How Does Your Garden Grow:  
Nature, Ecology, and the Urban Environment in *Paradise Lost*

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# Table of Contents

Introduction ........................................................................................................................................7

Chapter 1: Adam & Eve’s Growing Work ......................................................................................15

Chapter 2: Eden as Anti-London ....................................................................................................35

Chapter 3: Be Fruitful and Multiply .............................................................................................59

Conclusion .......................................................................................................................................79

Bibliography .....................................................................................................................................83
Introduction

The inspiration for this thesis came about when I took a course on John Milton during my sophomore year. When reading *Paradise Lost*, I was captivated by Milton’s beautiful and complex vision of the Garden of Eden and the role of humanity in paradise. Milton’s epic was not just a faithful copy of the biblical account of the fall of humanity; he was also able to inject a sense of freshness in the tale. The level of imaginative detail that Milton incorporated into his depictions of Heaven, Hell, and Eden— the suffering of the fallen angels in Hell, warfare between angels, Adam and Eve’s first meeting, the role of active work in the garden, and the stake that creation has in the fall – was inspiring to me. I became interested in the idea of gardens as a hybrid space between the natural landscape and manmade art. Gardens are real, physical spaces constructed and shaped by human hands, but they also represent an ideal natural space. And since Eden is lost to humankind, it is preserved as a purely imaginary space through Milton’s texts and the works of other writers as the last outpost of the true wilderness, of a perfect natural world as it was designed to be. Thus, when I came across the field of eco-criticism, I became interested in the role literature and the imagination can have in this discussion about environmental preservation. What does Milton have to say about the ideal relationship of humans to nature? How does his concept of wilderness compare to that of his peers and predecessors? How much of his response is shaped by his historical circumstances? And how do his metaphors of the land influence the way humans treat the natural world?
In Milton studies, there is an underlying assumption that Milton did not engage with his contemporaries. When we think about the motivations behind *Paradise Lost*, we first think of Milton’s poetic ambition to write the first English epic, and second the subject of creation and the fall of mankind, which is wholly disconnected from the present time. In neither case do we connect the poem to Milton’s contemporary context. I argue that Milton was living in a literary world composed of Classical authors and his peers that had seen important meditations on what a garden can and should be. Milton was also living in a time of emerging awareness about how human actions can both endanger and be influenced by nature. In this paper, I use Milton’s vision of paradise as filter to explore the environmental anxieties of early modern London. I will re-situate *Paradise Lost* in the context of Milton’s time and place – early modern London – in order to explore the relationship between Eden and real gardens for English people in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. By weaving the thread of literary tradition with the thread of Milton’s contemporary experiences, we will see Milton’s reformist attitudes towards work and nature. In fact, Milton’s Eden is a response to the emerging urban and environmental problems of his time – overpopulation, air pollution, rapid urbanization – and an enlightening study on how gardens can influence labor and sexual relations.

My first chapter sketches the intellectual and artistic landscape that served as an inspiration to Milton. The Bible is of course the most obvious influence on Milton’s work, and his text follows the account outlined in the Bible. Before Milton, no one attempted to write an epic of this scale. However, Milton is engaging with the literary tradition of describing nature as a heaven on earth connecting back to the Classical Golden Age and Elysium espoused by Ovid, Virgil, and Homer. Furthermore, many of his peers writing in the
same time period wrote about their concerns regarding human interactions with the environment. These authors—Edmund Spenser, Shakespeare, Andrew Marvell—mixed medieval allegories with Renaissance rhetorical tropes, presenting blasphemous imitations and brilliant renditions of biblical Eden, as well as staging ecological debates on the superiority of man over nature and the ethics of human intervention. I will examine the ways in which Milton’s predecessors and contemporaries reinterpreted the gardens that came before and responded to the rich tapestry of classical and biblical traditions. Milton’s Eden is built on the tradition of all these gardens of the past, but he is not a perfect inheritor of this pattern. Milton infuses this rich literary tradition of earthly paradise with his own innovations to creatively respond to the questions raised by other writers as well as create a new, dynamic natural world. In *Paradise Lost*, Milton’s Eden recalls a simpler, more rustic and blissful time that parallels the blessed places of the Golden Age. Adam and Eve live in a rich harmony with nature. Every need is met and provided for due to the bounty of the garden. However, Milton does not linger on Eden’s immense beauty. Instead he raises questions about the ethics of human intervention, the tension between wilderness and the need for order, the psychological impact of a space, and the possibility for humans to exist in harmony with nature. I will focus in particular on Milton’s emphasis on the need for occupation in the garden and the complex ways in which humans find delight in nature. Milton invents a schedule for Adam and Eve composed of daily gardening tasks, which allow the couple to exercise their agency and increase the pleasure they experience in Eden. The emphasis on the garden’s prolific and luxurious growth that requires consistent human labor sets Milton’s creation wholly apart from any of the literary gardens imagined before his time as well as any of the real, physical gardens that Milton might have walked through in his lifetime.
In chapter two, I explore Eden as the antithesis to the seventeenth century London metropolis, examining the ways in which the problems of air pollution and disease manifest in Milton’s work. I was inspired by the contrasts between the foul infernal smoke of the city and sweet air of paradise that run through *Paradise Lost* to focus on how Milton uses scent specifically to differentiate his imaginary garden paradise from the reality of London the city. Of course, gardens are multisensorial spaces, planted for enjoyment through both sight and smell. However, upon closer examination, I found that some of Milton’s most powerful images of Eden evoke scent. Cities can ultimately be understood by the bodies that occupy this space, and hence the foul odors associated with crowds and urban life provide a framework to study the urban environment of London. By taking a closer look into the smellscape of early modern London – composed of foul odors from human bodies, the plague, and commercial activity mixed in with the fragrances and spices of gardens – I draw comparisons between the urban air pollution and plague that Londoners experienced in their daily lives in the seventeenth century with the Miltonic vision of Eden. Disease and air pollution were two of the most pressing urban problems in the early modern period. London’s population grew rapidly due to the migration of laborers from the countryside into the city, and as the city became more and more crowded, the stench of disease and sulfurous smoke became part of the prolonged smells of the city. Because of all of the highly sulfurous sea-coal that England was burning at the time to meet their energy needs, the sulfurous emissions were especially apparent in the metropolis. The tunnels of black smoke and toxic emissions from industrial polluters—soap and salt boilers, lime-burners, brewers, etc.—cast darkness over the city, mirroring Satan’s deplorable state in sulfurous hell. Londoners also became increasingly aware of the link between the air pollution and their health and sought
ways to purify and counter the noxious air. Gardens became a prized solution to this problem, offering an escape from the claustrophobic, suffocating pressures of the city. Londoners could enter these garden spaces for a whiff of fragrant, Edenic air as a respite from the infernal smoke and sulfurous vapors. Perhaps fittingly for the blind poet, scent comes forth as the sensory medium through which Milton experiences bliss. Milton posits that the gentle gales of paradise and natural scents that evoke God’s ambrosial fragrance possess the power to restore health and uplift spirits. As these contemporary ideas about the scented environment make their way into Milton’s text, we recognize how descriptions of Eden are intimately connected to the context of London through the use of foul odors and fragrant aromas.

In chapter three, I contrast the anxieties of overcrowding and urbanization in the seventeenth century with Eden’s fertile environment and God’s mandate to Adam and Eve to reproduce. As I explored in the first chapter, the exuberant growth and fecundity of Eden is perceived as almost overwhelming for Adam and Eve. The garden seems to have a life of its own, and this regenerative energy mirrors the pace at which London’s urban population replaces itself. Just as the plants in Eden have a natural tendency to grow profusely, the inhabitants of London seemed to grow at a monstrous rate. Early modern Londoners viewed this uncontrollable growth as threatening not only because it put a strain on the city’s resources, but also because it bred urban unrest and disease. In contrast to this perceived urban crisis, Milton’s God commands Adam and Eve to reproduce and fill the earth. Eden contains an aura of regeneration and inexhaustible growth that is almost too endless for Adam and Eve to handle alone. Not only must the couple work to trim back this prodigious growth, they also experience the urge to produce more offspring to help manage Eden’s
resources and prevent waste. Thus, Milton gives Adam and Eve a healthy sexual life, one that reinforces their love and commitment for each other as well as supports the mandate to procreate. Nature’s fertility also has a psychological impact on the couple and motivates their marital relations. Eden serves as both a participant and witness to their acts of love. Before God creates Eve as Adam’s partner, Adam experiences the deep, excruciating pain of loneliness. Despite the generosity of God in creating an abundance of beasts, fowl, and fish, Adam craves the companionship of an equal partner. Hence, sex serves an important social and emotional function beyond just satisfying their physical needs. All of Eden becomes Adam and Eve’s marital bed, and Milton creates an ambience of love using the scented and visual environment of the garden. Furthermore, Adam and Eve are not only wedded to each other, but to Eden as well. Their idyllic and harmonious marriage extends to the garden, in which the plants and flowers mimic their loving embraces. Hence, all of nature is implicated in their transgression. When Adam and Eve consume the forbidden fruit, they introduce death and hardship into the universe. However, Milton allows the couple to maintain some semblance of paradise through their marriage. Adam chooses to fall with Eve, for he would rather suffer in the fallen world with her by his side than experience the anguish of being alone in paradise.

This paper explores the dynamics of work and rest, of perfume and stink, and of crowdedness and the need to populate as they appear in Milton’s Eden. Though these elements may seem disconnected upon first glance, if we take time to attend to these forces in the context of early modern London, we discover surprisingly vivid connections between real gardens and Milton’s paradise. These contrasts between the city and the garden, of the urban and the rural, appear in Eden even though the garden is timeless. Milton’s Eden is
more than an imaginary exercise of replicating earthly paradise, it addresses and seeks to provide answers to the environmental and social issues that were urgent and real to Milton – urbanization, overpopulation, and air pollution— and continue to be relevant to our current environmental crisis.

Through the Schiff Fellowship¹, I was also able to visit London, England and conduct a tour of Renaissance-style gardens. Although very few gardens survive intact from the Renaissance, there are extant Tudor and Stuart style gardens in England that I was able to visit. This opportunity to experience the physical reality of the gardens that Milton would have known and walked through in his lifetime has been invaluable to my research, helping me understand how Milton’s thoughts of ideal landscapes were influenced by the gardens that survived into his lifetime. Strolling through these gardens, smelling the fragrance of the fruits and plants, and admiring the design of the landscape in person enabled me to experience the sense of personal fulfillment with a garden that Milton sought to create when depicting humankind’s lost state of bliss. I will be incorporating my insights during my travels into this paper, specifically the different styles of English gardens I saw and my personal experiences traveling from the city into the countryside.

¹ I would like to thank Wellesley College for awarding me with the Jerome A. Schiff Fellowship to cover my
Milton was not the only writer of his time interested in the interaction between humans and nature. In fact, he had many influences in the depictions of the natural landscapes and garden spaces. One of the most important inspirations was of course the Bible, which laid the foundation for his tale, but *Paradise Lost* is not just an extended version of Genesis. In fact, Milton drew inspiration from the physical gardens around him as well as medieval and Renaissance texts that employed garden imagery. Among these scholarly influences are works by Dante, Edmund Spenser, William Shakespeare, and Andrew Marvell. This chapter will examine the literary visions of gardens Milton might have drawn upon when he set out to write about this foundational space of human history. By exploring these artistic responses to the nostalgia for the natural world, we will begin to see how this yearning for a connection to a purer past inspired Milton to create a new earthly Eden whose flora and fauna interacts intimately with the first couple.

Milton is engaging with a long tradition and cultural history of associating gardens with paradise, the one and only Eden of the Bible. In this cultural tradition, these real garden spaces, while lovely paradisiacal places in themselves, also act as a metaphor for true Eden, which is no longer accessible to humanity after the fall. Milton’s poetry is informed by his knowledge of his predecessors’ and cotemporaries’ works and their meditations on how garden spaces should be defined. In his youth, Milton was familiar with many of Dante’s
work, including the first major theological poem of the Renaissance, *The Divine Comedy.*

He was also a careful and enthusiastic reader of Edmund Spenser’s work. *The Faerie Queene* is Spenser’s incomplete attempt to write the first neoclassical English epic, a challenge that Milton undertook when he began writing *Paradise Lost.* In addition, Milton was an admirer of the poet he called “my Shakespeare,” and *The Winter’s Tale* contains debates about the ethics of human intervention in gardening practices. Finally, Andrew Marvell was a contemporary poet in whom Milton took an interest. Marvell composed “On Paradise Lost” as an introduction to *Paradise Lost,* and Milton even recommended Marvell to Council of State as Assistant Latin Secretary. Marvell offers an alternative perspective to Milton’s vision for the appropriate relationship between human beings and nature in his poems “The Mower Against Gardens” (1681) and “The Garden” (1668). Each of these writers offers his own understanding about humanity’s relations with the natural world, and Milton builds upon this foundation by expanding the framework with his own inventions.

Milton’s garden is its own private universe, and Milton emphasizes the untainted paradise’s inherent, natural beauty. Overall, the physical description of the Garden of Eden in *Paradise Lost* aligns with the biblical account in the book of Genesis. But more striking than the similarities is how Milton departs from this established model and sets a new precedent in the envisioning of earthly paradise. One of Milton’s most creative innovations is the inclusion of work and labor in the Eden. How should humans spend their time in the paradise? Is the great, unspoiled garden simply a place for rest and recreation, or is there some other agenda that Adam and Eve should follow? In his wide reading of other poets' work, including the first major theological poem of the Renaissance, *The Divine Comedy.*

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ideas of gardens and gardening labor, Milton positioned himself both with and against the answers that other poets propose to these questions.

II. What is a Garden?

There is a long tradition linking the very concept of paradise to a physical garden. Paradise does not only refer to “a place or region of supreme bliss”, its etymological meaning is an enclosed garden. Gardens are represented in accounts of the Golden Age and medieval passages on love as not only external, geographical spaces but also internal, psychological states. A. Bartlett Giamatti describes the garden as a “place of perfect repose and inner harmony.” The garden is a beautiful place because it satisfies our inner desires for peace, harmony, and love. In order to piece together this image of a perfect life, the poets must resort to a technique which says what the site and nature of the good life are not, as well as to descriptions of what it is. And this very spectacle, of words striving through traditional images and the negative formula to encompass an inner ideal, stylistically mirrors those central themes of earthly paradise literature – the place’s desirability and inaccessibility.

