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Working in collaboration with Professor Allison Hobgood (English, Women’s and Gender Studies), I intend to spend the summer of 2012 conducting an in-depth analysis of the relationship between Eve and Satan in the epic poem *Paradise Lost*, written by 17th century English poet, John Milton. Looking specifically at Book 9 in the poem, I will trace the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden (henceforth referred to as “the Fall”). In my essay, I will address various representations of Eve that exist in literary narratives before and after Milton, critique Milton’s interpretation of the Fall, examine the relationship of “the feminine” to “the demonic,” and use contemporary gender and queer theory in conversation with writings from the 1600s to illuminate some of the gendered identity politics of the Renaissance period.

Using *Paradise Lost* as my primary text, I hope to establish an original understanding of the character of Eve as depicted by Milton and of his interpretation of women’s role in the Fall. I will investigate the ways in which his descriptions of Creation and the Fall shed light on Eve, who is usually understood as either an empowered woman with enough agency to disobey God or as a disobedient creation who failed her male counterpart and all of the human generations to come. Specifically, I want to explore Eve’s paradoxical representation as an untainted, ideal female and the mother of humanity, and as the bringer of sin and the reason for humankind’s downfall. I plan to challenge this biblically-based narrative and to explore the ways original sin is used to create particular identity histories for women and to justify their subordination and mistreatment in many Judeo-Christian cultures.

In close reading *Paradise Lost* and exploring existing scholarship surrounding the poem, I hope to answer the following questions: How do Milton’s depictions of Eve and Satan differ from other interpretations of the Temptation and the Fall? How are Adam and Eve described as unequal from the moment of their creation; how does the method of Creation—Adam from dust, Eve from Adam’s rib—establish women as inferior even before Eve is tempted by the snake/Satan? How does Eve's femininity (as described by Milton) make her more susceptible to the temptation of eating from the Tree of Knowledge? Does Eve’s “fallibility” (and therefore the inferiority of all women) lie more in her weakness and corruptibility, or in her tendency towards darkness and the demonic? How does Eve/women and Satan’s relationship extend beyond the Garden of Eden? How is Milton’s text part of a broader cultural logic deployed in the oppression of women in many cultures today?

In addition to my analysis of Eve, I will likely introduce the character of Lilith—cited in the Dead Sea Scrolls and other Jewish texts as the first wife of Adam—to analyze the symbolic significance of snakes within the creation narrative and to further complicate the tie between women and the satanic/demonic. My research will also be shaped by available theoretical writing from the 17th and 21st centuries, which will give me insight into gendered cultural expectations of Judeo-Christian societies. My piece will draw from gender, queer, and possibly disability theory to offer a new and complicated reading of this volatile relationship between women and their representations in biblically-based narratives. I will reveal their complexity and dimensionality, as well as the biases of the people who have depicted them. Ultimately I hope to
offer a new reading of Milton’s poem and of the characters who continue to influence our ideas about gender and society.