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The Concept of Sexuality and Procreation in the Holy Matrimony Delineated in Milton's *Paradise Lost* as against 17th century Mores

I

While formulating the concept of literature which carries out both moral and didactic functions, Sir Philip Sidney writes in his *An Apology for Poetry*, that “Poesie [...] is an art of imitation: for so Aristotle termeth it in the word *mimesis*, that is to say, a representing, counterfeiting, or figuring forth – to speak metaphorically, speaking pictures, with this end to teach and delight” (quoted in *An Anthology of English Literature*, 405). Therefore, by referring to Sidney's acclamation of literature as an effectual means to educate and amuse one can draw a conclusion that John Milton's epic, *Paradise Lost*, can find its proper place in the edifice of writing rightly called “moralistic”. The reader can have such a conviction since:

literature – as indeed any art form – is not created in a contextual vacuum but closely reflects the values and concerns of the age from which it springs, and that if it is to have meaning and relevance for its intended audience, it must communicate in the ideas familiar to that audience.

Parker, 5

Literature of the 17th century is remarkably diverse. It explores and promotes many ideas owing to the fact that it is the time of many momentous transformations concerning perception of such notions as family, marriage, love, sensuality, sexuality and subjectivity. Furthermore, it does reflect people's anxieties and hopes concerning those concepts.

Owing to the fact that Milton, a Puritan, is eagerly engrossed in delineating mechanisms operating in the holy matrimony, it is sensible to expect that such notions as sexuality and procreation are perceptible in his greatest masterpiece *Paradise Lost*. This conviction is also facilitated by Gardner's assumption that the great Puritan “sets his picture of a golden age in which the crowning joy is the ‘mysterious’ union of man and woman in marriage” (86). Hence, the chief objective of the paper is to trace in the epic (in the

construction of the plot, in the first people's deeds and speeches) images of nuptial traditions, rituals and mores concerning the given conceptions existing in Renaissance England. In this way the author wants to show that *Paradise Lost* constitutes an element of a broader discourse on marriage and, especially, that this text is inscribed in the emerging Protestant ideology of companionate marriage.

Despite the fact that only 'echoes' of nuptial affairs can be gleaned from the epic, the author will show that the observances of English society can actually be found in the epic, due to the fact that Milton is embodying his philosophy and the beliefs of his age as to the nature of things. He is writing of married love, a subject very rarely touched on by other poets of his time.

II

[...] eased the putting-off
These troublesome disguises which we wear,
Straight side by side were laid, nor turned, I ween,
Adam from his fair spouse, nor Eve the rites
Mysterious of connubial love refused.¹

Paradise Lost IV. 739 – 743

The passage from Book IV indicates the mysterious part of the first people's existence in the Garden of Eden. Milton explicitly shows that, in opposition to some Catholic thinkers, there is a real sexual union between Adam and Eve.² They are not reluctant to express their affection towards each other; for the first progenitors it is natural to make love in their bower of bliss. According to Daiches, "interesting is Milton's repeated emphasis on sex, Eve's nakedness, on the beauty and propriety of unfallen sexuality" (187 – 8). The notion of sexuality both not depraved (up to the centre of Book IX) and corrupted by the sin of disobedience is persistently interwoven between events and speeches in *Paradise*. Burden

¹ All quotes referring to John Milton's *Paradise Lost* are taken from *The Works of John Milton* edited by Antonia Till. The Roman numeral refers to the number of the Book, whereas the Arabic one signifies the number of the verse. The author will use abbreviations in his paper – *PL* shall stand for *Paradise Lost*.

The verb 'ween' points to association of sexual union with isolation. In Burden's wording, Milton "still insists on associating sex with privacy. This concept of the privacy of unfallen love arises not at all of any uneasiness on Milton's part but quite simply out of his view of marriage as the institution of a special and private relationship, one meant for Man and not for the beasts" (46).

