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**INTERPRETING J. MILTON’S “FAMILY” AXIOLOGY VIA  
VARIOUS RUSSIAN TRANSLATIONS OF *PARADISE LOST***

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***Abstract***

One aspect of John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* is studied very rarely, if at all, and it is the aspect of family values. Naturally, the concept of family is not applicable to supernatural beings (God, angels, Satan); but in the poem there are also Adam and Eve, usually attested as background characters after Satan and considered only as an object of seduction and exile from Paradise. The affirmation of family values, however, occupies an important place in the poem as well, since it correlates with the author’s humanistic idea. We try to identify these values in the text of the poem via its translations into Russian, made at different times and with different accents and, accordingly, placing different accents in the text of the poem. Out of more than a dozen existing Russian translations, we choose three which reflect different epochs (1827, 1895, 1976) and which contain all the twelve Books of the poem. Before comparing corresponding axiological fragments in all these text variants with the original, these fragments are identified in the English text of *Paradise Lost* on the basis of Adam and Eve’s presence/absence in the narration. The comparative analysis implying compositional, categorical and context methods made it possible to identify the way of each translator’s interpreting the first “family” as an axiological microsystem of the source text.

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## 1. Introduction

J. Milton's epic poem *Paradise Lost* is traditionally studied from several points of view: its text and stylistics (genre, form, poetics); religion and morality in it; its historicism (in particular, autobiographical and revolutionary ideas). At the same time, one cannot say that each of these aspects correlates with a specific scientific discipline: the first is realized not only within poetics and literary criticism; the second is not connected exclusively with theology, etc. Rather, scientists belonging to different areas of humanitarian knowledge: philologists, philosophers, historians, culturologists for almost three and a half centuries have been considering the poem in the listed and many other aspects. Still, studying *Paradise Lost* is considered so difficult and multidisciplinary due to a complex, multi-faceted figure of its author and due to the text and the plot of the poem itself.

## 2. Problem Statement

Already by the beginning of the XX century, a lot of works had been devoted to Milton – so many that every 20-30 years there were published bibliographic reference books (in 1930 – *A Reference Guide to Milton from 1800 to the Present Day* by D. H. Stevens, in 1931 – H. F. Fletcher's *Contribution to a Milton Bibliography, 1800–1930*; in 1969 – C. Huckabay's *John Milton, An Annotated Bibliography, 1929–1968*, in 1989 – *The essential Milton: an annotated bibliography of major modern studies* by P. J. Klemp, in 2011– C. Huckabay's *John Milton, An Annotated Bibliography, 1989–1999* and many others). Within an article in the 21st century, it would be unthinkable to cite even a percent of existing works. However, within each aspect, there have been formed a certain number of studies, referred to most often by at least Russian researchers. The formal and poetic approach is mainly associated with T. S. Eliot and the “new criticism” (Potts, 2019), the humanistic and moral are generally connected with J. Hanford, E. Tillyard and D. Bush (as cited in Gleyzon, 2015), whereas the historical context of the poem is analyzed by a huge number of Milton's biographers, who, starting with John Aubrey, tried to connect the plot of *Paradise Lost* with the social, revolutionary activities and/or with the poet's personal life (Martins & Drumond, 2019).

Since the end of the XVIII century, *Paradise Lost* has been translated into Russian more than ten times, most of the translations being either fragmentary (only part of the poem is translated), or made through a third language (e. g. English → French → Russian), or created around the same time, with a difference of several years, which does not provide an objective picture of the change in the cultural paradigm. For a comparative analysis, translations of 1827, 1895 and 1976 were chosen. For the object of the analysis, there were chosen the family values (as the elements of the axiological system) reflected in the English text and its Russian variants. The aspect chosen is connected with all the three above-mentioned main approaches to *Paradise Lost*: textual, as the values are identified through certain use of words in the text; religious and moral, since Milton (as will be seen below) recognized only family bonds to be not sinful, and considered true love existing only in marriage. The family values are also associated with the historical basis of the poem, as in the center of the poem – if we do not consider the supernatural forces of Paradise and Hell – there are our ancestors, Adam and Eve, and it is these “our grand parents”

who try the “mortal taste” of the forbidden fruit, which Milton mentions at the very beginning of the poem.

