

April 29, 2012

Detailed Comments Requested

Overall, this essay provides evidence of careful close reading and thoughtful engagement with the text. It's well-written and enjoyable to read. My only major quibble, and it's really more of a discussion point, is whether we might read Aemilia Lanyer as satirizing the male view – is the speaker of the poem her or a persona who so vigorously agrees with antifeminist views that they start to be clearly questionable? As in Swift, of course, that doesn't mean that satire is effective, but at least, I, like you, often read her "defense" with such dismay that I hope she wasn't serious. Nevertheless, you've made your case well.

General non-content advice. The big thing: control the use of your quotations better. Dropping them in, even with the kind of commentary that surrounds your quotations, is not as effective as situating the quotations within a narrative context or otherwise introducing them and then integrating commentary so that your claims are clearly tied to your quoted words. See the paragraphs with the \* for examples.

Another pro-tip that you can use: the \$\$\$ kind of situating your ideas within alternate readings/the debates you're engaging. I haven't changed any of your ideas, but by putting in a few key pointers, those sentences now sell your ideas to readers to help them see how awesome and important your ideas are. Our goal should be always to not just set out our ideas but also to make sure readers appreciate them! You produce the kind of work that I think will one day be a contender for English department awards, and when readers are trying to figure out what's a good essay vs. a great one, the \$\$\$ phrasing shapes their view of your work as meaningful and as engaging important debates. It doesn't work if your readings of the text aren't already very good, as yours are, but readers can be pressed for time, and they may not have time to say, "wait, why is this solid reading important?" If you show them, they'll see immediately and leave with the sense that you are the brilliant, awesome reader of texts that we know you to be. So that's why I'm advising you to work on quotations and the money phrasings that "signpost" to your reader just why your ideas are important.

Editing: In the final stages of prepping an essay, if you have time, you might consider searching for "is," and eliminating any of them you can with more active verbs. It's easy for the "is verb+ing" cases – just use the verb; for others removing the "is" might require more grammatical reworking. Active verbs do help increase the smoothness of style, though, so it's worth considering for "important" essays when you want to be at your best.

Overall, as you can see, I think you have a great deal of potential. A

## Misogyny and Anti-feminism in *Paradise Lost* and *Eve's Apology in Defense of Women*

The character development of Eve in *Eve's Apology in Defense of Women* by Aemilia Lanyer and *Paradise Lost* by John Milton reflect opinions on who is to blame for the fall of man and what role and value women have in society. *Eve's Apology* at first appears to be a proto-feminist portrayal of Eve's actions, because the poem defends her decision to eat the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge and places the blame on Adam. It can be argued, however, that Lanyer's work is not feminist, based on the words and phrases used to describe Eve. In fact, by defending Eve with the claim that her weak nature left her susceptible to sin, Lanyer takes what we would consider? an anti-feminist stance. Transition needed – is this “similarly” or “by contrast”? The opinion of Milton in *Paradise Lost* is that Eve is to blame for the fall, and there are often misogynist tones in portraying the character of Eve. It is important to recognize that the authors of these two works are not simply criticizing biblical characters, but that they are using these characters as symbols of their sex, and by doing this are able to criticize women's roles, which traditionally have been subordinate to? men. It is important to analyze these two works because they are often compared to demonstrate an anti-feminist (Milton) and a feminist (Lanyer) portrayal of the biblical story of Adam and Eve, but it is crucial to realize that just because Lanyer defends Eve's decision does not mean she is actually a feminist. This essay will be used to explore the varied approaches to antifeminism in these works of literature and their portrayals of Eve and how these relate to our modern concept of feminism. Good intro with clear indication of your goals and original ideas.

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In terms of this essay, the definition of an anti-feminist can only be understood when compared to the definition of a feminist. For our purposes, A feminist is someone who takes a positive outlook on women's actions that go outside traditional gender roles, which include submissiveness, obedience, and humility. A feminist agrees that it is acceptable for a woman to demonstrate the characteristics of a man, such as pride or leadership. Therefore an anti-feminist believes that women have a limited spectrum of action and are designed to serve men, who (in their opinion) are overall more intelligent and better equipped for higher-level thinking and decision-making. This is different from misogyny, which according to the Oxford English Dictionary is when a man feels hatred towards women; therefore Lanyer could not possibly be a misogynist (not solely for this reason but also for the fact that she chooses to defend Eve despite her anti-feminist point of view). Milton, on the other hand, could be considered a misogynist due to the radically different characterizations he creates of Adam and Eve; one the ideal human being, the other the cause of all man's suffering. Good. I recommend saying "for our purposes" just to note that your working definition is distinct from others who explore feminist topics. You mean it in the general "pro-women" sense – and that's fine for our purposes. If it were a research essay, I expect that someone would ask you to be more specific about what kind of feminist ideas structure your definition, but this is perfect for our needs.