² According to Stein, "in spite of the need of theologians to uphold the sanctity of marriage, for secular reasons and for mystical reasons signifying the dignity of the church and the relations of the Trinity, it seems wiser to postpone the consummation of marriage until after the expulsion, which was probably not too long to wait and perhaps only a few hours" (53).

asserts that “Milton adopts the thesis that there was an unfallen sexuality. It can naturally be seen as part of God’s instituting of marriage for Adam and Eve in his injunction to them to multiply. And it was something in which Milton anyway believed.” (46). Creator gives Adam, initially, everything that is essential for him to live. He presents the first man with spirit, reason, knowledge, ability to speak, land where he can live and, theoretically, Adam should be happy, but he is not. Although he possesses those gifts, he feels incomplete and lonely; a woman is found sadly wanting. Thus, the corollary of the fierce verbal dispute between Creator and Adam is creation of Eve: “Male he created thee, but thy consort / Female for race” (*PL* VII. 529 – 530). The history of sexuality commences with Adam’s longing for a woman with whom, with the exception of lively and vibrant conversations,³ he wishes to create a sexual union. The attraction towards a woman is profoundly inscribed into Adam’s subjectivity so as to properly fulfil God’s behest: “Be fruitful, multiply, and fill the Earth” (531).

When Adam discerns his gorgeous Eve, he immediately knows that she is the one with whom he wishes to start a family. He senses that she is of the same kind, despite the difference of sex, in opposition to the plethora of inferior animals that he has just named, and importantly, he is now capable of creating a union, the holy matrimony, including sexual compatibility. According to Potter, “Milton, like Spenser, believed that marriage was the only satisfactory way of reconciling man’s sensual and spiritual needs; the love of husband and wife for each other would help them both to love God better.” (81). It is true in Adam’s case, since providing God did not listen to the first man’s laments and did not create a woman, the first man would, probably, scold his Maker up to end of his lonely and deplorable life. Only after being presented with the fairest gift, Eve, is he willing to extol God with all his might; he is filled with newly-found vigour to dwell in Paradise.

Not surprisingly, the first people are not the only recipients of the Creator’s order to procreate and fill the earth; the animals are also instructed in the same manner: “And God

³ The most important objective of the holy matrimony, for Milton, is companionship between spouses. This partnership is characterized by the existence of fit conversation between a man and his beloved wife. In his *Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, the author writes that “the soberest and best governed men are least practiced in these affairs; and who knows not that the bashful muteness of a virgin may times hide all the unliveliness and natural sloth which is really unfit for conversation?” (quoted by Le Comte, 26). The same divorce tract also promulgates the idea that “in God’s intention a meet and happy conversation is the chiefest and noblest end of marriage” (Steadman, 122). Milton’s stress on partnership and solace in a marital bond is thought to be a challenge to and reordering of ancient aims of the marriage, namely procreation and sexual union. “For him (Milton) the prime object of marriage was ‘the apt and cheerful conversation of man with woman, to comfort and refresh him against the solitary life’” (Stone, 102). Stocker also writes in the similar tone: “In the divorce tracts, Milton himself eloquently argued that the primary end of marriage was not procreation but companionship or ‘mutual conversation’ (i.e. all forms of interpersonal exchange)” (50 – 51).

created the great whales, and each / Soul living, [...], and blessed them, saying, / Be fruitful, multiply” (*PL VII*. 391 – 392, 395 – 396). The order is the same, but it goes without saying that dignity of Adam and Eve’s procreation is much greater and more sacred than brutes’. Milton is totally cognizant of the difference owing to the fact that he is constantly insisting on the distinction between the human and the animal creation. He accentuates the fact that what for animals is ordinary, for man it is mysterious; the inexplicable rite of marriage is natural to man. Adam and Eve, as the masterpieces of creation, experience more sanctified sexual compatibility. Milton strongly believes in existence of pre-lapsarian sexuality and does not refrain from promulgating the idea that for Adam and Eve their love making is a means of unification of their union.⁴ Many a time he hails wedded love, in which blameless sexuality gets free, and he ultimately contrasts it with sheer lust on the one hand and on the other with the artificial sightings of the courtly love tradition. Erotic compatibility proves to be one of the most essential features of the first progenitors’ marriage.

