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PARADISE LOST AND THE COUNTRY ESTATE POEM

Milton employed many genres in Paradise Lost and used their characteristic themes, motifs, and topoi. Genres are defined by their subject matter and the conventions that have been traditionally coupled with them. Moreover, each genre is a literary vehicle bearing ideological meaning; it is a repository of deep-rooted sentiments and values. Thus genres are determined by social institutions. The country estate poem, for example, is an upper-class genre, a panegyric praising the sociopolitical values embodied in the landed aristocracy of the early Stuart period. More specifically, the poet's courtly compliment idealizes the aristocratic lord, his country estate, and the responsibilities and perquisites of land ownership.

It is the purpose of this essay to examine Milton's strategy of situating the country estate poem in the larger context of his Christian epic, Paradise Lost, and the significance of his radical revaluation of the recognized conventions of the genre. Milton uses the conventions in order to question the courtly mythologizing of the lord and his estate. He reevaluates the genre through inclusion and transformation. In measuring these conventions by a biblical ideal, one that varies from the genre's ideology, he shifts the values away from the institutions of monarchy, court, and aristocracy in the fallen world. Milton displaces the genre to a superior myth of Edenic life. His treatment of this myth has the place of priority in that it is the story of man's first estate. This is a radical transformation of the genre because the poet is returning the country estate poem to its source, the inspired revelation of the Bible.

(I)

In "To Penshurst" Ben Jonson had established a significant English tradition of poems in praise of country estates. Although he had incorporated and combined many earlier modes, the epigram, epistle, pastoral idyl, and panegyric ode, his poem inaugurated a new line. It was paradigmatic with respect both to the literary genre and the social ideal of the country estate itself.¹ Concerned as it is with the traditional values of hereditary dynasty and social cohesion, a poem praising the ancestral home of the Sidneys provided a cultural and literary ideal in which Carew and Herrick, the "Sons of Ben," participated. They validated their inheritance by writing variations on Jonson's poem, thereby creating a sense of continuity as well as enriching the genre.

The poems that best characterize the genre are royalist and aristocratic. They are Jonson's "To Penshurst" and "To Sir Robert Wroth," Carew's "To Saxham" and "To My Friend G.N. from Wrest," and Herrick's "Panegyrick to Sir Lewis Pemberton."² These poems were written by poets who shared the ideal of social feudal relationships. That is, they were dedicated to the ancient rights of kings and the hereditary peerage as part of the social system. In several of these poems the king himself comes to visit the aristocrat's country estate. The poet's loyalty to the king, the church, and the laws provided the basis for the social and political values in their poetry. These poems celebrate and idealize the country estates of a ruling class.

Milton was a bourgeois, revolutionary, and republican who repudiated the old feudal order which Jonson, Carew, and Herrick celebrated. His prose tracts on political liberty vigorously opposed royal absolutism, and expressed contempt for the institutions of the ruling elite, their titles, privilege of birthright, and landed property.

In the early Stuart period the main business of England still lay in agriculture. Old rural traditions continued, therefore, from the preceding centuries to the time in which the country estate poems were written. Because landed wealth was the basis of aristocratic honor, reputation, and power, the country estate poem praised the harmonious relationship between the landowner and the land. All varieties of life were presented as having their place within the natural order of the lord's estate. The social order is seen as part of the natural order because the providence of nature is linked to man's mutual obligation and dependence in social and economic relations. The landed estate presided over by the responsible lord is the royalist ideal of a golden agrarian tempus ille. Its social function reflects the harmonious relations and mutual support of monarchy and nobility, central and local government, court and country, and thus is a microcosm of the state and the monarchic world-order.³

"To Penshurst" is designed to conform to the hierarchical structure of the great chain of being and the traditional social order in the chain. Jonson organizes the poem in several sections that show the interrelation of the natural, humane, and supernatural orders. Jonson begins by contrasting other houses with the "ancient pile" of Penshurst, which is seen as an organic part of the landscape and the natural order. Then the poet describes the estate grounds. He praises the order and innate bounty of Penshurst, and takes us through the groves and woods, the fields and their farm animals, the Medway and the fish-filled ponds, and then the orchards and gardens. The next section, a bridge between the natural and human orders, describes the obedient and faithful peasants who bring the gifts of the rich, productive land to the lord's manor house. We are taken in the following section to the house itself, where we see the lord's hospitality, his "open housekeeping," to

guests of every office and social class, and his "liberall boord" (59) in the great hall. The lord has visitors, King James and Prince Henry, the highest figures in the sociopolitical order, whose royalty has supernatural authority by divine right. The final section refers to the manorial family of which the lord is head, and the quality of domestic life, including the good lady's "high huswifery," and the gentility of the lord's children, who have been taught religion and virtue by their parents.

Jonson concludes his poem by contrasting the owners of the new houses with the owner of Penshurst: "Their lords have built, but thy lord dwells" (102). Here the poet alludes specifically to Sir Robert Sidney, the exemplary aristocratic landowner who dwells on his country estate rather than devoting himself to the pleasures of London society or the affairs of Court, and fulfills his social and administrative duties as protector of a contented peasantry and dispenser of justice, charity, and hospitality. However, the phrase "thy lord" also implies both the king as origin and source of virtuous nobility, and the supreme power of God who "dwells," providentially preserving and regulating the hierarchically ordered universe of which Penshurst is a microcosm.

