

Hierarchical Naming in Milton's *Paradise Lost* and Twain's Diaries of Adam and Eve

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Mark Twain — author, wit, philosopher, and self-named man — used names and naming throughout his works, not simply to add color, interest, or even characterization, but to shed light on the power struggles between people at different levels of nineteenth-century American society. Twain's "Extracts from Adam's Diary" and "Eve's Diary," which were directly influenced by one of his greatest literary influences — John Milton, are especially saturated with active naming. In *Paradise Lost*, Milton describes a hierarchically structured naming system that separates angels from fallen angels, God from man, and man from woman. In Twain's versions of the creation story, he inverts Milton's naming structure, instead using naming to demonstrate his anti-imperialist ideals through the dominant naming of Eve.

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In a speech entitled "The Disappearance of Literature," Mark Twain famously quipped about the readability of *Paradise Lost*, saying to the audience, "I don't believe any of you have ever read *Paradise Lost*, and you don't want to. That's something that you just want to take on trust. It's a classic, [...] something that everybody wants to have read and nobody wants to read" (Twain, 1910).

Of course, Twain was joking. He was a fan of John Milton, especially *Paradise Lost*. When courting his future wife, Olivia Langdon, the young Samuel Clemens bought her a Gustave Doré-illustrated edition of the text. Upon learning in a letter that she approved of the gift, Twain replied, "I am so glad Milton pleases my idol — I am delighted. Oh, we'll read, & look at pictures when we are married!" (Twain, 1967: 428).

Inspired by *Paradise Lost*, Twain took up the subject of Adam, Eve, and Satan several times beginning in 1852 and ending in 1905 (Baetzhöld and McCullough, 1996: 4). And yet, Twain was not only influenced by Milton's subject, but also by the weight he placed on the significance and impact of naming. In *Paradise Lost*, Milton

established a system of hierarchy-based naming that Twain later inverted in his own versions of the creation story: “Extracts from Adam’s Diary” and “Eve’s Diary.”

All naming in *Paradise Lost* requires transference of power from someone powerful to someone less so, as is the case when Adam names the animals and when Eve names the plants. In *Christian Doctrines*, Milton comments on this concept of hierarchical naming. He writes, “the imposition of a name is allowed to be uniformly the privilege of the greater personage whether father or lord.” Milton was developing his personal theory of naming well before he began his epic poem. He saw the inherent power in bestowing a name on another. But, before even the “greater” humans can exert this power of naming, they must be instilled with the God-given and God-like wisdom necessary. According to Milton, again in *Christian Doctrines*, “Man being formed after the image of God, it followed as a necessary consequence that he should be endued with natural wisdom, holiness and righteousness. Certainly, without extraordinary wisdom, he could not have given names to the whole animal creation with such sudden intelligence.” In *Paradise Lost*, Adam is the one instilled with wisdom enough to name the animals of God’s creation, but in Twain’s version of the creation story Eve is the master namer, and, therefore, the wiser of the two humans.

Naming in heaven depends not only on hierarchy, but also on the potential for a change in rankings. Hierarchy organizes the ranks of heaven in Milton’s epic, but not a hierarchy that could ever be changed or even authentically challenged. While a chain of command exists in heaven, the potential to uproot the instilled rankings does not — the positions of everyone in heaven are static. The angels, for instance, were created by the Word and have existed since the beginning of time. Steven Blakemore writes in “Language and Logos in *Paradise Lost*” that because the angels were created by the Word “their essence is profoundly linguistic.” The name of an angel, the most linguistic aspect of any being, is therefore an ingrained and essential aspect of his or her existence. As long as angels have existed (indefinitely), they have always had their names, because their names are a fixed part of their existence. Without a name an angel ceases to be real (as we will see is the fate of Satan and his followers) but, because a name is intrinsic to heavenly existence, the act of naming itself is unnecessary in heaven. Therefore, while names exist in heaven and are indispensable from being, the act of naming does not exist. And because nothing new is being created in heaven (or anywhere else until God creates the earth), the need to name does not arise. In Genesis, Adam and Eve are not named until after the fall. Milton, however, gives them names much earlier. Their names add meaning and foreshadow the fall of humanity. No mention is made of God naming Adam, so it is fair to conjecture that he was created with his name intact. Adam’s name is simply the Hebrew word for “man” (Campbell, 2008). Rather than giving Adam a proper name, God, instead, labeled him — a label which later became a name. While names existed in heaven, naming itself is not created until God grants Adam the wisdom and power necessary for the act. Adam will be the first to name.