Even though Milton most exquisitely locates the graces and glee of human intercourse in Paradise before the fall, one of the attributes of unfallen sexuality is a lack of energy;⁵ the first people’s kisses and embraces are, as it seems, too unnatural. According to Fish, “a pure sexuality may seem a contradiction in terms, but only because it is unavailable to us in our present state; and here the psychological effects of our loss manifest themselves in an attempt to bring Adam and Eve down to our level” (105). In fact, tokens of mutual affection lack our post-lapsarian, depraved grasp. Although it appears to be impossible to understand profoundly what the unfallen sexuality is, it is possible to perceive, thanks to Devil, the unnaturalness of the pre-lapsarian sex. “Without Satan”, as Armstrong points out, “Milton’s treatment of Adam and Eve’s sexual relationship, far from happy as it is, would have been disastrous” (111).⁶ Milton writes in Book IV:

So spake our general mother, and, with eyes
Of conjugal attraction unreprieved
And meek surrender, half-embracing leaned
On our first father [...]

⁴ Steadman acknowledges that by “placing the motif of romantic love within the context of matrimony, Milton gives it a moral elevation notably lacking in most of his predecessors. Even his treatment of sensual details emphasizes the purity of human desire in the state of original innocence. Ennobling the physical consummation of love by representing it as an essential aspect of holy wedlock, he stresses its inherent sanctity.” (122).

⁵ “Though Milton leaves us no doubt that kisses and embraces, to say the least, do take place in Paradise, yet compared with the teeming life of hell it cannot but strike us as another Bower of Arcadia” (Werblowsky, 23).

[...] He, in delight
Smiled with superior love
[...], and pressed her matron lip
With kisses pure. Aside the Devil turned
For envy, yet with jealous leer malign
Eyed them askance.

PL IV. 492 – 495, 497, 499, 501 – 504

The awkwardness of Adam and Eve's pre-lapsarian sexual union can stem from both lack of experience and passion or motion that is inevitably channelled into the paradisaical existence by Satan. "Innocent love is rational", writes Stein, "and sexual love in Paradise is innocent but may have the potentiality of irrational passion" (60). Upon devil's entering the quiet and blessed existence of the first people, irrationality penetrates their sexual union.

Milton intends to keep us aware of the correspondence between the paradise of natural fruitfulness and the paradise of human and sexual fruitfulness which is clear from Satan's outburst against the torment of seeing Adam and Eve in an embrace. The entrance of Foe into the Garden of Eden marks the slow, yet gradual approach of the epoch of fallen sexuality that achieves its climax in Adam and Eve's love making, marked with the unknown earlier desire and passion, after their sin of disloyalty. Along with the uncanny entering of God's Adversary into the Garden, there emerges another, more human-like, yet fallen, shape of eroticism.

According to Werblowsky, "a great split runs through the poem." (13). Book IX is undoubtedly the transitory phase in human sexuality and procreation. This Book opens with a vision of Adam and Eve's nearly divine, yet unnatural love-making, but it ends with a picture showing the first progenitors indulging in sexual activity which is brimming with desire and passion. Milton writes of this in such a manner:

But come; so well refreshed, now let us play
[...]
For never did thy beauty,
[...] so inflame my sense
So said he [...]
[...] whose eye darted contagious fire.
Her hand he seized, and to a shady bank,
[...]

⁶ The same author also claims that "the love-making presented here would seem much more statuesque and lacking in impetus than it does, if it were not energized by the passionate force of Satan's commentary [...], and

He led her, nothing loth;
[...]
There they their fill of love and love's disport
Took largely, of their mutual guilt the seal,

PL IX. 1027, 1029, 1031, 1034, 1036 – 1037, 1039, 1042 – 1043

The first people experience something entirely new in their holy wedlock. Desire emerges in their sexual union. While analysing Adam and Eve's revolt, Huntley claims that "after the Fall, the lust instead of love and the recriminations instead of harmony are the immediate results" (6). What was supposed to join them even more profoundly, ironically, causes disharmony between them. Furthermore, the dignity of love-making is severely destroyed. The lost sexual paradise of Adam and Eve's pre-lapsarian marriage is pointedly contrasted with the post-coital tiredness brought on by lapsarian sex. As the unfallen shape of sexuality is stigmatized with a lack of energy and unnaturalness, its fallen version is undoubtedly marked with exhaustion and yearning – "after the Fall a new self-consciousness enters, and we have sensuality itself. But how sensuality could have been absent from prelapsarian 'sex' [...] is rather difficult to imagine.", comments Waldock (62).