The country estate poems, following the model of "To Penshurst," created an idealized fiction of a feudal, aristocratic order. It is an imaginative order that satisfies the desire for a stability in the changing society of seventeenth century England. The poet's idealization of the country estate isolates and protects the life of the estate from the contemporary social and economic problems of rural England. The panegyric nature of these poems enabled the poets to be highly selective in their treatment of reality. However, the very fact that these poems praise actual country estates and contemporary landowners requires, paradoxically, that the poets avoid economic

historical realities. Their treatment of economic fact is disingenuous, and thus the poems misrepresent the inherently unstable conditions of early seventeenth century country life. That is to say, their idealized fictions do not seem appropriate or adequate to a more and more commercialized rural society and the deterioration of labor relations. They are, therefore, symptomatic of the discrepancy between the feudal ideal and a changing society. The epideictic themes of a permanent social order, the sanctity of property, stable social and economic relations, charity and open housekeeping, are manifestations of nostalgia for a way of life that was imposed on a society whose growing fragmentation revealed a nation at odds with itself on the eve of a civil war.

An important motif in Jonson's two country estate poems is the opposition between the ideal of the old manorial society and the social and economic forces inimical to its golden age harmony. These poems that celebrate the virtues of the country estate often do so partly by emphasizing the absence of pride, avarice, and oppression, which have become the dominant way of life elsewhere. In "To Penshurst" this threatening force is symbolized by the prodigy house; in "To Sir Robert Wroth," written in the Horatian or beatus illus tradition, it is represented by the city and Court. The poems continually remind the reader of the destructive forces outside the ideal country estate at Penshurst or Durrants. What Jonson does is project or attribute to the city, court, and prodigy house the ruinous commercialization that brought about the decay of rural England. This commercialization of the land, however, cannot be attributed solely to them. Many of the old aristocratic families were beginning to sell or lease out their lands, participating in and contributing to the changes in the rural economy and way of life, by abandoning the manorial custom of open housekeeping and severing their traditional ties with the countryside.⁴

The country estate poems were written during the rural crisis of early Stuart England, which involved the affairs of both the landed aristocracy and the tenant-farmer.⁵ The old aristocratic ideals regarding the social value of the land and of the lord's open housekeeping could no longer be maintained without the landowner's turning to capitalist enterprises, which had economic advantage but harmful social consequences. Under Elizabeth, agricultural production had declined. Holdings in land and incomes had eroded, and as a remedy against increasing fluctuation and inflation in agricultural prices, landowners tried to modernize, reorganize, and exploit their estates. In the Stuart period capitalist farming grew, and landowners used their property as a source of revenue by widespread selling or leasing out of lands. Consequently, the paternal ethic of good lordship was subverted and supplanted by the growing commercialization of rural property. The landowner used many ways of acquiring a greater share of the rising profits of farming. In order to augment landed income, he had increased his tenants' rents, which earlier had been fixed, reduced the duration of leases, and shifted to rack-rents on the shorter leases. The landlord-tenant relationship became more exclusively one of rents, and income was redistributed in favor of the landlords and at the expense of the tenant-farmers. Thus the landlord lost his prestige in the crisis of confidence among tenant farmers. The traditional relationship of dependence and loyalty between landlord and tenant had been undermined.

Moreover, the peasants had become victim of the landlord by losing their common rights in village fields, meadows, and wastes. Some landowners, in the interest of more efficient grain and wool production, were active promoters of enclosure and marsh drainage. Charles I himself, of course, was the greatest of the landlords, and having extracted higher national taxes from the farmers, joined the other landlords in exploiting the "wastelands," the woods, marshes,

and pastures. By clearing trees, draining marshes, and enclosing lands, they could parcel them out into large farms for lease at high rents, and thereby acquire new wealth. The policies of the Crown and the actions of the great landlords during a period of stress caused by increased population and a succession of scanty harvests and economic depression, worsened the position of the rural working class.

Thus there developed a direct clash between the tenant farmers and the landowners who had been the instrument and beneficiary of the Crown's policies. In the decades prior to the Civil War there was considerable discontent, resentment, and agitation in rural England. An angry peasantry rose in revolt and broke down enclosures and fences. They directed their rage against the taking away of their common rights. These sporadic peasant uprisings presented a threat to the political and social hierarchy, the king, courtiers, bishops, and great aristocrats.

The popular radical wing of the Puritan party expressed its anger against the private enclosure of common land. In Certain Articles for the Good of the Commonwealth the Levellers advocated "That all the grounds which anciently lay in common for the poor, and are now. . . enclosed. . . may forthwith, in whose hands soever they are, be. . . laid open again to the free and common use of benefit for the poor." The Leveller Agitators, moreover, raised questions about property rights in the light of the Law of Nature. They argued that freedom was based on the principle that it was created by man's own labor, and that when the fruits of his labor were coerced or stolen from him, both his property and freedom were taken from him. Colonel Thomas Rainsborough asked in the army debates of 1647: "But I would fain know what the soldier hath fought for all this while? He hath fought to enslave himself, to give power to men of riches, men of estate, to make him a perpetual slave."⁶