When Satan and his minions fall, they lose the names they had in heaven and become nameless. Milton makes it clear, when he mentions any of the fallen angels by name, that he is using not their heavenly, angelic names, but their fallen

names — names given to them by men long after the scene in Pandemonium that he describes. Of Satan's number one, for instance, Milton writes that he is "Long after known in Palestine and named / Beëlzebub" (I.80–81). In the timeless moment Milton describes, Beëlzebub has no name; he is fallen and cannot maintain the heavenly name he once had. Instead he must wait to be named by humanity. The same is true of Satan. This name, "Satan," is not the name he had in heaven. In fact, Milton tells us his name was Lucifer, but always quickly follows the heavenly name with explanations that it is only an approximation or a translation of the original name, which is in "the dialect of men / Interpreted" (V.761–762). In falling and losing their names, the fallen angels lose all connection to heaven, to their formerly linguistic selves, and to their creation. They lose meaning. Before God creates the earth and grants Adam the ability to name, it is impossible for names to exist anywhere except in heaven.

The hierarchical foundations of naming in *Paradise Lost* are played out repeatedly through and among the poem's human characters. First, for instance, Adam names the animals who not only "receive / From [him] their names" but also "pay [him] fealty / With low subjection" (VIII.343–345). The two actions are not far apart in significance. To give others a name in *Paradise Lost* is to establish superior power over them. Eve could never name Adam, who is at a level above her based on the structure established in the poem, but she can name the plants:

O flowers,
That never will in other climate grow,
My early visitation and my last
At ev'n which I bred up with tender hand
From the first op'ning bud and gave ye names (XI.273–279)

Eve's naming in *Paradise Lost* has a very different purpose from Adam's. Her naming is based on maternal care, while Adam's is based on establishing power, and yet Eve also establishes hierarchical power. Simply by naming the plants, Eve relegates them to a position decidedly beneath herself. Similarly, Adam uses naming to assert his power over Eve, this time by giving her a second, derogatory name: "Out of my sight, thou serpent! That name best / Befits thee with him leagued, thyself as false / And hateful!" (X.867–869). By calling Eve "serpent," Adam is asserting his power over her, and clinging tightly to the hierarchy of which they are both a part.

Another way that the hierarchy of naming shows itself in *Paradise Lost* is in Adam's inability to name God. While Adam often calls God by names of praise, such as "Vision," "Heavenly Power," and "Maker," Adam never calls God by a proper name, because it would be impossible to name a being hierarchically above himself. When Adam asks God what his name is, Adam understands that he could never receive a direct answer: "O by what name (for Thou above all these, / Above mankind or aught than mankind higher, / Surpassest far thy naming) how may I / Adore Thee, Author of this universe[?]" (VIII.357–360). Because naming in *Paradise Lost* is based directly on hierarchical power, Adam could never name God who is so decidedly above him. Naming's dependence on hierarchy and power in Milton's epic makes it an exclusively human act, one that does not exist in heaven.

In *Paradise Lost*, the act of naming and the possession of a name are inherently powerful. The hierarchical nature of giving a name makes the action an exclusively

human one. God, the angels, and even the fallen angels never name. That power begins with Adam, the first human being who, by naming, begins perpetuating waves of power into and throughout future generations of humanity.

Twain was fascinated by the story of the Garden of Eden and its inhabitants' loss of innocence, especially as portrayed by Milton. When he decided to write his own version of the story, he continued Milton's focus on naming, but, in characteristically Twain style, he meaningfully, and of course humorously, chose to turn Milton's idea of hierarchical naming on its head. As a self-declared anti-imperialist and frequent challenger of those in positions of power, Twain's rejection of Milton's structured naming practices makes perfect sense. The first major change is from Milton's distant, third-person structure in *Paradise Lost* to the first-person, reflective perspective of Adam and Eve's Diaries. By getting into the voices of Adam and Eve, Twain manages to show his reader the intrinsic power of naming in profound (and profoundly funny) ways.