One of the most conspicuous attributes of post-lapsarian love-making is the fact that it leads to conception. The close association of post-lapsarian sexuality with the act of giving birth to children is visible in the figure of the first woman. Only after the sin of disobedience, is Eve really conceptualized as a mother, importantly, as the "Mother of mankind" (*PL*. V, 392). Although this crucial function appears after the fall, there are a few moments in Eve's pre-lapsarian existence which prepare her for the momentous task of being a mother. During his visit to the first people, Archangel Raphael informs Eve of her approaching function. In accordance with Blamires, "addressing Eve as 'Mother of Mankind', Raphael speaks immediately of the fruitfulness of her womb as matching the fruitfulness of the garden." (133);⁷ her womb is to give birth to plenty of people. Not only does the Omnipotent's emissary inform Eve of her task, she is also instructed by God himself how to behave accurately in the holy wedlock – Eve is "nor uninformed / Of nuptial sanctity and marriage rites" (*PL VIII.* 486 – 487), asserts the narrative voice. She knows what to do in their

without his vitalizing presence they would seem flat and insubstantial" (Armstrong, 111).

⁷ As far as anatomical parts of a female body are concerned, Milton, far from avoiding writing about sexual affairs, delineates Paradise in such a way that "Eden is constantly associated with the maternal breast and the maternal womb. The bower in which Adam and Eve make love is so womb-like that the sexual act seems to be a return to prenatal harmony" (Le Comte, 119). This "puritanical" man does not hesitate to take on sexual and erotic overtones in his epic.

marriage, and she is cognizant of her reproductive function.⁸ Eve realizes that the holy matrimony entails and dignifies erotic union, procreation and labour. Although Creator's order of procreation is issued before the first parents' fall, only after the heinous deed, does Christ specify what genuine nature a sexual act is. In contrast to a laconic pre-lapsarian behest to multiply, God issues the sentence that she must submit to the will of her husband and that her children must be brought forth in sorrow. What was marked with pleasure before the fall now becomes stigmatized with agonizing pain of labour.

The sternness of the sentence is so unbearable that prior, pre-lapsarian, nearly divine, Mother of Mankind transmogrifies into a fallen and utterly depraved woman, all agog to participate in a plot against either them or their future offspring. According to Muldrow, Eve "wonders if it might not be possible for them to defeat their misery either by remaining childless or by taking their own lives." (72). Experiencing the overwhelming consequences of the misdemeanour, Eve advocates deployment of two, even more deplorable than the fall itself, solutions to the problem. She cries to her husband:

[...] in thy power
It lies, yet ere conception, to prevent
The race unblest, to being yet unbegot.
Childless thou art, childless remain: so Death
Shall be deceived his glut, and with us two
Be forced to satisfy his ravenous maw.
But if thou judge it hard and difficult,
[...] to abstain
From love's due rites, nuptial embraces sweet,
Then, both ourselves and the seed at once to free
From what we fear for both, let us make short;
Let us seek Death.

PL X. 986 – 994, 999 – 1001

Her corrupted eyes prove to be incapable of perceiving God's chance that is hidden behind the severe sentence. Ironically enough, on account of being thrown out from Eden, Adam and Eve stand an opportunity to find paradise, far happier, within themselves. Adam and Eve's love-making gains an entirely new attribute and dimension thanks to, and after, collapse.

⁸ According to Stocker, "in making compatibility primary, Milton was avant-garde even among reformers, who had generally sought to identify women's status in marriage beyond their traditionally designated role as 'sexual vessels'" (51).

Adam and Eve's newly found sensuality is, undoubtedly, one of the marked features of concerns upon sexuality in the 17th-century England. Sex in the holy matrimony can be looked at from two totally different points of view. On the one hand, procreation, inevitably stigmatized with the pain of labour, is the unifying factor, sealing a bond between spouses, but on the other hand, too much sensuality and passion between a man and his wife can easily have insidious effect on their union.

God says to the first man that it is not good that the man (Adam can be recognized as the figure symbolizing every man) should be alone. According to Belsey,

Reformation opinion varied on the reason why it was not good. Most evidently, Eve (also conceptualized as the figure of every woman) was necessary to generate the human race [...] 'her (Eve's) help consisted chiefly in three things: in bearing him (Adam) children, the comforts of his life, and stays of his age, which he cannot have without her'.