Milton was, according to Christopher Hill, "living in a state of permanent dialogue with radical views which he could not wholly accept, yet some of which greatly attracted him."⁷ There is much in The Tenure of Kings (1649), for example, that recalls the political thinking of the Levellers. This polemical tract echoes some of their radical ideas, particularly those dealing with the relationship between property and freedom. He saw that in a "free Nation" men "as wanting that power, which is the root and sourse of all liberty, to dispose and oeconomize in the Land which God hath giv'n them, as Maisters of Family in the house and free inheritance. Without which natural and essential power of a free Nation, though bearing high their heads, they can in due esteem be thought no better than slaves and vassals born, in the tenure and occupation of another inheriting Lord."⁸ This last phrase shows Milton's contempt for the traditionally accepted analogy between royal and private inheritance. In his later Readie and Easie Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth (1660) Milton wonders how in "any Nation styling themselves free" any man should "pretend hereditarie right" over its people "as their lord" (CE, VI.122-23). However, unlike some of the radical pamphlets, his Readie and Easie Way is moderate with regard to the rights of private ownership. His proposal for the future of the Commonwealth "requires no perilous, no injurious alteration or circumscription of mens lands and proprieties." Nevertheless, he insists that with "temporal and spiritual lords remov'd, no man or number of men can attain to such wealth or vast possession, as will need the hedge of an Agrarian law" (CE, VI.133-34). Opposed to the hereditary claims of privilege in the absolutist state, he argues that "a free Commonwealth both favors and promotes" liberty, and that "the other part of our freedom consists in civil rights and advancement of every man according to his merit" (CE, VI.143-44). This concept of merit had relevance to both political and

economic activities. Milton is reflecting and shaping the ideals of the English middle class, especially individual economic independence.

(II)

Because country estate poems were about actual geographical places and men, the poets described the recognizable physical features of the landscape, gardens, and manor house. The well-known owners and country estates were: the Sidneys at Penshurst Place in Kent, Sir Robert Wroth at Durrants, north-east of London, Sir John Crofts at Saxham in Suffolk, the de Greys, Earls of Kent, at Wrest in Bedfordshire, and Sir Lewis Pemberton at Rushden in Northamptonshire. Although the poets suggest the golden age and the garden of Eden in their praise of the estate, they adhere to the particularities of landscape.

Topographical landscapes represented places that were known by sight or reputation in order to gratify the patrons and the local pride of the general public. Jonson's description of the estate grounds in "To Penshurst," although an example of panegyric topography, represents the actual scenery and specific places, "copps. . . named of Gamage" and "Ashore, and Sydney's copp's" (19-26). Moreover, Jonson uses a structural pattern in the poem to give his landscape both comprehensiveness and coherence in order to represent the estate as a microcosm. His poetic form, including the regularity of his heroic couplets, organizes the description in an orderly, balanced, and hierarchical manner, suggesting the relationship of degree in nature and the human household. Following an orderly progression, Jonson at the same time creates a depth of prospect, from walks to the Mount, from the "lower land" to "the middle grounds" (22-24), from "beneath the broad beech" (12) to "the topps/ Fertile of Wood" (25-6). Moreover, he emphasizes a focal point in the natural surroundings, "That taller tree, which of a nut was set" (13) at the birth of

Sir Philip Sidney. The poet's pictorial description is idealized, emphasizing the estate as a moral emblem of the established family's excellence. The symmetries of the composition give a sense of variety, order, and harmony, through the interrelatedness of all things in nature and of land and estate owner.

Milton's visual survey of "That Lantskip"⁹ of Eden is reminiscent of the landscape descriptions in Jonson's poem. Barbara K. Lewalski has written, "The description of Eden as Adam's estate, his 'happy rural seat,' prepares us to discover the structural patterns of the country-house poem within the Eden idyl. We are led through Eden much as we are led through Penshurst or Appleton House in the poems so titled; we first view the savage nature outside the wall; then we make a circuit of the grounds noting their abundant flora and fauna."¹⁰ Like Jonson, Milton provides us with variety, depth, and harmony in his representation of Paradise. Moreover, he creates both pictorial space and depth through background landscape and foreground garden and bower. Several major differences, however, distinguish Milton's epic landscape from the landscape of country estate poems.

First, Milton's unrhymed lines, frequent enjambments, and verse paragraphs allow for a greater fluidity and openness than do the end-stopped, regular couplets of Jonson. Through his imagery Milton creates a sense of nature's apparent disorder, the irregularities of wandering rills, "mantling Vine," and "umbrageous Grots and Caves" (4.257-58). Milton's garden, furthermore, is not a specific geographical place that is identifiable in the familiar world, nor is it idealized topography drawn, as in "To Penshurst," from an actual model, but an imaginary scene or ideal landscape.¹¹ Milton, unlike Jonson, does not locate precisely the groves or orchards because he prefers the general over the particular, and thus emphasizes the ideality of the

Edenic landscape. His description, moreover, is based on a series of sweeping prospects rather than a single perspective. Jonson's landscape suggests a closed order, regularity, a resistance to change, and an adherence to the past. Milton's landscape, on the other hand, expresses an openness, a complexity of vision, and the freshness of the newly created world. Milton's phrase, "A happy rural seat of various view" (4.247), suggests an extensive view of multiple perspectives. He moves from the open field "where the morning Sun first warmly smote" to "the unpierc't shade" (4.244-46) of bowers, and from groves to fruitful orchards. Here and there are lawns and level downs with "Flocks/ Grazing the tender herb," as well as palmy hillocks and valleys that spread "Flowers of all hue" (4.252-56). The phrase "various view," however, also suggests the multiple perspectives of the characters: the omniscience of God "In prospect from his Throne" (7.556), the hateful ambivalence of Satan, the innocence and love of Adam and Eve, and the fallen but regenerate narrator who sees the Paradise garden as a sacred place from which he is exiled.

