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Thomas Luxon

Thomas.H.Luxon@Dartmouth.EDU

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Heroic Restorations: Dryden and Milton

Thomas H. Luxon

In his introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to John Dryden* (2004), Steven Zwicker maintains that “Dryden seldom wrote of, or even seems to have imagined, a coherent and progressive literary career of the kind that was often on Spenser’s or Milton’s mind.”¹ In her chapter in the same 2004 *Companion*, Annabel Patterson offers an important corrective to Zwicker’s characterization of Dryden. Patterson reminds us that in fact he was driven, almost from the beginning of his career, by a “grand ambition”— to redefine “the heroic,” both in subject and in form. She advances the fascinating (and counter-intuitive) thesis that Dryden’s ambition to re-invent English heroic poetry for his age probably also drove his political affiliations. “Most of this has to do, obviously, with Dryden’s idea of the heroic, as something that writers, especially if they have the laureateship in mind, must redefine for their own place and time.”² I cannot let it go without saying that John Milton was driven, from a very young age, by much the same ambition. Milton realized his ambition in three heroic poems (*Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regain’d* and *Samson Agonistes*) published in original and revised form between 1667 and 1674, exactly the years when Dryden was experimenting with his reinventions of heroism for the Restoration stage.³

This essay will sketch out the very different modes by which Milton and Dryden pursued this ambition of re-defining heroism for an age that was gradually coming to recognize itself as post-heroic. What could convincingly count as heroic behavior in an age like theirs? What depiction of heroism could survive the corrosive context of Stuart England from the late 1630s on without degenerating into satire or even farce?⁴ Both

poets regarded their ambitions as crucial to the future of the English people. Both believed that heroic virtues bound together civil society and that poets could inspire such virtues in people and rulers alike. Milton once imagined the English people themselves as potentially heroic: “a Nation not slow and dull, but of a quick, ingenious, and piercing spirit, acute to invent, subtle and sinewy to discours, not beneath the reach of any point the highest that human capacity can soar to” (*Areopagitica*), but by 1660 that same nation was more than eager to return to what Milton considered ignoble “bondage” (*The Readie and Easie Way*).⁵ Even Milton’s later-than-last-minute efforts to stem the tide of backsliding into restored monarchy can start to sound satirical when read in the context of contemporaneous events. The task of redefining heroism for a post-heroic age looked very different to these two men, one a disappointed republican and the other an ambitious “Servant to His Majesty,” and critics have justifiably belabored the differences. But after reviewing those, I want to concentrate some attention on an important, but misunderstood, intersection of their ambitious paths—Dryden’s adaptation of Milton’s great epic as a heroic drama: *The State of Innocence and the Fall of Man*.⁶

Dryden imagined that his project was to *restore* traditional heroism for what he regarded as a modern age. As Marcie Frank puts it, he took advantage of Milton’s own self-presentation as “old fashioned” by exaggerating it, as if *Paradise Lost* belonged to a pre-Restoration era (Frank 46).⁷ For Dryden, “old fashioned” is largely code for the “good old cause,” and royalists were ever anxious to depict that as hopelessly outdated. But far from being old fashioned, Milton actually wanted to start fresh. He chose to celebrate versions of heroism hitherto unknown.⁸ Far from restoring traditional heroics, he condemned them as un-heroic for any age. In book 9 of *Paradise Lost*, the narrator

dismisses first the classical “arguments” of Homer and Virgil (*PL* 9.13-19), and then the romance subjects of Ariosto and Tasso (27-41), proposing instead tragic “disobedience” and “Patience and Heroic Martyrdom,” subjects hitherto “Unsung” (8, 32-33). Milton also used Adam, Eve, and Raphael to illustrate more domestic forms of heroism such as condescension, marital conversation, and friendship. As late as 1693, Dryden held that Milton’s “Subject is not that of an Heroique Poem; properly so call’d: His design is the Losing of our Happiness; his Event is not prosperous, like that of all other Epique Works” (*Works* 4.14-15). Nevertheless, twenty years earlier, he chose a version of the Miltonic subject for his latest experiment in heroic drama, an opera in five acts, dedicated to celebrating, among other things, heroic beauty and the more domestic virtues of human behavior, marriage, mutual submission, and conversation. The literature of the coming centuries, in novels and plays, would continue to explore these more domestic heroisms long after Dryden’s experiments with heroic drama turned into fodder for satire.

John Milton searched for heroic subjects in British history and the Bible.⁹ When he finally settled on the double subject of “Mans First Disobedience.../With loss of Eden” and the restoration of “the blissful Seat” by “one Greater Man,” it was after a period of “long choosing, and beginning late.”¹⁰ Unlike Milton, Dryden did not bide his time; he experimented in rapid succession with one heroic subject after another. Apparently unafraid of failure he jumped from the heroism of the Lord Protector Cromwell (*Heroique Stanzas* 1659) to Charles II (*Astraea Redux* 1660). The first proved a political embarrassment and the second unconvincing.¹¹ Charles was a poor choice for planting heroic “seeds of vertu.”¹² His devotion to planting seed of another sort was so obvious to everyone that it had opened him to public ridicule. Dryden tried exotic heroes like

Montezuma, Almanzor, and Aureng Zebe and foreign heroes like Cortez and Ferdinand.¹³ Sometimes the exotic heroes were meant to remind readers of heroes closer to home like James, the Duke of York. *Annus Mirabilis* celebrates a plethora of heroes and subjects. An incomplete list, compiled from the program Dryden outlined in his “Letter” to Sir Robert Howard, of “the most heroic Subject[s] which any Poet could desire” includes “War,” the “prudence of our King,” the “valour of a Royal Admiral” (James), two “incomparable Generals” (George Monck and Prince Rupert), and “the invincible courage of our Captains and Seamen” (*Works* 1.50).¹⁴ Again, the King is assigned an accompanying rather than leading role in this poem. He is praised for “management and prudence,” and later for “Piety and Fatherly Affection,” traits hardly as heroic as the courage, valor, and loyalty ascribed to even the most obscure Seamen. Even the City of London, praised for “courage[,] loyalty and magnanimity,” appears more of a hero than the King. Eventually, the “Letter” admits that several of the King’s subjects come in for more heroic praise than he, and then praises him for tolerating the slight without taking offense: “the peculiar goodness of the best of Kings, that we may praise his Subjects without offending him” (1.52). There is an air of desperation in Dryden’s experiments with heroes, but also a whiff of change.

The Conquest of Granada, arguably Dryden’s most successful experiment, is a good example of this desperation. If Charles was a poor choice for heroic song, perhaps his brother James might do. The dedication tells James that Almanzor and his deeds are “faint representations of your own worth and valor in Heroique Poetry” (*Works* 11.3). This bizarrely twists the logic of the alleged civic purposes of heroic poetry. By insisting that his “feign’d Heroe” Almanzor is but a faint shadow of James, even that James’ own

virtues inspired his invention, Dryden turns the traditional purpose of heroic poetry on its head. Traditionally, “the feign’d Heroe inflames the true,” rather than the other way around. But Dryden deftly saves appearances by stating that these plays, by *reminding* James of his own heroic parts and deeds in the fiction of Almanzor, will stimulate still more virtuous actions in the future. Retreating from the conventional form of a dedication, Dryden writes, “to speak more properly, not to dedicate, but to restore to you those Ideas, which, in the more perfect part of my characters, I have taken from you. Heroes may lawfully be delighted with their own praises, both as they are farther incitements to their virtue, and as they are the highest returns which mankind can make them for it” (11.3). Instead of choosing an ancient Briton or Scot as an example of “the dead virtue” that “animates the living,” Dryden chooses the King’s brother and heir-apparent as an instructive example of “Heroique vertue” to all of the English, including, awkwardly enough, the king. Charles must be content to see himself reflected in an Agamemnon type, while his brother gets the lead role: “in your two persons, are eminent the Characters which *Homer* has given us of Heroique vertue: the commanding part in *Agamemnon*, and the executive in *Achilles*” (*Works* 11.6).

This choice of heroic subject is awkward for still other reasons. Almanzor is a legendary version of a real prince, a successful expansionist ruler of Muslim Iberia. As the play begins, the audience may well have taken Almanzor’s Islam as some kind of code for James’s Catholicism, which by mid-1672 was common knowledge, and had been suspected by courtiers and others for several years before that.¹⁵ James converted to Catholicism, along with his first wife, Anne, sometime late in 1668 or early 1669. Anne stopped taking Church of England communion in 1669, and on her deathbed in March

1671, she refused Protestant communion and received the Roman Catholic last rites. James avoided taking communion at Easter 1671 even while accompanying Charles to chapel (Miller 59). Partly to avoid Easter communion in 1672, he joined the fleet in preparations for the Third Anglo-Dutch war, a war in which Dryden clearly expected him to prove himself the quintessential English hero. But how could the quintessential English hero be a Roman Catholic?