John Milton, 38 – 39

The accent on a woman's reproductive function, being the most important one and signifying her dignity and identity as a mother, can be detected in almost every Reformation treatise or sermon. Not only a sexual union is of the great import for the well-being of the holy matrimony, but it is also one of the imperatives of the marriage. "It was Archbishop Cranmer", in Stone's words, "who in England first officially added a third to those two ancient reasons for marriage, the avoidance of fornication and the procreation of legitimate children." (101). Sexuality starts to be, definitely, exceptionally significant.

Morgan in *The Puritan Family* analyses steps which are rendered essential to the proper establishment of a marriage *per se*.⁹ In his analysis he enumerates such events as espousals, publication of banns, solemnization of the marriage at church, the wedding celebration and the last of these is a sexual intercourse. All those elements are important but only the sexual act is regarded as a true seal of the marriage. Without this act, there is not the holy wedlock – "the Anglican (church) recognized as valid all marriages that had been consummated in sexual union and preceded by a contract, either public or private, with witnesses or without, in the present tense or the future tense", acknowledges Morgan (31).

⁹ Stone writes of steps governing the marriage formation as well. He claims that "the first was a written legal contract between the parents concerning the financial arrangements. The second was the spousals (also called contract), the formal exchange, usually before witnesses, of oral promises. The third step was the public proclamation of banns in church, three times, the purpose of which was to allow claims of pre-contract to be heard (by the seventeenth century nearly all the well-to-do evaded this step by obtaining a licence). The fourth step was the wedding in church, in which mutual consent was publicly verified, and the union received the formal blessing of the Church. The fifth and final step was the sexual consummation." (30).

Rapid appearance of many autobiographies and diaries in the 17th century stems not only from the need for introspection but also from the fact that maternity offers another subject on which women can publish without unreservedly attacking conventional values. Women, at last, can find an excellent means of conveying their pent-up opinions, thoughts and apprehension over the biological cycle of a married life, such as conception and birth.¹⁰ Prior's affirms that "women's anxieties about pregnancy and childbirth form a leitmotif which appears in various guises throughout their diaries and memoirs." (196). Many an entry from diaries divulge both a woman and her husband's sheer happiness stemming from bearing children at full term, in opposition to many miscarriages and high infant mortality which marked the 17th century.

Diaries, generally, illustrate biological phases of the holy wedlock as essential communal events which gather many relatives and friends – "when a woman was due to give birth not only would the midwife be summoned but also a group of female attendees: these could be friends or family of the expectant mother and usually included her own mother", concludes Sanders (76). Although other women's presence and service can be constructed as protection of the female space from male interference, some husbands are not totally indifferent to their wives' suffering that pertained to childbirth. One of the paragons of husbands who enthusiastically attend their wives in childbirth is a minister, Ralph Josselin. His cheerful, albeit Puritanical, character and disposition allows him to be "delighted when his wife became pregnant some ten months after the wedding, and blessed the name of the Lord when 'some hopes of my wives breeding' proved to be well founded 'to our great joy and comfort'" (Macfarlane, 81). It is obvious that Josselin admires his wife's fertility; procreation, beyond a doubt, plays the unifying function in their marital bond.

Family and communal surveillance is not the only one which is given to eroticism *per se* and women in childbirth, owing to that fact that relatives are not the only ones who are attracted and influenced by spouses' sexuality. In Ingram's words, "Christian principles prescribed that in important respects marriage was in the last resort the concern of two individuals, a state divinely ordained for the procreation of children, the avoidance of fornication, and the mutual society, help and comfort of the couple" (128). State and church attempt to regulate the sexual union of spouses, since those institutions are aware of the fact that hyper active sensuality and lust in the holy wedlock are, undoubtedly, those factors that destabilize the equilibrium of the marriage union. Indubitably, the reversal reaction to such a

¹⁰ Apart from achieving growing independence stemming from writing about typical woman affairs, "the period of childbirth and the subsequent, often lengthy, 'lying-in' provide a rare, socially sanctioned space of female autonomy in the seventeenth century" (Sanders, 76).