Thus, the garden was never a strictly physical space. In fact, the spiritual and psychological impact of being in the natural environment is even more valuable. The inherent beauty of the garden is borne out of the garden representing a timeless ideal that, no matter how humans attempt to recreate through gardening and human intervention, is ultimately unattainable.

Any discussion of an earthly paradise must of course begin with the very first description of the Garden of Eden. In Genesis, the first mention of such a garden takes place immediately after the creation of the world:

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4 “Paradise, n. 3a, 4a,” The Oxford English Dictionary (OED).
6 Ibid. 11
And the LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground made the LORD God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil... And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it.\(^7\)

This passage establishes the basic elements of the Garden of Eden, one with an abundance of flora and fauna, where humans are given dominion over all entities in the garden. Milton introduces his garden in a similar vein, describing Eden as a “Heaven on earth, for blissful Paradise/ Of God the garden was, by him in the east/ Of Eden planted\(^8\).” And “in this pleasant soil/ His far more pleasant garden God ordained; / Out of the fertile ground he caused to grow/ All trees of noblest kind of sight, smell, taste.”\(^9\) These are the essential ingredients that Milton uses to create his Eden before incorporating the conventions applied to gardens of the Golden Age and the Classical and Medieval periods.

III. The Golden Age and the Pastoral Tradition

The concept of earthly paradise is traditionally based on features of “the Classical Golden Age,” which promoted peace, harmony, and stability. Hesiod’s *Works and Days* and Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* contain prime representations of the Golden Age that offer alternative myths about the origin of mankind and define the classical model of work and life in paradise. The key elements of Ovid and Hesiod’s Golden Age are first, the endless abundance of food, and second, the absence of work and pain. Hesiod describes a world of perpetual spring where the “the grain-giving field bore crops of its own accord, much and unstinting.”\(^10\) Similarly, Ovid writes, “the earth herself, without compulsion, untouched by hoe or plowshare, of herself gave all things needful. And men, content with food which came

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\(^7\) *The King James Version of the Holy Bible. Genesis* 2:8-15
\(^9\) Ibid. Book IV 213-216.
Humans live in an era of sheer abundance and prosperity. They effortlessly gather food that seems to spill forth from the generous earth. There is absolutely no physical exertion, no agriculture, no need to even use a plow or actively search for food. Humans spend their lives “entirely apart from toil and distress.” These ideas create the basis for the general concept of a paradise, one free from stresses and hardship.

In contrast, work defines the human condition in the Iron Age, the era that Hesiod and Ovid locate themselves in. This Iron Age marks the introduction of active labor and misery. Hesiod describes that humans “will not cease from toil and distress by day, nor from being worn out by suffering at night.” For Ovid, “not only did men demand of the bounteous fields the crops and sustenance they owed, but they delved as well into the very bowels of the earth.” This is the complete opposite to the ease and comforts of the Golden Age. Food that once was plentiful has become an inaccessible treasure buried in the depths of the earth. The heavy clusters of ripe fruit hanging from trees have been replaced by crops that must be arduously obtained with a hoe and plow. Similarly, the Latin poet Virgil’s *Georgics*, describes the necessity of hard labor in husbandry and agriculture. Work is perceived as painful punishment that must be undertaken. This model of hardship is one that continues to define the current conditions of humans in the fallen.

The Pastoral tradition has its roots in nostalgia for the Golden Age, for the uncorrupted Garden, yet is not a perfect parallel. The idealized vision of shepherds living a life of innocence and simplicity in harmony with the natural world recalls the prosperity of

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13 Ibid. 103.
the Golden Age. However, while leisure is important in the pastoral mode, the framework of otium requires the undemanding work of tending the sheep. Even when swains spend most of their time composing beautiful poetry and song, they at least have nominal jobs of being shepherds. Thus, Milton’s model of a balance of work and leisure in Eden may actually be closer to the pastoral rather than the Golden Age. Milton’s predecessors and contemporaries were undoubtedly influenced by this timeless pastoral fantasy.

Andrew Marvell’s “The Garden” (1681) describes the sense of overwhelming provisions in the natural world that aligns with the central tenets of the Golden Age. He praises the garden as a place of rest, tranquility, and retirement from daily life. The speaker describes how foods seem to fall into his mouth: “Ripe apples drop about my head; / “The luscious clusters of the vine/ Upon my mouth do crush their wine;/ The nectarine and curious peach/ Into my hands themselves do reach.”16 The garden is teeming with a wide variety of delicious foods that serve to satisfy the speaker’s every want. Absolutely no active agency is required on the part of humans, the fruit seem to have a mind of their own and willingly serve themselves to be consumed by the speaker. "Marvell's vision of paradise, albeit unsettling with its aggressive, even assaulting, flora, demonstrates that Milton’s garden is not simply a product of his time. As Milton’s contemporary, Marvell presents a traditional utopia, making Milton’s deviations from the classical model more remarkable and innovative.

IV. Humanity’s intimate connection to the natural world

Milton’s Eden is a significant departure from the classical model because he emphasizes the importance of both work and rest in paradise. One of Milton’s greatest innovations is creating a daily schedule for Adam and Eve in which they are assigned work.

Adam and Eve share a dynamic relationship with the earth even as Eden is characterized by a freedom from want and scarcity. Milton’s Eden continues the traditions of the Golden Age by celebrating the ripe abundance of the garden: “here on earth /God hath dispensed his bounties as in Heaven.” 17 The angel Raphael explains to the couple: “He [God] brought thee into this delicious grove, / This garden, planted with the trees of God, /Delectable both to behold and taste,/And freely all their pleasant fruit for food/ Gave thee.”18 In fact, there is an abundance of food available all year round because there is only one season in the garden: “all seasons, ripe for use hangs on the stalk.” 19 This type of social harmony and natural fecundity was emphasized in writings about the Golden Age. Since the garden is not lacking, it would seem that human labor is unnecessary. However, instead of being passive recipients of nature’s bounty, Adam and Eve are also active participants. They perform “pleasant labor” and take care of the numerous creatures borne out of the earth’s “fertile womb.”20 This abundance serves to emphasize how Adam and Eve’s desire to work is not borne out of the need for survival. And compared to the shepherds and shepherdesses, Adam and Eve’s work is not marginal to their existence. In fact, Milton exchanges the pastoral model of leisure and human passivity for a natural world that must be diligently controlled by human hands.

Adam and Eve are not merely the groundskeepers of Eden but an integral part of the garden. They have been specifically placed into this space to grow amongst the greenery. In the very first description of humans in Paradise Lost, Milton praises Adam’s “hyacinthine locks/ Round from his parted forelock manly hung/ Clustering but not beneath his shoulders broad” and Eve’s golden tresses: “Disheveled, but in wanton ringlets waved/ As the vine

18 Ibid. Book VII 537-540
19 Ibid. Book V 323
20 Ibid. Book VII 453
curls in her tendrils.”\textsuperscript{21} The human subjects are not alienated from the natural world. In fact, they seem to be composed of the same organic material as the garden and characterized by the hyacinth, vines, and tendrils. By using imagery associated with the Garden, Milton illustrates their profound connection to the landscape.

Furthermore, Milton imagines humans’ labor activity as a mode of creation that expresses their emotional bond. Adam and Eve’s work not only enhances their experience in the garden, but also bring the two closer together as a couple. Their ability to work harmoniously with each other is a testament to first, the strength of their bond with each other as a couple, and second, their union with the natural world as part of the ecosystem. Milton uses a traditional motif of an ideal marriage to characterize the work they perform.

Adam and Eve’s very first task is to marry the vine to the elm:

\begin{quote}
On to their morning’s rural work they haste,
Among sweet dews and flowers, where any row
Of fruit trees overwoody reached too far
Their pampered boughs and needed hands to check
Fruitless embraces; or they led the vine
To wed her elm: she spoused about him twines
Her marriageable arms and with her brings
Her dower, the adopted clusters, to adorn
His barren leaves.\textsuperscript{22}
\end{quote}

This image of vine clasped around an elm tree is a symbol of marriage commonly used to describe the happy, rural environment of amorous shepherds and pastoral lovers in Renaissance literature.\textsuperscript{23} The mention of “pampered boughs”, “embraces,” and “marriageable arms” all conjure the image of a blissful marriage. Eve is also identified as a vine clustering around Adam. Milton succeeds in making use of this classic image for his

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{21} Ibid. Book IV 301-307
\item \textsuperscript{22} Ibid. Book V, 211-219
\item \textsuperscript{23} Peter Demetz, “The Elm and the Vine: Notes toward the History of a Marriage Topos”, \textit{PLMA} 73.5 (1958), 421-532
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
own ends, transforming this symbol of love that was proverbial in the culture of his time into an image of gardening work. Under God’s supervision, Adam and Eve arrange the marriage of plants, transforming the barren space into one that is fertile and fruitful.\textsuperscript{24} Thus, nature seems to be an extension of their marriage. Milton subtly modulates this image of marriage to emphasize this strong, emotional bond that humans share with the environment. Milton proposes that the way to cultivate this relationship is to engage in productive work.

III. Spenser and the Danger of Idleness

Work is essential to Adam and Eve’s experience in the garden. Paradise is not simply a place where Adam and Eve passively wait to be fed like in Marvell’s garden. Adam and Eve are not the pastoral shepherds who enjoy \textit{otium} and never physically exert themselves. Everything in earthly paradise has its proper place and time, and this includes labor and leisure. In Marvell’s “The Garden,” nature’s fertility is too much for the speaker to manage, and overwhelms all bodily sense: the speaker stumbles "on melons as I pass, / Ensar’d with flow’rs, I fall on grass."\textsuperscript{25} In contrast, the sheer abundance of the garden’s provisions does not overwhelm Adam and Eve because they are tasked with containing and managing this prodigious growth. As mentioned before, it is crucial that Adam and Eve’s engagement with the land is more than an attempt to find substance; their work serves a greater purpose. The couple is assigned just enough work each day for their rest to be pleasurable and appetites to awaken: “They sat them down, and after no more toil/ Of their sweet gardening labor than sufficed/ To recommend cool zephyr and made ease / More easy, wholesome thirst and appetite/ More grateful, to their supper fruits they fell.”\textsuperscript{26} Milton demonstrates a much more

\textsuperscript{24} This image captures the intertwining of work and marriage and will be further examined in Chapter 3 in the discussion about the garden as Adam and Eve’s bedroom.
\textsuperscript{25} Marvell, “The Garden”, 39-40
\textsuperscript{26} Milton, \textit{Paradise Lost}, Book IV 327-331.
complex and rich conception of rest and pleasure. The labor that Adam and Eve perform is not arduous. Instead, it allows them to gain a heightened experience of satisfaction. The pair becomes even more “easy” and “grateful” than if they had remained idle all day long with no purpose. Therefore, a paradise absent of work is not a true paradise, and the repose and gratification one experiences in such a setting are false as well.

Similarly, Spenser addresses need for occupation in the garden. Spenser had previously explored the dangers that ensue when creatures spend their days unemployed and without work to stimulate their minds and bodies. One of the important gardens in *The Faerie Queene* is the Bower of Bliss, the domain of the enchantress Acrasia. The Bower is indeed attractive with the abundance of delicious fruits and flourishing vegetation; it is “A place pickt out by choice of best alive,/ That natures worke by art can imitate: / In which what ever in this worldly state / Is sweet, and pleasing unto living sense.”27 However, the comforts of the garden have been amplified to such an excessive level that they undermine the authentic experience of pleasure. For example, although grapes hanging from trees “entice/ All passers by, to taste their lushious wine,” they are made “of burnish’d gold.”28 This gilded fruit seems rather ridiculous if the purpose of the grapes were to provide nutrition and satisfy one’s hunger. The Bower is overadorned and overburdened by these superfluous luxuries. Paul Alpers argues that Spenser believed that the ultimate delight of resting in God is unattainable in this earthly life.29 The attractive qualities of the Bower of Bliss are problematic because they are merely imitations of the truly divine pleasure of rest one can

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28 Ibid. Book 2 Canto XII 54-55.
only find in heaven. The true, sweet Sabbath’s rest cannot be found on earth, so any of the Bower’s attractions are only a substitute for the blissful reunion with God.