Then, in Act 4 of *The Conquest of Granada*, the ghost of Almanzor's mother appears to him and reveals that he was born and baptized a Christian, a Roman Catholic, and, even more troubling for an English audience, a Spanish Roman Catholic. Suddenly, his earlier Islam registers as a mistaken, or false religion. Some in the audience must have found themselves confused, but some, I believe, saw this as a thumbnail sketch of James' conversion narrative. Like Almanzor, James was a warrior, "preoccupied," in John Miller's words, "with love and war, but when he returned to England, he began to think more deeply about religion," as did his wife, Anne (Miller 57). To James's way of thinking, the Roman Church's claims to apostolic authority seemed far stronger than those of Episcopacy: "He read and reread Heylin and Hooker, but could find no justification for the English church's separation from Rome" (Miller 57-58). For James, embracing Roman Catholicism was a return to his true mother church rather than a conversion.

The Conquest of Granada asks to be read as a celebration not only of the Duke's military prowess and valor, but also of his successful efforts at reconciling the competing demands of Love and Honor, with significant help from his beloved wife. Dryden invites us to see the Duke's heroic virtues sketched out in Almanzor. He also reminds us that his

hero is “not absolutely perfect,” just as everyone knew that the Duke, especially in matters of Love and Honor, was not perfect (*Works* 11.6). His and Anne’s first child was born barely two months after their wedding, and Andrew Marvell, for one, regarded their marriage as a plot (“experiment” was his word) to secure the royal succession for her family.¹⁶ Almahide, who captures Almanzor’s heart (and more) giving rise to the obligatory heroic struggle between Love and Honor, barely resembles Anne Hyde, but some may have regarded her perfect negotiation of the competing claims of Honor and Love as a counter-example to the scheming Lyndaraxa and the cynical royal mistresses she evokes. Almahide is also a royal mistress before King Boabdelin marries her, but once married, she becomes the perfect image of loyalty and self-control, while Boabdelin becomes quite the opposite. Almahide’s pure love for Almanzor, proved in Lucrece fashion, saves him from disgrace, and together they lead Granada to a restoration: “At once to freedom and true faith restor’d:/ Its old religion, and its antient Lord” (*Conquest II* 1.1.26-27).

Dryden may well have believed that James’s and Anne’s conversions to Catholicism, coupled with their fecundity, held the promise of a similar restoration in England. He needn’t have known about the secret Treaty of Dover (June 1, 1670) to gauge which way the wind was blowing and set course accordingly.¹⁷ I don’t mean to suggest that he was cynical; quite the reverse. He looks, in hindsight, naively idealistic, and he never swerved in his loyalty to James. Unlike Milton, who confessed to belatedness in arriving at his “Subject for Heroic Song” (“long choosing and beginning late”), Dryden stumbled from choice to choice—Cromwell, Charles II, London—before he pledged his loyalty to James as the most promising hero of England’s Restoration. He

hoped that James would become the hero England needed. And, as Jackson Cope pointed out, Almanzor does appear, by the end of *Part II*, to replace his martial virtues with a more domesticated set: chaste love, temperance and even patience (Cope 60-61). Dryden was trying to learn something from Milton's new heroisms.

But *The Conquest of Granada* failed in every way Dryden believed a heroic poem should succeed. The supposedly epic struggle between Love and Honor in Act 4 is so overdone that it almost slides into satire of its own accord. Almanzor, only recently outed as a Christian by his Purgatory-bound mother, tries to seduce (maybe even force) chaste Almahide with *carpe diem* arguments of near-Marvellian potency. His dignity (and her chastity) is saved only by her threat to imitate Lucrece and slay herself. This puts the hero only a half-step away from tyrannical rape; in fact he is guilty, in the next scene, of forcing kisses on Almahide in front of her husband, the King. Dryden seems almost to invite the ridicule we find in *The Rehearsal* 3.2. His hero is a Catholic warrior with Tarquinesque tendencies; King Mohamet Boabdalin is debauched, plagued with Othello-like jealousy, a truth-breaker, and a misbeliever (Muslim now is code for stubbornly Protestant). Almanzor calls the king's word "that weathercock of State" (*Conquest Part I* 3.1.10). I doubt that Charles recognized himself in Dryden's Muslim king, but at least a few others, especially those who knew of or suspected his dealings with Louis XIV, surely did. In *The Rehearsal* 1.1, Buckingham mocks the title Dryden held most dear, "Servant to His Majesty," suggesting that his "last Play" (*Conquest*), exposed him as less a servant to his Majesty than to his Highness, the Duke, and more intent on receiving royal favors than performing them (1.1.44-60).¹⁸ The "plot" of Mr. Bayes (as he is nick-

named in *The Rehearsal*), it seems, was not obscure to everyone, and his experiments with the heroic failed to promote civic virtues in the mighty.

With *The State of Innocence and the Fall of Man* Dryden tries a new take on the heroic. No more invincible warrior. Love and Honor appear in a much more domestic context, as they do in *Paradise Lost*. The Duke of York is still his chosen hero, but now the focus is on his domestic virtues and how they are inspired and supported by the heroic beauty of his new wife, Mary of Modena. The shift away from Valor and the competing claims of Love and Honor is partly circumstantial. James was obliged to resign his admiralty because of his conversion to Rome. The third Dutch war was a disaster in every way conceivable. Having spent all of his French gold, Charles was obliged to resort to Parliament, “whose price was the cancelling of the Declaration of Indulgence and the passing of the Test Act, which imposed religious tests to exclude Catholics from all public office.”¹⁹ This was aimed directly at the Duke of York, but also reflected Parliament’s growing suspicions about Charles’ religious and political intentions. For military prowess and valor the Dutch admiral De Ruyter won the prize.²⁰ But we should not disregard what Dryden learned from his engagement with Milton’s epic poem. He had resisted Milton’s notions of the proper “Subject for Heroic Song” as well as his strong opinions on rhyme. It would take a few more years for him to give up on rhyming couplets as *the* heroic medium, but as he attempted to render the story of Milton’s heroic pair, Adam and Eve, for the stage, we can see him re-considering, in unexpected ways, what could count as heroic in post-heroic England.²¹

Milton cared not a whit for the restorations Dryden so longed to celebrate and strengthen—the “ancient freedom” that he believed could only be guaranteed by absolute

monarchy, and the “old Religion” of prelates, perhaps even popes. Milton sings of quite a different restoration—of “the blissful Seat,” a Paradise within, but only after many lines that pour scorn on all of the heroic virtues to which Dryden stubbornly clings. Most of what Steven Zwicker says of *Paradise Regain'd* as a refutation of Dryden’s heroic drama could also be said about *Paradise Lost*: Satan is a satire on monarchy, empire, and conquest.²² Milton believed that there were far better ways to demonstrate loyalty to God than by military valor, and his angelic guards and warriors, for all their martial grandeur, are also noticeably ineffectual. The most effectively heroic of the archangels is Raphael because he is heroic in condescension, conversation and careful teaching.²³ In place of the heroic drama’s shopworn heroic struggle between Love and Honor, Milton offers us Adam’s struggle between obedience to God and his love for Eve. Fallen Eve, as if her transgression had turned her into a Restoration courtly mistress, regards Adam’s struggle as wonderfully heroic—a “glorious trial of exceeding Love,/ Illustrious evidence, example high” (*PL* 9.961-62). But in Milton’s anti-court heroic world, he deserves a scolding rather than pity and admiration.

Was shee thy God, that her thou didst obey
 Before his voice, or was shee made thy guide,
 Superior, or but equal, that to her
 Thou did'st resigne thy Manhood, and the Place
 Wherein God set thee above her made of thee,
 And for thee, whose perfection *farr excell'd* [150]
 Hers in all real dignitie: Adorn'd
 She was indeed, and lovely to attract

Thy Love, not thy Subjection, and her Gifts
 Were such as under Government well seem'd,
 Unseemly to beare rule, which was thy part
 And person, hadst thou known thy self aright.

(*PL* 9.145-57, emphasis mine)

Self-knowledge, something that only belatedly dawns on Dryden's Almanzor, is for Milton more heroic than deeds of any kind. All this rises to an even higher pitch in *Paradise Regain'd*, but the diffuse epic has paved the way for the brief one. There is much to be gained from trying to discover, from a close reading of Dryden's play, what he learned (and resisted learning) from Milton's *Paradise Lost*.