The misogynist attitude towards Eve begins in *Paradise Lost* when Milton chooses to describe Eve's first memory. "I thither went...to look into the clear/Smooth lake...A shape within the wat'ry gleam appeared...there I had fixed/Mine eyes till now, and pined with vain desire." (IV.456-466) This is the first instance of Eve attempting to step out of her designated role as a woman. God created her from Adam, for Adam, and her beauty was meant for Adam's pleasure, not her own. "Not equal, as their sex not equal seemed;/For contemplation he and valor

formed./For softness she and sweet attractive grace./He for God only, she for God in him.”

(IV.296-298). By seeking pleasure from looking at her reflection, she is attempting to be the owner of her physical beauty over Adam, and Milton portrays this vanity as a destructive flaw.

Good.

The lines mentioned above also reveal that Eve is created to serve God and Adam, and Adam only God. By disclosing this, Milton is choosing to portray Eve as spiritually distant and

therefore inferior. Good Adam enjoys direct fellowship with God while Eve does not. This is a

precedent for when she ultimately goes against God. Milton also chooses beauty to be Eve’s

greatest asset to her character, not intelligence, moral dignity, or physical strength like Adam.

Further, Milton describes these as superior over Eve’s characteristics in lines 490-491 of Book

IV. “How beauty is excelled by manly grace/And wisdom, which alone is truly fair.” The fact

that her looks are also her greatest weakness (she is easily tempted by the superficial flattery of

Satan) is misogynistic as well, because her immediate nature is sinful vanity?, while Adam’s

greatest weakness is love for? Eve herself, not a moral flaw within him. His weakness for Eve is

demonstrated [narrative context]; “The bond of nature draw me to my own/My own in thee, for

what thou art is mine...to lose thee were to lose myself” (IX.956-959). Even here, Adam boldly

makes the claim that Eve is his property (“what thou art is mine”), which is yet another hint at

Milton’s misogynic attitude. Good analysis.

The second instance of Eve breaking across gender norms? is when she succumbs to the temptation of Satan and gains the knowledge of good and evil. \$\$\$ Of course, her eating the fruit

could be seen as weakness, but I read Milton’s representation of it as his attempt to control

women/discourage them from seeking knowledge and power [situating your ideas like this can

show your audience what’s up for debate and show what side you are taking] Milton writes that

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**Comment [2]:** The role of this quotation is not clear. It’s kind of dropped in, rather than introduced by text that says, “For example, Milton writes that...” or then tying the next claims to point to lines or echo the line. I would encourage you to work on smoothly integrating quotations and their analysis. That will help make the difference in how people respond to your work and help them see that you are analyzing and not just dropping in “quote bombs” that aren’t tied to the surrounding material (because you aren’t, but it looks like you might be).

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**Comment [3]:** I’m not totally clear how there’s a precedent here or what the precedent is, really....

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Eve sought knowledge and power, and this action demonstrates her rebellion against God's role for her life. \* She expresses her motivation: "To add what wants/In female sex...And render me more equal, and perhaps/A thing not undesirable, sometime/Superior; for inferior, who is free?"

(IX. 821-826) Follow through: "what wants" in the female sex is of course the knowledge, power, and dominion given to Adam and God (or whatever). According to gender stereotypes,

knowledge and power were not available to women so, naturally, when Eve seek equality or superiority over men, the result is disastrous. Her words are very similar to Satan's reflection in Book I, lines 257-259: "And what should I be, all but less than he/Whom thunder hath made

greater? Here at least/We shall be free..." \$\$\$ On the one hand, this similarity demonstrates how

Satan's rhetoric has infected Eve. Yet this echo establishes the comparison of Eve to Satan and

thus contributes to the viciously misogynist view in Milton's text. ← see how this kind of

situates your claims and makes them more powerful? Little tweaks like this can really amp up

the impact of your already strong claims.

\*Milton continues to depict a misogynistic perspective of Eve when he reveals her true motivation for sharing the fruit with Adam. When [narrative context], Eve muses. "But what if God have seen./And death ensue? Then I shall be no more./And Adam wedded to another Eve..."

