

TILLYARD, BELL, AND MILTON ON THE FALL OF MAN

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Tillyard, Bell, and Milton on the Fall of Man

Every reader of Milton criticism has encountered at least one article which tries to identify the cause of Adam and Eve's fall in Paradise Lost. Practically all major Milton critics have attempted to pinpoint the cause of man's fall, with the result that such terms as "uxoriousness," "mental triviality," "an inordinate thirst for knowledge," and "intemperance" have been used to describe the actions of Adam and Eve in Book IX. Some of these critical causes of the Fall have been arrived at with considerable wrenching of the text of the poem, while other proposed causes seem better justified. In the past fifteen years, in reaction to this great hunt, much critical comment has appeared asserting that a prime cause for the Fall cannot be found, or that the search for one is irrelevant.

One outgrowth of the careful scrutiny of the Fall is a singular interpretation not only of the Fall but of the whole structure of Paradise Lost itself. This interpretation was first stated by A. J. A. Waldock in his book Paradise Lost and its Critics. Waldock contends that:

There was no way for Milton of making the transition from sinlessness to sin perfectly intelligible. It is obvious that Adam and Eve must already have contracted human weaknesses before they can start on the course of conduct that leads to their fall: to put it another way, they must already be fallen (technically) before they can begin to fall.¹

However, it is with E. M. W. Tillyard and Millicent Bell that this interpretation is fully developed. Briefly stated,

Tillyard and Bell's position is that Adam and Eve were essentially fallen before the eating of the apple and that the crisis of the poem occurs with Adam and Eve's reconciliation and their confession to God.

E.M.W. Tillyard's statement of this point of view appeared first, in his essay "The Crisis of Paradise Lost," in Studies in Milton. Here Tillyard takes exception to the traditional view that the eating of the apple is the crisis, or "centre," of the poem.

...if we read Paradise Lost rightly, opening ourselves to the poetry, we shall find that Eve's eating the apple is by no means the one, exclusive, centre of the poem.²

Milton, he says, may have really attempted to follow the biblical account of the Fall.

But intentions could be of no avail against the terms to which Milton submitted himself by offering to present in ample narrative the transition from a state of innocence to a state of sin. Under the terms of the story these two realms must be separated by a definite but dimensionless frontier: there cannot be a no-man's-land between; in the passage, time must not count. Such a lightning-quick change might be effective in a film... but in a narrative poem it could only be ridiculous, and in his heart Milton knew that well enough.³

Milton, the artist, knew that an abrupt transition from unfallen to fallen man would not work artistically. So he set about to blur the line between unfallen and fallen man. This Tillyard calls "faking." It is the technique by which Milton "anticipates

the Fall by attributing to Eve and Adam feelings which though nominally felt in the state of innocence are actually not compatible with it."⁴ Tillyard, to illustrate this incompatibility, cites Eve's dream in Book IV, Adam's questionings of Raphael on the nature of the universe, and Adam's admission to Raphael that Eve's love has the power to upset his reason. Tillyard concludes that:

The Fall, then, must be extended back in time; it has no plain and sensational beginning; and the actual eating of the apple becomes no more than an emphatic stage in a process already begun, the stage when the darker and stormier passions make their entry into the human heart.⁵

Sin and the "stormier passions" Tillyard sees entering the human heart with the dream of Eve in Book IV. If one accepts this early entrance of sin into the heart of man, then Tillyard's final point must be accepted as well: the Fall of man is "intertwined so firmly as to be inextricable" with the theme of regeneration, and the high point of Paradise Lost is the reconciliation of Adam and Eve and their confession of their sin to God.

That the theme of regeneration is present in Paradise Lost cannot be doubted, as it is a part of the Christian concept of the condition of man. To ignore the theme of regeneration is to seriously misread the poem, but to place the importance of this theme above that theme of the Fall is to ignore the first twenty-six lines of Paradise Lost and to

ignore the artistic demands of the poem. One may, indeed, sympathize with Tillyard's desire to counteract the popular view (not the critical one) that the last three books of Paradise Lost are anti-climactic and hence boring and relatively unimportant. However, to interpret the theme of regeneration as the dominant theme of the poem is to kill the patient with too much antidote.

Whether it was because of his critical reputation or because of the skill with which he presented his argument, there was little immediate comment on Tillyard's new interpretation of the Fall of man. But, with the publication of Millicent Bell's article "The Fallacy of the Fall in Paradise Lost" in 1953,⁶ a flurry of activity followed. Professor Bell accepts most of Tillyard's premises and interpretations and she carries them to their logical conclusions, something which Tillyard was wise enough to avoid. While Tillyard's interpretation of the Fall was somehow palatable, Professor Bell's extension of it did such violence to the text of the poem that many a critic was goaded into rebuttal.⁷

The article itself is a skillful weaving of stimulating observations and wrong-headed misreadings. For example, near the beginning of her article Miss Bell observes that: "Inherent in Milton's ancient material is the paradox of the essential causelessness of the Fall."⁸ Here is a statement which, in light of the recent reaction against the great hunt for a

prime cause for the Fall, most critics will support. However, when she explains why the Fall is causeless, she is much less persuasive. Showing her kinship to Tillyard, Professor Bell states that in the biblical account which Milton used the transition from the unfallen to the fallen condition is unclear.

The transition between Man and Woman uncorrupt and mankind corrupted is simply to be accepted as having happened. Yet the mind cannot accept the fact that perfection was capable of corruption without denying the absoluteness of perfection. In terms of the story, we cannot imagine any reason why Adam and Eve should, in the face of repeated warning, have violated God's injunction, not, that is, if we conceive the father and mother of the race to have been unfallen before the Fall. For all possible temptations...appeal to impulses characteristic of fallen mankind.⁹

Whereas Tillyard saw in the biblical account of the Fall artistic difficulties, Professor Bell sees it as a logical contradiction. Like Tillyard, she feels Milton sensed that the Fall could not be presented as it appeared in its original form, that he blurred the line between unfallen and fallen man, and that the crisis of the poem is not limited to the eating of the apple. However, her statement is stronger than Tillyard's, more rigid and open to objection.

There is, in effect, no longer a Fall as the Bible plot presents it--there is, possibly, no longer a Fall at all. And as a consequence, there is no possibility of discerning cause--from the very first we are after the Fall; we are dealing with results and not preliminaries.¹⁰

Bell cites many of the same examples from Paradise Lost to show that Adam and Eve are "man as we know him," such as Eve's dream in Book IV, her desire to work apart from Adam in Book IX, and Adam's discussions with Raphael. It is not surprising that Professor Bell believes evil entered the garden and the hearts of Adam and Eve sometime before Book IX. She is not confident enough, as is Tillyard, to pick an exact date for this entrance, but it seems probable she would place it somewhere in Book IV or V.