Steven Zwicker's insistence that Dryden meant to "do a job" on Milton's epic by "trivializing, domesticating" and rendering its subjects "ridiculous or comic" tends to obscure evidence that Dryden's ongoing efforts to re-define the heroic for the Restoration court owe a great deal to Milton. Dryden's *State of Innocence and the Fall of Man* is much more than "a recondite form of ridicule" (Zwicker 1995 156). Zwicker understands the dedication to Mary of Modena, the young bride of "the most feared Roman Catholic in England" as a "humiliating" application of Milton's heroic "blest pair" to James and Mary, the Duke and Duchess of York, a couple who to many Londoners increasingly personified the threat of Popery and arbitrary rule (154, 156). All of this ignores what Dryden learned from Milton about the promise of more domesticated forms of heroism like friendship and marriage, and more inward notions of restoration—finding "*Paradise within*" (*State Of Innocence* 5.4.267). And though Zwicker finds Dryden's exaggerated praise of the Duchess' beauty particularly offensive, even bordering on sacrilege and

idolatry, we shall see in a moment that Dryden borrows much of this rhetoric of praise from Milton's (and Adam's) own words about Eve (Zwicker 1995 155).

Though the dedication to Mary of Modena, the new Duchess of York, was written some three years after the play was first written, I believe it likely that the play was always intended to celebrate her marriage to James. By dedicating the published version of 1677 to the Duchess, Dryden signals his continued support of a highly controversial alliance. Mary of Modena was Louis XIV's choice for the recently widowed Duke of York. News of her betrothal to James renewed fears of a "Popish successor" and a more general tendency towards "arbitrary" rule. The couple was quietly married in Italy by proxy on September 30, 1673, a few days after Mary turned fifteen. When the House of Commons resumed meeting on October 20, its first act was to petition the king to prevent the consummation of this marriage and insist that the Duke, presumptive heir to the throne, marry a Protestant.²⁴ The King responded by proroguing Parliament for a week and then informing them that the marriage had already been "completed, according to the forms used amongst Princes, and by his Royal Consent and Authority" (Grey 2.189). Actually, it had been a Catholic wedding performed by proxy in the Catholic duchy of Modena; Henry Mordaunt, James' official procurator chose to absent himself from the parts of the service he deemed "obnoxious" to a Protestant.²⁵ The Commons, the majority of whose members thought this marriage spelled disaster for English Protestantism, refused to back down and sent a longer address on November 2, expressing their great fear (couched as an implied threat) that "this might be an occasion to lessen the affections of the people to his Royal Highness, who is so nearly related to the Crown" and that "this kingdom will be under continual apprehensions about the growth of Popery" (Grey

2.215). James and Mary had not yet been married in a Protestant ceremony, so many MPs believed there was still hope for an annulment. Charles responded to Parliament's second address by proroguing it until January (Grey 2.223). In the meantime, Mary and her mother arrived in England on November 21 and the new Duchess of York met her husband for the first time at their Protestant wedding on the 23rd. So unpopular was Mary, and this wedding, that the English ceremony was held far from London, where scandalous broadsides depicted her as an agent of the Pope (Rodger 85).

At the time, even to some of those who supported the King's prerogative to arrange royal marriages as he saw fit, this looked like a match made anywhere but in heaven. No one in the House of Commons thought of this couple as that "blest Pair," Adam and Eve in Paradise. Dryden's conceit was politically explosive but also impressively supportive of the King's prerogative. From the perspective of the Court, Dryden was doing heroic service as Poet Laureate and Historiographer Royal: he was supporting the heir apparent in what was becoming his darkest hour. And more, he was trying to praise the royal couple in some of the new language of heroic virtue he had gathered from Milton's great poem. As Jackson Cope suggested, Dryden learned several lessons from "the larger poet" about the heroic (Cope 60). The years from 1673 to 1681 were the most tumultuous of Charles II's reign, culminating in the Exclusion Crisis. With benefit of hindsight one might well consider 1673 the beginning of that crisis, and this marriage the second major step down that path, the first being James' open refusal to submit to the Test Act, passed by the Parliament in March.

The young princess and her mother, the Duchess of Modena, were none too keen on this marriage, either. In July, they had gone to some lengths to resist even meeting

James' official procurator (Mordaunt 423-24). The teenage Mary felt called to a religious life and her mother supported her vocation. As she herself put it, she "had an invincible aversion for Marriage" (Mordaunt 427). Louis XIV, however, overrode her inclinations. Catholic France had an agenda for England. This marriage was part of the back-channel foreign policy that came to be popularly feared as the "growth of Popery" and the threat of arbitrary rule. Dryden's *Dedication* reinforces his commitment to York's politics— alliance with France, tolerance (or even more) for English Catholics, and James as heir to the throne (rather than Monmouth or some other Protestant solution).

Besides the politics, Dryden's choice is notable for poetic reasons. We have been tracing his somewhat erratic choices for heroic themes, or Subjects, as he called them. Maria Beatrice Anna Margherita Isabella d'Este was virtually a living personification of the history of Italian epic, and Dryden calls attention to this: "I can yield, without envy, to the Nation of Poets, the Family of *Este* to which *Ariosto* and *Tasso* have ow'd their patronage; and to which the World has ow'd their Poems" (*Works* 12.81). Not only were her ancestors patrons of epic poets, their annals are crowded, writes Dryden, with heroes and "Princes, famous for their Actions both in Peace and War," scores of likely Subjects for heroic song (81). Dryden also lists all of the heroic virtues of her new husband the Duke: "Courage, and Success in War," "Fidelity to His Royal Brother," "Constancy," "Justice," "Magnanimity," and patriotism (82). But for this new heroic drama, an opera adapted from *Paradise Lost*, Dryden resigned to others all these traditional subjects in favor of Maria Beatrice's beauty: "But I could not without extream reluctance resign the Theme of Your Beauty to another Hand. Give me leave, *MADAM*, to acquaint the World that I am Jealous of this Subject; and let it be no dishonor to You, that after having rais'd

the Admiration of Mankind, You have inspir'd one Man to give it voice" (81). Her beauty is both his chosen heroic argument and his muse. Her "Greatness" (82), her "Conjugal Virtues" (84), even the "indowments and qualities of [her] Mind" (85) could have served as subjects for heroic song, but Dryden chooses beauty above all other arguments, because beauty "is more peculiarly Yours": "Greatness is indeed communicated to some few of both Sexes; but Beauty is confin'd to a more narrow compass: 'Tis only Your Sex, 'tis not shar'd by many, and its Supreme Perfection is in You alone" (82). Just what are we to make of this? Over-the-top Petrarchism? Certainly that, and more.

Like Dante's Beatrice, whose name means "bearer of beatitude," Dryden singles out Maria Beatrice's beauty as his guide to Paradise, or as he calls it *The State of Innocence*.²⁶ And her first name, Maria, reminds us of Mary, second Eve, whom Dante's St Bernard called "Virgin Mother, daughter of thy Son" (*Paradiso* 33.1). Once again, like his excessive praise for James in the dedication to *Conquest of Granada*, Dryden runs a significant risk of slipping, whether he means to or not, into satire. He casts himself as a latter-day Dante whose love for the Duchess's beauty is more "a Zeal than Passion":

'Tis the rapture which Anchorites find in Prayer, when a Beam of the Divinity shines upon them: that which makes them despise all worldly objects, . . . a single vision so transports them, that it makes up the happiness of their lives, . . . has power enough to destroy all other Passions. You render mankind insensible to other Beauties: and have destroy'd the Empire of Love in a Court which was the seat of his Dominion. (*Works* 12.83)

But Dryden's praise has less to do with the salvation of mankind than with emergent Tory politics. Not only will Mary's beauty turn heads at court, and out-do all the charms of the official royal mistresses, Dryden humorously suggests that already she has "subverted...even our Fundamental Laws; and Reign[s] absolute over the hearts of a stubborn and Freeborn people tenacious almost to madness of their Liberty," as if being a slave to her beauty could free a stubborn people from their misguided addiction to "their Liberty" at the monarch's (and nation's) expense. Zwicker regards this as a humiliating attack on Milton's Protestant politics and poetics. It probably looked that way to the Whigs in the House of Commons as well. But from the perspective of the Court, and the House of Lords, Dryden was doing what he regarded as his sacred duty as "Servant to His Majesty" by depicting "His Highness" and his bride as Father and Mother of the Human Race, prime examples of the newly celebrated domestic virtues of married conversation, mutual submission, and restorers of a "*Paradise within*." Milton critics have for many years now concentrated on Milton as a champion of republicanism. Fair enough, but that does not mean that we must read Dryden's Toryism as ridiculous or deliberately humiliating. Dryden recognized that Milton was re-defining heroism on a domestic and inward scale. This scale would eventually inform the novels of the next two centuries. Let's pay attention to the ways Dryden paid attention to Milton's Eve.

Eve, Milton insists, was a great beauty, and in *Paradise Lost* her distinctly female beauty presents a number of problems—interpretative, metaphysical, and moral. For present purposes, I shall attend to the poem's many suggestions of her beauty's power—power over herself, over Adam and Raphael, and even over evil itself in the person of Satan.