The most significant difference between the two kinds of landscape is that Jonson's idealized topography praises the aristocratic landowner, and Milton's ideal landscape praises Nature as God's Book and pattern of the divine order. Milton's landscape exemplifies Nature as the Art of God. Later in the poem Raphael tells Adam that from his angelic perspective the beauty of terrestrial Paradise is comparable to Heaven: "yet God hath here/ Varied his bounty as with new delights,/ As may compare with Heaven" (5.430-32). In the context of a Christian epic, Milton's panegyric landscape celebrates the Creator and not a mere landlord.

A topos of the country estate poem is sponte sua. Derived from the poems of Martial and Juvenal, this topos shows the golden age principle of the

generous compliance of the natural order.¹² Jonson describes in "To Penshurst" the orchard fruits each coming in their season and hanging on the walls so "that every child may reach" (44). Nature is not inert or insensate but vigorous and even enthusiastic in offering its tributes. The painted partridge is "willing to be killed;" fish deliberately run into the net; and eels "leap on land,/ Before the fisher, or into the hand" (28-38). Similarly, Carew in "To Saxham" inventively exploits the hyperbole inherent in the sponte sua topos:

The pheasant, partridge, and the lark

Flew to thy house, as to the Ark.

The willing ox of himself came

Home to the slaughter, with the lamb,

And every beast did thither bring

Himself, to be an offering (21-6).

Milton also shows bountiful nature in harmony with man: "Nectarine Fruits which with compliant boughs" (4.332) yield Adam and Eve their supper fruits as they sit reclining on a flowery bank by the stream. However, Milton does not exploit the sponte sua topos. He is restrained because he is intent on emphasizing the verisimilitude of the biblical myth rather than mythologizing the real world. Instead of falsifying the relationship between man and nature, he returns to the biblical archetype. Moreover, he shows the reciprocal relationship of man and nature in Adam's and Eve's participation in nature through their work. Although nature is described as "compliant," it is significant that in this scene they have just completed "thir sweet Gard'ning labor" (4.328).

The natural order in the country estate poem, on the other hand, is mythologized in symbolic images that preclude the necessity for the real

laborer. Because the landscape embodies the landowner, physical nature is part of the lord's bounty and benevolence. Nature and the landlord are presented as almost one and the same. Raymond Williams has argued that an implication in "To Penshurst" is that labor is the curse of Adam, and Jonson's "magical extraction of the curse of labour is achieved by a simple extraction of the existence of labourers." Both Williams and James Turner contend that the country estate poets, in their defense of landed property, represent country life by obscuring or suppressing the realities of agricultural labor. Williams discusses "complimentary mystification" and "consolidated mystified profit." Turner develops the idea of a "magic economy" in which the real worker has no place. This poetic fiction is based on the political assumption that the production of crops is in the landowner's power, and those who do the work are "included in him."¹³

The labor of prelapsarian Adam and Eve does not contradict the Edenic premise of pastoral freedom, but is an essential part of it. Their unforced work is itself a human example of the sponte sua *topos*. Milton stresses that this work is uncoerced and simple, "no more toil. . .than sufficed/ To recommend cool Zephyr, and made ease/ More easy" (4.328-31). It has been shown that Renaissance commentators on Genesis "are extremely careful to make this distinction between simple work and toilsome work. Work is the lot of man, whether in innocence or after the fall."¹⁴ God had given Paradise to mankind "to Till and keep" (8.320). Their tilling is not the curse of Adam, but one of the God-given activities of unfallen man. Milton describes "thir morning's rural work" (5.211), and later God tells Raphael that he will find Adam in the shade, retired from the heat of noon "to respite his day-labor with repast,/ Or with repose" (5.231-3).

A major difference between the aristocratic landowner and Adam in Paradise is one of "estate." The aristocrat is a landed heir who possesses property, power, and privilege. Adam, by contrast, does not actually own private property. In Paradise all things are held in "common"; only Adam's and Eve's married love is their "sole property" (4.751-52). They were given Paradise to "Till and keep" on the condition that they remain obedient and faithful to a Covenant with God. Adam's "estate," his condition of existence and state of privilege, his position in the world, and the land itself, is dependent on his fulfilling his spiritual responsibilities.

Like Herrick's virtuous landlord in "To Pemberton," Adam learns "order, Ethicks, and . . . All Oeconomicks" (89-90), a word derived from the Greek oikonomos, which means one who manages a household. Milton contrives to include lord, yeoman, and steward in his representation of Adam's "middle estate."