(IX. 826-828) For Milton, Eve's incentive for sharing the fruit with Adam is rooted in jealousy, which differs greatly from what she actually tells Adam. To him, she urges. "Thou therefore also

taste, that equal lot/May join us, as equal love..." (IX. 881-882) In contrast to her private

thoughts, Eve tells Adam [analyze her claim succinctly – or perhaps point out how her desire to

be superior above has suddenly become a push for their equality?]. This inconsistency portrays

Eve as deceitful and manipulative, encouraging an anger and lack of trust towards Eve and

women in general.

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Lanyer, although she cannot be classified as a misogynist, also reveals anti-feminist attitudes in *Eve's Apology in Defense of Women*. Early on in the poem she takes an anti-feminist stance of the biblical story: "Let not us women glory in men's fall,/Who had power given to overrule us all." (l. 15-16) She defends Eve's actions by stating that men were supposed to "overrule us all", and therefore prevent Eve from eating of the tree, but this in itself echoes anti-feminist views because she grants power to men over women. I'm mildly uncomfortable with calling Lanyer antifeminist – at least in the specific sense of always being against women, usually from an intellectually and morally superior perspective – but it makes good sense to assert that she echoes antifeminist views of women. It's a small shift, but it permits Lanyer to still "defend" Eve (even if it's by blaming Adam rather than offering a feminist defense). This belief is again stated in lines 33-36: "But surely Adam cannot be excused;/Her fault though great, yet he was most to blame;/What weakness offered, strength might have refused./Being lord of all, the greater was his shame." By portraying Eve as "weakness" and Adam as "strength", she is supporting an anti-feminist view of women. Lanyer also uses words such as "lord" and "king" to describe Adam, and this clarifies his power over Eve in the poem, which again asserts an anti-feminist view. "For he was lord and king of all the earth,/Before poor Eve had either life or breath." (l. 39-40)

Lanyer continues this standpoint when she claims that Eve was ignorant to what she was doing. "Giving to Adam what she held most dear... That undiscerning ignorance was perceived/No guile or craft that was by him intended... But she, poor soul, by cunning was deceived." (l. 20-29) Lanyer's choice of painting Eve as a "poor soul" and full of "undiscerning ignorance" forces the reader to believe that Eve was simply too stupid to realize the consequences of the temptation, and ignorance and stupidity are stereotyped characteristics of

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women in an anti-feminist perspective. Do you think Lanyer believes the antifeminist views that she presents here? Or do you imagine her as tongue-in-cheek supporting the antifeminist view to say, "Oh, but such a poor little woman couldn't possibly be at fault because she doesn't know enough or have enough power for such things; therefore, you HAVE to blame mankind, sorry." Her tone might be read as resembling *reduction ad absurdum* from our satire unit?

The author uses patience as a personification in lines 49-50, which contributes to her support of Eve by using one usually feminine attribute and applying it to all women, but in line 50 she describes women as "poor", which negates any defense for Eve as a feminist action. "And then to lay the fault on Patience' back,/That we (poor women) must endure it all." The lines suggest that women are not strong enough to carry the burden of the blame, but men can. Another example of this can be found in line 71 when Lanyer states, "Her weakness did the serpent's words obey." In this line she displaces the blame from Eve by separating her from one of her characteristics: weakness. The line can be misinterpreted as a feminist support of Eve by holding Satan's temptation as the cause of the fall instead of Eve herself, but by attributing weakness to her character, she is in fact creating an anti-feminist defense. The imagery used in lines 78-79 also contributes to the anti-feminist tone of the poem. "This sin of yours surmounts them all as far/As doth the sun another little star." Here Lanyer compares men to the sun, and women to stars. The sun is far larger than any star, and is also the center of the galaxy, implying that women are inferior to men and should serve them. Good!

Although these two works have previously been used to compare a feminist and anti-feminist viewpoint on the biblical story of Adam and Eve, it can be shown through the word choices and imagery of Lanyer in *Eve's Apology* that this is not the case. Milton's portrayal of Eve in *Paradise Lost* should not only be considered anti-feminist, but largely misogynistic due to

the degrading nature of Eve's character development. It is important to explore these varying and not always obvious expressions of anti-feminism in order to recognize the debasement of women in literature and to realize its implications. If literature that carries misogynistic and anti-feminist tones is supported, then the oppression of women will continue to be a dominant force in our culture. Perceptions of women have certainly changed since Milton and Lanyer wrote their works, but they remind their readers of how far women have come, and what they have to lose.

Poignant ending. Nicely done.

Works Cited needed.