First, beauty's power over herself. Eve tells the story, in book 4, of the captivating power of her own beauty, as reflected in the "watry gleam" of the "cleer/ Smooth Lake" in Paradise (*PL* 4.461, 45-59). At first she mistakes her reflected beauty for another being "Bending to look" on her, with "sympathie and love" (4.465). Milton radically changes Ovid's Narcissus story by insisting that the first vector of desire seems to Eve to originate from the "Shape" that appears in the pool. Both Narcissus and Eve mistake the image for another being, but Narcissus is so fixated on that being's beauty that all he cares about is his desire to possess the beautiful being upon which his gaze is fixed. He does not imagine the beautiful shape cares anything for him; indeed this episode is in part his just deserts for having never cared a whit for anyone's desire for him, man or woman.²⁷ Milton invokes Narcissus only to insist that Eve is quite different; she takes great pleasure in being desired, or, in this case, in thinking she is desired. Milton would have us believe that Eve was purpose-built to *respond* to desire, and not just man's desire.²⁸ The poem rhetorically asks the question: whose are the "*answering* looks/ Of sympathie and love"? (464-65, my emphasis). Eve imagines that the being in the pond answers her, but we know what she does not—the "answering looks" are hers to begin with. Narcissus's flaw was to scorn anyone's desire for him. That is what makes his come-uppance so poetically just—his own beautiful image fails to respond to his desire for it. Eve is all response to, and her beauty is all initiation of, sympathy and love.

But what has all this to do with beauty's power? When Eve imagines agency in the reflected shape, the poem invites us to share her mistake, to imagine that her beauty, abstracted from herself into two dimensions, a mere reflection in a pond, is endowed with power over her person, a power she cannot help but respond to, and, more importantly, a

power that is not her own. Crudely put, her “looks” look at her and, so she thinks, initiate a conversation of “answering looks/ Of sympathie and love.”²⁹

As I bent down to look, just opposite,
 A Shape within the watry gleam appeared
 Bending to look on me, I started back,
 It started back, but pleas'd I soon returnd,
 Pleas'd it returnd as soon with answering looks
 Of sympathie and love; there I had fixt
 Mine eyes till now, and pin'd with vain desire,
 Had not a voice thus warnd me, What thou seest,
 What there thou seest fair Creature is thy self,
 With thee it came and goes: (4.460-69)

What Adam later refers to as her beauty’s “powerful glance” is so powerful that it requires nothing less than the warning voice of God to break the spell it has on her (*PL* 8.533). And this omniscient voice may be read as authorizing a version of Eve’s initial mistake. The voice tells her that the image she sees in the lake, the one she imagines is a person who desires her, is actually her “self.” In addition to the misogynist implication that her self is nothing more than her outward appearance, this locution also threatens to perpetuate the confusion of abstracted beauty with an agentive self. The voice goes on to lend the abstracted beauty even more agency: “With thee it came and goes.”

Starting from the caesura in line 465, Eve betrays a new perspective; with the benefit of hindsight she knows that her response to her own beauty can lead nowhere, that she only *thinks* her image loved her first. Created to respond to desire, she has been

responding to a response—a brilliant example of “vain desire.” That is why we are so startled to read only a few lines further on, that Eve almost “returnd” with pleasure to the “smooth watry image” in the lake because Adam, for all his tallness, is just not as beautiful to look at. Even after she knows the reflection is not a person, but only a “watry image” of her own beauty; even after the invisible voice of God has told her that her image is actually a reflection of Adam; still she turns back with desire. Now, though not before, Eve risks imitating Narcissus, until another voice, Adam’s, tries once again to break the spell: “Return faire Eve,/ Whom fli'st thou?” (4.481-2). Adam’s cry, together with his breathless answers to her original questions about who she is, where she came from and how she got here, are not enough to keep Eve from turning back to the “answering looks” of her abstracted beauty. He must resort to force (however gently) by seizing her hand and, to preserve the notion of her freedom of choice, she must yield. Only then can she be free of the power of her own beauty. Adam’s cry echoes that of Narcissus to Echo in *Metamorphoses* (3.381-82), raising the specter of disaster once again, but, according to Eve’s own story, Adam has succeeded in teaching her to “see/ How beauty is excelld by many grace/ And wisdom, which alone is truly fair” (*PL* 4.489-91).

John Guillory refers to this lesson as a kind of beauty contest in which wisdom and manly grace, Adam’s invisible qualities, win the prize, leaving “beauty,” presumably female beauty, in second place. This makes sense in Milton’s metaphysics where the image of God in Adam is his invisible inward grace and wisdom, and Eve reflects God’s image only secondarily.³⁰ But the poem leaves us in no doubt about the power of this visible beauty. Unlike the invisible God, and Adam’s inward version of His image, one

can actually see Eve's "looks Divine" (4.291). Even Eve knows that, as far as visible things go, her beauty is far more "winning" than Adam's outward appearance (4.489). The poem allows that conviction, very narrowly stated, to stand, even though elsewhere it sounds so committed to the idea that invisible masculine wisdom is more Godlike (see 8.540-45 and 564-75). We shall see in a moment how in several places the poem's celebration of visible female beauty bumps uncomfortably up against its stated doctrines.

Dryden, of course, omits from his poem any such contest between outward and inward fairness. His Eve is simply the most beautiful human being ever, with the possible exception of the Duchess of York.³¹ Critics typically regard all this as the most obsequious sort of flattery, an awkward return to a shopworn tradition of exaggerated Petrarchan praise, but it is more than that. Dryden has deliberately chosen, in the face of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, this "Subject," this "Theme of Your Beauty" for his heroic song (*Works* 12.81). He doesn't hark back to the rage of Achilles, the cleverness of Odysseus, or even, as Anthony Welch argues, to the "Bases and tinsel Trappings" of "gorgeous Knights," typical of Renaissance epics (*PL* 9.35).³²

In what appears to be direct contradiction of Milton's beauty contest, Dryden alleges that female bodily beauty *is* true beauty, not just an outward show; both men and women can have greatness, but "Beauty is confin'd to a more narrow compass: 'Tis only in Your Sex, 'tis not shar'd by many, and its Supreme Perfection is in You alone. And here, *MADAM*, I am proud I cannot flatter" (82). His Lady, the Duchess, is his epic muse, his god, his subject, and his heroic theme all rolled into one. Singing of her beauty, Dryden believes, will fulfill the twin purposes of heroic verse—to delight and instruct.

Dryden seems deliberately to reverse Milton's inward/outward theory of what is truly fair when he tells the Duchess:

[Y]our Person is a Paradise, and your Soul a Cherubin within to guard it.
 If the excellencie of the outside invite the Beholders, the Majesty of your
 Mind deters them from too bold approaches; and turns their Admiration
 into Religion. Moral perfections are rais'd higher by you in the softer Sex:
 as if Men were too coarse a mould for Heaven to work on, and that the
 Image of Divinity could not be cast to likeness in so harsh a Metall. (84)

Female beauty, like poetry, has more power to move human beings to piety and moral action than the “harsh Metal” of prosaic (manly?) rationality. Dryden's Raphael steals a page from Milton's *Tetrachordon* when he tells Adam that Eve is “design'd/ For thy soft hours, and to unbend thy mind” (*State Of Innocence* 2.2.64-65).³³

On his first glimpse of Eve, Dryden's Adam immediately surrenders his “boasted Sovereignty” to the “Fair Vision”:

Fair Vision stay
 My better half, thou softer part of me,
 To whom I yield my boasted Sovereignty,
 I seek my self, and find not, wanting thee. (2.3.4-7)

There is simply no contest. Softer is better; she is the self he seeks, not the other way around. Milton's Eve learned the doctrine of what is “truly fair”—invisible manly wisdom—somewhat reluctantly. Dryden's Eve and Adam (and even the angels) appear instinctively to *know* that *she* is the fairest image of their maker:

Adam. O Virgin, Heav'n begot, and born of Man

Thou fairest of thy great Creator's Works;
 Thee, Goddess, thee th'Eternal did ordain
 His softer Substitute on Earth to Reign:
 And, wheresoe'er thy happy footsteps tread,
 Nature, in triumph, after thee is led.
 Angels, with pleasure, view thy matchless Grace,
 And love their Maker's Image in thy Face. (2.3.28-35)

When Satan showers Eve with similar-sounding praise in *Paradise Lost*, we are expected to demur. Even Eve gets suspicious. The serpent had claimed that eating the fruit raised him from a brute “to degree/ Of Reason in my inward Powers,” but Eve responds to his flattery with “Serpent, thy overpraising leaves in doubt/ The virtue of that Fruit” (*PL* 9.599-600 and 615-16). Nevertheless, Eve's lesson in beauty doctrine failed to inoculate her against the Serpent's further praise of her beauty; when he addresses her as “Fairest resemblance of thy Maker faire,” she no longer objects. The narrator tells us that Satan's words about Eve's “Celestial Beautie” and the gaze of “all things living” make their way into her heart (9.538, 540 and 550).