Throughout "Extracts from Adam's Diary" (1893) and "Eve's Diary" (1905), Adam is frustrated by Eve's insistence on naming everything around her.¹ Initially, Adam believes that the act of naming is futile. He cannot appreciate, or much less wield, the power behind naming. Over time, however, Adam's struggles with classification, the meaninglessness of names, and the power to name, as well as his observations of the alluring Eve, lead him to an understanding of the importance of names and naming. While Adam is traditionally seated hierarchically above Eve, in Twain's diaries of Adam and Eve, Eve starts out as just another of Adam's subjects, but as a masterful namer she quickly becomes the more powerful of the two.

Important to note is the fact that Eve is not naming in the traditional sense of granting a name to something or someone. Instead, she is labeling, especially animal species and topography. And yet, Eve's labeling, which is repeatedly called naming in Twain's diaries, demonstrates the essence of hierarchical power-based naming in the same manner as the typical onomastic sense of naming found in *Paradise Lost*.

Upon first meeting Eve, Adam struggles with what to call her. At first, he classifies her as an animal, writing in his diary: "It is always hanging around and following me about [. . .]. I wish it would stay with the other animals." Adam is annoyed by Eve and tries to avoid her, especially because of her persistent talking, which is a running joke throughout Twain's work. But, in spite of Eve's loquaciousness, she begins to grow on Adam. He becomes increasingly comfortable with her presence. Later, Eve insists on being called by her name. Adam humorously writes, "The new creature says its name is Eve. That is all right, I have no objections. Says it is to call it by when I want it to come. I said it was superfluous, then." Eve's naming of herself is a significant sign of empowerment. Adam tries to undercut her power by saying that the name is unnecessary, but Eve insists: "It says it is not an It, it is a She." From this point on, Adam calls Eve by her name — powerless against her self-declarative and empowering naming.

Eve begins her diary by attempting to classify Adam in the same way that he classified her in his own diary. "I think it is a man," she writes. "I had never seen a man, but it looked like one, and I feel sure that that is what it is. I realize that I feel more curiosity about it than about any of the other reptiles." While Adam is slow to

his realizations about naming, Eve quickly appreciates that her labeling of this creature means something. She can no longer treat the man the same way she treats all of the other animals. The first change she makes is to the pronoun she uses for the man:

If this reptile is a man, it isn't an *it*, is it? That wouldn't be grammatical, would it? I think it would be *he*. I think so. In that case one would parse it thus: nominative, *he*; dative, *him*; possessive, *his'n*. Well, I will consider it a man and call it he until it turns out to be something else. This will be handier than having so many uncertainties.

From this point on in "Eve's Diary," Eve calls Adam "he" whenever she refers to him. In *Paradise Lost*, Eve is clever, but remains hierarchically below Adam. In Twain's version of the Genesis story, however, Eve uses naming to establish more power than Adam has. Twain's use of naming effectively overturns the traditional hierarchy and the staunchness that goes along with it, giving his story a fresh, humorous, and modernly feminist approach.

As we see in Adam's diary, Eve also insists that he call her in the most "grammatical" way — *she* rather than *it*. Adam believed that Eve was one of the animals, but Eve sets him straight by renaming herself. In so doing, Eve humanizes herself for Adam. Perhaps because of her success with pronouns, Eve quickly takes to naming everything else in their paradise. Unlike Adam, naming comes naturally to her. She is proud of her skill in naming, perhaps more so because Adam lacks the skill, making her feel powerful:

During the last day or two I have taken all the work of naming things off his hands, and this has been a great relief to him, for he has no gift in that line, and is evidently very grateful. He can't think of a rational name to save him, but I do not let him see that I am aware of his defect. Whenever a new creature comes along I name it before he has time to expose himself by an awkward silence. In this way I have saved him many embarrassments. I have no defect like this. The minute I set eyes on an animal I know what it is. I don't have to reflect a moment; the right name comes out instantly, just as if it were an inspiration, as no doubt it is, for I am sure it wasn't in me half a minute before. I seem to know just by the shape of the creature and the way it acts what animal it is.

Eve immediately feels superior to Adam because of her naming skill, making clear the connection between naming and power in Twain's version.