While Spenser poses the problem, here Milton offers a solution by imagining the pleasure one derives in paradise as more complicated and multifaceted. Adam and Eve’s gardening work is essential to their experience in the garden:

```
God hath set
Labor and rest, as day and night, to men
Successive, and the timely dew of sleep
Now falling with soft slumberous weight inclines
Our eyelids. Other creatures all day long
Rove idle unemployed and less need rest;
Man hath his daily work of body or mind
Appointed, which declares his dignity
And the regard of Heaven on all his ways,
While other animals unactive range,
And of their doings God takes no account. 30
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Adam and Eve’s work is valuable because it separates them from the rest of God’s creation. In comparison to the animals that “rove idle unemployed,” humans perform meaningful by tending to the garden according to God’s command. Labor distinguishes the couple as superior beings and asserts the “dignity” of humanity. Adam and Eve are placed in the garden to have dominion over the rest of the creation. A human is “not prone/ And brute as other creatures but endued/ With sanctity of reason, might erect/ His stature and, upright with front serene, Govern the rest, self-knowing.” 31 As “upright” creatures, humans possess the ability to reason and capacity for self-knowledge. This is indicative of the closer relationship they share with God compared to the rest of creation, so they can find individual fulfillment in God’s approval and recognition of their work. Therefore, the pleasure that they derive from these activities is genuine and completely unlike the artificiality found in the Bower of

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30 Milton, Paradise Lost, Book IV 612-622.
31 Ibid. Book VII 406-510
Bliss. Through their gardening labor, Adam and Eve gain a better understanding of the value of the natural world and their role in this system.

IV. A Garden, Tending to Wild

Milton’s Eden exists as an enclosed garden at the top of a steep, wooded hill, but the garden also has a surprising tendency to excess and disorder. The very first glimpse into Eden in *Paradise Lost* emphasizes this chaotic wilderness: “So on he fares to the border comes/ Of Eden, where delicious Paradise, / Now nearer, crowns with her enclosure green,/ As with a rural mound the champaign head/ Of a steep wilderness, whose hairy sides/ With thicket overgrown, grotesque and wild, / Access denied.” 32 This emphasis on garden as a wilderness differentiates Milton’s Eden from the orderly, manicured estates of the seventeenth century. During my garden tour, I observed that Renaissance gardens took inspiration from Italian hilltop villas and formal gardens built in the French style. These gardens featured decadent box gardens, geometrical terraces, and cascading water fountains. Elaborate knot gardens with gravel paths were also popular during this period.

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32 Ibid. Book IV, 131-137
33 All photographs were taken by me during my trip to England.

Image 1: Gardens featuring descending terraces at Haddon Hall, Bakewell. 33
In contrast to these popular garden trends seventeenth century that required detailed maintenance, Milton’s Eden “grotesque” and “overgrown” thicket seems simultaneously hostile and protective towards humans. On one hand, it protects Eden’s borders, but on the other hand, this prolific growth is almost too much for humans to manage. Eve complains, “the work under our labor grows/ Luxurious by restraint: what we by day/ Lop overgrown, or prune or prop or bind,/ One night or two with wanton growth derides, / tending to wild.”

The garden’s exuberant growth and fertility requires the continuous labor of Adam and Eve. Despite their efforts to trim it back, the garden seems to have a life of its own. Each day the couple awakens to begin their tasks and find that the lopped branches and pruned thickets have grown back overnight. “This regeneration seems to mock their efforts and overwhelms Adam and Eve. They insist that the garden requires “More hands than ours to lop their wanton growth.”

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34 Ibid. Book IX 207-12
grow wildly and profusely, and second, the physical effort that Adam and Eve put in to prune and tend the garden. The garden is kept in this delicate state of equilibrium.

The tendency for the garden to overgrow indicates that mankind’s intervention in nature is necessary for Eden to function as a system. Adam and Eve’s active labor also implies that there is room for change and improvement in Eden. However it is difficult to reconcile this mutability with the concept of perfection, which is defined as “the most complete or perfect stage of growth or development.” An object that is perfect cannot be improved upon. If Eden is meant to be the original earthly paradise, an image of prelapsarian bliss, the fact that the garden will continue to grow and mutate if left untended to by humans seems to suggest that the garden, as God created, is incomplete. How can this idyllic landscape be a place that continuously evolves rather than one that is automatically preserved in its state of perfection? Of course, there are some aspects of the garden that are constant. For example, there is only one season in Eden, so the garden enjoys eternal spring and year-long harvests, which are also characteristics of the Golden Age and Spenser’s gardens. Milton, however, breaks from tradition by incorporating an active dynamic of change within this framework.

The resistance to and suspicion of change is not new. The Garden of Adonis in The Faerie Queene is an image of order and stability. This garden is the setting to Spenser’s alternative creation story and makes it an excellent foil to Milton’s Eden. Although the theme of the idyllic garden has its origins in the biblical Eden, the Garden of Adonis is not based on Christian theology. Spenser’s tale consists of the reincarnation of humans and the cyclical nature of life. This garden is described as “the first seminary/ Of all things, that are borne to

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36 “Perfection,” Def. 1b, *Oxford English Dictionary*
live and dye.”37 The Garden of Adonis is where all living things begin and end their lives. It is the resting place for human souls before they are born into earthly bodies and sent forth to begin their lives in the world. Upon death, they return to the garden where they shed their matter before being reincarnated into a new form. Thus, while the physical shape of these souls constantly change, all matter is conserved: “The substance is not chaungd, nor altered, / But th’only forme and outward fashion.”38 The eternity that exists in the Garden of Adonis consists of the persistent use and reuse of matter; the garden is held in a permanent state of stasis. Time is the garden’s only enemy: “wicked Tyme, who with his scythe addrest,/ Does mow the flowring herbes and goodly things.”39 Spenser portrays change as a threat to this system.

Milton, however, seems to view such a static state as less than ideal. His Eden is one whose growth threatens to spiral out of control and overwhelm the human subjects. Every morning, Adam and Eve approach “Their growing work, for much their work outgrew/ The hands dispatch of two gardening so wide.”40 Their efforts from the previous day are erased by the unpredictable growth and intense fertility of the garden. This emphasis on Eden’s volatility not only differentiates Milton’s Eden from Spenser’s garden, it also draws attention to the mutability of the human inhabitants. Adam and Eve are created in the perfect image of God, but not immutable. The angel Raphael reminds Adam of “his happy state,/ happiness in his power left free to will, / Left to his own free will, his will though free/ Yet mutable.”41 Humans have the power to both maintain their perfection and the power to lose it by being

38 Ibid. Book III, Canto 6, 38.
40 Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Book IX 202-3
41 Ibid. Book V 234-237.
disobedient to God. And since Milton established that Adam and Eve are not merely gardeners, but an integral part of the garden, it makes sense that he would extend the mutability of humanity to the rest of creation. Renaissance scholar A. Bartlett Giamatti argues that “if the garden is to be a true reflection of the first couple, it must reflect all that is within them, it must also include the potential for change, change for the better or change for the worse, which is part of their nature.” Adam and Eve’s ability to fall should be reflected in the external world if they share such a deep and profound connection with the landscape. Eden would be incomplete without Adam and Eve, thus Milton strengthens the vital, harmonious relationship between humans and their natural environment by granting the human couple and plants similar characteristics.

V. Cultivating the Landscape and the Soul

Adam and Eve participate in shaping their world through their gardening work, a creative endeavor. Eden was not created by God as a complete entity, but a space that requires humans to elevate it to a higher level of perfection. If Eden is God’s work of art, then Adam and Eve improve upon His canvas as they alter it. This indicates that human intervention in nature is necessary for Eden to function as a complete system. This view of human interference as a positive force is not unique to Milton. Shakespeare’s The Winter’s Tale presents a strong argument allowing humans to intervene in their environment, specifically regarding crossbreeding and grafting in the early modern economy. In the play, Polixines argues that nature is the ultimate source of creativity: “Yet Nature is made better by no mean/ But Nature makes that mean. So over that art,/ Which you say adds to nature, is an art/ That Nature makes.” Because human beings are a part of nature, anything they perform

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42 Giamatti, 299
is thereby a natural act. Art and nature are not in conflict with each other, but the dynamic interaction between the two leads to improvement. Similarly, Adam and Eve are carrying out natural work in the garden. Adam insists that “with the first approach of light, we must be risen/And at our pleasant labor to reform/ Yon flowery arbors.”  

Milton’s use of “reform” to describe their work implies that humans are not only altering nature but also improving upon the landscape.

On the other side of the debate on human intervention is Marvell’s “The Mower against Gardens,” which criticizes human actions that alters nature from its original state. The speaker describes humanity’s manipulation of nature to suit its own ends as a sinful enterprise: “Had he not dealt between the bark and tree, / Forbidden mixtures there to see. No plant now knew the stock from which it came; /He grafts upon the wild the tame: That th’ uncertain and adulterate fruit/ Might put the palate in dispute.”  

Nature should be preserved in its own purest state of unblemished innocence. Attempts to create new artificial mixtures and exotic breeds are wrong, akin to Adam and Eve’s transgression when they consume the forbidden fruit. Overly manicured gardens are also viewed as inappropriate because they indulge in human preferences instead of respecting the natural landscape the way God had intended. The view that Marvell offers in this poem is in direct opposition to Milton’s Eden. For Milton, human alterations do not compromise the essence of nature itself. Adam and Eve’s labor help the garden grow in perfection.

Eden’s mutability and the garden’s prolific growth seem to suggest that labor is a necessary task. However, Milton refutes this idea by emphasizing that Adam and Eve’s work is pleasant and delightful. They are not forced to work in order to meet the demands of the

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external world, but out of a personal desire for pleasure. The primary purpose of their labor is not to maximize their daily productivity in order stifle nature’s growth; the most important aspect of their performance is that they find joy in their work. This distinction is made when Eve suggests that she and Adam split up and complete their tasks separately: “Let us divide our labors, thou where choice / Leads thee or where most needs.” Eve is searching for the most efficient way to complete their assigned work. She worries that their amorous distractions prevent them from getting as much done as they would if they worked apart. By specializing in different parts of the garden, Adam and Eve can increase their productivity. Although Adam praises Eve for her strong work ethic, he rejects this suggestion. Adam responds:

Yet not so strictly hath our Lord imposed
Labor as to debar us when we need
Refreshment, whether food or talk between,
Food of the mind or this sweet intercourse
Of looks and smiles, for smiles from reason flow
To brute denied, and are of love the food,
Love, not the lowest end of human life.  

Adam insists that they do not need to deny themselves pleasures of taking breaks or exchanging loving looks and warm smiles while they work. The couple is not competing to determine who is the most efficient and productive worker. Adam reminds Eve that God made them “for not to irksome toil but to delight,” and labor is most gratifying when they can interact with each other. Adam and Eve’s embrace of the natural world requires daily work, but the couple is primarily motivated by the pleasure they derive from their task rather than the harvest they may reap.

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For Milton, labor does not only transform the outside world but also one’s internal state. The cultivation of the garden is simultaneously the cultivation of the human soul. This association between the internal mind and external landscape is discussed in Dante’s The Divine Comedy. Giamatti argues that Dante’s Garden of Eden is a blueprint for the ideals of the soul. The pilgrim is brought into harmony with the garden once he understands the meaning of sin and is ready to ascend to heaven. The innocent, pristine state of his inner being is reflective of his surroundings. Likewise, Milton’s Eden mirrors Adam and Eve’s interior state of harmony and purity. Through their work, Adam and Eve harvest the “immortal fruits of joy and love,/ Uninterrupted joy, unrivalled love.” Therefore, Adam and Eve are able to cultivate their own internal paradise while making alterations to the external environment. The external environment that Milton conjures for Adam and Eve is inspired not only by the nostalgia for a lost way of life, for an “existence blessed with Nature’s bounty,” but also by the other gardens in the literary tradition and his personal experiences as a poet of London. As Milton seeks to recreate humankind’s lost, original connection to nature, we will see in the next chapter how vividly London in the seventeenth century stood in contrast to this imagined paradise.

49 Giamatti, 119.
50 Milton, Paradise Lost, Book III 66-68.
51 Giamatti, 15-16
Chapter 2

Eden as Anti-London

I. The London Smellscape

In the previous chapter, I established the history of garden imagery and the important ways in which Milton’s Eden aligns with and differs from the gardens envisioned by other writers to demonstrate that Milton did in fact engage with his contemporaries. I will now turn my attention to how Milton’s physical, metropolitan environment influenced his vision of Eden, weaving together the literary tradition with early modern Londoner’s experiences of the city. When Satan first enters the garden, Milton describes his experience:

as one who long in populous city pent,
Where houses thick and sewers annoy the air
Forth issuing on a summer’s morn to breathe
Among the pleasant villages and farms
Adjoined, from each thing met conceives delight –
The smell of grain, or tedded grass or kine
Or dairy, each rural sight, each rural sound.  

One is immediately struck by the strong urban versus rural dynamic. The “populous city” and the “pleasant villages and farms” are set in direct opposition to each other. But why would there be a reference to a populous city in a prelapsarian world? All that exists at this point in the universe of Paradise Lost is Heaven, Hell, and Eden. Milton skillfully inserts details from his own time and place as a resident of London into the experience of viewing paradise for the first time. Milton uses the power of smell to make a connection to his readers’ urban experiences in the crowded city. One can immediately imagine the scent of the tenement and lodging houses, the stench of the overflowing sewers, the whiff of smog rising from smokestacks, and body odor and perspiration in the city of work and trade. It is not merely

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52 Milton, Paradise Lost, Book IX 445-51
the beauty of paradise that captivates Satan; the fragrances of the garden, the smell of grazing
cattle, the harvest, and freshly cut grass conjure nostalgia for rural life. There are many more
contrasts between the foul infernal smoke of the city and sweet air of paradise that run
through the poem. Milton emphasizes that the delights of Eden are not limited to only the