In Dryden's poem, none of this rhetoric of praise counts as flattery, much less Satanic flattery, because, though I am arguing Dryden learned to appreciate the power of female beauty from reading Milton, he does not share Milton's fear that such power will undermine the sovereignty of male rationality.³⁴ Dryden's Adam responds to Eve's beauty almost instantly by surrendering his “boasted Sovereignty” (superior rationality) to love and serve her beauty. Unlike Milton's, Dryden's Eve does not begin her subject-formative wondering by looking downward. In fact Dryden endows his new-waked Eve

with an upward rising attitude and an address to creation that Milton had reserved for Adam: “Tell me ye Hills and Dales, and thou fair Sun, /Who shin’st above, what am I? whence begun?” (2.3.8-9). But when Eve looks at the beasts, she notices that they all gaze on her “as if I were to be obey’d,” and as if they all long to be like her (13-14). And her self-regard sounds firm, firmer than in the case of Milton’s Adam: “I myself am proud of me” (15). When she comes across her image in the lake, she also at first believes that it is another being who, like the beasts, desires to imitate her, to be like her, even to love her:

And now a Face peeps up, and now draws near,
 With smiling looks, as pleas’d to see me here.
 As I advance, so that advances too,
 And seems to imitate what e’re I do:
 When I begin to speak, the lips it moves;
 Streams down the voice, or it would say it loves.
 Yet when I would embrace, it will not stay. (2.3.18-24)

The initial vector of desire here is the same as that in *PL* 4: Eve thinks that the being “draws near” to her with love and pleasure.³⁵ But Dryden’s Eve is utterly confident that this being, like all the other beings in Paradise, is attracted to her beauty, and naturally wants to draw near it. Once she understands that it is an image, not a being, Dryden’s Eve condemns the abstracted image of her beauty as “fair, yet false,” a “Being, form’d to cheat, / By seeming kindness, mixt with deep deceit” (26-27). Critics unfailingly take this as satire, as if Eve herself proclaims her own beauty a “deep deceit,” but another reading is possible, even more likely. Dryden invites us to regard abstracted beauty, beauty apart

from the “Person” herself, as deceitful. We recall that he proclaimed the Duchess’s “Person,” her body, a “Paradise,” guarded by her virtuous soul. Separate her image from her person and deceit is inevitable—one cannot draw near it or embrace it, and embracing beauty is the path Dryden’s Adam believes is the way to knowledge. Eve’s beauty prompts him to resign his birthright of command and volunteer his obedience because her beautiful person begets love:

Adam. Made to command, thus freely I obey,
 And at thy feet the whole Creation lay.
 Pity that love thy beauty does beget:
 What more I shall desire, I know not yet.
 First let us lock’d in closed embraces be;
 Thence I, perhaps, may teach my self, and thee. (46-51)

Eve’s beauty, embraced in person, offers a road to knowledge through love and sexual pleasure; Eve’s beauty, abstracted in the lake offered only deceit and disappointment. No voice from above tells Dryden’s Eve that what she sees in the pond is her “self” (*PL* 4.468). Disembodied beauty, for Dryden, is not “truly fair.” Thus Dryden revises one of the most apparently misogynist parts of Milton’s poem: when the divine voice implies that Eve is little more than her outward beauty. This claim does not govern the entire poem’s treatment of Eve, but Dryden brilliantly re-attaches female beauty to female subjectivity, power, and agency.

Some will object that Dryden’s Raphael defines Eve as a being designed to be subject to Adam:

An equal, yet thy subject, is design’d,

For thy soft hours, and to unbend thy mind.
 Thy stronger soul shall her weak reason sway;
 And thou, through love, her beauty shalt obey;
 Thou shalt secure her helpless sex from harms;
 And she thy cares shall sweeten, with her charms. (2.2.62-69)

Once again, these lines are often misread, or only partially read. It looks like Dryden's Raphael endorses the female subjection Milton describes in book 4: "both/ Not equal, as thir sex not equal *seemd*" (PL 4.295-6, emphasis mine). For once, Dryden appears more a devotee of ancient English liberties than Milton. His Eve is both equal, and a subject; Milton's poem claims for Adam "Absolute rule" (PL 4.301). Dryden depicts original sovereignty in the state of innocence as an ongoing negotiation between masculine reason and feminine charms. We must pay attention to something Dryden's Raphael certainly does not borrow from Milton; Adam, he says, should "sway" her "weak reason" with his stronger soul, but also "thou, through love, her beauty shall *obey*" (2.1.65-69, my emphasis). Jean Gagen correctly reminds us that, in *Paradise Lost* "this is precisely what Raphael insists that Adam should *not* do."³⁶ Dryden's Raphael suggests a kind of ordinary contract of marriage, one in which sovereignty and obedience are more complicated than in Milton's Paradise, where Adam's rule and Eve's subjection come built in, where Eve is created already married and already subjected.³⁷ Dryden's Eve is not created already married; there is no dream scene of Eve emerging from Adam's bloody side. They marry themselves to each other. They *negotiate* a relationship of sovereignty and subjection, not unlike the constant negotiation implied by England's

ancient notion of sovereignty—the king *in* Parliament. Adam’s reason should hold sway over hers, but her beauty should prompt his obedience “through love.”

And that is exactly what happens. Dryden’s Adam knows he was made to command, but Eve’s beauty prompts him to resign his sovereignty and lay Creation at her feet. When Eve responds coyly to his direct proposal that, without hesitation, they get “lock’d in close embraces,” he exercises his stronger reasoning power and convinces her to grant his “suit” and submit to his embraces without delay: “If not to love, we both were made in vain” (2.3.60). Eve knows that when she submits to his desire, she will lose the “much-lov’d Sovereignty” she has briefly held by virtue of her beauty. And so they come to an agreement—an erotic variant of the Hobbesian social contract: “Here, my inviolable Faith I plight,/ So, thou be my defence, I, thy delight” (76-77). Eve’s beauty gives her a potential for sovereign power; Adam’s superior reason and strength endow him with another sort of sovereign power. Unlike Milton’s pair, Dryden’s couple strikes a deal—she agrees to submit to his stronger reason and desire and, in return, he agrees to obey her beauty’s call to love her and protect her. Critics usually regard Dryden’s Eve as some sort of Restoration coquette because she responds to Adam’s sexual overtures by saying, “some restraining thought, I know not why,/ Tells me, you long should beg, I long deny” (2.354-55). But both come to realize there is good reason for a brief delay: they need to negotiate the terms of shared sovereignty and submission first. One might actually argue that Milton’s Eve is more the coquette; her “coy submission, modest pride,/ And sweet reluctant amorous delay” appear, given the circumstances, simply gratuitous (*PL* 4.310-311).

Let's now turn to other Miltonic descriptions of beauty's power. In every case, Eve's beauty exercises its power as if it had an agency of its own, apart from her own will. For example, Milton endows Eve not just with "Goddess-like demeanour," which we may suppose intentional on her part (*PL* 8.59). He also asks us to see her as a "Queen" attended by "A pomp of winning Graces" which, like supernatural courtiers, "wait" on her (61). These graces exercise special powers in her service, shooting "Darts of desire/ Into all Eyes to wish her still in sight" (62-63). Winning graces shooting darts of desire—these personify Eve's beauty as if they were supernatural courtiers acting on her behalf, but not at all under her control. The narrator tells us in book 5 that Eve's "Beautie.../ Shot forth peculiar graces" even when she was asleep (5.14-15). In book 8, as she retreats from sight, her beauty actively recruits attention, even as her own attention is on her "Fruits and Flours," which "toucht by her fair tendance gladlier grew" (8.44, 47). At this particular moment, however, Adam and Raphael are so intent on each other, as together they enter "on studious thoughts abstruse," that none of these darts reach their destination in their eyes, but they do reach those of Milton's readers.

In her absence, Adam tells Raphael just how powerfully Eve's beauty affects him. Nothing else in creation prompts in him such "vehement desire" or effects disturbing changes in his mind:

But here

Farr otherwise, transported I behold,
Transported touch; here passion first I felt,
Commotion strange, in all enjoyments else
Superior and unmov'd, here only weake

Against the charm of Beauties powerful glance (*PL* 8.525-33)

“Glance” here recalls the narrator’s earlier description of “winning Graces” shooting “Darts of desire,” inviting us to imagine Eve’s beauty as a glancing blow from an arrow or bolt. Adam worries that he is not “proof enough” against even a glancing blow from such a charming dart. Her charms are hardly passive, awaiting another’s gaze; they are aggressive, even threateningly so. That they are glancing blows even suggests they are somewhat promiscuously targeted; “all eyes” in range will be affected. Looking ahead to book 9, the narrator describes Adam’s fall, his willful disobedience, as a matter of being “fondly overcome with Femal charm” (*PL* 9.999). One way to think of Adam’s fall is that his reason was defeated in a heroically tragic single combat with the power of Eve’s beauty, though the word *fondly* robs the image of whatever pity or fear, whatever manly heroism, it might otherwise have suggested.

