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*Abstract: This paper discusses patriarchs and their households in Milton’s Paradise Lost. What are the roles of a patriarch? What makes a successful one? Did Adam fail as a patriarch and ultimately cause the Fall of Man? What do patriarchal relationships look like now? And how does reason and free will complicate all of this? This paper addresses all those questions and more and argues that the patriarchy was not flawed before the fall, did not cause the fall, but is broken now and will consistently fail.*

Patriarchy in Milton’s Eden and Beyond

In Milton’s *Paradise Lost* there are several hierarchical relationships including one between God and Man, one between God and the heavenly beings, as well as one between Adam and Eve. In each of these relationships, there is a clear structure and order. For instance, in the relationship between God and Man, God has complete knowledge and authority over Man. However, with this authority God chooses to give man a free will which ultimately leads to sin entering the world. Using the terms of this class, this could be considered a patriarchal relationship with God being the patriarch, and if Milton ascribes to the Christian faith, that will make God the ultimate model for what a “good” patriarch should be. There is a second patriarchal relationship in the story: the relationship between Adam and Eve, the two created beings on Earth. At the time of their creation, God establishes Adam as the patriarch in their marriage. If it can be said that Milton is commenting on the patriarchy between a husband and a wife, Milton’s *Paradise Lost* depicts the patriarchy before the Fall as good. However, because of the Fall, the structure is flawed and will have negative implications for the rest of mankind.

Before addressing the patriarchal relationship between Adam and Eve, which is the focus of this paper, it is important to consider Milton’s model for a patriarchy. Assuming Milton was a Christian and assuming that he wrote *Paradise Lost* based on the creation story from the Bible, that would make God the ultimate and perfect father or patriarch, so for the purposes of this paper, God will serve as the reference point for what it means to be a patriarch. One of the primary characteristics of God in *Paradise Lost* is that of a creator; Adam and Eve are his creation. As a creator, God specifically gave his creation free will. Bill Caudell. in his paper “Humanity as Art”, explores what it means for God to be a creator, why God created human beings the way he did, and how that relates to the fall. At one point Caudill discusses free will. He references the following lines from Milton’s *Paradise Lost* “They trespass, Authors to themselves in all/ Both what they and what they choose; for so/ I form’d them free, and free they must remain” (*Paradise Lost III:* 122-124) to show that God intended humans to be the authors of their own lives; they “are in charge of their own fates” as Caudell describes it. (Caudell 5). Applying this to the patriarchy, God intentionally does not completely control creation, which if following the patriarchal analogy would be his household; he has found value in allowing them to make their own choices, write their own lives, and experience the fallout of their actions whether they be good or bad. Along with this, God loves his creation. This is evidenced in the fact that he sees them as good, gives them the beautiful garden of Eden to cultivate, and following their fall, desires their redemption. This is the model for what is a “good” patriarch: He gives life via creation, He provides for his household via the garden of Eden, and He allows His household to have free will while at the same time providing warnings and information to help them make their decisions, which can be seen in God telling Adam and Eve not to eat from the tree of knowledge. These are a few of the base characteristics displayed in Milton’s God and model of a patriarch.

Milton shows that the patriarchal relationship between Adam and Eve in his epic poem *Paradise Lost* is good through the happiness and delight of both parties involved. If this were a toxic and destructive relationship then either Adam or Eve would feel the repercussions of that relationship, but throughout the poem, neither one indicates that they are unsatisfied or feel degraded; they are genuinely happy and overjoyed with each other. Eve fully understands her role in the partnership saying, “O thou for whom/ And from whom I was form’d flesh of thy flesh,/ And without whom am to no end, my Guide” (Book IV: 440-442) which she then follows by saying “And daily thanks, I chiefly who enjoy/ So far the happier Lot, enjoying thee” (Book IV: 446-447). This shows that prior to the fall she was content and enjoyed her relationship with Adam. Furthermore, even Satan acknowledges that the relationship between Adam and Eve is good, commenting on their embrace, “Sight hateful, sight tormenting! This there two/ Imparadis’t in one another’s arms/ The happier *Eden*, shall enjoy thir fill/ Of bliss on bliss, while I to Hell am thrust,” (Book IV: 505-508). Both examples show that this relationship was initially a healthy and successful one. This indicates that Milton believes the marital relationship of Adam and Eve was beautiful, produced a joyful couple, and is something to be desired.