visible and tangible items, but extend to the bliss of breathing in the fresh, clean air of the
countryside. The juxtaposition of urban and rural odors highlights the desire for natural,
floral fragrances in the postlapsarian, metropolitan environment in the sixteenth and
seventeenth centuries.

The previous chapter served to demonstrate that Milton’s Eden is not only a faithful
representation of Genesis, but also informed by the literary tradition of depicting real,
physical gardens as earthly paradise. In this chapter, I will explore how Milton’s Eden is
colored by his own experiences in contemporary London. More specifically, I plan to
examine the olfactory experiences of urban residents and the role that smell plays in
conditioning their daily lives. Scent is the medium that Milton uses to transmit some of the
most intriguing images of Eden in *Paradise Lost*. Smells and fragrances are particularly
fascinating because they are abstract, invisible, ephemeral, and also deeply personal. The
process by which the human body recognizes distinct odors and associates them with
memories is both essential for survival and the enjoyment of more subtle pleasures in life.
This chapter looks into the ways in which growing anxieties about urban life in London
appear in Milton’s text through the sense of smell. Milton’s vision of Eden acts as a foil to
London the city, reflecting the ways in which Londoners perceived their metropolitan
environment as lacking. First, I will examine the different elements that contribute to the
smellscape of early modern England: a concoction of odors from the human body, urban
waste, industrial pollution, and pleasure gardens. The second half of this chapter explores the details Milton incorporates into his vision of Eden that reflect the physical circumstances of his daily life. By analyzing the way in which his characters experience paradise through odors and scents, we gain a better understanding about Milton’s conception of humans and their relation to the surrounding environment.

What did London smell like in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries? What smells did the average person associate London with? And how did this affect the way in which the interacted with the city? The general perception is that early modern London was a smelly place, reeking of the sick who lay on the streets, the smell of burnt bricks and coal, the stench of rotting vegetables in the markets, and the odor of death from the burial grounds churches in the city. Despite the focus on these noxious smells, Holly Dugan’s work on the history of olfaction emphasizes that there was a distinct place for perfumes and sweet aromas in London. Londoners used incense, rosemary, jasmine, and pleasure gardens to counter the pungent odors. Dugan argues that these scents became strongly associated with concerns about health and disease, urban pollution, and even morality. Inspired by her work, I seek to determine how problems of overpopulation and rapid urbanization in England manifest in Milton’s work through his description of Eden’s delightful fragrances and Hell’s foul odors.

The population of England rose from three million in the middle of the sixteenth century to over five million by 1660, with about 300,000 people living in London. This demographic explosion affected the way in which Londoners viewed their city. The excess of

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human bodies inhabiting a limited space idea contributed to the idea of London as the monstrous, crowded burdened by the “the intimate yet cloying smell of human life.”

In general, the streets and waterways in London were often covered with litter and filth. The common practice was to throw household trash and empty chamber pots out of the windows, and the contents often mixed with the soil and dust and spilled onto passing pedestrians and coaches. Later efforts to clean up the city involved storing refuse in tubs to be collected by paid workers, but the carts transporting these tubs often leaked, leaving a cloying stench in the narrow alleys. Streets stank on a hot day if the night-soil men were late in collecting excrement from the cess-pits. Industrial waste, effluent, and offal from slaughterhouses were mostly dumped into the River Thames, and travelers could often smell the unmistakable reek of the river. A sixteenth century report described the “intolerable miseries and griefs [that]… stunk in the eyes and noses of the City.” The horrifying stench of the city was often blown by the wind into the outskirts of town as well, so London became enveloped in the stench of its own creation.

In addition to London’s explosive population growth, the Bubonic plague was another major contributor to the urban smellscape. As London became more and more crowded, the disease became more widespread in the metropolitan area. By 1563, nearly a quarter of the population in the 1500 had died from the plague. Bodies were buried in churchywards, but when the plague struck, the demand for graves quickly outgrew the supply. Bodies were piled on top of each other in shallow graves, which began to stink of rotting flesh. And since

55 Ackroyd, 363.
56 Ibid. 333-4.
58 Ackroyd, 363.
59 Picard, Elizabeth’s London.91.
churches were often built in the heart of cities, the offensive stench spread throughout the rest of the city. The odor of death became one of the most “permanent and prolonged smells of the city, with complaints against it from the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries.”  

Although the Bubonic plague is now known to be spread by rodents, the disease was believed to be airborne at the time. People feared foul-smelling air, thought to be contagious and pestilent. Attempts to explain these frequent outbreaks attributed the disease to the wrath of God. Even though the causation of the plague was murky and treatment was often ineffectual, the disease’s immense scale and endurance established the strong association between life in the city and illness. Ian Munro’s analysis of the effect of crowds and their impact on the meaning of a city during this period describes the plague as “a spatial disease; it [the plague] refigures the lived and symbolic space of the city, altering and transforming the urban aspect.”  

The plague became known as the quintessential urban malady. Hence, the stench of death and disease became strongly linked to urban life.

Urban air pollution is the next major component of London’s odors. Ken Hiltner argues that early modern England was experiencing an environmental crisis that strikingly resembles our contemporary problems:

as seventeenth-century England was mining and burning three to four times more coal than the rest of Europe (where wood was still relatively plentiful as fuel) combined with most of it being burned in London, this early modern city was the first on the planet to experience on a large scale the now ubiquitous and characteristically modern problem of air pollution.

Although Londoners had derived energy by burning fossil fuels for thousands of years, they began burning a particularly cheap type of coal with a high sulfur content—named “sea-

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60 Ackroyd, 363.
61 Munro, 242-43
coal” — in the twelfth century. The use of sea-coal rose dramatically because it was a more affordable and economically viable option than wood. When plagues and famines caused the population fall in the fourteenth century, reforestation and the increased supply of wood led to lowered prices. However, as the population rebounded in the sixteenth century and began consuming the forest at a startling rate, the cost of wood rose. In contrast to the price of wood, which would fluctuate according to the size of the population, sea-coal experienced no inflation. As affordable as sea-coal was for generating heat and energy, an unfortunate side effect was that it generated much more smoke that was especially toxic to humans than wood. As early as 1257, complaints arose about the smoke and pollution. Throughout the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, commissions were established to study the effects of pollution on bodily health. In 1307, a proclamation made burning sea-coal in certain parts of the city illegal. However, the dwindling supply of wood ensured that sea-coal would continue to rise in popularity. By the sixteenth century, “a pall of smoke hung over the capital, and the interiors of more affluent London houses were dark with soot.”

It soon became clear that the smoke was dangerous to humans, plants, and animals. John Evelyn’s 1661 pamphlet *Fumifugium* was one of the first known works to take on air pollution as the subject. Evelyn’s letter is specifically addressed to King Charles II of England and contains his analysis of the cause of the problem as well as specific recommendations for how to combat this pollution. His research identified the link between increased death rates in London, driven by respiratory illnesses, compared to rural areas.

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63 Ken Hiltner. "'Belch'd Fire and Rowling Smoke': Air Pollution in Paradise Lost.” *Milton, Rights, and Liberties*, (Switzerland: Peter Lang, 2007). 294-95
64 Ibid. 294-95
65 Acroyd, 426.
Thus, the thick smoke was not only a “prodigious annoyance” for the inhabitants of the city, but a true threat to their livelihoods:

That men whose very Being is Aer, should not breathe it freely when they may; but … condemn themselves to this misery and Fumo praeocioari, is strange stupidity: yet thus we see them walk and converse in London pursu’d and haunted by that infernal Smoake, and the surest accidents which accompany it, whereso ever they retire. 66

Evelyn concluded that living in London was injurious to the body because the smog from sea-coal caused suffocation, cough and consumption.67 In fact, he proposed that respiratory illnesses caused by air pollution were becoming the second leading cause of death in the seventeenth century. Evelyn urged the king to implement measures in order to save the people from this hellish and miserable existence, trapped by the “infernal Smoake.”

Smells also were perceived to have religious connotations and moral implications. Liza Picard identifies one of the more unusual explanations for the periodic outbreaks of the plague that was published in the city almanacs. Londoners believed that the plague was a type of “cosmic fart” in which the earth naturally “purges itself by expiring those Arsenical Fumes that have been retained so long in her bowels.”68 Dugan emphasizes the “ways in which late-medieval men and women conceptualized their faith through direct sensory engagement with the material world.”69 Early modern theories of olfaction argued that bad smell originated from bad things and good smells originated from good things. This framework was amplified through early Christian beliefs. For example, the fragrance of incense and natural, sweet smelling herbs became associated with God, whereas foul odors were associated with the susceptibility to sin and corruption of the heart. This aligns with the

67 Hiltner. “‘Belch'd Fire and Rowling Smoke’” 294-96
69 Dugan, 27
demonizing of air in relation to disease and pollution. In order to combat these noxious smells, Londoners came up with creative ways to perfume their environments, such as planting gardens in order to emit sweet smells and fragrances.

Pleasure gardens and open spaces became highly valued during this time as small areas of escapism from the claustrophobic city and into a representation of the wilderness. The fragrant flowers and herbs provided an aromatic change from the pervasive stink of bodies and industry. The range of plants available in the sixteenth century greatly increased due to the voyages of the Spanish, Portuguese, and English explorers. New species of flowers and fruit trees—including peaches, apricots, lemon, pomegranate, foxgloves, canna lilies, sunflowers, myrtle—opened up the possibilities for how Londoners could curate the aromas of their gardens. 70 The Elizabethan gardener placed a great emphasis on perfume, and so the gardens often focused on fragrant medicinal plants, culinary herbs, and sweet-smelling flowers and shrubs. The gardens were designed to offer multisensorial pleasures: cool shade from the burning heat, delicious fruits to satisfy hunger, birdsongs to soothe the mind, and delightful scents to counter pestilent clouds. Although features of gardens have often been replaced over time to make way for new fashions and landscaping trends, many of the gardens that I visited retained vestiges of earlier features that were preserved. I visited the gardens and campus of Cambridge University, where Milton was a student and the seeds of his ambition began to grow. Even though the Cambridge University Botanic Garden was created after Milton’s time, it provided me with ideas of the rich variety of plants and flowers that could have been grown at the time. I discovered crowds of golden narcissus, electric blue squills, pale pink magnolias, and other spring flowers. The winter garden was especially memorable: composed of colored stems and winter flowers and shrubs. Brilliant red and

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yellow plant stems, honey suckle scented like lemon-merengue and lily of the valley. It reminded me of the lack of seasons in Milton’s Eden, and thus the durability of the plants to withstand seasons. And instead of long, rectangular flower beds arranged in linear rows, the beds varied in sizes and were arranged in curving, irregular islands. This visual effect of a kaleidoscope of flowering plants aligns with Milton’s representation of the slightly disorderly nature of Eden as a contiguously growing garden.

Image 3: Flowers at the Cambridge University Botanic Garden.

Image 4: The Winter Garden, Cambridge University Botanic Garden.

Image 5: Systematic Beds: mint family beds, Cambridge University Botanic Garden.
I also visited two estates in Derbyshire, Chatsworth House and Haddon Hall, that had prime examples of seventeenth century gardens. Another common feature shared by all the gardens was the presence of specific scented and herb gardens that remained fragrant, even in the winter. The flowers and plants in these gardens produce an array of aromas that perfume the air and stimulate visitors’ sense of smell. When I entered into these spaces, I could immediately detect the rich exotic notes of mint, lemon, rose, and vanilla. The herbaceous beds showed which species were available to the average gardener, and perhaps were some of the plants Milton had grown in the garden behind his cottage. The large camellia collection at Chatsworth was especially impressive. As soon as I walked into the glasshouse from the cold outdoors, I was hit by the overpowering, sharp, fruity scent of the flowers. The canopies of the glasshouses were often covered by a dense lattice of branches and woody vines, which served as a reminder of the tangled vines and elms that Milton associates Adam and Eve with. Strolling through these estates left me with a better understanding of the richness of the palate that Milton is working with as he constructs his ideal garden space.

Image 6: Glasshouses at Chatsworth Estate and University of Cambridge Botanic Garden.
These estates belonged to the nobility, and therefore were inaccessible to most of the people living in London in the seventeenth century. In order to provide the average Londoner with a similar experience, Evelyn proposed in *Fumifugium* that a green belt of sweet-smelling plants be built around the city. Unfortunately, this plan never materialized. The reality was that physical gardens within the city were often built in cramped spaces between buildings and strewn with rubbish. Londoners had not yet been able to achieve their garden paradise. Therefore, the need for imagination to conjure up a space that offers all the pleasures they desire arises. Hence, Milton’s Eden seems to be a response to Evelyn’s goal of turning London into “one of the sweetest, and most delicious Habitations in the World.” 71

While Londoners could not remedy their unfortunate situation with real garden spaces, Milton can create a poetic garden to serve as the true antithesis to London.

Born and raised in London, Milton was a poet of the city. And some of his personal experiences in the urban environment informed the ways in which he portrayed Hell and Eden in *Paradise Lost*. London’s metropolitan population more than doubled during Milton’s lifetime. Milton also lived through the publication of *Fumifugium* in 1661, the plague in 1665, and the Great Fire of 1666. He would have been familiar with discussions about the diagnosed problem of air pollution and concerns of overpopulation and plague. Furthermore, Milton became blind later in life, and he may have potentially developed a more acute sense of smell that provided him with greater insight into the role scent plays in representation of spaces. Milton embarks on an ambitious mental exercise to envision the only pleasure garden that was not created by human hands, but instead by God Himself for Adam and Eve. And he grounds Eden in the context of his homeland by combining his urban

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71 Evelyn, Epistle.