Adam describes to Raphael just how much Eve’s beauty threatens his reason. Rationally, he knows she is his inferior in the mental and “inward Faculties” of wisdom, purity and dominion that mark him as more resembling “his Image who made both” (*PL* 8.541-45).

yet when I approach

Her loveliness, so absolute she seems

And in her self compleat, so well to know

Her own, that what she wills to do or say,

Seems wisest, vertuousest, discreetest, best;

All higher knowledge in her presence falls

Degraded, Wisdom in discourse with her

Looses discount'nanc't, and like folly shewes;
 Authority and Reason on her waite,
 As one intended first, not after made
 Occasionally; and to consummate all,
 Greatness of mind and nobleness thir seat
 Build in her loveliest, and create an awe
 About her, as a guard Angelic plac't. (8.546-59)

We saw how Dryden's Adam approached Eve's beauty, responding to its power with obedience—love. Once “lock'd in close embraces,” he expects to learn even more about love and desire (2.3.50).³⁸ Milton's Adam confesses that as he approaches Eve's “loveliness,” he comes close to losing his reason altogether (*PL* 8.546-59). Raphael remonstrates with him, trying to devalue the power of female charm—“things/ Less excellent,” “[a]n outside,” “all her shows” (8.566-67, 568, 575)—and urging him to resist subjecting himself to female charm and the brutish passion it moves. Dryden suggests instead that Adam would do better to obey beauty's command to love and desire rather than try to resist it and end up, like Milton's Adam, “fondly overcome.”

Milton's Raphael warns Adam against passion: “In loving thou dost well, in passion not” (*PL* 8.588), but no such warning appears in Dryden's poem. In *Paradise Lost*, Adam and Raphael talk about sex, even angelic sex, but Adam never shares with Eve what he learned from Raphael; in Dryden's *State of Innocence* Adam and Eve talk, quite frankly, about sexual pleasure and Adam expects to gain new knowledge from enjoying sex with her. Obeying her beauty, he loves her; there's no talk of reason being trumped or corrupted by passion. Adam looks forward to an eternal “perfect bliss” of

desire and satisfaction. The blessing of Paradise is that desire does not die with the fleeting satisfaction of possession:

Adam. Thus shall we live in perfect bliss, and see
 Deathless our selves, our num'rous progeny.
 Thou young and beauteous, my desires to bless;
 I, still desiring, what I still possess. (3.1.23-26)

Dryden's Adam is loving for the long haul. Desire does not die once he possesses Eve; rather it grows into a desire to learn more about such beauty and the person who embodies it. In Act 3's opening aubade, Adam gushes to Eve about how the earth moved when she brought to his arms her "Virgin Love" (31-34). God himself, "nodding" in approval, "shook the Firmament," while "Conscious Nature gave her glad consent" to sexual pleasure in a kind of triumphant masque:

Roses unbid, and ev'ry fragrant Flow'r,
 Flew from their stalks, to strow thy Nuptial Bower:
 The furr'd and feather'd kind, the triumph did pursue,
 And Fishes leapt above the streams, the passing Pomp to view. (3.1.34-38)

And Eve describes to Adam how blessing his desire to enjoy her beauty brings her to orgasm as well. Dryden borrows some of the language Milton's Adam used to describe how conversation with God left him "Dazl'd and spent" (*PL* 8.457) for Eve's description of her first sexual "extasie":

Eve. When your kind Eyes look'd languishing on mine,
 And wreathing Arms did soft embraces joyn,
 A doubtful trembling seiz'd me first all o'r;

Then, wishes; and a warmth, unknown before:
 What follow'd, was all extasie and trance;
 Immortal pleasures round my swimming eyes did dance,
 And speechless joys, in whose sweet tumult tost,
 I thought my Breath and my new Being lost (3.1.39-47)

Adam, in obedience to Eve's beauty, desires to enjoy her charms; when she submits to that desire, Eve experiences something like desire—"wishes"—which in turn brings her more ecstatic pleasure than any we hear of in *Paradise Lost*. Dryden employs an alexandrine in line 45, as if to invite us to bask a bit, at least rhetorically, in something like the "Immortal pleasures" she describes.³⁹ Dryden and Milton appear to agree on the power of female beauty, but Milton's poem responds to that power with fears and anxieties absent from *The State of Innocence*. Dryden's "blest pair" (*PL* 4.774; *State Of Innocence* 3.1.100) fall almost willingly from their state of innocence, and the poem allows us to admire Adam's sacrifice of immortality for love, without such narrated judgments as "compliance bad" and "fondly overcome" (*PL* 9.995 and 999).

One last comparative example of beauty's power in each poem could well be the exception that proves the rule just articulated above. Dryden's Lucifer responds to the sight of Adam and Eve's sexual bliss with jealousy, as if he were an injured lover bent on revenge:

Lucifer. Why have I not like these, a body too,
 Form'd for the same delights which they pursue?
 I could (so variously my passions move)
 Enjoy and blast her, in the act of love.

Unwillingly I hate such excellence;
 She wrong'd me not; but I revenge th'offence
 Through her, on Heav'n whose thunder took away
 My birth-right skyes! (3.1.92-98)

Lucifer, jilted by God, wants to revenge himself by raping Eve, and Dryden's Eve (unlike Milton's) truly is the "fairest of [the] great Creator's Works," a "Goddess" ordained by God to be "His softer Substitute on Earth" (2.3.29-31). To "enjoy" and destroy the most powerful beauty in Creation, the clearest human image of the Creator, would be revenge well aimed. Milton's Satan plots his revenge on God through both Adam and Eve, and he imagines it, not as violent rape, but ironically as a (perverse) bond of friendship, or even an unfortunate marriage—"mutual amitie so straight, so close,/That I with you must dwell, or you with me" (*PL* 4.376-77). A far more important difference, however, is that in Milton's poem, Eve's beauty threatens to take away Satan's fierce intent "with rapine sweet" (9.461). Not Eve, but her beauty, the power of her "Heav'nly forme" (457). Eve's intentions, as we noted in earlier examples, don't figure in this threatened aggression; she doesn't even know Satan is nearby:

Such Pleasure took the Serpent to behold
 This Flourie Plat, the sweet recess of Eve
 Thus earlie, thus alone; her Heav'nly forme
 Angelic, but more soft, and Feminine,
 Her graceful Innocence, her every Aire
 Of gesture or lest action overawd
 His Malice, and with rapine sweet bereav'd

His fierceness of the fierce intent it brought:
 That space the Evil one abstracted stood
 From his own evil, and for the time remaind
 Stupidly good, of enmitie disarm'd,
 Of guile, of hate, of envie, of revenge. (9.455-66)

Milton may have insisted on Adam's absolute authority and Eve's submission. Elsewhere his narrator is very clear that God's image shines more authentically in Adam than in his fair spouse, but here we are tempted to forget all that metaphysical blather. Face to face with evil, her beauty is clearly the most powerful thing in Creation. It's hard to imagine Satan being abstracted from his evil by looking at Adam. It certainly doesn't happen when he encounters Uriel, one of the seven brightest angels (*PL* 3.648-665). The narrator refers to "her Heav'nly forme" at line's end, with the briefest of pauses before the qualifying "Angelic" appears on the next line. As we read, and as Satan gazes, we already have supplied "Divine," before dropping our eyes to that next line. The poem displaces "Divine" or "Godlike" with "Angelic," but the echo does not die. I imagine that when he read this, Dryden appreciated how "soft, and Feminine" enhance beauty's power to the point where it can ravish "fierceness" from the fierce, and evil itself from "the Evil one." Dryden might have admired the power of female beauty as Milton first imagined it, but he allowed its possessor an agency Milton denied her, and he deemed such powerful beauty worthy of heroic song instead of fear, suspicion and blame. In the end, Milton chose not to celebrate beauty's power to overcome evil. He leaves that task to Satan who sings "Shee fair, divinely fair, fit Love for Gods" (*PL* 9.489), as if to celebrate female beauty is somehow Satanic, or as in Adam's case "effeminate."