God told Adam: "This Paradise I give thee, count it thine/ To Till and keep, and of the Fruit to eat" (8.319-20). Adam and Eve "as Lords" will "Possess" Paradise "and all things that therein live" (8.339-40). God makes it very clear to man that he is "Lord" of his estate, yet he must keep the terms of the Covenant-contract. Having been given Paradise, Adam's calling is to labor in the garden, and to obey God by shunning the prohibited tree of knowledge of good and ill, which has been set in the garden as a pledge of his obedience and faith. He tells Eve that God requires from them "no other service than to keep/ This one, this easy charge. . .not to taste that only Tree/ of Knowledge" (4.419-24). As lords of Paradise, Adam and Eve express their love for and gratitude to their Creator in family prayers.

When Adam fails to keep the terms of the Covenant, he falls. Satan, who had been envious of mankind, tells his mistress-daughter Sin that she will be

able to exercise dominion on earth, "Chiefly on Man, sole Lord of all declar'd" (10.401). The phrase "sole Lord" reveals that Satan misunderstands the nature of man's relationship with God, and thinks of Adam as absolute lord. Later, when Adam beholds the tyrannical Nimrod in the prophetic vision of fallen history, he says to Michael: "But Man over men/ He made not Lord" (12.69-70). Dispossessed of Paradise, Adam has learned about the nature of lordship: in Eden it was not absolute or permanent but conditional; in society no man can be lord over other men, and God is the only lord.

Man was as much a yeoman as a lord. Thomas Fuller thought of yeomanry as exemplifying the middle condition. It is, he wrote, "an estate of people almost peculiar to England, living in the temperate zone between greatness and want."¹⁵ Milton had associated yeomanry with Christianity, writing in Of Reformation about "the simplicity, the plainnesse of Christianity" which to "the Worlds Children seem'd but a homely and Yeomanly Religion" (CE, III. 24-5).

A yeoman of God, Adam was responsible for the estate given him to manage. Such an estate would have been, according to English feudal property law, in fee simple defeasible. It was granted to Adam but subject under certain conditions to reversion. Launcelot Andrewes in an Easter sermon spoke of the biblical Adam's state in such legal terms. Adam held his spiritual life, Andrewes argued, in a "defeasible state." He lost it, however, "by breaking the condition whereto it was limited."¹⁶

Paradise was only a gift to man, conditional on his obedience, and he had no absolute right to it. God's yeoman Adam was put into Eden "to Till and keep" it. This is the work that God had assigned. At least two Renaissance commentators on Genesis, Arnold Williams has noted, have speculated about why Adam was created outside Paradise. They concluded that it was for the purpose

of showing that Paradise did not belong to man. Paradise was too good for man, they contended, and therefore it was more fitting for him to be made of common earth. Had Adam been created in Paradise, his body could not have reverted to dust. After the Fall, he was expelled from Paradise and could not return. Therefore Man's creation outside Paradise was a homiletic lesson against spiritual pride.¹⁷

Adam and Eve work with their own hands, unlike the landlords who lived off the fruits of other men's labors. Adam says that it is "our delightful task/ To prune the growing Plants, and tend these Flow'rs" (4.437-38). He says that "God hath set/ Labor and rest," and while other creatures "Rove idle unemploy'd," Man has "his daily work of body or mind/ Appointed, which declares his Dignity" (4.612-19). The shared work of Adam's and Eve's "joint hands" (9.244) is an important part of their mutual support as well as their harmonious relationship with Nature and God.

Milton does not create poetic fictions about the spontaneous generosity of nature because he provides the recognizable ideal of human labor cooperating with nature's productivity. Adam and Eve are, to use the Puritan Slingsby Bethel's phrase, "the industrious sort of people,"¹⁸ and their work before the Fall emphasizes the dignity, purity, and social value of human labor.

Another position of the middle estate with which Adam has something in common is that of the steward, an official who governs the domestic affairs of a household. It is the figurative use of the steward in the New Testament, however, that has the greatest relevance to Adam's office in Paradise. Stewards appear in some of the parables of Jesus, and Paul in his epistles uses the figure of the steward as servant of God. In I Corinthians, for example, there is the "steward of the mysteries of God" (4:1). "It is required in stewards," writes Paul, "that a man be found faithful." Peter in

his first epistle writes, "As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God" (4:10). As God's steward Adam is responsible for the cultivation of the garden and of righteousness. His work in Paradise suggests that the life of prelapsarian man was active as well as contemplative. However, Adam failed as God's steward because he misused God's gift of rational understanding and free will.

That Adam is not a privileged landowner but a member of the middle estate shows that Milton could not embrace the ruling ideology of country estate poems. Like the steward, yeoman, artisan, or tradesman, Adam lives a life of moderation between the extremes of the landless, migrant laborer and landed aristocrat. In his Defensio Prima Milton, addressing his adversary, the royalist Salmasius, praises the middle estate:

Then you inveigh against the common people as being 'blind and dull, ignorant of the art of governing;' you say there is 'nothing more empty and changeable than they, nothing more fickle and excitable.' All which is very true of yourself, and it is true likewise of the rabble, but not of the middle sort, amongst whom the wisest men and most skilful in affairs are generally found; the rest are commonly diverted, on one hand by luxury and wealth, on the other by want and poverty, from achieving excellence and from the study of laws and government (CE, VII.393).

Of Milton's phrase, "A happy rural seat," J.B. Broadbent says that it "is almost laughably the England of Penshurst, Cooper's Hill, and Appleton House."¹⁹ It is true that Milton had incorporated the conventions of the country estate poem as is evident in his descriptions of the landscape, but this adaptation enabled him to radicalize these generic motifs and topoi. By

relating the estate to the original condition of unfallen man, the poet implicitly replaces the panegyric to the aristocratic landowner with a vision of man's estate in Paradise.

