The Birth of Eve in Fuseli's, Blake's, Groom's and Petrina's Illustrations of Paradise Lost

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Received April 07, 2017; Revised July 24, 2017; Accepted July 27, 2017; Published August 10, 2017.

Abstract:
In this paper, we are going to analyze how Milton's Eve has been illustrated by Fuseli, Blake, Groom and Petrina. The purpose is to see to what extent the artists reflect, challenge or write back to the text they are illustrating. This study focuses on the way the four illustrators have presented the moment of Eve's creation. Blake and Fuseli illustrated the poem at the end of the 18th and at the beginning of the 19th century. Petrina and Groom, two women artists, illustrated Paradise Lost in 1930s. The four illustrators' depictions of Eve are informed by different cultural discourses and gender ideologies dominant at the time they were produced.

Keywords: Eve, Paradise Lost, Milton, Illustration, Blake, Fuseli, Groom, Petrina.

1. Introduction
Illustrations bring to the verbal text a new coloring and serve as pictorial commentary on and critical contribution to it. The message of the verbal text is not only mirrored but also expanded, overstated, understated, challenged and reproduced in the illustrations. Spinozzi argues that "visual renditions are expressions of an aesthetic and ideological project aimed at exploring the potentialities of illustration as an interart genre" (2014, p.270). Hamburger in "The iconicity of script" highlights the power of the image compared to that of the written word (2011, p.250). Nikolajeva, notes that the interaction between word and image is "so rich and so promising in its ability to penetrate and unlock the intricacies" of the message that is supposed to be imparted to the reader (2000, p.238). From this point of view, the evolution of a poem like Paradise Lost owes much to the way it has been adapted in visual media; the focus in this article is on illustration as a visual medium through which Eve has been recreated differently.

A historical survey of different visual renditions of PL reveals that each historical period has read the poem with a different lens; hence the artists of different periods, responding to their social milieu, have magnified certain aspects of the poem and marred others. Stead and Védrine quote from Jean-Louis Haquette in their "Editorial" and testify to this assertion when they state that images in books "obey dominant schemes, and are strongly informed by the Biblical or iconographical tradition, as the illustrations of Milton's PL aptly exemplify " (2014, p.179).

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Illustrations therefore, are not engendered by the personal genius of the artist, but by the conventions and cultural codes dominant in society.

*PL* has served as the preliminary scenario in the hands of illustrators who manipulate its setting and characters. The agency is sometimes given to God the Father, sometimes to God the Son, Satan is demonized in one illustration and heroized in another, Adam and Eve may occupy either the central position attracting the viewer’s sympathy or the marginal spaces, swept afar from the viewer and minimized by the domineering luxurious landscape of paradise. All these different framings, settings and characterizations are formed within a web of discursive practices circulating in the social context in which the illustrator of *PL* has lived.

In this article, the focus is on the Creation of Eve and how the scene has been represented in Blake's, Fuseli's, Groom's and Petrina's illustrations. Illustrators have been chosen with regard to their contemporaneity, their gender, and the social and political contexts. Blake and Fuseli both illustrated *PL* during the last decade of the 18th and the first decade of the 19th century, that is, their affair with Milton took place in the heat of French Revolution and romanticism. Blake was born in London and lived in London; Fuseli was born in Zurich but abode in London. Mary E. Groom was a British engraver and a member of the English Wood Engraving Society, she is known for the engravings she produced for a 1937 edition of Milton's *PL*. The last illustrator is Carlotta Petrina, the American illustrator of *PL* who illustrated the poem in 1930s, in Italy during the reign of fascism.

*PL* iconography has been analyzed from different perspectives. Thomas Anderson in “‘All Things Visible in Heaven, or Earth’: Reading the Illustrations of the 1688 Edition of *Paradise Lost*” claims that Medina tries to depict Eve as autonomous while the poem “wants her to be a silent subject of other’s discourse and desire” (2004, p. 163). In “The 1688 *Paradise Lost* and Dr. Aldrich,” Suzanne Boorsch does not treat the interrelationship between illustration and text, but is mainly concerned with the authorship of the unsigned illustrations.