Milton's narrator pours contempt on Adam's "choice to incur/ Divine displeasure for her sake, or Death" (9.992-93). What Eve calls a "glorious trial of exceeding Love,/ Illustrious evidence, example high," in other words, a heroic deed, the narrator dismisses as "compliance bad" (9.961-62, 994). The epic power of female beauty dwindles in the narrator's estimation to "Femal charm" (9.999) whose power renders Adam "effeminate" (11.634). Eve thinks Adam's choice heroic; we are tempted to think so too, but the narrator discourages any such sentiment. This is one of those places where the poem moves us one way, and the narrator, not entirely successfully, points another.

Having done away with a narrator, Dryden chooses the poem's path. When Lucifer begins his temptation speech with "Hail, Sovereign of this Orb! Form'd to possess/ The world, and, with one look, all nature bless," we are not to think he over-praises her, or allows his reason to be subject to passion (4.2.36-37). Adam, we recall, first responded to Eve's beauty with obedient love and laid at her feet "the whole Creation" (2.3.76-77). And disobedience does not deface her beauty or cloud it with flushes of distemper (*PL* 9.901, 887). Dryden's Adam corrects Eve's silly conviction that tasting the fruit has turned her into a goddess; she already is a goddess. The fruit, he says, has not strengthened her reason or improved her knowledge. But more important, disobedience has not dimmed her beauty: "you have beauty still, and I have love" (5.1.68). That beauty still commands him to love: "Not cozen'd, I, with choice, my life resign: / Imprudence was your fault, but love is mine" (5.1.69-70).

Imprudence—Dryden reduces Eve's transgression to something merely venial. At the same time he advances Adam's transgression to something like the heroic status Milton's Eve believed it to be. He ventures death for her, in obedience to her beauty. Not

“compliance bad,” but obedience, and to her beauty and the love it prompts, not to God. That his deed brings death into the world, with all our woe, doesn’t really tarnish its heroic quality. The same love beauty commanded when they first met will also repair the ruin of death brought on by Adam’s willingness to venture death for love. How will obedience to beauty accomplish this? Dryden allows this to remain a mystery. As Barbara Lewalski observes, there is not even a whiff of redemption theology or soteriology in Dryden’s poem (159). Raphael promises that the human race will revive, escape death’s dominion and live eternally “in deathless pleasures,” but we are not told how (5.4.223). Dryden was more content than Milton for his faith to remain mysterious.

In fact, it’s not at all clear to what Dryden’s poem attributes the salvation of the human race, but it invites us quite confidently to embrace Eve’s notion that the fall was quite a good thing, for it enables heaven to turn evil into good: “Ravish’d with Joy, I can but half repent/ The sin which Heav’n makes happy in th’event” (5.4.235-36). It also implies that Adam’s heroic disobedience to the divine interdiction, which was obedience to beauty’s command to love, proves that human beings are not puppets of necessity. Without heroic disobedience, human obedience could never be distinguished from fate, or what Adam calls “the chain which limits men/ To act what is unchangeably forecast,/ Since the first cause gives motion to the last” (4.1.53-56). In this Dryden appears more committed than Milton’s narrator to the Miltonic conviction that good means nothing without the presence of evil, and virtue without the temptation of vice is nothing but a “fugitive and cloister’d virtue,” unworthy to be praised (*Areopagitica* 514-15).

When Dryden praises the Duchess’ beauty in heroic terms borrowed from *Paradise Lost*, he hails her as “Mother of Mankind” and mother of God combined:

Providence has done Justice to it self, in placing the most perfect
 Workmanship of Heaven, where it may be admir'd by all Beholders. Had
 the Sun and Stars been seated lower, their Glory had not been
 communicated to all at once; and the Creator had wanted so much of His
 Praise, as He had made Your condition more obscure. (*Works* 12.84)

Dryden here echoes Milton's Satan who claimed that Eve's "Celestial Beautie" was "best beheld/ Where universally admir'd" rather than alone in "this enclosure wild" (*PL* 9.540-43). But Dryden, unlike Satan, is sincere. MPs in the Commons were afraid to have such a woman so near the crown, but Dryden boldly celebrates it because he wants to believe, just as Lord Peterborough believed, that she could wield her heavenly beauty as a power for good:

But He has plac'd You so near a Crown, that You add a Lustre to it by
 Your Beauty. You are join'd to a Prince who only could deserve You:
 whose Conduct, Courage, and Success in War, whose Fidelity to His
 Royal Brother, whose Love for His Country, whose Constancy to His
 Friends, whose Bounty to His Servants, whose Justice to Merit, whose
 Inviolable Truth, and whose Magnanimity in all His Actions, seem to have
 been rewarded by Heaven by the Gift of You. You are never seen but You
 are blest: and I am sure You bless all those who see You. (*Works* 12.84)

Of course, heroic beauty failed to restore England to a state of Paradise, or even moral uprightness, let alone heroic dignity. James and Charles survived the Exclusion Crisis, thanks to the Tory reaction this poem anticipates so confidently. But in the end, James II became increasingly absolutist and his relations with the political nation

deteriorated, despite the stunning beauty of Queen Maria Beatrice. Not long after she bore him a son and Catholic heir on June 10, 1688, he was harried from the throne and replaced by the Protestants William and Mary. Was Dryden naïve to believe in the power of female beauty to save the Restoration settlement and the Stuart dynasty? Perhaps, but versions of this heroic naiveté live on today.

Dartmouth College

Notes

¹ Steven N. Zwicker, “Composing a Literary Life: Introduction,” in Zwicker, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to John Dryden* (Cambridge, 2004), 3. In the dedication of *Aureng Zebe* to John Sheffield, 3rd Earl of Musgrave, Dryden does, in fact, state his ambition to write an epic poem. He says he has talked about the project with King Charles and his brother, and welcomes an opportunity to do so again. His plan is to represent the King “and his Royal Brother” as “the Heroes of the Poem” in the discreet guise of “their Warlike Predecessors” (*The Works of John Dryden* Volume 12, Ed. Vinton A. Dearing (Berkeley, Calif, 1994), 154-55. The Royal Brothers are also suggested by Boabdelin and Almanzor in both parts of *The Conquest of Granada* (1670-71, 1672) and as Hector and Troilus in *Troilus and Cressida* (1679). Dates for plays are, first the date of first performance, then the date of publication, unless they are the same. The California Dryden is referred to throughout as *Works* by volume and page or by act, scene and line in the case of drama.

² Patterson, “Dryden and Political Allegiance,” in Zwicker, ed., *Companion*, 222.

³ *Paradise Lost in Ten Books*, 1667; *Paradise Regain'd* and *Samson Agonistes*, 1671; *Paradise Lost* in twelve books, 1674. Milton dies in 1674.

⁴ Jackson I. Cope pointed out some time ago how liable Dryden's heroic plays, even his best ones, are to satirical treatment; see his "Paradise Regained: Inner Ritual," in *Milton Studies* 1 (1969): 51-60. Eric Rothstein (*Restoration Tragedy* [Madison, Wisc., 1967], 24-76) reminded us even earlier that the popular attack upon heroic plays came swift and included many more satirists than Milton's heroic poems and Buckingham's *The Rehearsal*. John Evelyn's wife marveled that *The Conquest* could represent love "so pure," and "valour so nice" in an age she characterized as "the decline of morality" (*Diary and Correspondence of John Evelyn, F.R.S* in 4 Volumes, ed. William Bray [London, 1852] Volume 4, 25). Paul Stevens astutely reminds us how even the most serious of intentions can morph into satire given the political contexts in which things are written and read. See his "Lament for a Nation? Milton's *Readie and Easie Way* and the Turn to Satire" in Laura Lunger Knoppers, ed. *The Oxford Handbook of Literature and the English Revolution* (Oxford, 2012), 602-607.

⁵ Milton, *Areopagitica* in Don M. Wolfe et al. eds., *Complete Prose Works of John Milton* (New Haven, 1953-1982), 2.551. *The Readie and Easie Way* in YP 7 (Revised) 407. This edition of Milton's prose is referred to throughout as YP by volume and page numbers. It is good to remember that the republican experiments of 1649-1660 were never popular. The army imposed and enforced a constitution whose legitimacy dwindled with every passing year. The Rump Parliament had no more than a whiff of illegitimacy, and the Nominated Assembly of 1653 had virtually none.

⁶ Marcie Frank provides a succinct overview of critical commentary up until the early 1990s; see "Staging Criticism, Staging Milton: John Dryden's *The State of Innocence*," *The Eighteenth Century* 54 (1993) 51-53. Since then, the most significant pieces have

been by Candy B. K. Schille, “The Two Faces of Eve: ‘Milton’s Pamela,’ Dryden’s Shamela,’ and *The State of Innocence, New Perspectives on the Eighteenth Century* 3 (2006): 10-20; Jennifer Airey, “Eve’s Nature, Eve’s Nurture in Dryden’s Edenic Opera,” *Studies in English Literature* 50 (2010): 529-44, both of which offer much-needed feminist perspectives, and Steven Zwicker, “Milton, Dryden, and the Politics of Literary Controversy.” In Gerald MacLean, ed., *Culture and Society in the Stuart Restoration: Literature, Drama, History* (Cambridge, 1995), 137-58. I shall take issue with the latter in what follows.