round-the-clock surveillance is the notion, one of social developments, which emerge among the landed elite, the bourgeois and professional classes – the increasingly open recognition and acceptance of sensuality, the result of which is the open inclusion of eroticism in the holy matrimony. This century is marked not only with the Civil War but also the sexual revolution¹¹, the phenomenon that appears after 1660 as the reaction to too severe and ascetic way of life advocated by Puritans.¹² Black asserts that “the religious horror of sex as possession by the wrong gods lies behind the puritanical wish not to think about it or look at it.” (178). For Puritans, generally, sexuality denotes evil; Milton, however, appears to notice its benefits as well.

People, generally, are so tired of incessant interference of theologians and ministers in their sexual life that they heartily welcome the erotic uprising, marked with freedom from prying surveillance. According to Hufton, “no group, unless it was the very poor, so held in contempt the rules laid down in prescriptive literature concerning marital chastity than the European aristocracies” (145). Severe control of moralists is rejected, but a feeling of happiness is rather short since the avoidance of proper sexual standards turns against those who readily accept the new trend. The laxity in sexual behaviour, beyond a doubt, triggers marriage disintegration, against which Reformation theologians struggle.¹³ Adultery, fornication and other sexually improper conduct flourishes after the severe renunciation of “looking-for-unity-in-household” Puritans’ ideology governing the sexual life of a husband and his wife.

¹¹ Being congruent with the Renaissance symbolism Adam and Eve’s fall can be conceptualized as the lost cause of Puritans at the moment of Restoration of 1660; the ensuing desire, passion and lust experienced so vehemently by first people is akin to sexual revolution of the 1660s, instigated by Charles II as a reversal of Puritan ideology governing sexuality. Goreau claims that:

Charles II’s return to the throne effected an abrupt and deliberate reversal of Puritan ethic. His need to distinguish himself in every way from his predecessors – added to his natural inclination – created an atmosphere in which promiscuity, systematic frivolity, and extravagance were adhered to a social norm almost as dogmatically as the more severe of the Puritan party had adhered to godliness.

21

Apart from explicit sexual frivolities, “native English pornography as a literary genre [...] became a torrent in the last years of Charles II” (Stone, 335). What is important about this “revolution” is the fact that London society appeared to be most prone to newly-found libertinism. “Certainly, the infidelity of the husband was most generally tolerated but, having produced the legitimate line, great court ladies, or a proportion of them, also engaged in amorous encounters” (Hufton, 145). What Puritans had strenuously worked on for several decades, seemed to be severely debased in confrontation with the new fashion in sexual behaviour.

¹² Stone avows that all “passionate love-making was sinful, regardless of whether it took place inside or outside marriage. Sensuality itself, the lust of the flesh, was evil. The basic advice to a husband was that ‘nothing is more impure than to love a wife like an adulterous woman.’” (314).

¹³ The new found libertinism, except being responsible for rapid marriage disintegration, stimulates the appearance of civilized behaviour according to which “it is fashionable in the presence of others to affect a certain indifference towards one’s spouses” (Hufton, 145).

Milton writes in *Paradise Lost* about this carnal revolution while trying to create a contrast between true love, affection and sexual union experienced by Adam and Eve in Eden and the frivolities and promiscuity advocated by courtly life – the new shape of libertinism primarily affects the fashionable society of London, primarily the court and aristocratic circles, but, as these are both the most visible and the most influential groups, they seem to dominate other social circles. After 1660 the worst nightmare of Reformation theologians comes true due to the fact that the flesh establishes total supremacy over the spirit in the holy wedlock. According to Calvin, “the flesh is heir to every ill in the human condition: ‘There remaineth in man regenerate a feeling of euill, from whence continually spring desires that allure and stir him to sin’ [...] ‘all the lusts of the flesh are sinnes and that the same disease of lusting, which they (frivolous people) call a freedom, is the wellspring of sinne’” (quoted by Mallette, 57). The severely inhibited eros starts reigning over the spirit.