Adam successfully regains the upper hand (albeit temporarily) by initially ignoring Eve's self-declarative naming. Eve writes, "This morning I told him my name, hoping it would interest him. But he did not care for it. It is strange. If he should tell me his name, I would care. I think it would be pleasanter in my ears than any other sound." Eve has the power to name herself with or without Adam's approval, but she is still hurt when he chooses not to acknowledge her name. Eve's declaration of her name to the man she cares for is an important act showing that she has the power to say who she is — Call me Eve. When Adam rejects her, she feels deflated: "No, he took no interest in my name. I tried to hide my disappointment, but I suppose I did not succeed." The declaration of her name to Adam is essentially her act of revealing part of herself to him. The fact that he deems her name unworthy of his time or interest significantly reveals his struggle to win back some of the power in their relationship,

but also his lack of understanding of the manner in which Eve uses naming — for domestic purposes rather than classification.

Eve reestablishes her superior power to name quickly and decidedly when part of the garden catches fire. Of the incident, Eve writes, “I was curious to know what the pink dust was. Suddenly the name of it occurred to me, though I had never heard of it before. It was *fire!* I was as certain of it as a person could be of anything in the world. So without hesitation I named it that — fire.” Eve makes it evident that Adam cannot keep up with her power to name because he lacks a certain talent which is required for the act. But she tries not to think less of her mate, writing, “He is not to blame for his brightness, such as it is, for he did not make it himself; he is as God made him, and that is sufficient.” Once again, Twain’s anti-hierarchical approach to naming gives Eve the upper hand.

In “Extracts from Adam’s Diary,” even after Eve introduces herself by name, Adam continues to find names entirely meaningless. When Eve names “summer resorts,” for instance, Adam writes, “another invention of hers — just words, without any meaning.” Adam’s comment here unwittingly anticipates twentieth-century onomastic theory. Like T. L. Markey and John Algeo, Adam intuitively on some level that the names themselves lack meaning, but he cannot yet understand the importance of the act of naming. Eve names the animals, places, and things around her because the act of naming is her way of making a mark on the world. Just as she gave herself a name in order to establish herself in her own eyes and in the eyes of Adam, Eve names because the act allows her to exert power. While in *Paradise Lost*, naming for Eve is a beautiful, creative, and maternal act, in the diaries, naming is Eve’s way of demonstrating her power within her sphere.

Later, Adam calls fish by the name that Eve has given them, but he pauses to comment on the ridiculousness of fish or any other animals needing names: “[S]he continues to fasten names on to things that don’t need them and don’t come when they are called by them, which is a matter of no consequence to her, as she is such a fool anyway.” In calling his fellow human being a fool, Adam makes it clear that he does not understand why Eve feels compelled to name. He finds the act bothersome and pointless. He cannot comprehend that Eve names not for the benefit of the animals but as her way of asserting herself.

As Eve moves from taxonomy to toponymy, Adam’s frustration grows. He later comments, “Been examining the great waterfall [...]. The new creature calls it Niagara Falls — why, I am sure I do not know. Says it *looks* like Niagara Falls. That is not a reason, it is mere waywardness and imbecility.”² Even though Adam cannot comprehend why Eve wants to name, he clearly has some understanding of the power of naming, because he knows that he is unable to stop the act. Realizing that naming is a power that he does not possess, Adam says,

I get no chance to name anything myself. The new creature names everything that comes along, before I can get in a protest. And always that same pretext is offered — it *looks* like the thing. There is the dodo, for instance. Says the moment one looks at it one sees at a glance that it “looks like a dodo.” It will have to keep that name, no doubt.

Adam wishes that he could name something, anything. Rather than admit that he does not have the talent for naming as Eve does, he claims that she names before he

has the opportunity to name. Adam's theory is proven false, however, when both Adam and Eve come up with names for their home. Adam writes,

The naming goes recklessly on, in spite of anything I can do. I had a very good name for the estate, and it was musical and pretty — GARDEN-OF-EDEN. Privately, I continue to call it that, but not any longer publicly. The new creature says it is all woods and rocks and scenery, and therefore has no resemblance to a garden. Says it *looks* like a park, and does not look like anything but a park. Consequently, without consulting me, it has been new-named — NIAGARA FALLS PARK. This is sufficiently high-handed, it seems to me.