Miss Bell next discusses the eating of the apple and attempts to explain why man disobeyed God's command. This sounds exceedingly strange coming from a critic who has previously emphasized that the Fall was causeless. Evidently the Fall was causeless but the eating of the apple was not. She writes:

Adam and Eve had nothing new to learn from the mysterious fruit except the nature of their own hearts. And this they learned from themselves, from the act of fulfilling their own desires to the final degree....¹¹

Thus far there is little to quarrel with, but her later statement that Adam and Eve "come to the occasion in the possession of every passion, yet ignorant of their own natures" is somewhat disturbing, and her conclusions on the Fall are contradictory to the text of the poem.

..if, as I have been contending all along, the Fall is only the climax of self-realization reached by humankind already fallen, then it was not only inevitable, but necessary. [*italics mine*] Once the sinfulness of Adam and Eve is established, it is only along this road followed to its bitter terminus that they may pass to redemption. And this redemption is not merely release from sin, but the acquired moral ability which enables Man to vanquish Evil.

Adam and Eve's deficiency had been that they were insufficiently aware of their own qualities, repeat though they might the academic lessons concerning the relation of the Will, and Reason, and Passion. What they lacked was the inner regulatory of conscience, that agency of Right Reason which instructs the soul concerning the majestic scheme of order ruling Man and Nature. Their redemption involves the awareness that for them virtue can never be instinctive. Like the bearing of children or the tilling of the ground, virtue must henceforth be the fruit of pain and vigil.¹²

Miss Bell comes very close to saying that God created man evil; she actually does say that evil was "inevitable."

Both of these possibilities Milton denies again and again and again, particularly in Book III:

...So will fall
Hee [*man*] and his faithless Progenie: whose fault?
Whose but his own? ingrate, he had of mee
All he could have; I made him just and right, (III. 95-99)
Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall.¹³

...They therefore as to right belong'd,
So were created, nor can justly accuse
Thir maker, or thir making, or thir Fate;
As if predestination over-rul'd
Thir will, dispos'd by absolute Decree (III.111- 19)
Or high foreknowledge; they themselves decreed
Thir own revolt, not I....¹⁴

Foreknowledge does not imply foreordination. Man is capable of meeting Satan's challenges and overcoming them. This crucial test must be met by man alone, without any further divine intervention, save the warning visit by Raphael. God through his omnipotence sees the outcome of man's temptation, but for man to remain a free agent and for his love of God to be of value he must face Satan alone.

Miss Bell, however, concludes that Adam and Eve misunderstood the nature of their own hearts and the order of the universe and that they could not for long live among surroundings they did not understand. Adam and Eve were always fallen and an act of open disobedience was inevitable. The eating of the apple was more than an act of disobedience; it was also man's first step along the road of self-realization and his ascension in the scheme of the universe.

As will be shown later, Tillyard and Bell's argument is based on a false premise, but before moving to a careful examination of their argument, it is important to point out that their conclusion--that the eating of the apple in Book IX is not the crisis of Paradise Lost--violates the dramatic structure of the poem. First of all, no one will dispute that the Fall of man was for Milton an exceedingly important event historically and theologically. It was probably the most important event in human history, or in Tillyard's words, the "most pregnant event in the history of the world." The Fall

was man's first rejection of God and of God's original plan for his spiritual development. With the Fall comes the beginning of human experience and the human condition as we know it. As Milton says in the Areopagitica, man now knows good through evil:

It was from the rind of one apple tasted, that
the knowledge of good and evil, cleaving
together, leapt into the world.¹⁵

and from Paradise Lost:

...next to Life
Our Death the Tree of Knowledge grew fast by,
Knowledge of Good bought dear by knowing ill.
(IV. 220-23)¹⁶

or, as Adam in his misery says to Eve late in Book IX:

O Eve, in evil hour thou didst give ear
To that false Worm, of whomsoever taught
To counterfeit Man's voice, true in our Fall,
False in our promis'd Rising; since our Eyes
Op'n'd we find indeed, and find we know
Both Good and Evil, Good lost, and Evil got,
Bad Fruit of Knowledge.... (IX. 1067-73).¹⁷

It is God, in Book XI, who makes the clearest statement of the meaning of the Fall:

O Sons, like one of us Man is become
To know both Good and Evil, since his taste
Of that defended Fruit; but let him boast
His knowledge of Good lost, and Evil got,
Happier, had it suffic'd him to have known
Good by itself, and Evil not at all. (XI. 84-89)¹⁸

Not only was the Fall the beginning of the human condition, but it also makes possible God's incarnation and the Redemption of man, the greatest demonstration of God's love for man. We can infer Milton's feelings on the

Incarnation and Redemption through Adam's joyful speech in
Book XII.

Light out of darkness! full of doubt I stand,
Whether I should repent me now of sin
By mee done and occasion'd, or rejoice
Much more, that much more good thereof shall spring,
To God more glory, more good will to Men
From God, and over wrath grace shall abound.
(XII. 473-78)¹⁹

Granting that the Fall was important to Milton's religious beliefs, the question arises as to whether Milton, for artistic expediency, would have distorted the presentation of the Fall in a work whose purpose was to "justify the ways of God to man."

However, one need not be aware of Milton's religious beliefs to see that the structure and the very artistic fibre of Paradise Lost emphasize the Fall, or as H. V. S. Ogden states: "everything in the poem before the Fall points toward that event and...everything after it proceeds from it and looks back to it...."²⁰ Satan mentions man in Book I, as does Milton, and the whole of Books II, III, IV and much of V deal with two journeys: Satan's journey to earth to seduce man and Raphael's journey to warn him; Books V, VI, VII and VIII deal essentially with Raphael's warning, extended and digressive though it is. To accept the contention that the crisis of Paradise Lost is not the eating of the apple, one must explain why Milton devoted the vast majority of the

first eight books to these two journeys and Raphael's warning, which seem to point toward the confrontation between man and Satan in Book IX.

Further examination of the first eight books reveals that a tension is present because the reader knows the outcome of the story--that Adam and Eve will eat the forbidden fruit and thereby fall. Knowing that man will fall colors every event before Book IX, making each action but a prelude to the act of disobedience. This dramatically ironic effect forces the reader to constantly look ahead to an event he knows will occur, hence emphasizing the Fall.