The relation between Adam and Eve has been dealt with by Stephen A. Raynie in “Francis Hayman Reading *Paradise Lost* in the 1740s.” He argues that Hayman’s designs for *PL* reveal a gradually widening gap between Adam and Eve in the course of their relationship (2004, p. 546).

Stephen C. Behrendt in *The Moment of Explosion: Blake and the Illustration of Milton* argues that Blake upholds Messiah as the center of Milton’s *PL*. Kester Svendsen in “John Martin and the Expulsion Scene of *Paradise Lost*” refers to the heroic stature of Satan who seems to be at the peak of his power in pandemonium. Atashi and Anushiravani in "Paradise Lost Dressed in the Costume of History: John Martin’s Rendition of *Paradise Lost*" offer a new historical reading of John Martin’s illustrations of *PL* land trace the Darwinian discourse of struggle for survival and the colonial discourse of the civilizing mission in Martin’s mezzotints. Space has also been considered from an ecological perspective by Diane Kelsey McCool in *A Gust for Paradise: Milton’s Eden and the Visual Arts*. McCool is specifically concerned with the depictions of the Garden of Eden in illuminated manuscripts, paintings, frescoes and prints.

Wendy Furman Adams and Virginia Tufte in an article entitled “Metaphysical Tears: Carlotta Petrina’s Illustration of the Expulsion Scene”, comment on the fragility of Adam and Eve in Petrina’s illustrations. Petrina, according to Furman et al, seems to be intent on depicting Adam and Eve as equals, suffering from the same tragic fate. Furman and Tufte in another article “Pleasing Was His Shape, and Lovely: The Serpent With Eve and Adam in Art before Milton and in Revision by Three Twentieth Century Women” trace the Serpent in the biblical illustrations; they also go through the works of Carlotta Petrina, Mary Groom and Alexis Smith and reveal the
way they defy the misogynistic approach of the former artists (1999, p. 129). In another article entitled “With Other Eyes: Legacy and Innovation in Four Artists Revisions of the Dinner Party in Paradise Lost” Furman and Tufte discuss the different ways John Baptist Medina, William Blake, Carlotta Petrina and Mary Groom have depicted the dinner party in PL. Furman and Tufte have also written an article on Fuseli’s illustrations of PL which is entitled “Anticipating Empson: Henry Fuseli’s Revision of Milton’s God.” In it, they argue that Fuseli’s focus on Satan takes place at the cost of eliminating God and Messiah.

These works contribute greatly to research related to PL iconography; however, The moment of Eve’s creation has not been considered in previous research. In PL, Eve is created by Milton and God, more as a gendered being rather than a human figure. The way different illustrators have treated the moment of Eve’s creation in different historical moments deserves attention. Each artist offers his/her own version of Eve/God relationship in his/her own context.

2. Creation of Eve in Milton’s Paradise Lost

The Creation of Eve has been recounted twice in PL: The first account is given by Eve herself in Book 4, and the second is related by Adam to Raphael in Book 8. The two accounts indicate subtle nuances that reveal striking differences between the characters of Eve and Adam. Having been lectured by Adam about how generous and praiseworthy God is and how important it is for them to shun the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, unaware of the lurking presence of Satan, Eve remembers the moment when she found herself “repos’d/Under a shade of flours, much wondering where/And what I was, whence thither brought, and how” (Book 4, LL. 450-51). She finds a lake which is to her, another sky; she finds a fair shape in water and does not recognize that it is her own reflection and pines with a vain desire for the fair watery image. A voice warns her that it is herself that she sees in water and asks her to follow him. More than often does she use passive verbs to describe her reactions to what goes on around her. Unlike Adam, who after being created begins an active search for answers to his innumerable questions, Eve is more reactive and is led by voices, and simply yields to imperatives. Bowers describes Eve as a "feeling" and Adam as a "reasoning creature" and proceeds to chart their contrasting reactions to the world: "she sees life by reflection, he directly. Thus she looks to God through him, as in a mirror, while he in his contemplation addresses God without intermediary” (1969, p. 266). In PL, Milton takes pain to give both Adam and Eve divine grandeur but makes it clear that partaking of the divine grandeur is a matter of degree because Adam has direct access to divinity but Eve’s contact with God has to be conducted through Adam: “Hee for God only, shee for God in him” (Book 4, L. 299). Thickstun reviews the critics who believe that Milton’s Eve is inferior to Adam and explains that such an outlook is caused by the fact that Eve has nobody to educate, thus her position in the didactic hierarchy would be considered as unjustly inferior to that of Adam (2007, p.138).