experience and visual imagination to create paradise. Let us now return to the opening quotation of this chapter, in which Satan experiences Eden

as one who long in populous city pent,
Where houses thick and sewers annoy the air
Forth issuing on a summer’s morn to breathe
Among the pleasant villages and farms
Adjoined, from each thing met conceives delight –
The smell of grain, or tedded grass or kine
Or dairy, each rural sight, each rural sound.72

This image of Satan’s advance into the garden illustrates the consequences of London’s urbanization. With the rapid population growth, London’s streets became “thick” with house, resulting in a strain on the sewage system and posing a danger to public health. The emphasis on “forth issuing” enhances the pungency of the sewers that annoy the air in contrast to the idealized smells of grain, grass, or kine. Milton infuses his depiction of the garden experience with his contemporary understanding of urban life. Satan breathes in the fragrance of Eden as if he is a resident of London finding respite in the countryside. My own experience traveling from London to Bakewell, Derbyshire mirrors this image of leaving the hustle and bustle of city life into the peaceful English countryside. As I took the train from London to Chesterfield, I watched the buildings and traffic lights fade away into rolling green fields of grass with grazing sheep. Strolling across the various garden estates, breathing in the smell of wet grass, and listening to the babbling rivers brought me an incredible sense of wonder for the peace and immensity of the natural world, a response that Milton’s readers would have been familiar with as well.

II. Scenting the Divine

For Milton’s garden to be a true depiction of paradise, Eden must not only be visually appealing but also incorporate multisensorial pleasures, such as the scent of the divine. Eden

72 Milton, Paradise Lost, Book IX 445-51
is an aromatic site with fragrances that evoke God’s heavenly smell. The narrator describes how God’s “altar breathes/ Ambrosial odors and ambrosial flowers.” When God speaks, “ambrosial fragrance filled/ All heaven and, in the blessed spirits elect,/ Sense of new joy ineffable diffused.” The wholesome scents of nature are much closer to God’s natural, heavenly aroma. Even during the creation of the world, God placed emphasis on sweet-smelling scents: “Brought forth the tender grass whose verdure clad/ her universal face with pleasant green, / Then herbs of every leaf that sudden flowered, /Opening their various colors and made gay/Her bosom, smelling sweet.” The herbs and fruit trees God plants to replace the barren desert contribute to the scent of paradise, which blends with His own ambrosial odor. Adam, as a creature made in the image of God, also emits sweet aromas. Adam exclaims that “With fragrance and with joy my heart o’erflowed.” He describes how he comes to consciousness: “As new waked from soundest sleep, /Soft on the flow’ry herb I found me laid/ In balmy sweat, which with his beams the sun/ Soon dried and on the reeking moisture fed.” While sweat and tears are commonly regarded as signs of suffering, in paradise fragrance transforms their meaning. Kim Edwards describes how the moisture rises as fragrant offerings to the Creator: “As the trees weep, so Adam sweats balm, and that balm perfumes the air of paradise.” And Milton’s choice of “reking moisture” is interesting because “reek” not only refer to foul smells but also means to “give of smoke, steam, or fumes.” This definition is extremely relevant concerning the rising tunnels of smoke associated with industrial operations and labor in the city. And yet the balmy, sweet-scented

73 Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Book 2.244-45
74 Ibid. Book 3.135-7
75 Ibid. Book 7.315-19
76 Ibid. Book 8.266
77 Ibid. Book 8. 253-256
79 "reek, v.1.2". OED Online. Oxford University Press.
sweat evokes the scent of pleasure rather than perspiration from labor. Ultimately, God created the garden to bring pleasure to its both himself and the inhabitants.

III. The Stench of Hell

Satan, on the other hand, resides in the sulfuric stink of Hell. Milton imagines Hell engulfed in fire and smog, which resonates with Evelyn’s complaint of London being enveloped by “a Hellish and dismal cloud of sea-coal” in *Fumifigium.* In fact, the parallels between smoggy London and burning hell are striking. Evelyn casts an image of the city as a hell upon the earth with its sulfurous smoke and noisome airs. He deplores the fact that the proud city of London “should wrap her stately head in Clowds of Smoake and Sulphur, so full of Stink and Darknesse.” Similarly, Satan is trapped in

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{a dungeon horrible, on all sides round} \\
\text{As one great furnace flamed, yet from those flames} \\
\text{No light, but rather darkness visible} \\
\text{Served only to discover sights of woe,} \\
\text{Regions of sorrow, doleful shades, where peace} \\
\text{And rest can never dwell, hope never comes} \\
\text{That comes to all, but torture without end} \\
\text{Still urges, and a fiery deluge fed} \\
\text{With ever-burning sulfur unconsumed.}
\end{align*}
\]

Removed from God and the light of Heaven, Satan dwells in perpetual darkness. And even though there are flames in hell, the fallen angels are surrounded by “darkness visible” and and plagued by “sights of woe” no matter where they turn. Similarly, the residents of London in the seventeenth century were living in a hellish environment, suffering from the black smog generated by pollution. The sight and smell of smoke aroused fears of fire among the Londoners, especially after the Great Fire in 1666, and these anxieties of a “fiery deluge” and being swallowed up the darkness were very urgent and real.

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80 Evelyn, 15.
81 Evelyn, Epistle.
Even Pandemonium, the capital of Hell, is depicted as a city enveloped in a dense, smoky, pungent atmosphere: “there stood a hill not far whose grisly top/ Belch’d fire and rolling smoke; the rest entire/ Shone with a glossy scurf, undoubted sign that in his womb was hid metallic ore, / The work of sulphur.”

The city sits upon a sulfurous deposit upon which the Satan and his fellow fallen angels build their operation to mine precious raw materials and “metallic ore” to build their weapons of war. Even the flames that illuminate hell omit foul odors: “starry lamps and blazing cressets fed/ With naphtha and asphaltus,” better known as paraffin and pitch. The image of belching fire and rolling smoke remind readers of the sooty, sulfurous atmosphere of London due to the burning of sea-coal.

In Paradise Lost, fire itself is a consequence of the fall. In Eden, there is no need for fire, not even to cook food because all the fruits and plants in the garden are fresh and ripe, ready for consumption. Eve prepares their dinner “With rose and odors from the shrub unfumed.” Hence, fire itself is a fallen element. Mining and burning become associated with Hell and branded as a dangerous, sinful endeavors. The flames and stench of “ever-burning sulfur” in hell only emphasize Satan’s fall from grace and the torturous prison he lives in, consumed by the odor of burnt wood and rotten eggs.

The association of Hell with sulfur may in fact originate with Milton. As mentioned earlier, the highly sulfurous nature of sea-coal meant that when burnt, the smell emitted was especially noxious and apparent. And Hiltner found that there is almost no pre-modern mention of sulfur or literal brimstone in connection with Hell in countries that did not use coal with high sulfur content. In contrast, medieval and early modern English writers would

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83 Ibid. Book 1.670-674
84 Ibid. Book1.728-9
85 Ibid. Book 5.349
86 Hiltner, 'Belch'd Fire and Rowling Smoke',298
often use sulfurous smoke to depict the state of Hell, possibly due to the fact that sea-coal had been used in England for centuries. Hilter explains, “because the smell of sulfur was known in pre-modern England chiefly from the burning of sulfurous coal and perhaps gunpowder, literary references to Hell in terms of these words would have initially conjured up images not of Hell, but rather of air pollution from sea-coal so horrific that it was now being characterized as hellish.”

Evelyn similarly employed the imagery of London as Hell when he described the corrupt, pestilent air in the city:

> London ‘tis confess’d, is not the only City most obnoxious to the Pestilence; but yet is never clear of this Smoake which is a Plauge so many other ways, and indeed intolerable; because it kills not at once, but always. Since still to languish, is worse than even Death itself. For is there under Heaven such Coughing and Stuffing to be heard, as in the London Churches and Assemblies of People, where the Barking and the Spitting is incessant and most importunate.

London is the hell in which the urban population dies a slow death, suffocating from the infernal vapors and virulent fumes rising from the city. Now, after Milton, the connection of sulfur with Satan has become commonplace, but this association was novel at the time and thus places *Paradise Lost* in a very unique position in regards to the growing awareness of the pollution problem.

In contrast to the inescapable, horrendous stench of Hell, Satan welcomes the fragrant, fresh air of the Eden. When Satan makes his journey into the garden, he is struck not only by the beauty of “a circling row/ Of goodliest trees loaded with fairest fruit,” but also the easily discernible “native perfumes” of paradise. Milton describes Eden through Satan’s personal experience of the garden, and the pure, fragrant air is one of the few pleasures Satan is not denied. Not only can he enjoy the sweet-smelling flowers and plants,

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87 Ibid. 299.  
88 Evelyn, 10  
Eve herself emits a floral fragrance that entices Satan. Milton compares Eve to Pomona, the Roman goddess of flowers and fruitful abundance, “with flowerets decked and fragrant smells.” Her loveliness and virtue are like scents that emanate from within, and Satan’s experience of her perfume is so powerful that it temporarily distracts him from his own devious plans: “Such pleasure took the serpent to behold/This flower plot, the sweet recess of Eve ….That space the evil one abstracted stood / From his own evil and for the time remained/ Stupidly good, of enmity disarmed, / of guile, of hate, of envy, of revenge” Her aroma resembles God’s heavenly fragrance and is so powerful that it draws Satan away from his evil thoughts, and he is rendered speechless and stupefied by the delightful aromas of Eden:

As when to them who sail
Beyond the Cape of Hope and now are past
Mozambique, off at sea northeast winds blow
Sabean odors from the spicy shore
of Araby the blessed, with such delay
Well pleased they slack their course, and many a league
Cheered with the grateful smell of Old Ocean smiles,
So entertained those odorous sweets the fiend
Who came their bane, though with them better pleased
Than Asmodeus with the fishy fume
That drove him, though enamored, from the spouse
Of Tobit’s son and with a vengeance sent
From Media post to Egypt there fast bound.

The “sabean odors,” “grateful smell of Old Ocean smiles, and “odorous sweets” are all intoxicating to Satan. Nonetheless, the effect does not last long and Satan cannot merely enjoy the olfactory pleasures of paradise. In fact, Satan’s greed for the garden poisons the sweet and spicy and attracts infernal spirits. Like Asmodeus, Satan ultimately responsible for generating the foul fishy fumes that repels him from Paradise. The only air that Satan can

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90 Ibid. Book 4.377
92 Ibid. Book 159-170
inhabit is the “black mist low creeping” he brings with him.\textsuperscript{93} Perhaps by denying Satan the ability to fully integrate into the Edenic atmosphere, Milton is emphasizing the gravity of London’s urban pollution problem. Even the pleasure gardens emitting fragrant scents are not enough to counter the smoke and pestilence of the city.

IV. Breathing Other Air

After Satan successfully tempts Adam and Eve into consuming the forbidden fruit, Milton depicts their exile from the garden as a loss of pure, fragrant air. As they are expelled from the garden, Eve laments: “How shall I part, and whither wander down/ Into a lower world, to this obscure/ And wild? How shall we breathe in other air, less pure?”\textsuperscript{94} No longer can they bask in the “gentle gales” and “transpicuous air” of paradise, they are forced into the postlapsarian atmosphere.\textsuperscript{95} Even though air is a transparent, immaterial element, their powerful sense of loss is marked by the bliss derived from breathing in the heavenly perfumes of Eden and the sorrow of living in a new world defined by the stench of disease and death and resembles London’s polluted atmosphere.

As a result of their transgression, the new condition of Adam and Eve’s existence is mortality. Death is their final punishment. Milton describes how Earths’ atmosphere begins to fill with the scent of disease and decay. Now that the guardian angels of Eden have left Paradise, Sin and Death follow Satan up from Hell and onto the earth:

So saying, with delight he snuffed the smell
Of mortal change on earth. As when a flock
Of ravenous fowl, though many a league remote,
Against the day of battle to a field
Where armies lie encamped come flying, lured
With scent of living carcasses designed
For death the flowing day in bloody fight,

\textsuperscript{93} Ibid. Book 9.179
\textsuperscript{94} Ibid. Book 11.283-285
\textsuperscript{95} Ibid. Book, 4.156, Book 8.141
So scented the grim feature and upturned
His nostril wide into the murkey air
Sagacious of his quarry from so far.  

Rather than introduce death in purely visual terms, this phenomenon transpires through the sense of smell. Death turns his “nostril” into the “murkey air” that is thick and dense with pestilent vapors. In anticipation of the loss of life, “sagacious” Death acutely smells the scent of his future victims, as if he can perceive the future casualties of war that will be left behind to be preyed upon by vultures. Death sniffs the “smell of mortal change” and the “scent of living carcasses.” And it is this ghastly odor that conjures bloody visions of the future where cities engage in battle, with towns burning up in “sulfurous fire.” The image of the foul stench of death penetrating through the thick clouds of smoke contributes to the corruption of creation. The angel Michael is sent from heaven by God to present Adam with a catalogue of the forms of death that his sinful act brought into the world. Not only will they suffer from fire, flood, and famine, a “monstrous crew” of disease will be brought upon men:

Immediately a place
Before his eyes appeared, sad, noisome, dark;
A lazar-house it seemed where laid
Numbers of all diseased, all maladies
Of ghastly spasm or racking torture, qualms
Of heartsick agony, all feverous kinds,
Convulsions, epilepsies, fierce catarrhs,
Intestine stone and ulcer, colic pangs
Demonic frenzy, moping melancholy
And moonstruck madness, pining atrophy
Marasmus and wide-wasting pestilence.

The description lazar-house and diseased multitudes immediately conjures up the acrid smell of the London fog during the Great Plague of 1664-5. This image of the sick

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96 Ibid. Book 10.272-81
97 “murky, adj. 2.a.” OED Online.
98 “sagacious, adj. 1.” OED Online.
99 Milton, Paradise Lost, Book 11. 655-68
100 Ibid. Book 11.477-287
populace and listing out their various maladies is especially “sad” and distressing. The urban environment is also “noisome” and the foul-smelling, noxious elements are offensive to the sense of smell. \(^{101}\) Lastly, the billowing clouds of smoke swallow London and leave the city devoid of not only physical light, but also moral, intellectual, and spiritual light.\(^{102}\) As the pestilent vapors of the plague are mixed in with the tunnels of smoke from industry, it becomes even harder to discern the scent of death from other smells. Trapped in such darkness, Londoners “breathe nothing but an impure and thick Mist accompanied with a fuliginous and filthy vapour, which renders them obnoxious to a thousand inconveniencies, corrupting the Lungs, and dis ordering the entire habit of their Bodies, so that Catharrs, Phthisicks, Coughs, and Consumptions rage more in this one City than in the whole Earth besides.”\(^{103}\) Evelyn’s description of the illnesses plaguing the general population is eerily similar to Milton’s catalogue of death. Evelyn suggests that the individuals corrupted by polluted air are dying a slow, painful death, their bodies slowly wasting away as they are overcome by coughing and wheezing. Adam and Eve’s descendants and Milton’s fellow Londoners share a similar fate in the fallen world. As city dwellers inhale the noxious air, their bodies are slowing degenerating and withering away.

Since many Londoners interpreted the plague as the will of God, this idea of death as divine punishment aligns with the way in which the angel Michael presents the montage of death to Adam. The diseases demonstrate that after the fall, Adam and Eve’s bodies have become vulnerable to environmental contaminants, much like the invisible contaminants believed to be circulating in London’s atmosphere. As mentioned before, the plague became associated with metropolitan areas, and many believed that the disease was spread through

