

Reinventing literary
history- cregan
joselyn wohl essay



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Eve Reinventing Literary History- Cregan Joselyn Wohl

Paradise Lost by John Milton 2/16/99

It is obvious to the reader that John Milton blames Eve entirely for initiating the

original sin and thus losing Paradise. It is she who convinces her husband to allow them

to work separately, and it is she who is coerced to eat the fruit that was expressly

forbidden by God. John Milton's view is patriarchal, but involves a contradictory

description of Eve as logical, for men at that time did not view women as intelligent.

Milton's demonstration of Eve's ability to analyze God's commands with reason and her

own judgment emphasizes his opinion that in order to succeed one needs only to have

faith in God, which supersedes all intellect, for God is the most knowledgeable being.

Adam has the undying faith necessary to remain in Paradise, but Eve obviously does not

and is therefore responsible for her sins, and for their banishment.

In deciding how Adam and Eve will carry out their daily labors, Eve wants to

work apart from Adam and to divide their labours because

While so near each other thus all day

Their task they choose, what wonder if so near

Looks intervene and smiles, or object new

Casual discourse draw on, which intermits

Their days work brought to little, though begun

Early, and the hour of Supper comes unearnd (ix, 220-224).

Eve's rationalization for working separately from Adam is that she thinks that they will

be able to get more work done considering the fact that they will not be distracted by each

other. Adam feels protective over Eve and is fearful that the malicious Foe/ Envy

their happiness, and of his own/ Despairing, seeks to work them woe and shame/ By

sly assault (ix, 253-256). Adam is taking into careful consideration what God has

warned them about Satan, and wants to prevent a situation in which the serpent could

attack an alone and vulnerable Eve. Adam pleads for her to leave not the faithful side/

that gave thee being for The Wife.../ Safest and seemliest by her husband stays,/ Who

guards her, or with her the worst endures (ix, 265-269).

Adam is wary of Eves innocence and vulnerability and therefore does not want

her to put herself into a situation in which Satan can get to her. Eve is not fearful because

she places reason before her acceptance of Gods frightful warning. She questions:

How are we happy, still in fear of harm?

But harm precedes not sin; only our Foe

Tempting affronts us with foul esteem

Of our integrity (ix, 326-329).

Eve is reminding Adam of the fact that they still possess the free will to do what is right

or wrong despite what dangers they might come across. Adam is finally convinced and

orders Eve to Go; for thy stay, not free, absents thee more;/ Go in thy native innocence,

rely/ On what thou hast of virtue, summon all,/ For God towards thee hath done his part,

do thine (ix, 372-375). Eve is eager to go and even though she has provided good

justifications for her leave, is foolishly confident that she will do the right thing, foolish

because she is not as fearful of Gods warning as Adam.

Eve goes about her labors and is portrayed by Milton as guilty of luring the devil

towards her with her beauty, making him love her and then hate her because he cannot

have her or be as beautiful as her. Her graceful Innocence, her every Air/ Of gesture or

least action overawd/ His malice...but the hot hell that always in him burns... soon ended

his delight,/ and tortures him now more, the more he sees/ Of pleasure not
for him

ordained (ix, 459-470). He becomes more passionate and eager in his
rebellion against

her because of her beauty, ironically.

Satan, in the form of a serpent, then goes on to convince Eve that the fruit
from

the tree of knowledge made him speak and think like a human and would in
turn make

her think like a god and know the difference between good and evil. The dire
snake

was still able to lead Eve our credulous Mother to the tree of inhibition, root
of all our

woe (ix, 644-645) despite the fact that Eve knows God's command. She
states :

Of the Fruit

Of each tree in the Garden we may eat,

But of the fruit of this fair tree amidst

The Garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat

Thereof, nor shall ye touch it, lest ye die (ix, 659-663).

Gods command is loud and clear in stating that the fruit from the tree of knowledge is

forbidden. God is making a command that he expects to be followed by Adam and Eve.

When Eve does in fact partake of the forbidden fruit, her rash hand in evil hour/ Forth

reaching to the Fruit, she pluckd, she ate (ix, 780-781), she is credulous because she

is naive to the serpents temptation. She is willing to be open minded and to take into

consideration what the serpent has to say, using reason to determine her actions instead of

blindly adhering to Gods command, as Adam would probably have done.

Milton

suggests that, since Eve does actually commit a wrong, her philosophy on the fact that

we live/ Law to ourselves, our Reason is our Law (ix, 653-654) is not a valid reason for

undermining the word of God.

Eve is, after all, swayed to question God's intentions when the serpent asks her

about the fruit being forbidden, saying: Why then was this forbid? Why but to awe,/

Why but to keep ye low and ignorant,/ His worshippers (ix, 703-705). Here, the serpent

is committing the greatest sin of all by questioning God's integrity in his commands. One

is never to question God's word which is the supreme authority. He even goes as far as to

question whether envy can dwell/ In heavenly breasts (ix, 729-730). The serpent is

placing God in a different light and forcing Eve to distrust God's intentions.

This forces Eve to contemplate the reasons why she was forbidden the fruit. She

asks: What fear I then, rather what know to fear/ Under this ignorance of Good and Evil/

Of God and Death, of Law or penalty? (ix, 753-755). Eve cogitates that if she does not

possess knowledge of Good and Evil, then she can have no understanding of what she

should and shouldn't do. Eve begins to utilize the free will that she realized she had to

determine her own actions through rationalization as opposed to faith. She thinks that in

order to follow a command, one needs to understand why they are following it, and in

order for her to understand why she must break that command. This is a difficult

situation that Eve finds herself in, but being curious, and willing to experiment with free

will and actually think for herself as an independent being, separate from God, she

decides to feed of the forbidden fruit.

Milton makes several points in blaming Eve for the fall of Paradise. He is

making a general statement towards faith in God, saying that without undying faith, one is

at fault. Eve did not demonstrate undying faith because reason limited how much she

believed in Gods intentions, and she therefore sins. Another point is that when women

try to go off on their own and think for themselves they fail miserably. Milton

emphasizes a womans

inability to think without her husband, because when Eve goes off on her own and tries to

use logic she sins. The Serpents words replete with guile/ Into her heart too easy

entrance won... and in her ears the sound/ Yet rung of his persuasive words, impregnd/

With Reason, to her seeming, and with Truth (ix, 733-738|). Milton is insinuating here

that the serpents malicious lies seemed like the truth to ignorant and naive Eve. Eating

the fruit explicitly forbidden by her creator, she is guilty of the fall of Paradise, despite

her obvious intelligence and reasoning. The irony of Miltons argument is that Eve does

have a well functioning brain, but he final judgment is wrong. Women may be intelligent

but they are not wise because Eve has sinned against God, and there is no worse act that a

Protestant can commit. In order to be successful in life, one must possess wisdom, and it

seems that Milton does not place it within Eves character, but in Adams character, the

man. In conclusion, even though a woman can think analytically, she cannot make wise

judgements on her own and is susceptible to mistakes and sins, usually brought about by

foul temptation.