This tension is present in all narrations in which the outcome is known and to an extent is a handicap for Milton. For example, in Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde the many references to the known outcome--Criseyde's jilting of Troilus--result in an impression that all of the characters are pawns in the hands of an inescapable fate moving them to destruction. Naturally, such an effect would be contrary to the theology of Paradise Lost. Milton did try to avoid this feeling with a multitude of statements which stress man's free will--"sufficient to have stood, though free to fall." (III.99)²¹ However, Milton does use this tension to his advantage in the first part of Book IX before the actual eating of the apple. Knowing Eve will eat the apple

heightens the drama and intensifies the reader's emotional involvement to a pitch found nowhere else in Paradise Lost. Here, when Eve is striving to work apart from Adam, and later, when she is succumbing to the smooth arguments of the Serpent, the reader, knowing the outcome, feels this tension most strongly and, like one watching a bad dream and unable to stop it, witnesses the gathering momentum toward calamity.

Thus it seems doubtful that Tillyard and Bell's contention that Book IX is not the crisis of Paradise Lost corresponds to the artistic demands of the poem. However, if this conclusion to their argument seems doubtful, the argument itself is no more secure, for it is based on a fallacy--the assumption that man before Book IX was either perfect or fallen. He must be one or the other. There is no middle ground; there are no other categories of existence. This assumption is clearer in Bell:

The transition between Man and Woman uncorrupt and mankind corrupted is simply to be accepted as having happened. Yet the mind cannot accept the fact that perfection was capable of corruption without denying the absoluteness of perfection.²²

When Tillyard and Bell see certain actions before the eating of the apple that are not characteristic of perfect beings, they assume that Adam and Eve are fallen. Such an either-or distinction is a semantic pitfall: prelapsarian man does not have to be either fallen or perfect. In point of fact,

before the eating of the apple Adam and Eve are neither perfect nor fallen, not in Milton's interpretation of the biblical account and not in Milton's recreation of it in Paradise Lost.

It is, I think, fair to assert that Tillyard and, more clearly, Bell are reacting to the misconception that prelapsarian Adam and Eve were perfect. Bell, in a later defense of her original article, comments on Dr. Johnson's contention in The Lives of the English Poets that Adam and Eve are above human "curiosity and sympathy:"

Never did a critical judgment so well illustrate the suffocating results of a preconception about an author's plan. Since Johnson assumed that Milton's characters were, by the nature of their situation, personages utterly unlike himself, he had no interest in them. Yet this has hardly been the reaction of most other readers, who have found the story of great human significance.²³

It is Professor Bell's aim to dispel the preconception that Adam and Eve are distant, unsympathetic, and perfect beings. Adam and Eve, she maintains, are characters in an intimate human drama. She would have one accept "Milton's mingled, all-too-human characterization of Adam and Eve as part of a close-woven meaning unifying the whole work."²⁴ Unfortunately, Tillyard and Bell are inclined to over-humanize Adam and Eve, contending that they are fallen throughout most of Paradise Lost. They do not take into account that prelapsarian man cannot be judged on the same terms one uses

to judge man after the Fall. Before the eating of the apple imperfection does not imply sinfulness.

The over-humanization of Adam and Eve also overlooks their epic addresses and the idyllic pastoral description of their surroundings, which give them a loftiness and a beauty not seen in "man as we know him." Any interpretation which views Adam and Eve as fallen before Book IX contradicts this loftiness and beauty. Significantly, the epic addresses and the pastoral^{description} do not appear after the eating of the apple.

Just why the tendency to view Adam and Eve as perfect beings before the Fall is so prevalent is difficult to explain. Even a critic of such stature as C. S. Lewis states that "Adam and Eve were created full-grown and perfect."²⁵ An examination of this term in Lewis is enlightening not only for its shortcomings in explaining the prelapsarian condition but, more importantly, in revealing Milton's conception of Man both before and after the Fall.

It is difficult to know if Lewis in A Preface to Paradise Lost uses the word "perfect" in reference to Adam in its complete and absolute sense, for he never really defines the word. Lewis is more concerned with removing the preconception that Adam and Eve were childlike and naive. However, the ambiguity of the term and the way it seems to creep into his argument illustrates how pervasive, and how basic, and how unexamined this assumption can be. The assumption--

that prelapsarian man in the biblical account is perfect or that Milton so thought--is rather unimportant in Lewis' criticism. However, as seen in Professor Bell's statement that the Fall was necessary and inevitable, this assumption can lead to a distorted view of the poem. Just why this assumption is so widespread is difficult to say, since there is no mention of perfection in the biblical account.

Lewis, as mentioned previously, is concerned with Adam's mental powers. He writes:

Adam was, from the first, a man in knowledge as well as in stature. He alone of all men 'has been in Eden, in the garden of God: he has walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire'. He was endowed, says Athanasius, with 'a vision of God so far-reaching that he could contemplate the eternity of the Divine Essence and the cosmic operations of His Word'. He was 'a heavenly being', according to St. Ambrose, who breathed the aether, and was accustomed to converse with God 'face to face'. 'His mental powers' says St. Augustine, 'surpassed those of the most brilliant philosopher as much as the speed of a bird surpasses that of a tortoise.'²⁶

This is still a long way from calling Adam and Eve perfect, and why Lewis did so earlier in his Preface is not clear. Lewis' point is well taken; Adam and Eve are not childlike, intellectually. However, an examination of the various descriptions of Adam and Eve reveals that something more than intelligence impresses us.

Two of far nobler shape erect and tall,
Godlike erect, with native Honour clad
In naked Majesty seem'd Lords of all,
And worthy seem'd, for in thir looks Divine

The image of thir glorious Maker shone,
 Truth, Wisdom, Sanctitude severe and pure,
 Severe, but in true filial freedom plac't;
 Whence true aurtority in men; though both
 Not equal, as their sex not equal seem'd;
 For contemplation hee and valour form'd,
 For softness shee and sweet attractive Grace,
 Hee for God only, shee for God in him:
 His fair large Front and Eye sublime declar'd
 Absolute rule; and Hyacinthine Locks
 Round from his parted forelock manly hung
 Clust'ring, but not beneath his shoulders broad:
 Shee as a veil down to the slender waist
 Her unadorned golden tresses wore
 Dishevell'd, but in wanton ringlets wav'd
 As the Vine curls her tendrils, which impli'd
 Subjection, but requir'd with gentle sway,
 And by her yielded, by him best receiv'd,
 Yielded with coy submission, modest pride,
 And sweet reluctant amorous delay. (IV. 288-311)²⁷
 [italics mine]

This passage is typical of the descriptions of Adam and Eve before Book IX, and in such descriptions we can see that prelapsarian man's intelligence is one aspect of his attractiveness, as are his physical beauty, his honesty and his innate dignity. Milton, in common with others of his period, would see mankind, at least the ideal man, in this light. However, as a Christian humanist, Milton's glorification of mankind would be somewhat tempered by the Fall. Man is beautiful or dignified to the extent that he is a mirror of the divine. However, the Fall has diminished and distorted this divine image. Prelapsarian Adam and Eve, on the other hand, are creatures in whom the divine image has not yet been altered. This accounts for their lofty and attractive

nature. Yet to call Adam and Eve perfect, or to argue that Milton thought them so, is to misread a Christian humanist's glorification of unfallen man.