\(^{101}\) “noisome, adj. 1,” *OED Online.*

\(^{102}\) Evelyn, 4.

\(^{103}\) Evelyn, 5.
the air. These anxieties about being exposed to infectious air during outbreaks of the plague were exacerbated by the fact that it was essentially impossible to protect the body from being infected by the “scented air and undetectable traces of contagion.” No one felt safe in the city, where the smell of disease was conflated with the rotting smell of death.

V. The Restorative Powers of Fragrance

When the residents of London escaped the stench of the city and into the countryside, they were able to breathe in fresh air to soothe and restore their bodies and minds. Because the plague was a perpetual threat in the early modern period, people attempted to protect themselves from the presumed diseased air by creating aromatic concoctions. Common belief held that just as foul air produces disease, clean air promotes good health. These sweet aromas supposedly had the power to stimulate the mind, cheer up the spirit, and energize the body in order to fight the virus. People relied on the environment to produce natural, wholesome scents in the garden and also utilized their own ingenuity to create perfumes made of rosemary and rosewater to combat the disease. The price of herbs and garlands increased during outbreaks in London markets, and under Henry VIII and James I, aromatic fountains were built to protect the body. Even John Evelyn believed that perfuming the air would be a possible solution to the problem of urban air pollution: these fragrances would “render the People of this vast City, the most happy upon Earth.” He proposed that the fresh air produced by plants could counter the smoke, cleaning the blood of urban residents and helping fruits grow. Evelyn recommended that the grounds immediately around the city be carved into plots, “diligently kept and supply’d, with such shrubs, as yield[ing] the most fragrant and odoriferous Flowers, and are aptest to tinge the Aer upon every gentle emission

104 Ackroyd, 100
105 Ibid. 100
106 Evelyn, Epistle.
at a great distance.”¹⁰⁷ These would include fragrant and refreshing blooms and fruits: roses, sweet-brier, juniper, lavender, rosemary, carnations, primroses, violets, lilies, strawberries, lemon, mint, chamomile, and thyme. Evelyn hoped that this array of native plants would “perfectly improve and meliorate the Aer about London.”¹⁰⁸

Milton includes discussions about the potential of perfumed relief into *Paradise Lost*. The fallen angels believe that the sweet, divine smells from Eden could restore their bodies and deliver them from despair:

perhaps in view
Of those bright confines, whence with neighbouring arms
And opportune excursion, we may chance
Re-enter Heaven; or else in some mild zone
Dwell, not unvisited of Heaven’s fair light,
Secure; and at the brightening orient beam
Purge off this gloom: the soft delicious air,
To heal the scar of these corrosive fires,
Shall breathe her balm.¹⁰⁹

Beezlebub smells “the soft delicious air” and believes that in order “to heal the scar of these corrosive fires,” one should “breathe her balm.” Balm is generally a soothing agent, but the balm that Milton is referring to is a precious, restorative product that herbalists believed could be used against poisons, infections, fevers, pestilence, and other diseases.¹¹⁰ Since the air of paradise is scented with balm, the fallen angel wonders if the air’s restorative benefits might enable them to re-enter Heaven.¹¹¹ Beezlebub believes that the balm will cure them; however he is misunderstood. While the balm promotes health, it cannot heal the spiritual scars of the fallen angels. Satan and his followers are trapped in a diseased, desolate dungeon. When Satan first breathes in the Edenic air, he finds that it inspires “Vernal delight

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 14.
¹⁰⁸ Ibid., Epistle.
¹⁰⁹ Milton, Book 2.394-402
¹¹⁰ Edwards, 192
¹¹¹ Edwards, 192
and joy, able to drive/ All sadness but despair." Ultimately, there is no cure for his diseased heart. Thus, even the redemptive powers of fragrant air are limited.

Given that it is impossible for the fallen angels to return to their original states, how likely is it for city-dwellers to rehabilitate their urban environment? Can Londoners fully restore their polluted atmosphere around their city to the one they have lost? Environmental damage is often framed an irreversible phenomenon that is an inextricable part of the Fall. Nature has fallen along with its inhabitants, and the sulfurous air pollution and virulent disease characterize the state of the postlapsarian world. And who did early modern Londoners blame for their plight? Evelyn identifies industrial polluters—brewers, dryers, soap and salt boilers, lime-burners—to be the primary offenders. He chastises the “columns and clowds of Smoake, which are belched forth from the sooty Throates of those Works.” He advocates for the removal of these “nuisances to the city” and proposes that these industries be moved away from London center. This seems to portray environmental damage as a necessary consequence of industrialization. However, Hiltner points out that industry was not even the principal cause of the air pollution problem in early modern London. It was the over-reliance of sea-coal in domestic households. Hiltner suggests that Evelyn’s decision, among that of many other writers of his time, to cast blame on the industry was a result of the populace’s own inabilities to acknowledge their personal role in contributing to the larger problem.

112 Milton, *Paradise Lost*, 4.153-6
113 Evelyn, 14
114 Ibid. 15
115 Ibid. 16
117 Ibid. 123-4.
If this is the case, what does it mean for Adam and Eve? Can we find hope in their bittersweet departure from Eden? Can the couple regain purer air? Adam and Eve’s error can be framed as the first instance of harm inflicted upon their environment by humans. In a broader sense, the fall introduced death, suffering, and arduous labor into the world. More specifically, through the angel Michael, Milton clarifies Adam and Eve’s complicity. Michael makes explicit to Adam how their transgression has led to the introduction of disease and death in the fallen world. Thus, perhaps Milton is suggesting that early modern Londoners need to be willing to confront their personal roles in altering the atmosphere. While most texts written in the medieval and early modern periods celebrated pristine natural environments, Milton demonstrated an awareness of the natural environment and how humans can endanger it. By referencing the dangerous, contagious elements of urban life in his depiction of Eden, Milton suggests that even though Eden is regenerative and inexhaustible, it is not invulnerable to destructive human actions. Whereas Evelyn deflects responsibility by passing the burden to the polluting industries, Milton suggests that changing the ways Londoners behave their daily lives can do more. And individuals will only be able to acknowledge their complicity in causing such problems once they understand and reflect upon the reciprocal relationship between humans and nature, in which not only human actions alter nature but the landscape powerfully impacts and influences interpersonal relationships.
Chapter 3

Be Fruitful and Multiply

I. London, the Monstrous City

Just as Eden served as a foil to an urbanizing London, revealing the far from ideal conditions city-dwellers confronted, the rapid population growth in particular served to heighten the awareness of the relationships between the lived environment and its inhabitants. In *Paradise Lost*, God’s first command to Adam and Eve is: “Be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth, / Subdue it, and throughout, dominion hold/ over fish of the sea and fowl of the air/ And every living thing that moves on the earth.” 118 At this moment, Eden is a vast expanse that has yet to be populated by humans. Hence, God specifically insists that his creation reproduce: Adam and Eve have an obligation to “fill the earth.” In contrast with the words of Milton’s God, many in the seventeenth century saw the city as already filled and sought measures to limit its growth. Population has always been a hotly debated issue in regards to development. Is rapid population growth a problem? A Malthusian argument suggests that rapid growth will exceed earth’s carrying capacity and lead to overpopulation and other social problems, which aligns with the concerns in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In fact, not only did Londoners perceive their city as sufficiently populated, they also believed that the rapid influx of new bodies would overwhelm and put unnecessary stresses on the social fabric of the city.

Sixteenth century London saw an inflow of people coming from the countryside in search of work, contributing to growing unease about human disorder in the city. As I have explored in Chapter 2, this urban migration fed into the fears of pollution, pestilence, and

118 Milton, Book 7 531-534
dangers of city life. From 1580 to 1600, London’s urban population grew from 100 to 200 thousand. Agricultural laborers abandoned their small farms and moved into the city searching for new economic opportunities. Aristocrats also moved back from their country estates back into the city. This lead to widespread complaints about overcrowding in the city because the inhabitants felt that such rapid growth could not be absorbed by the existing infrastructure. There was a sense of the city being stretched to its limits. The first official response to this population crisis took place in 1580, when Queen Elizabeth I implemented proclamations against new buildings and subdivisions of houses in London aimed at stemming the tide of urban migration. The common perception of Londoners was that the excessive number of people occupying the limited metropolitan space caused a great inconvenience by putting a strain on existing resources and lowering the overall quality of life in the city. Not only was the quantity of people problematic, but also the demographic of individuals moving into the cities, mainly the urban poor and unskilled workers. Ian Munro emphasizes the “a portion of the population that was characterized as an excess, a surplus population.” This led to conflicts among the urban populations with violent riots and uprisings, adding to the fears that the city was not being threatened by an external force but by a danger emerging from within. As a Londoner, Milton would have had a clear sense of this growing population crisis and the ways in which this population growth affected the way in which individuals perceived the world around them as well as their interactions with each other. In this vein, this chapter will examine how the physical environment can both impact and reflect human relationships, and more specifically how Adam and Eve’s marital relations are informed by their garden surroundings.

119 Munro, 4.
120 Ibid. 15
121 Ibid. 21
Milton’s work offers an important counterpoint to the common attitudes towards population and crowding in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. While measures were put in place to stop migration into London, Milton’s Eden is, almost unbearably, free of people. Milton injects his garden with a pervasive longing to be filled. Even after God creates a vast array of flora and fauna to inhabit Eden, there is an underlying sense of emptiness without the existence of “man to till the ground.”\textsuperscript{122} And after God creates Adam and Eve, the couple continue to experience feelings of loneliness, as if the expanse of the garden is too much for them to bear alone. God commands the pair to “multiply a race of worshippers.”\textsuperscript{123} Thus, there is a powerful incentive to populate the earth that runs through Milton’s version of the creation myth. And this growing population is seen as an asset rather than a burden. This emphasis on growth and reproduction powerfully impacts Adam and Eve’s interactions as a couple. Sex becomes a crucial component of Adam and Eve’s experience in the garden, not only as an act that enables the couple to fulfill God’s mandate to reproduce but also as a means to improve their marital relations.

Through the juxtaposition of the emphasis on procreation in Eden with the concerns of crowding in early modern London, I have discovered that aspects of smell are also attendant on this discussion of overpopulation. Milton’s use of scent powerfully engages the reader in the fears and dangers of the urban environment. Munro argues that cities are ultimately understood through the bodies inhabiting it, and thus one cannot envision early modern London without including the rank breath and the stink of the crowd. In Chapter 2, I explored how the crowd was identified as the source of urban infection and thus became a symbol of the fears and dangers of city-life. This warrants further discussion as to how scent

\textsuperscript{122}Milton, \textit{Paradise Lost}, Book 7.24
\textsuperscript{123}Ibid Book 7.630.
serves to enhance Adam and Eve’s relationship. In seventeenth century London, the foul odors reminded city-dwellers of the disorder and destructive power of the crowds. In Milton’s Eden, however, sweet floral fragrances help reinforce Adam and Eve’s blessed relationship and unwavering love for one another.

II. Nature’s Fruitful Womb

The fertility and abundance of the garden serve as a magnificent backdrop to Adam and Eve’s paradisal marriage. At first, the earth is empty and bare. Once God begins to fill Eden with his creations, the garden overflows with diverse creatures and plants from the earth, air, and sea. Raphael narrates to Adam:

when the bare earth, till then
Desert and bare, unsightly, unadorned,
Brought forth the tender grass whose verdure clad
Her universal face with pleasant green,
Then herbs of every leaf that sudden flowered,
Opening their various colors and made gay
Her bosom, smelling sweet; and these, scarce blown
Forth flourishing thick the clustering vine, forth crept
The swelling gourd, up stood the corny reed
Embattled in her field and the humble shrub
And bush with frizzled hair implicit; last
Rose, as in dance, the stately trees and spread
Their branches hung with copious fruit or gemmed
Their blossoms. 124

Before anything had been created, Eden is “bare, unsightly, unadorned.” Milton depicts a powerful, procreative momentum as the verdant grass, leafy herbs, sweet-smelling flowers, curly vines, gourds and reeds burst forth from the ground. All of creation is swept up in this flourishing, swelling energy. God commands the sea creatures and fowl to “be fruitful, multiply.”125 And Paradise Lost celebrates Eve’s fecundity, which is attributed and compared to Eden’s abundance: “The earth obeyed and straight/ Opening her fertile womb,

124 Milton, Book 7.313-26
125 Ibid. Book 7.396
teem’d at birth/ Innumerable living creatures, perfect forms,/ Limbed and full grown.”  

Nature gives birth to a variety of flora and fauna without end. God’s mandate to Adam and Eve to procreate mirrors Eden’s inexhaustible abundance. Eve’s “fruitful Womb shall fill the world,” and God promises her that she shall be called “Mother of Human Race.” This depiction of nature as a benevolent, kindly, caring motherly provider was common in the early modern period.

As discussed in Chapter 1, work is valued as a leisure activity rather than a productive task. The work Adam and Eve undertake trimming the garden is important and necessary, but the fruit of their labor is the psychological rewards of pleasure derived from working rather than the physical crops they reap from the land. However, even as their garden labor serves to make their rest even more pleasurable, Adam and Eve soon realize that their duties seem a bit too endless. Eden is too vast and abundant for them to handle alone. Even as Adam admires the marvels of Eden, he wonders about this seeming disproportion between the vastnesses of the heavens, which provide more stars than necessary to light the earth:

I oft admire  
How nature wise and frugal could commit  
Such disproportions with superfluous hand  
So many nobler bodies to create,  
Greater so manifold, to this one us,  
For aught appears.  

This amazement at how many times greater the heavenly bodies are to Earth itself parallels Adam and Eve’s wonder at the abundance of creation itself. The couple believes Eden to be “for us too large” and constantly bring up the need for children as helpers for their gardening

126 Ibid. Book 7 453-56  
128 Ibid. Book 8.25-30
work. They repeatedly complain that they not only need more laborers to prevent Eden from becoming an overgrown wasteland, they also need more people to consume the fruits of their labor. They anticipate that they require “more hands” in order to fulfill their task as caretakers of the garden. David Glimp explains that “God has been both excessively generous and not generous enough; he has provided plenty to do but too few workers to do it.” Even as Eden is filled with plentiful plants and fruits, Adam and Eve feel a sense of urgency about their numbers and fear that any unharvested fruit will fall off the trees and go to waste because there is no one to pick them: “where thy abundance wants/Partakers, and uncropt falls to the ground.” Therefore, their future offspring are not only part of Eve’s abundance and the divine wealth that God aims to spread on the Earth, but they are also necessary for the management of Eden’s resources and to prevent potential waste.