Even though Adam and Eve ultimately fell into temptation, Milton does not attribute this to a flaw within the patriarchy, rather, it is a result of the actions of Adam and Eve individually. The first evidence that flaws within the patriarchal structure were not necessarily the cause of the fall can be seen through the fact that Adam, in his place of leadership, sought to be mindful of potential dangers and warn Eve of them. He tells Eve about the tree in Book IV saying, “So various not to taste that only Tree/Of Knowledge, planted by the Tree of Life.” (Book IV: 422-424). Adam follows these instructions with encouragement and a reason not to disobey “Then let us not think hard/ One easy prohibition, who enjoy/ Free leave so large to all things else, and choice/ Unlimited of manifold delights.” (Book IV: 432-435). He has done his duty as a patriarch by informing his partner of what is going on around them, detailed what is expected of them, and models and leads her by his response of obedience. On top of this, Adam does not allow this to be the only time that he discusses this with Eve. In Book V, Eve has a dream where she is tempted. When she awakes from this dream, she informs Adam. He takes this opportunity to empathize with her, “The trouble of thy thoughts this night in sleep/affects me equal; nor can I like/ This Uncouth dream, of evil sprung I fear;” (Book V: 96-98), as well as encourage and guide her in her fear saying, “Yet evil whence? In thee can harbor none,/ Created pure. But know that in the Soul/ Are many lesser faculties that serve/ Reason as chief;” (Book V: 99-101). He reminds Eve that she has the faculties of reason and can make her own choices. Essentially, he tells Eve how she can stay away from Eve; he encourages her to do what she is capable of. There is not much else that you can expect from a leader who is not oppressive. Further, Adam continues to try to be a good leader for Eve and protect them both; in Book IX, right before the Fall, Adam makes one more warning saying, “But God left free the Will, for what obeys/Reason, is free, and Reason he made right,/ But bid her well beware, and still erect.” (Book IX: 350-352). He follows this final warning by pleading with her not to separate. Overall, Adam did everything outside of tyranny to be what is considered a good leader and protect Eve, showing that it may not be a failed patriarchy that caused the fall.

Milton shows that the Fall was a result of flaws within Adam and Eve separately; it was their flaws as humans that caused evil to enter the world. As seen earlier through Adam’s warning to Eve, both parties possess that faculties of reason. They are in control of their own actions and decisions. Milton does not blame a flawed system in his commentary on the Fall; rather, he blames the people and evil involved. Further evidence, that the Fall is not the result of the patriarchy comes through Satan’s rejoicing at finding Eve alone. As he is searching for them in the garden he says, “He sought them both, but wish’d his hap might find/ Eve separate, he wish’d, but not with hope/ Of what so seldom chanc’d, when to his wish, / Beyond his hope, Eve separate he spies,” (Book IX: 421-424). Adam and Eve are a lot stronger together than they are apart. Satan hoped they would be separate because he knew that’s when they were at their weakest. It’s Eve’s own flaws and weakness that allow her to be tempted and to give in; there’s not a connection to the patriarchy here. As seen earlier Adam did everything in his power to equip Eve, but ultimately, it was her own actions that led to the Fall not some flaw within the system.

However, even if the patriarchy was not flawed before the Fall, it certainly is afterwards and will continue to a broken system for the rest of humanity. One of the first reasons for this is because the desire to prioritize oneself above your partner has entered the relationship. Immediately following her consumption of the forbidden fruit, Eve seeks to bring Adam into sin with her even if it means his death or suffering. She says “Confirm’d then I resolve,/ Adam shall share with me in bliss or woe:/ So dear I love him, that with him all deaths/ I could endure, without him live no life” (Book IX: 830-833). She claims to love him here, but true unselfish love would seek to protect that person and ensure their safety and happiness; in this instance Eve is thinking only of herself. Adam eats the fruit with Eve out of his own free will. Just like Eve, he has knowledge and reason and was not forced to eat the fruit; he willingly accepts. This does not mean that Adam and Eve possessed sinful and selfish desires on their own before eating the fruit; they were existing in a state of purity. However, when faced with evil and temptation, they disobeyed and thus now have fallen away from that pure state and have personal knowledge of and desire to do evil. Now that selfish motivations have entered the picture, relationships will struggle to have the pure unblemished love that Adam and Eve once shared and as a result will be riddled with conflict and brokenness. Further reason that the patriarchy will be flawed following the Fall comes from the fact as a punishment Adam and Eve and all their descendants have been cursed by God. One of these curses specifically addresses the marital relationship and the nature of the roles within it. The happiness that Eve once had under Adam’s headship is now gone; she will experience a desire to rule over Adam and thus will bring disunity into their previously peaceful relationship. God tells Eve that “In sorrow forth, and to thy Husband’s will/ Thine shall submit, hee over thee shall rule.” (Book X: 195-196). The way this curse is phrased also indicates that the nature of Adam’s headship has changed; it appears that, in this curse, he is no longer a leader in an equal relationship, but there will be a semblance of rulership that was not previously there. Both this curse and the entering of selfish desire into the world means that the patriarchal relationship will be flawed and will not bring the harmony and happiness that it once could.

In conclusion, while the patriarchal relationship between a husband and wife is flawed now, it was not flawed before the Fall. There is no indication that Milton believes that the Fall was the fault of anything else but the individual actions of both Adam and Eve. This is shown through the emphasis he places on the capacities of free will and reason in Adam and Eve as well as through his emphasis on their personal happiness before the Fall. Along with this, in comparison to God as the model patriarch, Adam fulfils this duty prior to the fall. He loves Eve, cares for her, warns her of the dangers, and reminds her of how she can use reason to overcome it. They fall not because of the patriarchy or because of Adam’s handling of his patriarchal duties, but because of their individual choices. However, because of sin and the curses placed on mankind, the patriarchy, like any other institution, will now consistently fail. The current patriarchy is flawed. Sin, pride, and self-centeredness will plague Adam and Eve and all their descendants for the rest of time.

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