Paradise Lost* (where Milton follows Genesis), the fact that Maleldil speaks more to the Green Lady than God does to Eve could indicate that Lewis intends to diminish the

14. Cf. Lewis, *Perelandra*, 61: "Maleldil is telling me,"; and 80: "Maleldil apparently told her not to"; also during the temptation narrative on 105, "Maleldil is not putting much into my mind about [your questions]." Lewis could easily say the Green Lady learned it from the King, just as Eve learned from Adam (who learned from Raphael).

differences between her and the King as they stand before Maleldil. Lewis shows that while the Green Lady is willingly subordinate to both the King and Maleldil, Maleldil speaks to her—not just the king—giving her equal value.

Another way in which *Paradise Lost* differs from *Perelandra* is that in *Paradise Lost*, Eve seeks separation from Adam. She asks that they “divide [their] labours” and he consents (Milton, IX 214). Thus, it was an intentional separation. The Green Lady, on the other hand, tells Ransom, “When we were young—many days ago—we were leaping from island to island, and when [the King] was on one and I was on another the waves rose and we were driven apart” (Lewis, *Perelandra* 66). The Green Lady and the King are separated not by their own will but by chance. This random separation is interesting because it gives Lewis the opportunity to limit the interpretation of a “pre-Fall,” where the Fall is viewed as a process and not a single event (when Eve decides to eat the forbidden fruit). While it could be easy for the reader to conclude, as stated earlier, that Eve’s fall was inevitable *because* she left Adam in the Garden, it is not a case of causation but correlation. Lewis precludes the same argument being made for the Green Lady by having her leave the King unintentionally. The stage is set for the temptation scene, which arises through no fault of her own, just as Eve’s temptation is not caused by her separation from Adam.

Another interesting difference is the state of the universe prior to the temptation of each couple. Adam and Eve are introduced to the idea of evil when Raphael relates to them the story of Satan’s fall from heaven (Adam directly, and Eve by Adam). They have a notion of what it means to go against the will of God. Similarly, the Green Lady is introduced to evil through conversations with Ransom about stepping outside of

Maleldil's will. However, the situations are distinct in that, while *Paradise Lost* occurs after the fall of Satan, *Perelandra* occurs after the redemption of Thulcandra by Maleldil through the Incarnation and Resurrection. The Incarnation is the reason the Green Lady and the King have humanlike forms: as she tells Ransom, "in your world Maleldil first took Himself this form, the form of your race and mine. . . . Since our Beloved became a man, how should Reason in any world take on another form?" (Lewis, *Perelandra* 62).

The Incarnation and Resurrection, as the Green Lady hears from Maleldil, is a "corner" in time; after the Son of God comes to earth, nothing can be the same (62). Both the composition of *Perelandra* and the events described in the text occur, of course, after the events detailed in Milton's *Paradise Lost* and his *Paradise Regained*; thus, while *Perelandra* draws extensively upon *Paradise Lost*, it also has the benefit of drawing on *Paradise Regained*. This essay does not intend to develop the ways that *Perelandra* also enacts *Paradise Regained*; however, it must be noted that in *Paradise Regained*, when Jesus is tempted by Satan, he is able to withstand that temptation. *Paradise Regained* could be considered a literary "corner" of sorts, as the Incarnation and Resurrection constitute a historical corner. Thus, *Paradise Regained* sets up a pattern for *Perelandra* to follow, and the Green Lady has a precedent to follow in resisting temptation. Even more striking is that the Green Lady is a woman. The fact that she resists temptation as Jesus does in *Paradise Regained* shows that maleness or femaleness does not impact one's ability to say no to temptation. It is important to consider, however, that just because there is a precedent for resisting temptation, that does not mean that her success was inevitable; Ransom comments several times on the precariousness of her innocence (cf.

Lewis, *Perelandra* 68). The Green Lady is free to resist or give in to temptation, just as Eve in *Paradise Lost* is free to resist or give in to her temptation.

The differences between *Perelandra* and *Paradise Lost* are inevitable in that they are two distinct genres and written at different time periods. However, this difference does not exclude them from being viewed in relation to each other; indeed, reading *Perelandra* and noting its similarities to and divergences from *Paradise Lost* helps the modern reader to understand and better interpret *Paradise Lost*. Specifically, it provides a framework of sorts through which to understand Milton's hierarchical conception and complementarian view of gender.

On Interpretation

Critics have taken these two works of literature and, looking at them from an egalitarian viewpoint, have read into Milton and Lewis views that are not fully justified. It is important, in each case, to submit first to the context of the work and let one's preconceived notions be framed by the original intention of the author. Initial submission to an author's worldview is what Lewis argues for in *A Preface to Paradise Lost*:

[Readers] must try by an effort of historical imagination to evoke that whole hierarchical conception of the universe to which Milton's poem belongs, and to exercise themselves in feeling as if they believed it; they must give up the "unchanging human heart" and try instead to live through some of its real changes. (Lewis, "The Doctrine")

Only then can one truly understand what Milton is saying. While other forms of criticism can be very useful to literary scholarship and offer an imaginative exploration of *Paradise Lost*, first one should submit to the text and the author. Since both Lewis and

Milton are operating within a specific worldview, and since this complementarian worldview is integrated into their writing, it is imperative when reading either work to assume, at least in the initial reading and study, a complementarian understanding in order to avoid violating and distorting the text. Adopting a complementarian point of view can also be useful when reading other narratives which present a complementarian opinion of gender relations, ensuring that the reader is less likely to misread the text.

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