This attitude stands in stark contrast to the fear amongst London authorities in the early modern period about urban crowds and social unrest. Despite the high rate of infection caused by the plague in the seventeenth century, the size of the metropolitan population rebounded quickly due to massive immigration from the countryside. The shortage of labor in the city due to the plague attracted masses from rural areas to fill these positions, and trade and commercial activity soon resumed. The city’s ability to regenerate was astounding. Even as the plague came and went, London survived, driven by a fecundity and motive force that could not be understood, and something to be feared. The resurrection and urban growth was also deeply troubling because of the complex relationship the crowd shares with the city.

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129 Ibid. Book 4.730
132 Milton, 4.731.
133 Munro, 184.
On one hand, crowded streets symbolize a healthy city with vibrant commercial activity. On the other hand, crowds were also the harbinger of the plague. London’s own growth carries within itself the threat of its own destruction. Thus, the unwanted population of vagrants and the urban poor were used as scapegoats for the social problems in the period, framed as “a blemish on the perfect body on the city.”

For Milton, however, prosperity is a divine gift rather than an abusive excess. Adam and Eve’s offspring are not an “excess” population but in fact necessary for the garden to function as God intended it to. Using the lands efficiently allows Adam and Eve help to eliminate waste and increase their own numbers, and at the same time, increasing their numbers help them reduce wastefulness of their natural resources. Glimp writes about this reciprocal dynamic in Eden: “a place abundant enough to accommodate future generations and a place whose abundance requires generations order to be used efficiently.” There is no fear about this sense of uncontrollable growth, since Eve’s fertility acts as an asset to prevent waste in Eden. In Milton’s garden, Adam and Eve are far removed from the violence and dangers of urban life. Therefore, procreation can be viewed positively. Milton celebrates the beauty of sensual sex. It is possible for Adam and Eve to engage in sinless sex in Eden, not only because it aligns with the mandate to procreate but also because it strengthens their relationship. In fact, more important than the need for more bodies and hands to work the garden is the desire for companionship.

III. Desire for Companionship

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134 Ibid. 186
135 Ibid. 40.
136 Glimp.
Adam’s desire for intimacy and camaraderie with another human being leads him to ask God for a partner in the garden. Adam was created as a solitary entity, and he senses his loneliness in comparison to all of the other provisions God has created. The creeks, streams, seas “with fry innumerable swarm.” Every single other creature God created was given a mate, God even made preparations for every plant and herb in the fields before they grew: “each Plant of the field, which ere it was in the earth, /God made, and every herb, before it grew/ On the green stem.” And yet in the midst of all this abundance, Adam has no pair. He senses an “imperfection” in his being that can only be corrected by the creation of a companion. He is not satisfied with the world as it has been created for him, even if the earth is “replenished” with various living creatures who will come to Adam at his command, because the animals do not provide him with the delights of companionship. He asks his creator, “Among unequals what society/Can sort, what harmonie or true delight?” Adam feels incomplete without a significant other. He needs someone who is well suited to him, who can offer him “fellowship” and share in “rational delight.” Adam requires a compatible partner to offer him love and social communication:

But man by number is to manifest  
His single imperfection, and beget  
Like of his like, his image multiplied,  
In unity defective, which requires  
Collateral love, and dearest amity.  
Though in thy secrecy although alone,  
Best with thyself accompanied, seek’st not  
Social communication, yet so pleased,  
Canst raise thy creature to what height thou wilt  
Of union or communion, deified;

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137 Milton, 7.400  
138 Ibid. 7.335-337  
139 Ibid. 8.423  
140 Ibid. 8.371  
141 Ibid. 8.383-84  
142 Ibid. 8. 417, 19
Adam identifies this “single imperfection” in God’s creation and suggests that the only way to remedy this defect is through “collateral love and dearest amity.” Thus, God creates Eve for Adam not only as an aid in the maintenance of the garden, but more importantly to forge an emotional bond with him. Eve is the only true equal partner for Adam, one who he can converse with and help him find true happiness and contentment in Eden. This adds a spiritual and social dimension to their sexual relations beyond serving the physical purpose of producing more offspring. This type of intimacy is often perceived as lacking in urban spaces. In contrast to an early modern London that was perceived as crowded, clogged, and overflowing with human bodies, Milton’s Eden is unbearably free of people and each individual creature is treasured. Even though we are surrounded by more people in cities, there is a lack of personal connection with these strangers. Thus, Milton’s emphasis on this strong, intimate bond between Adam and Eve counters the urban alienation and loneliness individuals may have felt living in London.

IV. Blissful Bowers

Adam and Eve’s marital bliss transforms the entire garden into their private bedroom. Eden is both a witness to and participant in their love. Milton gives Adam and Eve a full sexual life in Eden, even though in the book of Genesis the first mention of sex only appears after the fall. Milton creates a sensational natural backdrop for Adam and Eve’s lovemaking:

“Thus talking, hand in hand alone they passed/ On to their blissful bower; it was a place /

Chosen by the sovereign planter when he framed/ All things to man’s delightful use; the roof/

Of thickest covert was inwoven shade, /Laurel and myrtle, and what higher grew/ of firm and

\[143\] Ibid. 8.422-33
fragrant leaf.”¹⁴⁴ It is in this verdant bower inlaid with precious metals and gems, and strewn with “flowers, garlands, and sweet-smelling herbs” that Adam and Eve to consummate their love.¹⁴⁵ Their “nuptial bed” is built out of the best that the natural world has to offer. ¹⁴⁶ Adam and Eve tend to their plants as they would each other, even their gardening tasks seem to mirror a marriage. Their compatibility is demonstrated by the harmonious way in which they marry the vine to the elm:

On to their morning’s rural work they haste,  
Among sweet dews and flowers, where any row  
Of fruit trees overwoody reached too far  
Their pampered boughs and needed hands to check  
Fruitless embraces; or they led the vine  
To wed her elm: she spoused about him twines  
Her marriageable arms and with her brings  
Her dower, the adopted clusters, to adorn  
His barren leaves.¹⁴⁷

Their mutual love for each other inspires the rest of the flora and fauna in the garden to interact in a similar manner. Nature begins to mimic their tender and fluid interactions, using “fluid embraces,” “pampered boughs,” and “marriageable arms” to give a performance of idealized love. Eve is the “human consort” who completes Adam, she adorns his “barren leaves” with her dowry of clustered grapes.¹⁴⁸ The blooming flowers and clusters of fruit are not only the literal fruits that are produced by the plants through Adam and Eve’s help, but also refer to the offspring Eve will produce by entering into a marriage with children. These natural motifs emphasize the ideals of harmony, peace, and beauty and transform Eden into a mirror of the love Adam and Eve share for each other.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid. Book V 689-694  
¹⁴⁵ Ibid. Book V 709  
¹⁴⁶ Ibid. Book V 710  
¹⁴⁷ Ibid., Book V, 211-219  
¹⁴⁸ Ibid. 8.420
Instead of depicting sex as a shameful act borne out of ravenous passion, Milton establishes sexuality as an intrinsic part of human nature. Sex is a pure, harmonious union of the body and soul, and Milton highlights the ways in which the garden setting enhances their expression of romantic love. After a hard day of working and tending to the garden, Adam and Eve return into their nuptial bower: “into their inmost bower/ Handed they went and, eased the putting off/ These troublesome disguises we wear, / Straight side by side were laid, nor turned, I ween,/ Adam from his fair spouse, nor Eve the rites/ Mysterious of connubial love refused.” 149 The Bower is an idyllic, prelapsarian sexual space where Adam and Eve can enjoy the mysterious rites of connubial love, experiencing a pure union of flesh and soul without guilt. Eve craves “conjugal caresses” and kisses from Adam, which Milton does not condemn. 150 They can experience all the pleasure without any limitations and share in their love for each other and for God.

Milton manages to separate dangerous desire from the act itself, so that the act of sex is not condemned as sinful. Milton emphasizes the healthy sexuality of Eden’s inhabitants. This stands in stark contrast to the imbalance and intemperance of Spenser’s Bower of Bliss. For Adam and Eve, their whole bedroom is a garden, just as all of Eden is their bedroom. They conveniently roam around the garden naked, without shame. Spenser’s bower, on the other hand, is a place of temptation. Its enticements and attractions lure humans from their quest, highlighting the sinful nature of its inhabitants who choose to indulge in their vices: “See the mind of beastly man,/ That hat so soone forgot the excellence/ Of his creation, when he life began, / That now he chooseth, with vile difference, To be a beast, and lacke

149 Ibid. 5.738-43. 150 Ibid. 8.56
The bower is a sick orgy that reduces humans to the level of beasts. In *The Farie Queene*, Spenser promotes chastity as the greatest virtue and condemns lust as the basest of all human sins. Lust and love of the body does not lead to celestial love or virtues or higher ideals. In fact, lust after flesh can corrupt with the body. The bower represents a shameful lack of modesty rather than a healthy lack of shame.

Even as Adam and Eve become “one flesh, one heart, one soul,” they do not give into extreme passions. Sex is categorized as a natural act, a tempered desire. They are able to exercise control over their desires much like the way they exercise active control over the frenetic growth of the fruits and plants in the garden. The pleasure they derive from their act is productive but not excessive. James Turner describes Milton’s unique portrayal of the dynamic between Adam and Eve: “He does not share classical visions of man swept helplessly away by the torrents of Venus, and he does not emphasize animal sexuality like the great panegyrics of natural fertility in the Georgics.” Instead, Milton aims to show human innocence that lies in the core of this relationship. Milton’s vision of sex is a “paradoxical combination of luxuriance and restraint, virginity and wantonness.” As everything in the garden has its own proper time and place, so does sex. Adam and Eve’s sexual desire is controlled and thus does not promote jealousy or lust. The couple exercises restraint over their passions for the other, indulging in these desires just enough to balance their work and pleasure.

None of Milton’s predecessors invoke scent as powerfully as Milton has in his depiction of sensuality in the garden and the bower. Scents could be used to cultivate sensual

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151 Spenser, Book2 Canto XII 87
152 Milton, 8.499
154 Ibid. 241.
environments, both within the private realm of the bedroom and outside. In early modern England, it was common practice to use potpourri to scent the bedroom. These smells could either help to refresh the body, or they could act as aphrodisiacs that inspired erotic, sensual passions. Smells became intimately connected to a woman’s body. Literary texts in the period described women’s bodies dispensing sweetly scented vapors and scents imaginatively smelled by men. A lover’s scent was compared to odiferous pleasures. In fact, early modern men and women believed that the womb and genitals, like the nose, were organs of olfaction. Thus, the womb could react to both sweet and foul odors. Perfumes had the ability to penetrate the body, inspiring pleasure or disgust in the womb. Scents could be used to protect the female body from external smells but also protect others from their own bodily smells. Thus, smelling itself was perceived as a dangerously erotic, intimate act. Perfuming the air with pleasant smells could be potentially arousing, and thus garden spaces affected the attitudes towards sexuality.

Eve herself appears as a scented creation, “veiled in a cloud of fragrance where she stood.” She is a fragrant flower with an ability to powerfully affect Adam. When Adam first wakes from his sleep and encounters Eve, he is struck with her vigor and beauty and describes how “With fragrance and with joy my heart o’erflowed.” The natural fragrance of the bountiful plants and flowers in Eden not only help enhance Eve’s beauty, but are now associated with the pure joy of companionship. From Adam’s perspective, the entire universe celebrates Eve’s creation: “The earth/ gave sign of gratulation, and each hill; / Joyous the birds; fresh gales and gentle airs/ Whispered it to the woods and from their wings/ Flung

155 Dugan 116
156 Dugan, 118.
157 Milton 9.425
158 Ibid., 8.266
rose, flung odors from the spicy shrub/ Disporting till the amorous bird of night/ Sung
spousal and bid haste the even star.” 159 And Adam perceives Eve to surpass all good things
in the world: “And in her looks, which from that time infus’d / Sweetness into my heart,
unfelt before, And into all things from her Air inspir’d/ The spirt of love and amorous
delight.” 160 He experiences this pure moment of love, amorous delight, and sweetness that
radiates from within Eve. Furthermore, Milton describes Eve as a “flower plot” whose
“sweet recess” whose graceful innocence and beauty stupefy Satan and drive out his evil
thoughts temporarily. 161 Thus Eve’s effect is not limited to just her intended partner, but also
impacts other entities in the garden.

Furthermore, their lovemaking is presented as a form of worship to God. The rites
performed in the marriage bed are not lustful orgy, but rather a devoted act of worship. The
intimacy the couple shares is a source of delight for both the participants and for the creator.
Raphael teaches Adam and Eve that all of creation is borne from “one first matter”:

so from the root
Springs lighter the green stalk, from thence the leaves
More Aery, last the bright consummate flow’r
Spirits odorous breathes: flow’rs and their fruit
Man’s nourishment, by gradual scale sublim’d
To vital Spirits aspire, to animal,
To intellectual, give both life and sense,
Fancy and understanding, whence the Soul /
Reason receives. 162

The growth of the trees correspond with the growth of the mind and soul, and Turner states
that “the biological urge from growth is a kind of aspiration towards diety.” 163 The fruits and
flowers rise up to feed humans, and similarly fragrance acts like a type of nourishment to

159 Ibid. 8.510-19
160 Ibid. 8.474-7
161 Ibid. 9.456
162 Ibid.  5. 479-87
163 Turner 240
Milton. And these vapors travel up to the heavens and work as a type of incense that is pleasing to God:

when as sacred light began to dawn
In Eden on the humid flowers that breathed
Their morning incense, when all things that breathe
Form the earth’s great altar send up silent praise
To the creator and his nostrils fill
With grateful smell, forth came the pair
And joined their vocal worship to the choir
Of creatures wanting voice.  

The air of Eve infuses sweetness into Adam’s heart and inspires the spirit of love in all things. And the morning after, Adam retains powerful post-coital memories of the “gentle Aires” and “Odours from the spicy Shrubs.” This intense, intermingling effect of fragrance and joy illustrates that there is a comfort provided in a marriage besides just sexual benefits. The sweet and lovely scents are full of Adam and Eve’s gratitude to their creator, and rise and incense into the heavens to worship all of creation.

V. Love in a Fallen World

Once Adam and Eve consume the forbidden fruit, the distinction between lustful desire and sex is erased. After the fall, the couple return to their bower:

Her hand he seized, and to a shady bank,
Thick overhead with verdant roof embow’red
He led her nothing loath; flow’rs were the couch,
Pansies, and violets, and asphodel,
And hyacinth, earth’s freshest softest lap.
There they their fill of love and love’s disport