In the above passage from Paradise Lost man is said to have been made in the divine image; Milton does not say that he was divine. This is but one of the many references to man's divine image in the poem. In Book VIII Raphael says to Adam:

...for God on thee
Abundantly his gifts hath also pour'd
Inward and outward both, his image fair:
Speaking or mute all comeliness and grace
Attends thee, and each word, each motion forms.
(VII. 219- 23)²⁸

In Book VIII Adam (though hardly an experienced judge) says of Eve:

Grace was in all her steps, Heav'n in her Eye,
In every gesture dignity and love. (VIII. 488-89)²⁹

Satan, in Book IV, says of Adam and Eve:

O Hell! what do mine eyes with grief behold,
Into our room of bliss thus high advanc't
Creatures of other mould, earth-born perhaps,
Not Spirits, yet to heav'nly Spirits bright
Little inferior; whom my thoughts pursue
With wonder, and could love, so lively shines
In them Divine resemblance, and such grace
The hand that form'd them on thir shape hath pour'd.
(IV. 358-65)³⁰

And Milton, in Christian Doctrine, writes:

...and this not only in the body, but in the soul,
as it was chiefly with respect to the soul that
Adam was made in the divine image.³¹

It is fairly certain, then, that Milton conceived of prelapsarian man as being made in the divine image,³² and it is from this image that his beauty emanates. There is no mention of perfection, though perhaps a case could be made that Adam and Eve were created physically perfect, hence their almost superhuman beauty. This is certainly supportable from the text and readily fits within the framework of the traditional concept of the Fall. In fact, it could be argued from the physical degeneration of Satan and from the Platonism of Comus (458-470), that physical beauty mirrors spiritual beauty and that physical degeneration reflects spiritual degeneration. However, it cannot be shown that Milton believed Adam and Eve's beauty, even if it was a perfect beauty, to be an indication of spiritual perfection.

Certainly Tillyard is correct in asserting that man in Paradise Lost is never perfect in a moral sense; nor did Milton intend that Adam and Eve should be so interpreted. As many critics have pointed out--Tillyard included--God's original plan was for man to raise himself gradually to a higher spiritual level and this indicates man's middle position in the universe. Adam's inability to name God, though he can name all the animals in the garden, further bears this out. Milton comments in Book IV:

...Sleep on,
 Blest pair; and O yet happiest if ye seek
 No happier state, and know to know no more.
 (773-75)³³

The Fall of man, in Paradise Lost at least, is not just an act of disobedience but is also man's attempt to raise his place in the universe through unjust means by skipping several steps in the Great Chain of Being. Man's middle station is an essential part of the meaning of the poem.

H. V. S. Ogden, in his article "The Crisis of Paradise Lost Reconsidered," makes an interesting point about Milton's view of perfection and the appearance of the word in Paradise Lost. Ogden quotes two passages from the Christian Doctrine which are especially relevant:³⁴

We may understand from other passages of Scripture, that when God infused the breath of life into man, what man thereby received was not a portion of God's essence, or a participation of the divine nature, but that measure of the divine virtue or influence, which was commensurate to the capabilities of the recipient.³⁵

This sin originated, first, in the instigation of the devil, as is clear from the narrative in Gen. iii and from I John iii. 8, "he that committeth sin is of the devil, for the devil sinneth from the beginning." Secondly, in the liability to fall with which man was created, whereby he, as the devil had done before him, "abode not in the truth," John viii.⁴⁴ nor "kept his first estate, but left his own habitation." Jude 6.³⁶

And from Paradise Lost Ogden quotes God in Book III:

I made him just and right,
 Sufficient to have stood, though free to Fall.
 (III.98-99)³⁷

It is Ogden's opinion (and a just one, I think) that the two times the word "perfect" is used to describe Adam and Eve in Paradise Lost (V, 524 and VII, 642) it occurs "clearly in a qualified sense, meaning perfectly able to make the right choice, i.e., 'sufficient to have stood.'" Ogden concludes that there is nothing in Paradise Lost to "justify the conviction that the fable of that poem is founded on the 'donnée of Man's inconceivable perfection.'"³⁸ It seems clear in Milton's interpretation of the biblical account, and in his treatment of it in the epic form, that prelapsarian man had only the option to achieve perfection.

The point of the biblical account is man's middle state -- the fact that he is ^{not} impervious to corruption on the one hand (he is not morally perfect), nor merely an automaton responding to the dictates of God on the other. God's speeches in Book III eliminate both of these possibilities from man. This is not a new concept; one need only recall Aristotle's distinction between actuality and potentiality. Adam in actuality is sinless but he has the potentiality of sin.

The troublesome term "perfect" is clearer if interpreted in the sense (clearer in the Latin word perfectus) of "finished." Indeed, it is Adam who refers to Eve as "accomplished Eve" (IV, 660), paying tribute to her great

beauty born of the undistorted divine image within. Man is also characterized by a moral imperfection, the potentiality of sin and the option to achieve a spiritual perfection.

In the first eight books of Paradise Lost, if it is doubtful that Adam and Eve are perfect, Tillyard and Bell's position--that Adam and Eve are fallen--is no more certain. Tillyard and Bell, in asserting that the Fall should be extended back to Book IV, cite five instances which supposedly show that Adam and Eve are "virtually fallen:" first, when Eve tells of admiring her image in the pool (vanity); her prophetic dream in Book IV which is instigated by Satan; Adam's questions to Raphael about the nature of the universe in Book VII (an inordinate thirst for knowledge); Adam's description to Raphael of the power of his love for Eve (uxoriousness and idolatry); and Eve's desire to work alone in the opening of Book IX (willfulness and the first breaking of God's hierarchy). Certainly, Adam and Eve in these five scenes do seem to be distinctively human, but this does not mean, as Tillyard and Bell assume, that by being imperfect Adam and Eve are by that very fact "fallen."