Adam feels slighted by Eve. He has finally come up with a name on his own, but his expression of creativity is rebuffed by her. Earlier, Adam attempted to reject Eve's name for herself, but he was entirely unsuccessful. Now, not only is Adam calling Eve by her name, he is losing out on naming anything else. He is offended by her rampant naming, but knows that he is powerless to stop it, and so says nothing to Eve. Instead, he writes snide comments in his diary. At one point, Adam comments on Eve's determination to clutter their home with "execrable names and offensive signs" designating newly labeled proper nouns:

THIS WAY TO THE WHIRLPOOL.
THIS WAY TO GOAT ISLAND.
CAVE OF THE WINDS THIS WAY.

The names are meaningless to Adam, and yet he takes on Eve's names, calling the animals by their new names and calling their home a "Park" rather than the Garden of Eden. As the days pass, Adam realizes that the act of naming is significant, which is evident not only in his frustration with the power displayed by Eve's naming, but in his first act of successful naming.

"We have named it Cain," Adam writes. For the first time, Adam's attempt at naming works. He and Eve name their son together. For the rest of the story, Adam says nothing against Eve's naming. He finally sees a purpose for the act. In fact, Adam takes the naming of Cain to the next level by attempting to classify him. Unable to understand that the baby is as human as he and Eve, Adam tries to discover what kind of animal he could be. At first Adam believes the baby is a fish, but when he "put it in the water to see, it sank, and she plunged in and snatched it out before there was opportunity for the experiment to determine the matter." Twain's humorous depiction of Adam's thoughtless treatment of his child further emphasizes his slow-witted responses to names and naming. Later, Adam determines that the baby must be a new kind of kangaroo. He writes, "[I]t is a curious and interesting variety, and has not been catalogued before. As I discovered it, I have felt justified in securing the credit of the discovery by attaching my name to it, and hence have called it *Kangarooorum Adamiensis*." Again, Adam names the baby, but without any help from Eve, his naming only highlights his ignorance. Adam has finally adopted the important act of naming for himself, but, in the end, this attempt fails as well. He realizes that the baby is in fact not a kangaroo and instead calls him an "unclassifiable zoological freak."

Adam and Eve's purposes for naming are disparate, but they are both using naming as a tool. Adam, like a taxonomist, names in order to classify and make sense of the

world around him. Though he lacks a natural talent for naming, Adam comes to see the practicality of the act. For him, the act of naming is cerebral and calculated. Eve, on the other hand, names out of maternal instinct and caring. She uses naming as a tool to facilitate better care for the animals, places, and things with which she shares her home. For Eve, naming is instinctual. In a Platonic sense, she names based on the true form of a thing, which she has an understanding of immediately. The fish “looks like” a fish to Eve. For both Adam and Eve, however, naming is a powerful act and a way to establish oneself in a new world. Adam, left lacking the wisdom granted his character in *Paradise Lost*, is daunted by the world, while Eve’s conviction makes her a force to be reckoned with. Adam undoubtedly notices the attractive force of Eve. Like Milton, naming for Twain was a way of demonstrating hierarchical relationships. Twain, however, took the power of naming one-step further, allowing his characters who apparently have less power in society to use naming to declare their worth. Eve’s power to name makes her a strong force, one that Adam can neither contain nor control. By the end of Twain’s narrative, Adam finds himself entirely fascinated with naming, which may be why Adam ends up in love with Eve, the master namer, and declares at her grave: “Wheresoever she was, *there* was Eden.”

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Notes

- ¹ Twain wrote “Eve’s Diary” the year after his wife died. The short story’s diary entries closely follow those of “Extracts from Adam’s Diary,” which he wrote twelve years earlier. Twain later went back and edited “Adam’s Diary” in order to publish the two stories side by side.
- ² Naming is particularly present in the Niagara Falls version of the diaries, which I use for this analysis. Late in his career, Twain was paid to revise his

diaries, setting them in Niagara Falls as a part of an advertising campaign for the tourist spot. All of the locations Eve labels are real locations still found on US maps. For an explanation of the genesis of the Niagara Falls version, as well as other edited versions of the diaries, see Baetzhold and McCullough’s introduction to the diaries in *The Bible According to Mark Twain* (3–7).

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