

Madison Santana

Dr. David Ainsworth & Dr. Emma Wilson

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Abstract:

This essay presents Eve's inherent distance from God and Adam as her primary tool in her development of a sense of reason and logic separate from the two. Eve's formation as a being closer to the Earth and Creation in effect gives Eve a clearer mind to reason separate from God; her appreciation of sensuality and the physical and concrete give her a nuanced understanding of the world unlike other characters in Paradise Lost. The consequences of Eve's actions in relation to God's established hierarchy within Creation are discussed, as are the implications of her "transgression" on the future of logic and choice within the poem and outside of Eden.

Three Cheers to Eve: A Defense of the Desire for Knowledge

Milton's God creates a universe that is a place of hierarchy, in which he holds autocratic and absolute power. It is a place of rules that must be obeyed. It is a place where questions are warranted, so long as they are the right questions. Each member of God's creation is given a specific rank, a unique title. As seen in the War in Heaven, breaking rank can have catastrophic results. In fact, Chaos ensues when the chain of hierarchy is broken. An unlikely heroine emerges out of this tyranny in Eve, the last of God's creation, created primarily for Adam's amusement; Eve is the natural next step in the creation of God's hierarchy on Earth, in which

Adam is created for the glorification of God, Eve for the glorification of Adam, and the animals for the glorification of all. When Eve chooses to eat the Fruit, not only does she choose to “break rank,” to defy her subordination to Adam, and subsequently to God, but she also engages in her first significant exercise of her own free will. It is in this scene that Eve is truly most powerful because she chooses not only independently, but also chooses for herself. By comparing Eve’s opening dialogue with Adam in Book 4, full of sweet words and charm, to her Temptation in Book 9, a scene full of questions and directed by logic, it becomes clear that Eve’s decision to eat the Fruit is truly one of independence and free reason, for the first time separate from Adam. By choosing *without* Adam, not *against* Adam, Eve establishes herself firmly as a force in contention with God’s despotic hierarchy, and perhaps as Adam’s equal.

Our first introduction to Eve comes in Book 4, where she and Adam discuss her creation and reminisce on their first encounter. By analyzing not only the content of Eve’s language, but its sound and structure, the pure innocence and inferiority of Eve to her spouse is clear and startling. Eve’s speech to Adam during the story of her awakening is saturated with alliteration and assonant sounds that give her language a slow, alluring quality. Her syntax is full of long *o*’s, long *e*’s, and repetitions of *s*’s, *f*’s, and *th*’s: “...what could I *do*, but *follow straight*, invisibly *thus led*? *Till I espi’d thee*, fair indeed and tall, under a Platan, yet *me thought less fair*, less winning *soft*....” (*Paradise Lost* 4: 475-478). Utilizing sound in this way gives Eve a warm and feminine charm; the structure of her language creates a soft, lulling sound similar to that of running water, coincidentally a symbol of purity throughout the Bible.

Analyzing the content of Eve’s speech along with its structure further builds on the feminine and inferior nature of its tone. In her speech, Eve praises Adam first, then God, for her creation. In fact, nearly half of her speech consists simply of quoting logic given to her by either

God or Adam, and the rest only her minor reflection of it. In this scene, Eve cites Adam as her law: “O thou for whom / and from whom I was form’d flesh of thy flesh / and without whom am to no end, my Guide / and Head, what thou hast said is just and right...” (*Paradise Lost* 4: 439-442). Using Adam as her primary source of law, or reason, is the only mechanism Eve has by which she can attain closeness to God. Because she was created by God *through* Adam, she is more “of the Earth” than she is of Milton’s God. Because she is primarily at a disadvantage by lacking direct access to divine discourse, which Raphael tells Adam is the only source of “right reason,” or “God’s reason,” one may think Eve is unfairly handicapped in the plight of avoiding temptation. In fact, after God tells Eve to “follow [him]” for he “will bring thee where no shadow stays thy coming,” Eve does not again have direct conversation with a divine being, only messages relayed to her either through dreams or indirectly through Adam (*Paradise Lost* 4: 469-470). However, it is truly this distance that allows Eve to reason independently of the two male characters in her life and to experience a new awakening into her own acquisitive reason.

In the scenes surrounding Eve’s fall, her reason takes a stark turn. While her speech certainly takes on characteristics of Satan – at this time, her only “fallen” companion – and his speech, it also embarks on a new path of reason that had remained unseen until this point in the narrative. Eve’s decision is rooted essentially in self-interest. Her decision to eat the fruit is her first and perhaps only decision in which she thinks only of herself; the subsequent consequences in the face of God and those facing Adam because of her choice are simply afterthoughts. Her decision to eat the fruit is one of ambition and self-empowerment; it is a decision that could potentially and boldly rupture not only God’s hierarchy, but also his tyranny in Paradise.

While the syntax of Eve’s speech in this scene remains primarily feminine, with long vowel sounds and repetition, the mode and content of her reason take a drastically masculine turn

in terms of reason found in *Paradise Lost*. In the final twenty lines of Satan's speech to Eve, he uses the words "God" and "Goddess" a total of nine times in reference to Eve and what she may attain by eating the Fruit. Ironically, the number nine, or nine repetitions, is a biblical symbol for divine completeness, and often, final judgment (Slick). In answer, Eve's opening lines consist of a repetition of words connoting royalty and honor associated with the Fruit and its consequences: "Great are thy *Virtues*...*best* of Fruits...*worthy* to be *admired*...and taught the Tongue not made for Speech to speak thy *Praise*," (*Paradise Lost* 9: 745-749). Eve also finds a new vocabulary when referring to God; once her self-proclaimed Creator and source of Life, he is now "Our great Forbidder" surrounded "with all his Spies," or angels (*Paradise Lost* 9: 814). Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Eve's speech is filled with questions. For a character who before this moment never questioned her place as simply Adam's companion, this new line of reasoning is intriguing. Interestingly, this interrogation of Satan's logic mirrors that of Adam to Raphael, perhaps further suggesting Eve's independent development of reason in this scene away from Adam. From one question to the next, Eve's speech increases in speed and acuity. Eve asks a total of seven questions in her speech, a biblical symbol of both spiritual *and* physical perfection (Slick).