An important formal topic in the genre is the architecture of the manor house. Jonson contrasts Penshurst with the ostentatious artifice of other country houses. Penshurst is organic and vital, an integral part of the landscape and nature, "of soyle, of aire,/ Of wood, of water" (7-8). The virtue of country house architecture is, according to these poets, that it is natural, useful, and hospitable. Carew's description of the manor house at Wrest Park is contrasted with the houses whose "external embellishments cost more/ Than real use" (54-5). This emphasis on utility recalls Francis Bacon's essay, "Of Building," in which he writes: "Houses are built to live in, and not look on; therefore let use be preferred before uniformity, except where both may be had."²⁰ The manor at Wrest, says Carew, has "an useful comeliness" (20) because its architect "built a house for hospitality" (20-4). Throughout this poem Carew examines the relationship between the external and internal, art and nature: "Yet we decline not all the work of Art/ But where more bounteous Nature bears a part" (69-70).

The bower in the garden of Eden is Milton's counterpart to the country house. His description of the bower stresses its architectural properties. "The Silvan Lodge" (5.377) of Adam and Eve is framed, canopied by a roof of laurel and myrtle, and fenced by a wall of shrubs. The poet introduces the Acanthus (4.696) because in Roman and Italian architecture the leaves of the acanthus have been used as a decorative architectural motif. Other images of art and architectural design predominate in the description of the bower. Some flowers, for example, are "wrought Mosaic," while others underfoot "with rich inlay/ Broider'd the ground" (4.699-702). The violet, crocus, and

hyacinth, which make up the rich inlay, are "more color'd than with stone/ Of costliest Emblem" (4.700-03). The word "emblem" signifies both the properties of jewels and flowers in pictorial symbols and an ornament of inlaid work. These architectural ornaments, moreover, are taken from nature; they are alive, organic, and fertile. Nature is the Art of God, "the sovran Planter" (4.691), and is woven in the bower's architecture as part of divine immanence. The bower, like the manor house, is not only natural, but it is useful as well: "It was a place/ Chos'n by the sovran Planter, when he fram'd/ All things to man's delightful use" (4.690-92).

It is clear that in Paradise Lost it is God who is the architect of the bower. He is the "great Architect" (8.72) who had planned the universe, "his great Idea" (7.556), according to the rational principles of proportion and number. Having taken "the golden Compasses" prepared in his eternal store, he circumscribed "This Universe, and all created things" (7.225-27). Moreover, the "sovran Architect" framed the self-opening gates of heaven (5.254-56). He had, in addition, designed, laid out, and planted the landscape and garden of bliss, enclosing it "with goodliest Trees/ Planted, with Walks and Bowers" (8.304-5) and constructed the sylvan lodge for Adam and Eve.

Describing Penshurst, Jonson contrasts the manor house with other mansions, the gigantic prodigy houses of the Tudor and early Stuart periods, built for the exhibitionist owners' aggrandizement. They are "proud, ambitious heaps," the products of acquisitiveness and pretension of court aristocrats with the object of preserving their threatened status. In contrast to the open housekeeping of the virtuous, public-spirited landlord who resides on his country estate, the owners of these extravagant buildings were interested mainly in gaining power by impressing a monarch. The great courtiers by means of stupendous expenditure had their prodigy houses built to accommodate and

entertain royalty. The English countryside was embellished with these architectural fantasies: Sir John Thynne's Longleat, Lord Burghley's palace, Sir Christopher Hatton's Holdenby, the Earl of Salisbury's Hatfield, the Earl of Suffolk's Audley End, among others, exemplify a wholly new scale of building as well as of moral and esthetic decadence. These aristocrats attempted to outdo their rivals and establish their family's dominance in a certain county. Rober Burton in Anatomy of Melancholy called these houses "insanae substructiones," which, when "unseasonably used, imprudently handled, and beyond their fortunes," consume the owners. These buildings, Burton says, are "inutiles domos" that may "overthrow" the estates of those men who are "consumed by mad phantastical buildings, by making galleries, cloisters, terraces, walks, orchards, gardens, pools, rilles, bowers, and such-like places of pleasure."²¹

John Aubrey describes the regular entertainment of royalty at another estate, at Wilton near Salisbury: "King Charles I did love Wilton above all places and came thither every summer. It was he that did put Philip first Earl of Pembroke, upon making the magnificent garden and grotto, and to new build that side of the house that fronts the garden."²² As a result, an ambitious building project was started. An architect influenced by Inigo Jones began putting a vast Italianate facade on the old house at Wilton, but had to abandon the project half-way when the Earl of Pembroke ran out of money.²³

The parallel with the prodigy house in Paradise Lost is Pandemonium. Both are "proud, ambitious heaps" (101) built for "envious show" (1). Pandemonium resembles the prodigy house that boasts "a row/ Of polish'd pillars, or a roof of gold" (2-3). Pandemonium is

Built like a Temple, where Pilasters round
Were set, and Doric pillars overlaid
With Golden Architrave . . .

The Roof was fretted Gold (1.713-15;717).