Tillyard and Bell's interpretation of these scenes violates the text of Paradise Lost as well. Below is Eve's description of her admiration of her image in the pool:

I first awak't, and found myself repos'd
Under a shade on flow'rs, much wond'ring where

And what I was, whence thither brought, and how.
 Not distant far from thence a murmuring sound
 Of waters issu'd from a Cave and spread
 Into a liquid Plain, then stood unmov'd
 Pure as th' expanse of Heav'n; I thither went
 With unexperienc't thought, and laid me down [*italics mine*]
 On the green bank, to look into the clear
 Smooth Lake, that to me seem'd another Sky.
 As I bent down to look, just opposite,
 A Shape within the wat'ry gleam appear'd
 Bending to look on me, I started back,
 It started back, but pleas'd I soon return'd,
 Pleas'd it return'd as soon with answering looks
 Of sympathy and love; there I had fixt
 Mine eyes till now, and pin'd with vain desire, [*italics mine*]
 Had not a voice thus warn'd me, What thou seest,
 What there thou seest fair Creature is thyself,
 With thee it came and goes.... (IV. 450-69)³⁹

The beauty and simplicity of the verse mirrors the beauty and innocence of Eve herself, causing one to overlook any hints of vanity in this scene. This is surely the emphasis Milton intended. Eve's admiration of her reflection, probably her first conscious action, seems hardly sinful considering her "unexperienc't" condition, and significantly a voice warns her, which will not be the case in Book IX when Eve, knowing the nature and gravity of her act, eats the forbidden fruit and willingly disobeys God's only test of man's obedience. More important, the Eve who is relating these memories is a far wiser and more experienced Eve, who sees that her preoccupation with her image was "vain desire." She now knows:

How beauty is excell'd by manly grace
 And wisdom, which alone is truly fair. (IV. 490-91)⁴⁰

The sinfulness of Eve's act seems even more doubtful when it is remembered that Milton conceived of the Fall, and of sin in general, as originating both by man's "liability to fall" and by the "instigation of the devil." While it might be possible to argue that Eve immediately after her creation was "liable" to fall, it is certain that the devil had no part in instigating the gaze into the pool; Satan was then either lying on the fiery lake in hell or was fighting his way up through chaos and was not present in the garden.

Satan, however, is present during Eve's dream in Book IV and does instigate the dream. Here, according to Tillyard, is the first example of Milton's "faking" and the first entrance of evil into the garden and into the heart of man. This interpretation, however, conflicts with Adam's resulting consolations to Eve that:

Evil into the mind of God or Man
May come or go, so unapprov'd, and leave
No spot or blame behind.... (V. 117- 19)⁴¹

This explicit guard against interpreting Eve as guilty of sin because of the content of her dream Tillyard supposedly explains away by asserting that, "In the abstract the doctrine may be tenable, but it cannot work in concrete literary presentation."⁴² Tillyard does not elaborate on why such a concept is unworkable and one is left having to take his word. Professor Bell, equally arbitrary in

her comments on Adam's reassurances to Eve, says that "we cannot believe it, knowing already the outcome of the story."⁴³ What Tillyard and Bell mean is that they feel that this doctrine does not work artistically. This is hardly a sound basis for a critical assertion; most readers have felt differently concerning the credibility of Adam's consolations.

The whole matter ultimately boils down to whether Milton could have believed that Eve was corrupted through a dream rather than through an act of will. Many critics have strenuously insisted that Milton could not. Wayne Shumaker⁴⁴ makes distinction between evil states of mind which do not lead to sin and evil states of mind which lead to sin, whether in the form of an overt act or in the form of an inner acceptance or acquiescence. Diekhoff, too, objects, asserting that so long as evil thoughts are not accepted by reason and not turned into action they carry no blame.⁴⁵ Ogden says of Adam and Eve:

...although they are liable to temptation and although their wills be attracted to what the temptation offers, they are innocent and upright, sinless and pure, until their conscious minds yield and they commit the act of disobedience.⁴⁶

Milton's prose writings seem to discredit Tillyard's contention as well. In The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce he states that "Man's own free will self-corrupted is the adequate and sufficient cause of his disobedience

besides Fate" ⁴⁷ and in the Areopagitica, the contention that "those actions which enter into a man, rather than issue out of him...defile not"⁴⁸ is the basis of his argument against censorship and his confidence in man's ability to work out his own salvation. Sin for Milton was the will's conscious acceptance of or acquiescence to evil, and there is no sign of acceptance or acquiescence in Eve's dream or in her actions prior to Book IX.

It is Professor Bell who points to Adam's questioning of Raphael on the nature of the universe as evidence that Adam is fallen. She sees Raphael's "impatient reproof" against an inordinate lust for knowledge as further evidence for this contention. In discussing this scene Miss Bell finds it necessary to account for Adam's reply to Raphael:

But apt the Mind or Fancy is to rove
 Uncheckt, and of her roving is no end;
Till warn'd, or by experience taught, she learn
 That not to know at large of things remote
 From use, obscure and subtle, but to know
 That which before us lies in daily life,
 Is the prime Wisdom; what is more is fume,
 Or emptiness, or fond impertinence.... (VII. 188- 95)⁴⁹
 [*italics mine*]

She accounts for Adam's reply:

Fine words. But the lesson does not really take, as the outcome of the tale will show, the desire for knowledge of hidden matters being not the least notorious of the appetites flaring into expression at the Fall. And since the Fancy will not be disciplined by warning, it is only "by experience taught" that Adam is to apprehend "the prime Wisdom." His title to perfection, [*italics mine*] meanwhile, is none too clear.⁵⁰

As with Tillyard's comment on evil entering the mind without corrupting, we are left having to take a critic's word that Adam's reply to Raphael is to be discounted. "His title to perfection" has been clouded, and in terms of Bell's argument this means that Adam is fallen.

It might more readily be shown, instead, that when Adam questions Raphael about the nature of the universe, he is merely exhibiting a natural human curiosity about his surroundings. This may not be the action of a perfect being, but it is not the action of a fallen one either. Most importantly, Adam is ignorant of the true nature of his act, the directions to which it can lead.