Adam’s lengthier account of Eve’s birth takes place in the form of a long conversation with Raphael. Adam reviews his argument with God and describes how his request was granted: he falls asleep after being “streind to the highth/In that celestial Colloquie sublime” (Book 8, LL. 444-45); his internal sight that he calls fancy however, is left open to see how Eve is created. The scene is described in terms of a caesarean the wide wound of which is filled up with flesh and healed presently. Adam opens his eyes and beholds Eve being led by the unseen creator. Seeing Adam, Eve turns away because as she herself recounted, she found Adam "less faire,/ Less winning soft, less amiablie milde,/ Then that smooth watry image” (Book 4, LL.477-80). Adam, however,
amends the story slightly and attributes Eve’s turning away to her “Innocence and Virgin Modestie” (Book 8, L. 501). This revision reveals aspects of Eve’s character that Adam refuses to acknowledge, Eve is more eager to see her own reflection mirrored in water than to mirror back Adam’s requirements, she has a degree of self-consciousness and a series of desires the depth and contours of which are beyond the reach of Adam.

When analyzing the illustrations, the moments chosen by illustrators must be taken into consideration: Which account of Eve’s creation is more apt to be represented in the illustrations? Eve’s account or Adam’s account? or both? Are Adam and Eve depicted as equals or is “Hee for God only, shee for God in him”? or shee for God only, hee for God in her? and what implications would each approach have in the historical moment that occasioned the illustrations?

3. Henry Fuseli’s Creation of Eve

Henry Fuseli illustrated PL in the last decade of the 18th century. He sets the encounter between Eve and God in a dark atmosphere. Fuseli opts for a vertical framing and thus arranges the moment of creation in a hierarchical order (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006, p.57). The contrast between the deity and the human figures becomes visible through the manipulation of rhythmical lines and color scheme. Adam, Eve and the Creator are positioned along a vertical axis in a bleak, decontextualized setting. The degree of contextualization is a major determinant of truth modality (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006, p.161). Kress and Van Leeuwen note that the presence or absence of setting offers a higher or lower modality of truth. The absence of background connotes generality; a human figure in an empty background has no individuality and the scene is not one of particularity but one of universality (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006, 158). Therefore, the defenseless Adam lying on the ground, the newly created Eve stretching her body perpendicular to Adam and subserviently praying to an inattentive Creator, and the stony deity are forming a universal pattern of miscommunication (figure 1). Particular uses of color scheme, Kress and Van Leeuwen assert, produce different degrees of reality (Ibid). Color differentiation refers to the use of a diversified range of colors. The more diversified the range, the higher the modality. The skin color of the two human figures, the black color of the background and the iron gray of the deity form the entire scale of color differentiation in this illustration. The spotlighted body of Adam and Eve, foregrounded in a decontextualized bleak paradise, summarize the salient points of the scene of creation: human beings abandoned in a world of gloom. No effort has been made to give the setting an aura of the pre-lapsarian paradisal bliss. Other determinants of salience in this picture are the dramatic curves of Adam and Eve’s bodies, forming the core of organic matter in the scene. The lifelike effect and flexible curvatures of Adam and Eve are intensified when juxtaposed with the angularity of the deity’s torso at the top of the picture. The deity is wearing armor with a pattern of angular lines crossing each other, and his blank eyes are directed away. Armor-plated, the deity avoids eye contact with the appealing Eve; the arrogant deity remains untouched and untouchable.
Figure 1. Henry Fuseli, “The Creation of Eve,” Oil on canvas, 1793 (New Arts Library).

Eve, fully awake, taking pains to stretch her body toward the creator is more like a prophet bridging the gap between the human and the divine. Her attached hands form a triangular vector leading the eye to the upper part of the picture which is the divine abode. Eve's body is vertically curved and Adam's body is horizontally curved, as a result, the binary between Eve's verticality and Adam's horizontality has been softened into dynamic curves. The binary between the human and the divine is comparatively stiffer regarding the creator's angular linearity. Eve's Creator in Fuseli's illustration is a figure of authority, deaf and blind to the loving pleas of the created. Eve's inexhaustible aspiration in this scene, met with indifference, foreshadows the moment of disobedience.