Took largely, of their mutual guilt the seal,
The solace of their sin, till dewy sleep
Oppressed them, wearied with their amorous play.  

The nuptial bower has since been corrupted. No longer is their performance a pleasing act of worship to God. They do not emerge from the bower refreshed, nourished, or full of praise.

164 Milton, 9.192-203
165 Ibid., 10.1037-45
Instead, they sought “solace of their sin” in sex, oppressed by the burden of their guilt and wearied from their amorous play. Milton even describes Eve’s eye as rising with “contagious fire,” inflamed with desire for Adam. Hence, Adam and Eve have transformed an act intended to be beautiful and procreative into a destructive deed.

All of creation is implicated in the fall. When Adam and Eve taste the fruit: “nature gave a second groan, / Sky loured, and muttering thunder, some sad drops / Wept at completing of mortal sin.” The storm symbolizes the gravity of their actions. The sympathetic groan of nature upon the fall produces a sense of treachery much like the groan of a betrayed lover. Adam and Eve were wedded to the land as much as they were joined in a relationship for each other. Nature’s response to mortal sin indicates a schism in the relationship not only between humans and God, but humans and the plants in Eden. Before this moment, Adam and Eve had tended to the plants as caretakers, and the flora actively reciprocated by yielding delicious fruits for the couple. However, in the postlapsarian world, nature is no longer as generous. The “compliant boughs” no longer offer shade to Adam willingly, instead he must demand the pines to “cover me” This command signifies that the reciprocal dynamic between nature and humans has changed into a hierarchical relationship. Nature is now victim to Adam and Eve’s transgression: “Earth felt the wound, and nature, from her seat/ Sighing through all her works gave signs of woe/ That all was lost.” And as part of their punishment, their harmonious relations with the natural world is devastated by suffering and death, introduced through fierce antipathy as beasts, fowl, fish begin to devour and feed on each other. The prelapsarian diet was herbaceous, and now

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166 Ibid. 9. 1036.
167 Ibid. 9.1001-03
168 Ibid. 4.333, 9.1087.
169 Ibid. 9.782-84.
meat-eating is introduced with the fall, unleashing another method in which humans inflict pain upon their environment.

When Adam and Eve are exiled from Eden, they leave behind work that was seen as beautiful and noble. In the postlapsarian world, they must now toil and labor for their food. Michael informs Adam “Cursed is the ground for thy sake; thou in sorrow / Shalt eat thereof all the days of thy life; / Thorns also and thistles it shall bring the forth /Unbid, and thou shalt eat the herb of the field. / In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread/ Till thou return unto the ground.” 170 And yet despite their fallen state, Milton retains the possibility of happiness for the pair. Adam and Eve are promised a “Paradise within thee.” 171 In Marvell’s “The Garden, ” Marvell argues that being alone in paradise is superior to being exiled from Eden. The speaker compares himself to lonely Adam in the garden: “Such was that happy garden-state, While man there walk’d without a mate; /After a place so pure and sweet, /What other help could yet be meet!/ But ‘twas beyond a mortal’s share/ To wander solitary there:/ Two paradises ‘twere in one/ To live in paradise alone.” 172 For Adam, solitude was the original paradise. Milton, however, argues that there is a happier Eden.

Eden is indeed a spectacular home to be envied, but Adam and Eve do not only reside within a physical, earthly paradise, they also find paradise through their companionship. After Adam realizes what Eve has done, he chooses to reside in a fallen world with her rather than spend an eternity in an unadulterated paradise without her. Adam simply cannot imagine an existence without Eve: “How can I live without thee, how forgo/ Thy sweet converse and love so dearly joined/ To live again in these wild woods forlorn?” 173 Even as he is aware of

170 Ibid. 10 201-06
171 Ibid. 12.58
172 Marvell, The Garden, 57-64
173 Milton, Book 9. 908-10
her transgression, he resolves immediately to join her in death because he cannot afford to lose her. Turner describes Adam’s choice as “an act that combines marital love, human solidarity, and Adams’ fear of repeating his earlier loneliness before Eve’s creation.” 174 That loneliness is presented as more devastating than living in a fallen world. It is the same agony that Satan experiences upon his first glance of the couple:

Sight hateful, sight tormenting! these two  
Imparadised in one another’s arms  
The happier Eden, shall enjoy their fill  
Of bliss on bliss, while I to Hell am thrust,  
Where neither joy nor love, but fierce desire,  
Among our other torments not the least,  
Still unfulfilled with pain of longing pines.” 175

It is this loving relationship, and not the natural beauty of Eden that inspires Satan’s jealousy Satan when he first comes upon the pair in the garden. The full splendor of nature’s bounty and the all the comforts provided in Eden pale in comparison to the powerful feelings Adam and Eve share for each other. It is this all-consuming love for each other that elevates the couple to a higher spiritual state that Satan envies. Unlike this lucky pair, Satan cannot find a sense of fulfillment in this landscape. Even if he enters into the physical boundaries of Eden, there is an emotional release that he can never experience.

If Adam were to let Eve die alone, he would suffer the torment of returning to his original, lonely state. Adam refuses to be parted from Eve, and instead insists that they remain as one:

But rise, let us no more contend, nor blame  
Each other, blamed enough elsewhere, but strive  
In offices of love, how we may light’n  
Each other's burden in our share of woe;  
Should God create another Eve, and I  
Another rib afford, yet loss of thee

174 Turner, 153
175 Milton, Book 4.505-11
Would never from my heart; no no, I feel
The link of nature draw me: flesh of flesh,
Bone of my bone thou art, and from thy state
Mine never shall be parted, bliss or woe.  

Rather than blame each other, Adam suggests that they rise above their feelings and use love to relieve the “burden in our share of woe.” He reminds them that they are tied together by the bonds of nature, borne of one flesh. Therefore, even as problematic and inherently wrong Adam’s actions are in consuming the forbidden fruit defying the command of God, Milton emphasizes the strength of their marital love that allows them to preserve part of their prelapsarian experience as they enter into a fallen world together.

Is the planet better or worse off without humans? Milton seems to suggest that creation is incomplete without the human species. Eve’s reproductive drives are required for Eden to balance waste prevention and population growth. And even as Adam and Eve are forced to leave Eden, the couple carry with them the mandate of reproducing. Their exile mirrors the movement of the workers from the countryside into London in the early modern period. Workers left their farms and migrated into the city to seek new opportunities in the emerging capitalist economy. This transformed the proprietary relationship of humans to the earth. As Robert N. Watson discusses, wage labor became dominant in the sixteenth century: “segments of the feudal peasantry became a rootless proletariat for hire, alienating workers from their fields and their own bodies in the course o alienating work from product and ownership from object. Urbanization “promoted not only a new kind of anonymity (which wage labor magnified), but also (as in the Hellenistic era) the pangs of alienation from a past

176 Ibid. Book 10. 958–67

more directly linked to the land – and family–that provided life.” These jobs in the manufacturing and service industries were seen as far less noble pursuits. Likewise, Adam and Eve traded the innocent, simple gardening tasks in Eden for laborious work, wrestling for food from the land. They left behind the most ideal and natural form of labor to forge their way in the fallen world. They are the refugees exiled from paradise and forced to flee into an urban wasteland.

Adam and Eve’s forced exit from Eden and the urban migration in early modern England demonstrate instances in which humanity is growing increasingly alienated from nature. How are Adam and Eve are meant to navigate this postlapsarian world? This question resonates with both readers of Milton’s text in early modern England as well as today. The sentimental yearning for nature, for the wilderness, for a retreat from civilization is as relevant today as it was four hundred years ago as humans continue to struggle to find their place in the natural order. Is it possible that as they are drawn away from Paradise, God is sending them to remediate the purity of Eden and create a new Eden elsewhere? Even though the two face fatal and painful consequences as part of their transgression, it is the bliss that they find in each other that allows them to retain a slice of paradise. And if the happier Eden exists between the two of them, perhaps they carry the potential rebuilding a paradise on Earth. Adam and Eve were imbued with characteristics of plants, both in terms of the fragrance they emit and the way they curl around each other like the vine and the elm. They are the seedlings in the garden, now being sent forth to propagate new gardens.

178 Ibid., 9.
Conclusion

One point that cannot be forgotten in this discussion is that Eden exists only in the imagination, as an ideal space forever lost to humankind, and thus these representations of earthly paradise are shaped by human perception. On the surface, Milton appears to be drawing a direct line from the Bible to Paradise Lost, with no branching. However, Milton was in fact influenced by other interpretations of garden spaces and type of role humanity could play in such a setting. Of course, Genesis is instrumental for any re-creation of Eden, but the inclusion of daily gardening tasks, foul sulfurous odors, populous cities, prelapsarian sex, demonstrate that Milton sought inspiration from other sources to fashion his garden. Through my efforts to re-situate Milton’s Eden in his historical context, we see how both the literary tradition of earthly paradise and Renaissance discussions on ecology influenced his work. Tracing the Classical to the Renaissance representations of nature revealed how Milton accommodated and reformed these models to create an Eden that is wholly unique. Milton responds to the concerns writers such as Spenser, Shakespeare, Marvell, and Dante raised about human labor and interventions in the natural environment. In contrast to the belief that humans are hostile forces selfishly altering nature for their own needs, Adam and Eve’s alternations of the garden do not compromise the essence of nature. The garden’s prolific growth requires the continuous labor of Adam and Eve to help elevate Eden to a higher level of perfection. And Adam and Eve derive more than just sustenance from the land, the fruits of their labor are internal rather than external. The true purpose of their work is not to maximize productivity and the harvest they reap from the garden, but to experience the perfect amount of labor each day in order to better appreciate their rest. Therefore, Adam and Eve’s interventions in Eden are necessary for the garden function as a complete system.
Furthermore, through my analysis on early modern environmental anxieties, I discovered that Milton ingeniously contextualized his representation of Eden for his contemporary audiences by enriching his visual imagination with personal experiences living in a metropolitan environment. We can connect the innovations of Milton’s Eden with the emerging awareness of problems of overpopulation, urban air pollution, and disease in the seventeenth century. Milton envisions Eden as the antithesis of London, it is the ideal, natural garden habitat conducive to harmonious human relations that the smoggy, crowded city does not provide. The foul infernal smoke of London contrasted with sweet air of paradise is one of the most evocative images employed to differentiate imaginary garden paradise from the reality of the city. And by analyzing the way in which Milton’s characters experience paradise and hell through scent, we gain greater insight into Milton’s ideas about how humans should interact and relate with their environment. The direct parallels drawn between Hell’s Pandemonium and London the city are especially striking, with the image of belching fire and rolling smoke in hell arousing the fear in Londoners of being engulfed in fire, smog, and toxic, sulfurous plumes from factories. The emphasis of Hell’s sulfuric stink serves to condemn the deplorable situation people were living in due to the excessive burning of sea-coal to fuel industry and other activities of daily life. These fears were exacerbated by the fact that it was almost impossible to protect the body from what they perceived as noxious, pestilent air. One of the few ways Londoners sought to protect themselves from disease and death was through the presumed restorative powers of sweet fragrances. The wholesome, sweet scents of nature are much closer to God’s ambrosial aroma, and thus gardens in the seventeenth century were designed to offer olfactory pleasures. Urban residents could escape from the horrendous stench of the city and into these small plots of land to indulge in a
pastoral fantasy and breathe the fresh, Edenic air to soothe their bodies and minds. The “noisome terrors of London during its plague [were] juxtaposed with a promise of spring,” and Milton’s Eden is one of the most evocative images of that promise for the ideals of beauty, peace, and harmony with the natural environment.179

These fragrant aromas also become important for Adam and Eve’s experiences of love and desire. The odoriferous pleasures of flowers, fruits, and herbs in the garden help to transform all of Eden into Adam and Eve’s bedroom, and their performance of love inspires the rest of the flora and fauna in the garden to interact in a similar manner by mirroring their loving embraces. By granting Adam and Eve a healthy sexuality in Eden, Milton also emphasizes the importance of procreation. As opposed to the seventeenth century concerns of London being stretched to its limits by the rapid tide of immigration, Adam and Eve are commanded to fill the earth. And offspring are required not only to serve as laborers to prevent Eden from becoming an overgrown wasteland but also to provide intimacy and companionship. Population growth and is portrayed as a divine mandate, and consequently the act of sex itself is a devoted act of worship rather than a lustful, intemperate orgy. And all of creation is swept up by Eden and Eve’s fertility, highlighting how Adam and Eve are not only wedded to each other, but to Eden as well. Hence, their transgression is as much of a betrayal of their harmonious relations with nature as it is a disobedience of God’s commands. Nature is a victim of their actions, and as part of their punishment, disease, suffering, and death are introduced into the world. However, Milton indicates that not all hope is lost. Even though Eden will be missed, Adam and Eve find paradise through their companionship and emotional bond, not only in the physical environment. Though the pair is exiled from paradise, they retain a sliver of that immeasurable joy by staying together.

179 Ibid. 100
Ultimately, Milton, like many of his predecessors and contemporaries, sought to explore the type of union individuals could achieve with the natural world, tempered by the troubles of urban life and pressures of the city. Each of these writers seek a sense of satisfaction for themselves as the creator of these spaces and for the characters inhabiting the gardens. Despite the growing awareness of humanity’s culpability in the destruction of nature in the early modern period, Milton’s Eden is one centered and deeply focused on humanity. Adam and Eve are not only inhabitants of the garden but also integral parts of Eden, acting as an extension of the plants. Described with curving tendrils and the wedded vine and elm, the couple seems to be made of the same organic matter as the other plants. Milton does not pit the humans directly against nature. Instead, he presents a sliver of hope that humanity can work in tandem with their natural environment to regain their lost paradise. In the post-fall model of the universe, Adam and Eve no longer feel at home in the world, forced to wrestle food from nature and bear punishment for their transgression. But Milton leaves his readers with a final image of the pair imparadised in one another’s arms, suggesting that through this slice of paradise that Adam and Eve retain, they will be able to find fulfillment in their landscape, wherever they go. Perhaps this is Milton’s final question to his contemporary Londoners, which can be extended to readers of his text today, challenging them to more closely examine their present responsibilities to the natural environment.
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