The scene is strikingly similar to Eve's admiration of herself in the pool--both actions are the results of innocence and curiosity, and just as Eve was warned by God of the dangers of vanity so is Adam warned by Raphael of the nature of an inordinate thirst for knowledge. And just as Eve renounces the "vain desire" of self-admiration, so Adam renounces idle speculation. The picture in these two scenes is one of prelapsarian man, having committed a potentially sinful act through innocence and ignorance, being instructed on the true nature of his act. Indeed, Raphael's whole mission to earth is to give man God's second warning not to eat from the tree of knowledge. In Book V God tells

Raphael to visit earth:

...and such discourse bring on,
 As may advise him of his happy state,
 Happiness in his power left free to will,
 Left to his own free Will, his Will though free,
Yet mutable; whence warn him to beware [italics mine]
 He swerve not too secure: tell him withal
 His danger, and from whom, what enemy
 Late fall'n himself from Heaven, is plotting now
 The fall of others from like state of bliss;
 By violence, no, for that shall be withstood,
 But by deceit and lies; this let him know,
Lest wilfully transgressing he pretend
Surprisal, unadmonisht, unforewarn'd. [italics mine]
 (V. 233-45)⁵¹

God has endowed prelapsarian man with enough reason and knowledge to enable him to act in accord with His laws and in harmony with the order of the universe. If, however, through innocence or through the "guile" of an outside agent (Satan) man should be unprepared for or unaware of a moral challenge, God's Providence will warn him. The God seen here--Milton's God--is much fairer to man than Tillyard and Bell would have us believe.

We may take a similar view of Adam's statement to Raphael of his love for Eve.

...yet when I approach
 Her loveliness, so absolute she seems
 And in herself complete, so well to know
 Her own, that what she wills to do or say,
 Seems wisest, virtuousest, discreetest, best;
 All higher knowledge in her presence falls
 Degraded, Wisdom in discourse with her
 Loses discount'nanc't, and like folly shows;
 Authority and Reason on her wait.... (VIII. 546-54)⁵²

Professor Bell notices Raphael's resulting "contracted brow" and observes: "But in the scale of Raphael's vision, which represents Milton's own deepest convictions concerning the ultimate proportions of things, Adam's love is sinful."⁵³ And Tillyard (again feeling) asserts: "Technically, he is still innocent, but in our hearts we recognize him as just across the frontier."⁵⁴ On the contrary, Adam's speech represents man's third commission of an innocent error, following the same pattern as his earlier search for knowledge and Eve's admiration of her reflection. He is warned by Raphael not to let his passion rule his reason (560-594), and he replies, clearly recognizing his error and repenting it. Milton says he replies "half abashed," and there is little doubt that Adam has his passions under control:

Yet these [Eve's charms] subject not; I to thee disclose
 What inward thence I feel, not therefore foil'd,
 Who meet with various objects, from the sense
 Variously representing; yet still free
 Approve the best, and follow what I approve.
 (VIII. 607-11)⁵⁵

While a strong love has entered his mind, it has not upset his reason or his loyalty to God--not yet.⁵⁶

It seems clear that Adam in the two scenes with Raphael and Eve at the pool and after her dream demonstrate that they have seen their error and are truly cognizant of the potential evil of their actions. However, Professor Bell

feels that the obvious interpretation of these scenes is incorrect; there is something more beneath the surface. Adam and Eve are not sincere in their statements of recognition and repudiation. In answer to Wayne Shumaker⁵⁷ Miss Bell writes:

Mr. Shumaker reminds us that Eve corrects her false view of herself at the lake and is troubled by her dream when she wakes. She knows the law, of course; she knows it even at the end. Yet thus early she has betrayed her oneness with the rest of womankind, and mankind too, who possess such vagrant impulses of self-love or curiosity which we must call rebellious even before the final, signaling Disobedience. Adam accepts the reproofs of Raphael upon his idolatry of Eve--yet surrenders not a jot of his adoration, as his culminating act of self-ruin shows. And Eve's vanity and presumption are precisely what the serpent finds he can count upon. Put to the test, they show themselves to have harkened to the law only in the outer chamber of consciousness, leaving the heart untouched.⁵⁸

Miss Bell argues that because Adam and Eve do ultimately fall they are insincere in their repudiation of earlier actions which can lead to sin. This post hoc reasoning is unsupported by any evidence within the scenes themselves, and hence is of doubtful value.

Eve's actions in Book IX before the eating of the apple are more difficult to explain, particularly her desire to work apart from Adam on the fatal morning of the Fall. Tillyard and Bell call this an act of sinful willfulness and, more important, the first breaking of hierarchical order in Paradise. Tillyard sees that Eve's arguments have

the "air of having been thought out beforehand,"⁵⁹ and Professor Bell comments:

Already, as their dispute illustrates, Eve and Adam are changed from ideal prototypes.⁶⁰ [*italics mine*]

So here too we must confess that we have arrived too late. The onset of temptation is past.⁶¹

She has all the careful guile and gentle persistence of a woman planning to deceive her husband!⁶²

It must be admitted that Eve's actions do show a certain resemblance to willfulness, though willfulness itself need not be sinful, as it is a characteristic of woman so basic as to make one wonder if merely the Fall could be responsible for its presence. However, it is doubtful if the hierarchical order is broken. Eve leaves Adam's side with his permission, reluctant though it is, and it seems clear that a firm word from Adam would have brought her back to his side, though perhaps grudgingly. Had Eve openly disobeyed Adam--left when he implicitly forbade it--she would have broken the hierarchical order and would have shown herself to be fallen, but as the scene stands, Eve is unfallen. Even as late as line 377 Eve is referred to as being "yet submiss," a Miltonic direction Tillyard attempts to dispute with much labor and doubtful logic.⁶³

Of course, it is assumed here that "submiss" is best interpreted as suggesting obedience resulting from conviction.

It seems to me that a claim could be made that Eve's submission was obedience without conviction, that in obeying the letter but not the spirit of the law she had in fact broken the hierarchical order. However, such an interpretation, to be acceptable, must have additional documentation to show that Eve was obedient without conviction. There is little evidence before the eating of the apple that Eve was straining under the bonds of obedience to Adam. In fact, the opposite is true; one of the striking features of Adam and Eve before Book IX is their complete harmony with their surroundings and themselves.