Whereas the bower, like Penshurst or Wrest, is organic and naturally beautiful, Pandemonium, like the prodigy house, is artificial and ostentatious. The bower is created by the art of God for the love of man; Pandemonium is an artifice erected for the self-love of Satan.

From the Middle Ages through the sixteenth century, the great household was very public and every one in it was on public display. The houses of the ruling class had been constructed of interlocking suites of rooms without corridors. Thus any one moving about the manor required passing through other people's rooms because suites of rooms led out of each other. However, in the latter part of the seventeenth century plans for houses allocated space to corridors and hallways allowing access without intrusion upon privacy in separate rooms. These house plans reflected an ideal of the Puritan middle class, which was the establishment of a domestic nuclear family and personal privacy.²⁴

Whereas the great communal hall is the most important room in the country estate poem, in Paradise Lost it is the nuptial bower, the bedroom of Adam and Eve. Historically, the hall had a variety of functions: it was the place for the lord to receive distinguished guests, to dispense justice, call assemblies, or hold feasts and entertainments to celebrate family marriages and christenings. On a daily basis, however, the hall was where the entire household ate, and the lord and lady and their more important guests would sit at a 'high table' on a raised dais, surveying the servants and tenants below seated on benches at long refectory tables.²⁵ All members of the household,

servant, tenant, chaplain, lady-in-waiting, were bound together by the ideal of the powerful and benevolent lord, and the loyalty displayed by his followers. Most of the time, there were visitors of all ranks, and sometimes they came in great numbers. Because crowds of people continuously came to the manor, the lord saw to it that there were vast amounts of food and drink. The servants carried the food from the kitchen, Herrick's "fat-fed smoking Temple" (6), in a great procession along a spacious route to the hall. The ceremony of serving up the meal was carried out by carver, cupbearer, sewer, and butler as well as gentlemen waiters. A banqueting hall in Paradise Lost appears in a passage which disparages feudal concepts of power and honor: "Then marshall'd Feast/ Serv'd up in Hall with Sewers, and Seneschals" (9.37-8).

The great hall of the manor was a vestige of feudal power; and the hall at Penshurst, for example, with its traceried windows, the central hearth, the dais, and arcades, still give physical evidence of medieval interior design and concepts of hierarchy and ceremony. John Selden describes a great hall and its political significance:

The Hall was the Place where the great Lord used to eat, (wherefore else were the Halls made so big?), where he saw all his Servants and Tenants about him. He eat not in private, except in time of sickness: when once he became a thing cooped up, all his greatness was spilled. Nay, the King himself used to eat in the Hall, and his Lords sat with him, and then he understood men.²⁶

The hall epitomized the political power, reputation, and the hospitality of the landed aristocrat; the bedroom became symbolic of the growing belief of the middle class in personal autonomy, self-expression, inwardness, and the right to personal privacy, particularly with respect to married love. The

hall represented what Lawrence Stone calls "the Open Lineage Family" of the aristocracy, and the bedroom, "the Closed Domesticated Family" of the middle class.²⁷

The love between Adam and Eve is their "sole propriety" (4.752). That is, their marriage is their exclusive, proprietary relationship. The poet's description of the nuptial bower in Eden emphasizes its seclusion, concealment, and privacy. The roof is "of thickest covert" and "inwoven" (4.692-93), and the bower itself is fenced up with a wall. No creature "durst enter. . . . Such was their awe of Man" (4.704-05). The shady bower is "sacred and sequester'd" (4.706). In "close recess" (4.709) Eve decks her own "Nuptial Bed" with "Flowers, Garlands, and sweet-smelling Herbs" (4.709-10). The inmost bower" is the place for "the Rites/ Mysterious of connubial Love" (4.738-43).

The hymn "Hail wedded Love" celebrates that "Mysterious Law" (4.751). Here in their sacred and sequestered bower, Adam and Eve consummate their nuptials, a "Perpetual Fountain of Domestic sweets" (4.760). As the flowery roof "Shower'd Roses" (4.773) on the naked limbs of loving husband and wife, they are once more "Imparadis't in one anothers arms" (4.507). "Here Love," the genial angel of the nuptial bower,

his golden shafts employs, here lights

His constant Lamp, and waves his purple wings,

Reigns here and revels (4.763-65).

Milton ironically contrasts the pagan Cupid of the libertine lyric with married love in Paradise. Moreover, his use of the word "revels" is redeemed from its fallen aristocratic associations with "Court Amours/ Mixt Dance, or wanton Mask, or Midnight Ball" (4.~~767~~⁷⁶⁷⁻⁹).
767-9

The motive for marriage among the great aristocrats was not necessarily love; it was often wealth and social status. They thought of marriage as a diplomatic and dynastic affair, contrived to unite political and family interests, and to acquire estates by well-chosen marriages with heiresses. Among the Puritans of the middle class, however, the chief end of marriage was godly companionship and mutual comfort and support. Milton in Tetrachordon declared marriage "a divine institution joyning man and woman in a love fitly dispos'd to the helps and comforts of domestic life" (CE, IV.101-05).

"Holy matrimony," the sanctification of marriage, was a recurring theme in Puritan sermons and marriage books. For Puritans, marriage was an extension of Covenant theology, and was considered a sanctified contract, with mutual obligations between husband and wife.²⁸ Milton's description of physical love in marriage praised the joys of physical union, sanctifying the flesh. "For marriage must not be called a defilement," Milton wrote in An Apology, for the doctrine of holy scripture unfolds "those chaste and high mysteries". . . in which "the body is for the Lord and the Lord for the body" (CE, III.302-06).