4. William Blake's Creation of Eve

William Blake finished the illustrations of PL in 1808. Blake's illustration to PL documents the profoundly inspiring moment when the act of creation takes place at the hand of The Son, rather than The Father (Figure 2). Blake opts for the parallel positioning of the created (Eve) and the creator (The Son). Eve in Blake's illustration seems to have gravitated to the ascending hand of The Son without the slightest physical contact; the parallel figuration of Eve and The Son is reinforced by the fact that there is no age gap between the creator and the created. Unlike Fuseli's blind and stony God who avoided eye contact with the appealing Eve, Blake's deity is slightly tilting his head toward the figure of Eve and is flooding her with his light; Eve is serenely thankful and The Son is beholding her with attentive eyes. There is a reciprocal sense of appreciation between the created and the creator.
Many of the determinants contributing to the salience of the deity are eliminated. An important clue which deserves attention is the left/right positioning of the human and divine figures. Eve, fully exposed, is put on the left and The Son with a white flowing robe is standing sideways on the right. The vectors or pointers in this painting are formed by The Son’s hand pointing towards Eve, by Eve’s torso mildly tilted towards The Son and by the daggers of the crescent moon pointing to the left of the picture where The Son is standing. The left to right vectors pointing to The Son and the right to left vectors pointing to Eve seem to counterbalance each other. The left to right pattern of western handwriting that begins from the familiar and moves to the unfamiliar, gives way to a circular course of vectors that equally familiarize and defamiliarize the position of the creator and the created. The Son who has replaced The Father and has taken over the position of the Creator, evokes the image of the romantic poet/prophet whose creative power lies NOT in his physical might but in his intuitive and spiritual light. Eve is enthroned as an enlightened figure whose act of disobedience will distinguish her from an absent-minded Adam. The Son who has replaced The Father, and Eve who eats the forbidden fruit are both different types of romantic rebel hero centralized in this illustration.

5. Mary Groom’s Creation of Eve

In Mary Groom’s wood-engraving (figure 4), the creation of Eve has been fashioned into a kind act of giving. Groom’s God has a pensive, brooding and motherly disposition with a forward bending torso and a forward tilted head, carefully cradling the unconscious Eve. Groom departs from Milton in that her God has the young face of The Son rather than The Father with whom Adam pleads for company in PL. In the Eighth Book of PL, Adam recounts to Raphael how Eve came to him “Led by her Heav’ly Maker, though unseen, And guided by his voice, nor uninformed/Of nuptial Sanctitie and marriage Rites” (Book 2, ll. 485-7). The encounter between Adam and Eve, in this engraving, takes place in a state of unconsciousness, and the fact that the unconscious Eve is being cradled— and NOT led— by The Son keeps “nuptial sanctitie and marriage rites” at bay. Many illustrators, who have rendered this scene in visual media, have chosen to establish rapport between the fully awake and enlightened Eve and the creator, while Adam is lying on the dark ground, asleep and unaware. Groom, on the contrary, has chosen to establish rapport between
Adam and Eve by depicting both of them as unconscious. Groom's Eve, contrary to Milton's Eve, is not ripe with femininity, nor does she seem to be informed of matrimonial knowledge.

Figure 3. Mary Groom, *God Creates Eve*, Wood Engraving, 1980 (New Arts Library)

The picture plane has a horizontal scale of narration in that there is a left-to-right vector across the picture, leading our eyes from The Son on the left to Adam and Eve facing each other unconsciously on the right. The Creator being the source of power, generation, and authority occupies the left corner and Adam and Eve, the newly created, the unknowing and the unknown, are put on the right corner. The Son is not positioned highly above Adam and Eve, but almost on the same level: the creator and the created are located on a linear and horizontal plane, furthermore, the deity is positioned at the viewer's eye level. These visual measures, as shown in figure 3, are intended to humanize the deity who is beholding Eve with sad, sympathetic, brooding eyes on the one hand, and infantilize Eve on the other.