⁷ Nathaniel Lee refers to Milton as “the dead Bard” in his prefatory poem, “To Mr. Dryden, on his Poem of Paradise” printed in the 1677 edition (omitted from the California Dryden), though Milton was still alive when Dryden composed it in 1673.

⁸ But see Sarah Van der Laan, “Milton’s Odyssean Ethics: Homeric Allusions and Arminian Thought in *Paradise Lost*” in *Milton Studies* 49 (2009): 49-76.

⁹ See the *Facsimile of the Manuscript of Milton’s Minor Poems, preserved in the library of Trinity College, Cambridge* (Cambridge, 1899), which contains notes for proposed poems on ancient British, biblical and Scottish themes. See also the opening pages of the second book of *The Reason of Church Government* in YP 1.810-17.

¹⁰ [Paradise Lost 1.1, 4-5](#) and [9.26](#). All quotations from Milton’s poetry are from *The John Milton Reading Room* online at http://www.dartmouth.edu/~milton/reading_room/contents/text.shtml (1997-2015).

¹¹ Patterson goes so far as to claim there is “nothing in either the tone of *Astraea Redux* or its direct statements [to] suggest that Dryden now saw the Restoration as the rebirth of a heroic era” (“Dryden and Political Allegiance,” 225).

¹² The phrase is Milton's; he believed the responsibility of a national poet was "to inbreed and cherish in a great people the seeds of vertu, and publick civility" (*The Reason of Church Government* Book Two, YP 1.816). Dryden embraced much the same sense of himself as Poet Laureate, believing he was tasked with instructing "greatest men" in the ways of virtue: "The feign'd Heroe inflames the true: and the dead virtue animates the living. Since...the World is govern'd by precept and Example;...that kind of Poesy which excites to virtue the greatest men, is of greatest use to human kind" (*Works* 11.3).

¹³ Montezuma and Cortez are competing heroes of *The Indian Emperor* (1665, 1667); Almanzor is the hero of *The Conquest of Granada* (1670-71, 1672); Ferdinand is the victorious king of *The Conquest of Granada* and Boabdelin the loser; Aureng Zebe, a south Asian Indian, is the hero of *Aureng Zebe* (1675, 1676). Though *Aureng Zebe* is usually called Dryden's last heroic play (Zwicker, "Composing a Literary Life," x), I would argue that his lifelong quest for a proper heroic subject and properly heroic verse form continues in works like *All for Love* (1677, 1678) and *Troilus and Cressida* (1679).

¹⁴ It is tempting to argue that the real hero of *Annus Mirabilis*, strategically hidden in plain sight amongst the crowd, is James, "Victorious York" (line 73), who, as Royal Admiral, commanded the surviving, but hardly victorious, fleets of both Albemarle (Moncke) and Prince Rupert. Unlike the subsequent battles fought by the General and the Prince, James's triumph at Lowestoft was a clear victory for the English. Dryden's "Verses to Her Highness the Dutchess," which immediately precede the poem, remind us of this. With the dedication in 1672 of *The Conquest of Granada*, Dryden is ready to be explicit: "the most glorious victory which was gain'd by our Navy in that war, was in that first engagement [Lowestoft].... All our achievements against them afterwards, though

we sometimes conquer'd and were never overcome, were but a copy of that victory: and they still fell short of their original" (*Works* 11.5).

¹⁵ John Miller, *James II* (New Haven, 2000) 64.

¹⁶ *Last Instructions to a Painter* 50-57, in Nigel Smith, ed., *The Poems of Andrew Marvell* (Harlow, England, 2003), 370

¹⁷ The secret treaty, agreed to by Charles and James, obliged France to assist England financially so that it could wage war on the Dutch Republic without calling Parliament; as part of the treaty King Charles II promised to return himself and the English people to the Roman Catholic Church.

¹⁸ *Plays, Poems, and Miscellaneous Writings associated with George Villiers, Second Duke of Buckingham*, Volume 1, Ed. Robert D. Hume and Harold Love. From 1668, when he was officially made Poet Laureate, until 1685, Dryden proudly proclaimed himself on the title pages of his serious plays, "Servant to His Majesty," even though no one would have recognized any of his heroes as a representation of Charles.

¹⁹ N.A.M. Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean: A Naval History of Britain 1649-1815* (New York, 2004), 85.

²⁰ According to Rodger, "The Duke of York called de Ruyter 'the greatest [admiral] that ever to that time was in the world'" (85).

²¹ Dryden included quite a successful soliloquy in blank verse for Lucifer in *State of Innocence* 2.2. With *All for Love* he finally bids farewell to his now shopworn and discredited rhyme. Even as early as *Aureng Zebe*, he sounds ready to declare that Milton was right about rhyme, as he was about so many other matters concerning the heroic.

²² Zwicker argues, convincingly, that “Milton shaped his brief epic [*Paradise Regain’d*] as an answer to and a refutation of the heroic drama: its rhyming couplets, its bombast and cant, its aristocratic code of virtue and honor, its spectacle and rhetoric, its scenes and stage machines, its exotic lands and erotic intrigues, its warring heroes and virgin queens, its exaltation of passion and elevation of empire,” but he declines to consider that Dryden’s poetic practice was positively influenced by Milton’s earlier epic (Zwicker, “Milton, Dryden, and the Politics of Literary Controversy,” 139-40).

²³ I am grateful here for Paul Stevens’ meditations on Miltonic “condescension” and its afterlife in Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* at the Eleventh International Milton Symposium in Exeter, England in July 2015.

²⁴ Anchtel Grey, ed. *Debates of the House of Commons From the Year 1667 to the Year 1694* Volume 2 (London, 1764), 282.

²⁵ Henry Mordaunt, Earl of Peterborough, *Succinct Genealogies of the Noble and Ancient Houses* (London, 1685), 429.

²⁶ Dante Alighieri, *Paradiso* translated with a commentary by Charles S. Singleton (Princeton, 1975), Commentary 3.

²⁷ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Translated by Frank Justus Miller (Cambridge, Mass, 1977), 3.402-510.

²⁸ The poem at various points expects us to see Eve as desirable to plants, flowers, a serpent, devils and angels alike, as if gazing on female beauty were not ever a matter of gender.

²⁹ For Milton’s use of the word “looks” in this sense, see *PL* 4.291.

³⁰ John Guillory, "Milton, Narcissism, Gender: On the Genealogy of Male Self-Esteem," in Christopher Kendrick, ed. *Critical Essays on John Milton* (New York, 1995), 165-193. See also *PL* 4.292-93. In *Tetrachordon*, Milton glosses Genesis 1:27's "image of God" as "Wisdom, Purity, Justice, and rule over all creatures" (587).

³¹ See her portrait in men's hunting dress by Simon Verelst in Brett Dolman, *Beauty, Sex, and Power: A Story of Debauchery and Decadent Art at the Late Stuart Court (1660-1714)* (London, 2012), inside title page.

³² Anthony Welch. "Losing Paradise in Dryden's *State of Innocence*." In Charles W. Durham and Kristin A. Pruitt, eds. *Uncircumscribed Mind: Reading Milton Deeply* (Selinsgrove, Penn, 2008), 222-242.

³³ See *Tetrachordon* in *YP* 2.596-97. And see Schille's similar remark (13).

³⁴ See the Chorus in *Samson Agonistes*, 1003-1007 and Belial's speech in *PR* 2.153-71.

³⁵ Alexander Nehamas uses exactly the same language to describe the way a person's beauty affects him: "the desire to draw near," to "come close to you, "to possess beauty" in *Only a Promise of Happiness: The Place of Beauty in a World of Art* (Princeton, 2007), 53-55.

³⁶ Jean Gagen, "Anomalies in Eden: Adam and Eve in Dryden's *The State of Innocence*" in Albert C. Labriola and Edward Sichi, Jr., eds. *Milton's Legacy in the Arts*. (University Park, 1988), 142.

³⁷ See *PL* 4.297-311, where their looks are said to declare their respective roles.

³⁸ Adam's expectation that by obeying beauty's call to erotic love, he will learn about things not yet understood comes uncannily close to the way Nehamas describes the power of beauty to initiate learning: "What we can say ... is never enough to explain the

beauty that marks the object of love, and that makes love inseparable from wanting to learn” (72). And “there is more to learn about the object before me that is valuable in ways I can’t now specify” (76).

³⁹ Many thanks to Ivy Schweitzer for pointing out the alexandrine here. See also the “immortal nuptials” promised to Damon in *Epitaphium Damonis* (215-19) and the promise of “Elysian dew.” In *A Mask at Ludlow* (888-1011).