

Paradise Lost V, Fish

We'll get a bit more re Milton's religion including rebuttal of Fish in 2 weeks. Next week, the reading in Kerrigan concerns itself with some of book V's odder features.

Eve's question (IV 637):

- “to know no more is women's happiest knowledge and her praise” -- why are there stars at night, when we are not awake to see them? (How do we understand the juxtaposition of her speech's beginning and end?).

Adam's answer:

- night reminds us of universe's sublimity, that we are only small part of it, that there are other eyes requiring light to see.
- Their light prevents night from regaining its “old possession”— should we read this as actual rival empire, or simply as metaphor, description of the time *before* God created light? (Darkness did not need to be created; God's chaotic “dark materials” are the stuff on which creation worked).
- Light of heavenly bodies includes “stellar virtue,” on the analogy of heat in sun's rays – light is understood as energy, and that energy not only illuminates but nourishes and sustains life. Energetically, starlight keeps things ticking over – *no* light = no energy in system, no life.

Thus, no night as such in heaven – “dim” night, twilight. But does that make night bad?

- Adam: “God hath set labor and rest, as day and night to men successive” – work “declares [man's] dignity” (IV 612).
- Adam and Eve retire into darkness of the shady, no shadier bower (and poet's silence or indirection) @ 690 for love-making (“rites mysterious”).
- Night is when reason sleeps (V, 108-13) but fancy wakes (Adam's theory for the etiology of Eve's dream). Is *that* a problem? Reason needs to sleep (see the IV 612 quote above re human dignity, and Raphael's later description of the alternation of day and night in heaven as “grateful vicissitude,” pleasurable change – cf. Adam's “repose” at noon from the sun's rays and his own labor).
- Why doesn't *fancy* (imagination) need to sleep? Is it *guilty* here, or simply w/o particular morality (because not indissolubly attached to the reason and will)?
- Adam bending over Eve sees beauty that “whether waking or asleep shot forth peculiar graces” (14-15). Beauty and fancy seem to be curiously autonomous parts of the self, which operate w/o our volition or even consciousness. Again, *not evil*. Cp. Eve's “wanton” hair. 294: “nature here wantoned as in her prime, and played at will her virgin fancies”. (“Wanton” and “play” are virtual synonyms). Beauty, imagination, profuse sweetness – these are features of Eden we simply can't ignore or write off as inattention. Nor as demonic rhetoric. Are they “distraction”?? That's an awful lot to have to look past! Do we really think Adam and Eve aren't supposed to enjoy it? (I'm arguing with Fish). If not, for what appears to be Paradise of intense sensual pleasure we should instead understand a Paradise of strenuous and constant challenges for Adam and Eve. But they don't appear to feel a sense of challenge, or precariousness, much less guilt.

Raphael's arrival

- Back to light and dark. Book V's main action begins at midday, but paradoxically this is when Adam has again withdrawn from heat into “bow'r or shade” (230), because the sun provides “more warmth than Adam needs” (302).
- We find later that heaven has “our evening and our morn, we ours for change delectable, not

need” – and that heaven’s night is only “grateful twilight,” no darker (V 627 ff).

- At beginning of VI, R describes mechanism (since no sun in heaven), and characterizes the alternation of light and dark as “grateful vicissitude”.
- So we can’t read light/dark simply as good/evil.
- Adam’s “physics” seems to translate light/dark as energy/matter. That gives us at least suggestive way in to one of the most explicit concerns of Book V, which also begins the massive information download that will occupy four central books of the poem – what is the relationship between earthly and heavenly things, or between matter and spirit? How do angels eat and digest food, how is dinner prepared in Eden or in heaven, what do angels talk about after meals, etc.
- Do angels poo? Or in more sophisticated terms, V 570-76, “What if Earth be but the shadow of Heav’n and things therein each to other like more than on Earth is thought?” Is the relationship between Earth and Heaven *mimetic* (one is shadow/image of the other, more real) or allegorical (systems of signs where corporeal things *stand for* spiritual things to which they are analogous)?
- Why might Milton care that angels really eat, not only *seeming* to eat (435)?
- Matter/spirit not separated by Cartesian divide, but exist on hierarchical *continuum* which is also in some way a *cycle* (404-33). The material world is not an idolatrous distraction, but created good, for our use and pleasure.

“To render man inexcusable” (Argument) vs. “Them beheld with pity heav’n’s high King” (V, 220).

- What effect does this download, here particularly the info re Satan’s revolt, have on Adam and Eve, and on us? (NB: Eve leaves only @ beginning of VIII, and we learn later that she returned before the end of the colloquy, in time for R’s warning).
- “inexcusable” is Milton’s voice, not God’s, though God does anticipate that an uninformed Adam might “pretend surprisal”.
- Is the knowledge delivered in Book V useful, does it make Adam more or less free, is it the right knowledge?
- NOTE: these questions respond in part to ones raised in various journals (some of which replicate the unease Fish says we feel at hearing God name man as “ingrate” in Book III) -- so I won’t forestall the discussion we may still have with further comment.

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