### 3. Research Questions

In our analysis, we will try to answer three questions:

1. In which compositional patterns of *Paradise Lost* are family values manifested?
2. How are these values distinguished within the plot development in the original version and in the three selected Russian translations of the poem?
3. Is it possible, based on J. Milton’s “family” axiology, to talk about the strategies of each translator?

### 4. Purpose of the Study

This article does not aim at evaluating numerous approaches to *Paradise Lost*, comparing them, or at giving preference to one over the others. The attitude to the poem and the diversity of its interpretations is to be recognized as a historically determined phenomenon, and therefore, to some extent objective. Historically objective as well seems the interpretation of the poem by representatives of other cultures, and in particular, by Russian translators of different epochs. The identification of this interpretation is understood to be the main purpose of the study.

### 5. Research Methods

For our analysis, we used the method of comparative text analysis. The original text of *Paradise Lost* is traditionally taken from the second author’s version published in 1674, wherein 12 books are included (as opposed to the first, which included 10). This version has been reprinted many times with some spelling and punctuation modifications; we use the Wordsworth Poetry Library edition (Milton, 2004).

After their identification in the English version, fragments related to family values are correlated with the versions of their translation in 1827 (in the reprint of 1843 the translator is not specified, but most probably it is F. Zagorsky), 1895 (translator A. Shulgovskaya) and 1976 (translator A. Steinberg). The comparison is connected with the text categories of the theme and tonality. Text categories in the Russian stylistic tradition are understood within the concept of “mandatory text properties” of Prof. Matveeva (2017) as related to the components of the communicative act, the theme reflecting the subject / object of the narration, and the tonality (emotionality) denoting the attitude of the author to what is depicted and the energy of the text in general (Itskovich, 2018). The method of text analysis through its categories inevitably relies on M. Bakhtin’s idea of text dialogism.

In total, there were analyzed 2246 original lines of the chosen fragments and their variants of translation in three Russian versions of the poem, two of them written in prose (translations of 1827 and 1895) and one in verse (1976). Within the compositional and textual analysis, elements of the field and context methods were also used.

## 6. Findings

### 6.1. Compositional distribution of the axiologically marked fragments

Many researchers have pointed out that the central character of *Paradise Lost* is not Adam, and not even God, but Satan (see, for example, Al-Akhras & Green, 2017; Conlan, 2017; Dos Santos, 2016 etc.). The “Arch-Enemy” is mentioned in all books of the poem except VIII, XI and XII. The very first appearance of Adam and Eve in the poem, with the exception of address to the Muse in the introduction, is only IV, 288–340 (the book here and further marked by a Roman figure, and the lines by Arabic, correspondingly). This late appearance is connected with the fact that the first three Books tell us about the Satan and his warriors hurled from the Heaven, about their torments in “bottomless perditions”; about their council in the Hell; and finally, about the flight of Satan to Eden to search for the First Men. But even in Book IV and after it, the plot returns to Adam and Eve only when it is needed: for Satan’s eavesdropping on their conversations (IV, 411–491), descriptions of the state of innocence – conversations before bedtime and evening prayer (IV, 610–775); for the morning in Paradise (V, 1–219); the morning before the fall and their short argument on whether to work together or singly (IX, 192–383). More than 3/5 of Book V (350–907) and Books VI, VII, VIII are occupied by Adam and Archangel Raphael’s “discourse at the table” – in fact, this is Raphael’s story about the creation of the world. During this “discourse”, Adam is present, but he does not interfere almost at all. The entire Book IX (after line 192) speaks on the main event of the poem – the Fall, wherein “the grand parents”, naturally, participate (IX, 192–1189). After it, they are again on the background, appearing episodically in Books X (109–208; 714–1104), XI (136–384), and XII (607–649). We should note that, similarly and in parallel with the first conversation with Archangel Raphael, the rest of Book XI and the whole Book XII, except for the mentioned ending, Adam listens to Archangel Michael foreseeing the future of mankind (cf. Watkins, 2018; Welshans, 2018). In the monologues of both archangels, there are naturally no mentionings about family values.