6. Carlotta Petrina's Creation of Eve

Petrina illustrated *Paradise Lost* in Italy during 1930s, when fascism was dominant, almost at the same time Mary Groom produced her engravings in England. The creator of Eve in Petrina's illustration is not the Son, but the Father (figure 5). The old patriarch with a muscular body and a domineering pose has bent over the tiny figures of Adam and Eve, butchering Adam's rib into Eve. His creation of Eve includes the violent act of framing and molding. Eve's small and unfinished body is dwarfed by The Father's giant figure. Her shoulder and her bottom are caged within The Creator's hands. And the fact that Eve's body is still unfinished highlights the painful process of framing yet in progress. Nevertheless, the unfinished Eve, devoid of voice and autonomy, is the only character who meets the gaze of the viewer with her ghastly eyes.
The illustration has a vertical frame. The abstract, the ideal, and the spiritual occupy the upper space of vertical frames and the mundane, the material and the earthly occupy the bottom part of the picture (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006, p.186). The Father has salience due to his huge size and also because of his occupation of the upper half. Adam and Eve are placed at the Patriarch’s feet and are hence subjugated to his manipulative power. Eve is the joint between Adam and the Father, bridging the gap between the two realms of matter and spirit. By looking straightly into the eyes of the viewer, Eve challenges the viewer, inviting him/her to bear witness to her plight, and demands sympathy, change, reconsideration, and a reaction perhaps. Therefore, the only character that can be considered the viewer’s peer is Eve, enframed, fashioned, molded and victimized at the hands of the huge patriarch. Contrary to the text of Milton, Petrina’s Eve is not beholding Adam when she is created, but her future sons and daughters—that is, the viewers. Disappointed with the patriarchal God, she seeks help from humanity.

7. Discussion of the Findings and Conclusion
Fuseli depicts the gloom and the darker side of Milton’s work in which the communication between the haman and the divine is blocked. William Blake shows his occupation with the notion of Messianism that burgeoned with the fervor of the French Revolution. He heroizes both Eve and The Son. Groom and Petrina both illustrated the poem after the First World War and before the Second World War. Groom is more interested in the prelapsarian blissful moments of innocent love between Adam and Eve, but Petrina depicts a tragic and gloomy atmosphere in which Adam and Eve are minimized and victimized by patriarchal deities. The different approaches point to the way the social context of each era creeps into the artists’ conception of Eve.

Martin finds connections between sensationalist gothic novels and Fuseli’s paintings although tracking parallel relation between them is not feasible (2007, p. 292). Gothic appeared as a reaction against the enlightenment tendency to repress darkness (Briggs 2012, p.179). Literary
and cultural gothic therefore has the mission to make visible what is supposed to be kept invisible. The gothic emphasis upon the sensational and phantasmagoric reveals a cultural nostalgia and a restless longing for what has gone out of fashion. Moral and cultural heroism, for example, as Martin notes, were outdated in late 18th century due to the economic changes and the restructuring of European class system. The corporeality of human figures struggling and reaching for an unseen point, with faces that express exaggerated emotions involved in exaggerated dramas of evil and darkness bespeak a unknown presence beyond the reach of the aspiring man. It would be naive generalization to label Fuseli’s treatment of Paradise Lost “gothic” although gothic elements can be traced in his illustrations. His humanistic emphasis upon the corporeality of muscular human figures in contrast with the stony divinity, and his minimization of the paradisal setting reveal to us a secular appreciation of the plight of humanity living in a dark vacuum, struggling to recapture the uncanny that has been swept into the shadow. Eve seems to be experiencing an existential vacuum when she reaches for a divinity that has turned into stone.