The country estate poem had been primarily a panegyric to the landed aristocracy in a feudal, monarchic world-order. Milton opposed the ideology of the ruling class, its hereditary claims, political power, and privilege that are expressed in the conventions of the genre. Incorporating the country estate poem in to his Christian epic, Milton questions its ideological assumptions. He radically transforms the generic conventions, having measured them by the biblical ideal of man's first estate. Three major themes emerge from Milton's representation of this estate. The first is that man in Paradise is not a landowner, but a member of the middle estate who was given Eden as a gift on condition that he remain obedient and faithful to the Covenant with God. The other themes had been expressed by Milton in Of Reformation:

Well knows every wise Nation that their Liberty consists in manly and honest labours, in sobriety and rigorous honours to the Marriage Bed, in which both Sexes should be bred up from chaste hopes to loyall Enjoyments (CE, III. 52-3).

In contrast to the aristocratic landlord who consumes the bounty of the land, Adam is a kind of yeoman who produces, tilling and keeping the land he was conditionally given. That is, Adam's freedom consists in his "manly and honest labours," the cultivation of the garden and of righteousness. Finally, it is not the public hall of the manor house but "the Marriage Bed" in the bower that is a central locus in the prelapsarian estate of mankind. It symbolizes God's providential plan of creation on earth. The natural and supernatural orders unite in the microcosm of married love.

NOTES

1. Alastair Fowler, Kinds of Literature: An introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), pp. 154-56.
2. Quotations from Jonson's "To Penshurst" and "To Sir Robert Wroth" are from The Complete Poetry of Ben Jonson, ed. William B. Hunter, Jr. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1963), pp. 77-84, Carew's "To Saxham" and "To My Friend GN from Wrest" from Minor Poets of the Seventeenth Century, ed. R. G. Howarth (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1953), pp. 85-6 and 134-37, and Herrick's "Panegyric to Sir Lewis Pemberton" from The Poetical Works of Robert Herrick, ed. L. C. Martin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), pp. 146-49. Subsequent references and line numbers appear in parenthesis in my text.
3. Ruth Nevo, The Dial of Virtue: A Study of Poems on Affairs of State in the Seventeenth Century (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), pp. 11; 20-1.
4. L. C. Knights, Drama and Society in the Age of Jonson (London: Chatto & Windus, 1937), pp. 100-01.
5. The analysis of the rural crisis in the foregoing paragraphs owes much to the following works: Lawrence Stone, The Crisis of Aristocracy, 1558-1642 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965); Brian Manning, The English People and the English Revolution, 1640-1649 (London: Heinemann, 1976); Joan Thirsk, ed., The Agrarian History of England and Wales (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), IV.
6. In Puritanism and Liberty, ed. A.S.P. Woodhouse (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1965), pp. 338; 71.
7. Milton and the English Revolution (New York: The Viking Press, 1973), pp. 113-14.

8. The Works of John Milton, ed., Frank Allen Patterson et al., (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931-38), V. 40. Subsequent references are within my text as CE.
9. Citations from Milton's poetry in my text are to Complete Poems and Major Prose, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (New York: Odyssey Press, 1957). 4.153. Subsequent references are within my text.
10. "Paradise Lost" and the Rhetoric of Literary Forms (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), p. 18.
11. John R. Knott, Jr., Milton's Pastoral Vision: An Approach to Paradise Lost (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), pp. 42-3.
12. William A. McClung, The Country House in English Renaissance Poetry (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), p. 12.
13. The Country and the City (London: Chatto & Windus, 1973), pp. 32-41, and The Politics of Landscape: Rural Scenery and Society in English Poetry, 1630-1660 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979), p. 162.
14. Arnold Williams, The Common Expositor: An Account of the Commentaries on Genesis, 1527-1633 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1948), p. 131.
15. Quoted in The Agrarian History of England and Wales, p. 301.
16. "Easter Sermon Preached before the King's Majesty," April 5, 1607, in Ninety-Six Sermons (Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1841), II: 217-18; The Common Expositor, pp. 109-10.
17. The Common Expositor, p. 136.
18. Christopher Hill, Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England (New York: Schocken Books, 1964), p. 133.
19. Some Graver Subject: An Essay on 'Paradise Lost' (New York: Schocken Books, 1967), p. 184.

20. Selected Writings of Francis Bacon, ed. Hugh G. Dick (New York: The Modern Library, 1955), p. 114.
21. The Anatomy of Melancholy (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1964), I: 52.
22. Quoted in Mark Girouard, Life in the English Country House: A Social and Architectural History (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1978), p. 121.
23. The Crisis of Aristocracy, p. 552.
24. Lawrence Stone, The Family, Sex and Marriage, 1500-1800 (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), pp. 253-54.
25. Gervase Jackson-Stops and James Pipkin, The English Country House, A Grand Tour (Boston: Little Brown, 1985), p. 44.
26. In Table Talk (London: J. M. Dent, 1934), pp. 48-9.
27. The Family, Sex and Marriage, pp. 28-9.
28. William Haller, "Hail Wedded Love" ELH 13,2 (1964), 84.