Examining the temptation scene itself, it is important to keep in mind Ogden's statement on the nature of sin:

...although they are liable to temptation and although their wills be attracted to what the temptation offers, they are innocent and upright, sinless and pure, until their conscious minds yield and they commit the act of disobedience.⁶⁴

Eve listens to the Serpent as he tells of eating the apple and is led to the tree. Since Eve is ignorant as to what tree the Serpent is referring, she incurs no sin. More disturbing, she listens to the Serpent denounce the test of obedience and she allows him to praise her beauty. Certainly evil has entered her mind but it has "defiled not." Milton, to point this out, tells the reader that Eve was "yet sinless." (l. 669) Nothing could be simpler or

more direct. The advocates of an early Fall cannot explain away this deliberate assertion of Eve's unfallen condition. Evil has not been accepted by her reason nor has it been transformed into action.

Just when it is after this statement of Eve's sinlessness that Eve accepts the evil of the Serpent is not clear--probably her following speech where she restates many of the Serpent's arguments--but at least we do know that Eve is not fallen prior to line 659 of Book IX.

In this speech, which immediately precedes Eve's eating of the apple, one element of her mental processes becomes apparent: self-deception. In Paradise Lost self-deception and the deception of others are constant companions to the state of sin. Eve deceives Adam when she first sees him after her fall, when she says he was constantly on her mind and when she says that she ate the apple for his sake; the two deceive themselves when they think that perhaps God will not know they have broken his only sign of obedience, or that he may not care; they also deceive themselves when they hopefully believe that death will bring an end to their suffering and guilt. However, it is Satan, the archetypal fallen being, who best illustrates the marriage of sin and deception. He is constantly deceiving others--in hell, in heaven before his expulsion, and in Paradise; his every utterance deceives someone; in his soliloquies he deceives

himself.⁶⁵ Every fallen being in Paradise Lost is constantly engaged in deceiving. What is noteworthy is that the first example of self-deception or the deception of others by Adam and Eve comes after the eating of the apple. Until this time, Adam and Eve have been characterized by their honesty, striking in its completeness and purity. This, while not conclusive evidence in itself, seems to lend weight to the belief that Adam and Eve are sinless until the eating of the apple.

It may seem difficult to accept prelapsarian man as sinless and imperfect, though one should remember that this is the view taken by most Christian churches today toward a child before it reaches the age of reason. Their being imperfect yet sinless makes it possible for Adam and Eve to have many qualities which after the Fall will appear as sinful, but which were not necessarily so in a prelapsarian time. Who can say what significance an act may have had before the birth of human experience as we know it? What critics have seen as signs that the Fall should be extended back in time, or perhaps that the condition of man from the moment of his creation has been fallen, are in reality only signs of potential weaknesses that would become enlarged and distorted into sins after the Fall, distorted as is man himself and the divine image within him. Love will become lust and uxoriousness; appreciation of one's beauty will become vain pride;

curiosity will become an inordinate thirst for knowledge;⁶⁶ moderate gratification of the senses will become lust or gluttony; even man's belief in his own dignity will become aspiration to godhead.

These potential weaknesses are not the causes of the Fall. They are the conditions of prelapsarian man and will serve as a contrast to man's fallen condition. I do not believe that there is one psychological cause for the Fall. We can never really ask why man fell. The most we can say is what Milton said in the first twenty-six lines of Paradise Lost: man fell because he disobeyed. But this is much like saying that man was disobedient because he disobeyed.⁶⁷

Although difficult for the modern mind to accept, the Fall of Man to Milton was a great event of faith which could not be explained logically.⁶⁸

If it is granted that these potential weaknesses are not well-laid signs that Adam and Eve are fallen before the eating of the apple, exactly what is their function in Paradise Lost?

It is often said that, while the description of prelapsarian man is extraordinarily beautiful, Adam and Eve as artistic characters are unsuccessful until after the Fall. The beauty of Adam and Eve can hardly be disputed, but that they are unsuccessful as characters in a narrative is open to question. Certainly, Milton's purpose in writing Paradise Lost and the nature of the subject matter made it

impossible for Adam and Eve to have idiosyncracies, or individuality. However, Adam and Eve do have a certain charm, are genuinely interesting in themselves, and do take on some of the weight and substance of human beings in the five so-called sinful acts before "man's first Disobedience." When Eve admires her reflection in the pool; and when, in fear, she recounts her dream and is comforted by Adam; when Adam presses to know the nature of the universe and what is beyond the stars; when he expresses the strength of his love for Eve; and when Adam and Eve discuss the merit of working apart with undignified restraint: it is in these scenes that Adam and Eve become living characters.

Tillyard and Bell have, I feel, rendered something of a service to Milton criticism, emphasizing the possible conflict between Paradise Lost as a work of art and Paradise Lost as a statement of religious conviction. They have, more particularly, pointed out how the five episodes not found in the biblical account do make prelapsarian man more familiar. However, the rigidity of their thinking has not only led them to doubtful conclusions--Adam and Eve are fallen before Book IX; the crisis of the poem occurs with the eating of the apple; sin was inevitable and necessary--but it has also rendered them incapable of adequately defending these conclusions. If one's thinking has not been made rigid by presuming that

prelapsarian man must have been either perfect or fallen, these episodes fit within the framework of an imperfect, "yet sinless," Adam and Eve, and the Fall occurs, as it did in the biblical account, with the eating of the forbidden fruit.

- 1 (Cambridge, 1962), p. 61. Other critics who support this position are: E. E. Stoll, Maurice Kelley, Max Bertschinger. For these, see Bibliography.
- 2 (London, 1951), p. 10.
- 3 Ibid., p. 10.
- 4 Ibid., pp. 10-11.
- 5 Ibid., p. 13.
- 6 PMLA, LXVII, No. 4-5.
- 7 Among those who have disagreed with Tillyard and Bell are Arnold Stein, Wayne Shumaker, J. S. Diekhoff, J. B. Broadbent, John Peter, and B. A. Wright. For these, see Bibliography.
- 8 "The Fallacy of the Fall in Paradise Lost," PMLA, LXVIII, No. 4-5, p. 963.
- 9 Ibid., p. 863.
- 10 Ibid., p. 867.
- 11 Ibid., p. 878.
- 12 Ibid., p. 878.
- 13 Paradise Lost, Works of John Milton, ed. F. A. Patterson (Columbia, 1931-1940)--hereafter referred to as Works--II, part 1, p. 80 - 81.
- 14 Paradise Lost, Works, II, part 1, p. 81.
- 15 Areopagitica, Works, IV, p. 310.
- 16 Paradise Lost, Works, II, part 1, p. 114.
- 17 Paradise Lost, Works, II, part 2, p. 298.
- 18 Paradise Lost, Works, II, part 2, p. 348.
- 19 Paradise Lost, Works, II, part 2, p. 395.
- 20 "The Crisis of Paradise Lost Reconsidered," PQ, XXXVI, p. 9.

