

Draftings In

Volume 6
Number 1 *Draftings In Milton*

Article 2

1991

Prefatory Note

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Recommended Citation

Kalmar, Elaine (1991) "Prefatory Note," *Draftings In*: Vol. 6 : No. 1 , Article 2.
Available at: <https://scholarworks.uni.edu/draftings/vol6/iss1/2>

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Prefatory Note

It is a pleasure to introduce these essays on John Milton's *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*. The essays had their genesis as projects in the Milton course in the fall of 1989 and were refined through the following spring in the process mandated by this series, group reading and rereading one another's papers and revising their own. Bev Byford's essay underwent further reworking under the guidance of Professor Grace Ann Hovet, for the purpose of submitting the required research paper for the M.A. degree in English Language and Literature.

The essays are written from a variety of perspectives, as each author brought to Milton's epics particular interests. David Tietge brought to the poem his interest in philosophy by exploring some philosophical issues Milton raises in the great epic. Harvey Hess brought to the topic of Milton's compositional techniques his long experience as music critic and author of operatic libretti, examining analogous methods of composing in the baroque music of Bach and the baroque poetry of Milton. Bev Byford read Milton as a lifelong Roman Catholic exploring Milton's radical reformation puritanism by examining the serving of food in Paradise in light of the seventeenth-century debate about the eucharistic meal of the communion services. Chad O'Neill applied his recent intensive study of the Gospels to Milton's reading and retelling of the story of Messiah in Milton's shorter epic, *Paradise Regained*. The variety of approaches confirms the continuing interest of contemporary criticism in Milton's great epic poems.

It is somewhat startling to read the essays translated into the "gender neutral language" required by this series, and it seems to me that to equalize the sexes is to modify and 'dehistoricize' Milton's thought. The poet did describe the purpose of *Paradise Lost* to "assert Eternal Providence, / And justify the ways of God to men." He distinguishes between the sexes in this way:

Two of far nobler shape erect and tall,
God-like erect, with native honor clad
In naked majesty seemed lords of all,
And worthy seemed, for in their looks divine
The image of their glorious Maker shone,
Truth, wisdom, sanctitude severe and pure,
Whence true authority in men; though both
Not equal, as their sex not equal seemed;
For contemplation he and valor formed,

For softness she and sweet attractive grace,
He for God only, she for God in him:
His fair large front and eye sublime declared
Absolute rule; and hyacinthine locks
Round from his parted forelock manly hung
Clust'ring, but not beneath his shoulders broad:
She a veil down to the slender waist
Her unadorned golden tresses wore
Disheveled, but in wanton ringlets waved
As the vine curls her tendrils, which implied
Subjection, but required with gentle sway,
And by her yielded, by him best received,
Yielded with coy submission, modest pride,
And sweet reluctant amorous delay.

In the poem, Eve has no direct contact or conversation with the divine but receives all communications from Adam. In our time, this seems sexist, but in Milton's time, Joseph Wittreich has shown that Milton was viewed as champion of women by his early women readers (*Feminist Milton*).

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