She begins by pondering Death and the nature of the Beasts, and how different they could really be from man: "For us alone was death invented? Or to us denied / this intellectual food, for Beasts reserved? / For Beasts it seems: yet that one Beast which first / hath tasted, envies not, but brings with joy / the good befallen him..." (*Paradise Lost* 9: 766-770). Eve's devotion of such a large portion of her speech to the nature of the animals further speaks to her closeness to the Earth and her inherent distance from God; it may even have been this familiarity and fascination with the Earth that served to further encourage her curiosity with the Serpent. As Jacob Boyd

alludes to in his article, “Faulty Machinery: An Examination of Eve’s Fate as it Relates to Her Creation,” it is the physical and roughly human, though ophidian, nature Satan takes on in his temptation that enraptures Eve: “To gain her attention, he takes the form of a serpent, and it is not until he flashes a ‘gentle dumb expression’ at Eve that she stops to take notice of him (*Paradise Lost* 9: 527). Eve, devoid of contact with the miraculous, except for perhaps the face of the angels, only takes notice of the anthropomorphic snake when he presents himself to her” (Boyd 4).

However, this is not what ultimately convinces Eve to eat the fruit – it is her desire to at once feed her mind and body, her spiritual and physical self. Before reaching out for the fruit, she asks, “Here grows the Cure of all, this Fruit Divine, / Fair to the Eye, inviting to the Taste, / of virtue to make wise: what hinders then / to reach, and feed at once both Body and Mind?” (*Paradise Lost* 9: 775-779). In these lines, Eve regards the fruit as an active panacea that appeals directly to her senses; her senses find the Fruit inherently pleasing, and thus Eve, coupling its sensuality with her own reasoning, overrides God’s mandate and takes the Fruit for herself.

The immediate impact of Eve’s fall on her state of mind can be found in her three new major conclusions concerning her own logic and the use of it. While in her first speech Eve refers to Adam as Law, here Eve says outright in her opening dialogue to Satan that “our Reason is our Law,” (*Paradise Lost* 9: 654). Whether she is quoting what Adam has told her, or is purposely leaving him out of the situation in order to assert her own Virtue, the result of this statement is the same: Eve must depend on only herself in the face of Temptation. Secondly, after eating the fruit, Eve hopes that she may be more desirous to Adam now that she has attained this new “knowledge” and that they may have discourse as equals, striving toward higher reason together. In her first speech, Eve uses her inferiority and femininity as a charm;

here, Eve desires to use her intellect and reasoning abilities to be at once equal and beautiful to Adam. Finally, Eve praises her newfound faculty of *Wisdom through Experience*: “Experience, next to thee I owe, Best Guide; not following thee, I had remained in ignorance, thou op’n’st Wisdom’s way, and giv’st access, though in secret she retire” (*Paradise Lost* 9: 807-810). In this statement, Eve once again denies Adam as her chief source of knowledge and reaffirms her new found reliance on her own logic and understanding. Eve’s personification of Wisdom and Experience may at first glance appear to be a weakening of her new found independence; however, this is not the case. The faculties of Wisdom and Experience are skills that must be exercised willfully. Experience cannot be gained without the choice to engage in it; likewise, Wisdom can only be gained through active retrospection and an active application of the knowledge it provides to novel situations.

Though Eve breaks new ground in her exercise of reason, she is nonetheless punished by God. God’s punishment not only attempts to put her back in her ordained “place,” but also attempts to undermine the very logic that led her to her choice. God says, “Children thou shalt bring in sorrow forth, and to thy Husband’s will thine shall submit, hee over thee shall rule” (*Paradise Lost* 10: 194-196). The purpose of Eve’s punishment is purely to subdue her; though Adam’s punishment is harsh – plowing fields, sweating for the bread he eats, bearing the burden of family – it highlights his own masculinity and reaffirms him as the master of his wife. However, as seen only one book earlier, Milton’s God’s will is not always obeyed in Paradise, and is rarely obeyed outside of it. The final depiction of Adam and Eve is one of equality: “The World was all before them, where to choose / thir place of rest, and *Providence* thir guide: / They hand in hand with wand’ring steps and slow, / through Eden took their solitary way” (*Paradise Lost* 12: 646-649). As she accomplished in eating the Fruit, Eve now walks again with Adam as

her equal against the ordinance of God. This ending scene is confirmation that even with his new edict, Adam, and more importantly Eve, will continue to do as they please – a very human behavior reiterated time and again in Books 11 and 12 as the future of mankind is related to Adam. Though they may still have divine Providence as their guide, the couple now has the power to match such Providence against their own reckoning.

It is only appropriate that Eve, the first woman, should set a precedent for the role of women for centuries to come. Women's control of men through wit and reason has been known to change the course of history and engages readers to this day; such powerful characters include women such as Sharazad, Helen of Troy, or even Anne Boleyn. By eating the Fruit, Eve displays the power of self-reliance. In her desire for equality with her male counterpart, Eve not only turns Adam away from the "tyrant" that is Milton's God, but also reaffirms that Adam is willing to die for her love, and her love alone. Most importantly, Eve uses reason and will power to thwart the oppressive nature of Milton's God and his stringent hierarchy. Though they are fallen, both Adam and Eve may now, thanks to Eve, live a life of experience, free of ignorance, and face their consequences using the truest wisdom: that which can only be born from experience.

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