- 21 Paradise Lost, Works, II, part 1, p. 81.
- 22 "The Fallacy of the Fall in Paradise Lost," PMLA, LXVIII, No. 4-5, p. 863.
- 23 Ibid., pp. 1190-91.
- 24 Ibid., p. 1192.
- 25 A Preface to Paradise Lost (New York, 1961), p. 117.
- 26 Ibid., p. 117.
- 27 Paradise Lost, Works, II, part 1, pp. 116-17.
- 28 Paradise Lost, Works, II, part 1, p. 243.
- 29 Paradise Lost, Works, II, part 1, p. 153. It should be noted in passing that this speech tells us as much about Adam as about Eve. The ironic inclusion of "Grace" and "Heaven" in one utterance--which Raphael could not help noticing--clearly shows that Adam's judgment is imperfect where Eve is concerned. That he is apt to confuse divine loyalties and mortal ones will be clearly born out in Book IX.
- 30 Paradise Lost, Works, II, part 1, p. 118.
- 31 De Doctrina Christiana, Works, XV, p. 45.
- 32 See George Whiting, Milton and This Pendant World (Austin, 1958); and Douglas Bush, Paradise Lost in Our Time (Glouster, Mass., 1957).
- 33 Paradise Lost, Works, II, part 1, p. 134.
- 34 "The Crisis of Paradise Lost Reconsidered," PQ, XXXVI, pp. 5-6.
- 35 De Doctrina Christiana, Works, XV, p. 39. Also see XV, p. 53.
- 36 De Doctrina Christiana, Works, XV, p. 181.
- 37 Paradise Lost, Works, II, part 1, p. 81.
- 38 "The Crisis of Paradise Lost Reconsidered," PQ, XXXVI, p. 6.

- 39 Paradise Lost, Works, II, part 1, pp. 122-23.
- 40 Paradise Lost, Works, II, part 1, p. 124.
- 41 Paradise Lost, Works, II, part 1, p. 148.
- 42 Studies in Milton (London, 1951), p. 11.
- 43 "The Fallacy of the Fall in Paradise Lost," PMLA, LXVIII, No. 4-5, p. 871.
- 44 "Notes, Documents and Critical Comment," PMLA, LXX, No. 5, pp. 1185-86.
- 45 Milton's Paradise Lost: A Commentary (New York, 1958), p. 56.
- 46 "The Crisis of Paradise Lost Reconsidered," PQ, XXXVI, p. 3.
- 47 The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce, Works, III, p. 41.
- 48 Areopagitica, Works, IV, p. 310.
- 49 Paradise Lost, Works, II, part 1, p. 242.
- 50 "The Fallacy of the Fall in Paradise Lost," PMLA, LXVIII, No. 4-5, p. 872.
- 51 Paradise Lost, Works, II, part 1, p. 152.
- 52 Paradise Lost, Works, II, part 1, p. 255.
- 53 "The Fallacy of the Fall in Paradise Lost," PMLA, LXVIII, No. 4-5, p. 873.
- 54 Studies in Milton (London, 1951), p. 12.
- 55 Paradise Lost, Works, II, part 1, p. 257.
- 56 It should be noted that in the opening of Book IX Milton refers to Adam's conversations with Raphael as "venial discourse unblamed" (line 5).
- 57 "Notes, Documents and Critical Comment," PMLA, LXX, No. 5.

- 58 Ibid., pp. 1189-90.
- 59 Studies in Milton (London, 1950), p. 17.
- 60 "The Fallacy of the Fall in Paradise Lost," PMLA, LXVIII, No. 4-5, p. 869.
- 61 Ibid., p. 870.
- 62 Ibid., p. 870.
- 63 Studies in Milton (London, 1951), pp. 19-20.
- 64 "The Crisis of Paradise Lost Reconsidered," PQ, XXXVI, p. 3.
- 65 See C. S. Lewis, A Preface to Paradise Lost (New York, 1960), pp. 94-103.
- 66 See Howard Schultz, Milton and Forbidden Knowledge (New York, 1955).
- 67 This is Bell's point and a just one, I think. "The Fallacy of the Fall in Paradise Lost," PMLA, LXVIII, No. 4-5, p. 864.
- 68 See W. S. Worden, "Milton's Approach to the Story of the Fall," ELH, XIV, p. 27.

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TILLYARD, BELL, AND MILTON ON THE FALL OF MAN

by

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AN ABSTRACT OF A MASTER'S REPORT

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E. M. W. Tillyard in his Studies in Milton and Millicent Bell in PMLA (Dec. 1953) advanced a unique interpretation of the Fall of man in Paradise Lost. Briefly stated, their argument is that Adam and Eve were fallen before the eating of the apple and that the crisis of the poem occurs with Adam and Eve's reconciliation and their confession to God. However, the Fall was such an important element in Milton's religious thought that it is doubtful he would have distorted or undercut it in an artistic presentation. An examination of the structure of Paradise Lost reveals that the eating of the apple in Book IX is the crisis of the poem and is essentially faithful to the Biblical account.

Tillyard and Bell are justly reacting to the assumption (seen even in a critic of C. S. Lewis' stature) that prelapsarian Adam and Eve were perfect beings. That man is made in God's image is an idea found constantly in Milton's writings and seems to indicate that Adam and Eve were not perfect. But Tillyard and Bell assert that since Adam and Eve are not perfect, they must be fallen.

This is equally doubtful. Eve's admiration of her reflection in Book IV, Adam's questioning of Raphael about the nature of the universe and his admission to Raphael that his love for Eve has the power to upset his reason (all cited by Tillyard and Bell as examples of pre-Fall sin) seem based on

innocence rather than deliberation. Similarly, Adam's echoing of Milton's sentiments that "Evil into the mind of God or Man/ May come or go, so unapprov'd, and leave/ No spot or blame behind" refutes Tillyard's claim that Eve's dream in Book IV shows her to be fallen. Eve's so-called sinful desire to work apart from Adam in the beginning of Book IX is likewise innocent in light of Milton's comment later in the book that Eve was "yet sinless."

Adam and Eve in these five scenes do demonstrate potential weaknesses which would become distorted and enlarged after the eating of the apple. Milton's addition of these five scenes to the Biblical account of the Fall serves the function of making Adam and Eve more successful as characters in a narrative, but these five scenes do not show that Adam and Eve are fallen. Adam and Eve fall, as Milton asserts even in the first line of the poem, when they pluck the fruit of the forbidden tree.