It is not surprising that Blake changes Eve’s creator from The Father into The Son. Like many of his contemporaries, Blake remained critical of the old rules and replaced the Father with the Son who is the spirit of change and renewal. Blake and his contemporaries were influenced by the messianic expectations cherished by the revolutions. The French Revolution however, turned out to be Pandora’s box (Dawson 1993, p.53). After the ideals of revolution went astray and bloodshed and reign of terror disappointed the elite, the revolutionary extroversion considered to be an ideal model of artistic and literary expression gave way to an introvert preference for internal apocalypse and the rebel hero gave way to introspective poet/prophets. Blake flirted with Satan as the rebel hero for a time by humanizing the fallen angel and beautifying him, but he shifted his focus upon The Son who represented the calm and introvert source of light who could bless the creatures with his light. When we track Eve in Blake’s illustrations we notice that Blake spotlights her and tries to underscore her central position. Blake’s daring departure from Milton can be witnessed in the way he sets Eve’s moment of creation. Neither in Eve’s nor in Adam’s account of creation is she capable of seeing the Creator. Blake allows Eve enough spiritual legitimacy and agency to make her stand footloose in the air when encountering the Creator whose role is played by the Son (figure 2). Blake draws upon the romantic ideal of intuition, which is a source of light and insight, to elevate Eve, who partakes of intuitive knowledge, into a spiritual and enlightened stance.

Almost one century later, in 1930s, Petrina and Groom offered very different pictures of Eve. Due to the outspread economic depression and the rise of consumer culture in the 1930s, there appeared in the interwar years in Europe and America shifting gender roles and conflicting conceptions of femininity. Femininity was considered as a harbinger of peace in a world plagued by war; on the other hand, the price to be paid for economic and personal independence of women was too high for that insecure age (Buckley and Fawcett 2002, p.84). To repress the threatening sexual identity of British women, Kuhn argues, a model of femininity was constructed through the cinema culture to form the taste of the British movie goers. There appeared a preference for “little girlish” stars with a pre-pubescent appearance rather than stars signaling “overt, adult sexuality” (1996, p.181). The interwar gender ideology therefore propagated the image of the infantile asexual female figure in sharp contrast with the demanding New Woman who refused to be subjugated to her pre-war position. At the time of a sinking economy, occupational insecurities and gender conflicts, in line with the interwar gender ideology, Groom infantilizes Eve and deletes from her stature the ripe feminine features that Milton obsessively highlights in PL.
The renditions of the two woman illustrators differ from each other glaringly. Groom’s version is a nostalgic retreat into the pre-lapsarian world of happiness where the deity, man and the environment were in blissful harmony, whereas Petrina’s version is a presentiment of disaster, and a visual allegory of the fascist dystopia. According to the futurist manifesto which was the artistic movement dominant in France, Italy, and Russia from 1908 through the 1920s, the new woman or the new Eve in the futurist utopia was “amoral, unsentimental and androgynous” (Kershaw and Kimyongur 2007, p.121). Futurism and fascism had some common features one of which was their harsh criticism of the "decadent feminized culture" of Europe and their praise of the patriarchy and masculine power and prowess. Marinetti took pains to liberate the new futurist man from the yoke of the feminine by "inversion of reproductive races" and attributing the power of generation to the New Man (Gomez 2010, p.154). Kershaw and Kimyongur refer to the relative definition of modernity in fascism and explain that for women modernity was synonymous with "reproduction and patriotic conformity rather than adherence to imported models of fashionable sexuality"(Kershaw and Kimyongur 2007, p.122). The violence inherent in the fascist conception of the discourse of femininity has been depicted and lamented in Petrina’s illustrations: Eve, bereft of agency, is being violently molded by the huge salient patriarch.

Revolutions, wars, and world crises seem to have occasioned a resurgence of interest in Paradise Lost: traumatized and desperately in need of new birth, (wo)man makes a recourse to Adam and Eve and the moment of their creation to flesh out the character of the progenitor of humanity anew.

End notes

1From this point on, this abbreviated form is used to refers to Paradise Lost
2See Carlotta Petrina’s illustration of Eve’s Creation
3See William Blake’s illustration of "Eve’s Creation", "The Rout of the Rebel Angels" and "Christ Offers to Redeem Man"
4See John Baptiste de Medina’s Illustration of “The Fall"
5See Gustave Doré’s Illustration of Satan: "Me Miserable, Which Way Shall I Fly?"
6See Henri Fuseli’s Illustration of "The Expulsion Scene"
7See John Martin’s illustrations of the pre-lapsarian scenes of Paradise Lost
8See for instance the illustrations of Eve’s Creation by Fuseli, Blake, Doré, and Michelangelo

References

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