III

In conclusion, as far as conceptions of sexuality, erotic compatibility and ensuing procreation are concerned, it is feasible to draw comparisons between Adam / his beloved wife’s and a typical Renaissance couple’s sexual life. It is beyond any doubt that for those two pairs sexuality – practised within the strict limits delineated by moralists and theologians who have always been eager to show hostility towards sex as pleasure and have been anxious to confine its legitimacy to the functional purpose of procreation – is a remarkable gift from their Creator. The aptitude which two couples are endowed with is of a great import, since on account of sexuality they can dutifully obey God’s behest ordering them to multiply and fill the earth.

Sexuality as a reality so deeply rooted in the union of two persons can be channelled in two opposite directions; it can be either blessed, acting as the powerful seal bonding the marital union, or it can be corrupted with sin, brimming with lust and passion and leading to the marriage break-down. In the epic, the collapse of the first progenitors can be conceptualized as the lost cause by Puritans, whose ideology become ridiculed and renounced by Charles II who abhorred the ascetic mode of life. Desire experienced so fervidly by Adam and Eve after the sin of disobedience is undoubtedly the poetic vision of ‘the overflowing-with-passion sexual revolution of the 1660s’.

Accusations, on the part of Adam, of his Eve, after their mutual sin, are saturated in “double standard” way of thinking. They both commit the same heinous misdeed, but it is he

who thinks that a woman is exclusively responsible for it. A man could commit such a crime without any serious consequences, whereas Eve should be severely punished.¹⁴ “The sexual revolution” of the 1660s has one “liberating-for-a-weaker-vessel” effect; thanks to its greater sexual permissiveness, it questions, to some extent, a notion of double standard in people’s thinking of sexual conduct. This mentality is challenged in such a way that both a man and a woman can indulge in many sexual liaisons and extra-marital infidelities without dire consequences.

Belsey asserts that in the period of Reformation family standards become “the object of intense propaganda, and of the anxiety that the reconstruction of any value system necessarily creates.” (*Shakespeare and the Loss of Eden*, xiii). Social “transformations” of family does also stimulate changes in the character of a marital bond. The 17th century is characterized by the gradual emergence of partnership and companionship in wedlock. Spouses start to see the powerful benefit in sharing duties and responsibilities, promoting the well-being of a family. The emerging partnership and more overtly expressed eroticism in a matrimonial bond are constituents that are detectable in the reconstruction of family values in the 17th century England. The holy matrimony triggers the appearance of a new purpose of intercourse, being at variance with a stringently procreative function, so fiercely supported by the medieval ideology and theology – as it seems, at the root of all the most significant changes of the late 17th century lies a progressive reorientation of culture towards the pursuit of delight in this world, rather than deferment of gratification until the next one.¹⁵ The most important change in status of a man and a woman after the wedding, however, is the fact that they can legitimately become parents, a mother and a father to their progeny, obeying the direct behest of God to multiply and fill the earth. Creator legitimizes the first people to become parents; He sanctifies sex as the tool to procreation but also sanctifies it as a token of a mutual affection between spouses. Sex in a martial union, beside its procreative function,

¹⁴ This unjust trend in thought regarding sexual conduct of different sexes has had millennial tradition behind it, stressing the ‘mercenary’ worth of women, who have been regarded as the sexual property of men and that value of this property is severely diminished if it has been or is being used by anyone other than the legal owner. Double standard implies that sexes are not equal and each of them should be treated differently while committing the same crime or sin.

¹⁵ While analysing sexuality in the Renaissance, Stone comments that “the attitude of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century theologians towards sexuality was one of suspicion and hostility, only very slowly and reluctantly tempered by the rejection of the ideal of virginity at the Reformation and the substitution of ‘holy matrimony’” (313). Along with the gradual shift from the virginity (signifying the contemplative existence postulated by the medieval theologians) to the holy wedlock (the hallmark of Reformation ideology) there emerges the shift from the strictly procreative character of sex to passionate and pleasure-seeking love-making.

should enhance and promote partnership and companionship in the holy matrimony, as it is in Paradise before the fall.

Reformers have deployed a variety of tools in order to spark moral, religious and intellectual revival. In truth, one of those instruments is literature. As a supporter of religious and political propaganda, John Milton does participate in this process. In such a context, *Paradise Lost* can be seen as an instructional text serving moral and intellectual growth of English society.

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