Obviously, the “family” axiology can appear only in those parts and fragments of the text where Adam and Eve are present on the scene and interact (totally 2246 of 10565 lines, which do not include the episodes of the “silent” or almost silent presence of Adam near the narrating archangel). The family is a human phenomenon (Cornes, 2019; Welburn, 2019), and it would be difficult to speak about its manifestation in the pictures of heavenly battles or the hellish torments of Satan and his “horrid crew”. Therefore, Adam and Eve are on the scene during approximately 20 % of the whole text, whereas Satan is present about nearly 60.

This circumstance, however, does not make them background figures. According to the degree of manifestation of “family” values, the identified fragments listed above are also not homogeneous. Book IV contains the eulogy of marital love (750–770), where Milton contrasts sacred bonds to adulterous lust “driven among the bestial herds” (IV, 753–754). According to Milton, the charities of “father, son, and brother” are primary; those hypocrites who condemn the pure love as impure are said to be “our destroyer, foe to God and Man” (IV, 749). Love within the family is the source of reproduction: “Our Maker bids increase” (see also: Su Fang Ng, 2007; Bare, 2018). In terms of the field theory of J. Trier, we define this fragment as the core of the axiological field “family”.

The core, which contains the analyzed meanings in the purest form, is traditionally opposed to the periphery – usually more extensive, including a larger number of units that have the same meanings, but manifested more implicitly. If we apply this logic to the fragments, then we should recognize peripheral (in the expression of “family” axiological meanings) Adam and Eve’s love conversations in Paradise, as well as their assurances of mutual fidelity after the Fall (Lindley, 2018). An introduction to one of the editions of the poem says, “Richard Steele reported a tea party where he overheard some women whisper that Milton made our first parents say “some of the tenderest things ever heard”” (Tillyard, 1935, p. 35).

For the following comparative analysis, there was taken a sample core fragment (the author’s appeal to wedded love, IV, 750–762) denoting “family” axiology. The corresponding Russian fragment was found in 1827, 1895, and 1976 translations.

## **6.2. The Russian translators’ interpretation of the sample fragment**

Here is the well-known Milton’s monologue, which glorifies conjugal love. In the text of the poem, it is placed after Eve, who has not yet tasted the forbidden fruit, ascends with Adam to their bed:

Hail, wedded Love, mysterious law, true source  
Of human offspring, sole propriety  
In Paradise of all things common else!  
By thee adulterous lust was driven from men  
Among the bestial herds to range; by thee,  
Founded in reason, loyal, just, and pure,  
Relations dear, and all the charities  
Of father, son, and brother, first were known.  
Far be it that I should write thee sin or blame,  
Or think thee unbecoming holiest place,  
Perpetual fountain of domestic sweets,  
Whose bed is undefiled and chaste pronounced,  
Present, or past, as saints and patriarchs used. (IV, 750–762)

And here is the same fragment in the Russian translation of 1827 (word for word translated here back into English according to its reprint of 1843):

I bless you, conjugal love, the true source of life! By you, a shameless voluptuary was expelled from the society of people and forced to wander between animals, only you light, strengthen the union of blood, and you are the first to lodge tenderness in the hearts of parents, children and brothers. O inexhaustible source of family happiness! Woe to him who portrays you with the paints of vice or shame, and honors the unworthy to proceed in the most consecrated sanctuary: your bed is unclad. And the patriarchs of the past centuries, and the pious men of our times, fed on your clean waters (Milton, 1843, Part I, p. 172–173).

Although the general meaning is understood and rendered by the translator, numerous transformations seem to distort the value meanings of the analyzed fragment. The thematic plan of the Russian version is expanded by the addition of a “shameless voluptuary” (‘adulterous lust’ is, in terms of modern philosophy, the sexual desire of someone else, of the “other”, but it is hardly a person); the translator’s metonymy changes the whole meaning of the sentence. Another inaccuracy is the correlation of the “present” and “past” with “saints and patriarchs”: time indexes refer here to the previous line.

More accurate is another prose translation of 1895 (by A. Shulgovskaya), again translated here back into English:

Praise to you, conjugal Love, the mysterious law of nature, the true source of life, the only property in Paradise, where all other benefits were the common property of all! You have driven a man from a blind lust, decent only to dumb cattle. Through you, for the first time, consecrated, purified, and fastened precious bonds of blood and holy words – father, son, brother – were known. The very thought, o wedded marriage, is away from me to see in you a sin or shame, or consider you unworthy to penetrate the purest refuge! You are the eternal source of family joys, immaculate and holy is your bed, was and will be: saints and patriarchs were upon it” (Milton, 1895, p. 87–88).

Here, no longer “a voluptuary”, but “a blind lust” belongs to the cattle, “present or past” are also referred to correctly, the metaphor “saints and patriarchs” lying upon the bed of the wedded love is preserved. The only translator’s transformation is the addition “o wedded marriage”, so that the reader should not forget whom the narrator refers to.

Translated in 1976 in verse, the fragment is interpreted like this (a back translation into English presented below):

Praise to you, o marriage love,  
A true source of human kind,  
Law covered in mystery! You in paradise  
Where everyone shares everything together,  
Are the only property. You,  
From the lust inherent only in cattle  
Senseless, delivered Man.  
You, relying on the mind, approved  
The sacred legality of blood ties,  
And the purity and righteousness of kinship,  
And you first joined us  
To the ideas of father, son, and brother.  
I won’t even think of you  
Sinful and contrite, in the sacred Garden  
Penetrate the unworthy! O spring

Of inexhaustible family delight!  
Your bed is pure through the ages  
And it will be pure in the future; that is why  
The saints rested upon it  
And the patriarchs. (Milton, 1976, p. 126–127)

Though it hardly sounds Milton-like in the back translation, the main ideas are still conveyed correctly, though certain phrases are rendered by Arkady Steinberg with intentionally greater pathos than there is in the original. “Mysterious law” turns into “a law covered in mystery,” “hail, wedded Love” becomes a separate line: “Praise to you, o marital love!” Generally insignificantly, the category of tonality is extending; the only thematic deviation of the translation from the original is the specification of the “sacred Garden” (Milton has just a “holiest place”).

## 7. Conclusion

Milton sounds unexpectedly loud in modern philosophical and cultural discourse. Ignorance and knowledge, good and evil, loss and gain, male and female – all these are just some of the axiological oppositions in *Paradise Lost*. This list should be extended by the opposition “family and fornication” (“pure family love vs. impure love aside”).

The positive features of the family, which constitute Milton’s “family” axiology, are reproduction and increase, most intimate tenderness to each other, infinite trust, staying together in joy and in sorrow (according to the plot of the poem – in Paradise and on Earth). According to special dictionaries, the family is defined as “an intimate domestic group made up of people related to one another by bonds of blood, sexual mating, or legal ties” (Scott, 2014, p. 238), i. e. Adam and Eve definitely constitute a family. With the eaten forbidden fruit Eve seduces Adam; the sin of one imposes blame on the other, even if he himself has not sinned (Adam cannot but eat it, as they are a family and are not able to exist without each other). Thus, the family is also a responsibility, and it is still Eve who is to be accused: “more loth, though first to offend” (X, 109–110).

At first glance, the values reflected in a particular work of literature should be preserved when this work is being translated into another language. A value is somewhat related rather to tonality (assessment, emotion), and not to some background details which can be changed or reduced. However, not all the Russian translations allow us to identify the axiological microsystem of the English original text. In the 1827 translation, the substitution of “lust” for “voluptuary” destroys the figure of contrast (antithesis); thus, the translation becomes unclear, since there appears a question who was sent to the cattle. The 1895 translation, “weighing” less heavy, reflects the translator’s strategy of “accuracy”, with only a few additions to make the English text of the 17th century more understandable to the Russian reader. Finally, the translation of 1976, most widely read today, is perceived even more easily due to the poetic form, although it is extended by about 20 %. This is partly due to the translator’s attempts to specify the content, and partly because Russian text is generally longer than its English version.

Therefore, family values serve as the key to the aesthetic side of *Paradise Lost*, as well as to translation strategies that allow tracing the evolution of the variants of the greatest English epic in Russian.

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