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Adam, Eve, and The Fortunate Fall

The fall of Man is described in chapter 3 of Genesis, in which Eve, the partner to Adam, consumes the Forbidden Fruit from the Tree of Knowledge within the “paradise” of The Garden of Eden. This act led to a disconnect between Man and God, and ultimately was the beginning of inherent sin in mankind, as well as the need for redemption if one desired a spiritual connection with God. Eve, while responsible for the Fall, played an integral part in facilitating this redemption as depicted in John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. In particular, Eve’s interactions with Adam before and after the fall, as well as Milton’s interpretation of what he called “the paradise within” and how Eve fits into this interpretation of paradise, serve as a way of detailing the meaning behind the phrase “The Fortunate Fall”.

Before the fall in *Paradise Lost*, Adam and Eve’s relationship was similar to that seen between a father and a daughter; the father teaching the daughter the logical and reasonable ways of interpreting the world around them, and the daughter following along and asking introspective questions along the way. While this kind of relationship is not necessarily harmful in a marriage, it does not allow for mental stimulation between the two in the relationship, something that Milton deemed a necessity in any marriage. The stale back-and-forth between Adam and Eve can mainly be attributed to their position within Eden and their respective relationships with God. Not only that, but their own self-identification played a major role in how they communicated with each other. Adam was much more logical in his thinking, believing that he could reason his way through any situation that arose. Eve on the other hand was much more introspective, applying emotion, passion, and sensation when observing the brand new world around her. This difference in thinking processes between Adam and Eve is a precursor to the events leading up to the fall in book 9.

Another aspect that set Eve apart from Adam from the start was her place in the hierarchy of God and Man. Upon creation, Eve was set one step farther away from God than Adam. She was connected to God *through* Adam, seen perfectly in the interaction between Adam and Eve on the first night they are together. Eve addresses Adam after his explanation of why they must sleep and rise to continue God’s work as “My Author and Disposer, what thou bidd’st unargu’d I obey; so God ordains, God is thy Law, thou mine” (Milton, p102). This disconnect between Eve and God is seen again during the reveal of Eve in book 4 next to the Smooth Lake, when she “bent down to look, just opposite, a shape within the wat’ry gleam appear’d bending to look on me” (Milton, p 97). When comparing this to Adam’s recount of his own creation, who first gazed towards the sky, Milton is depicting the difference in distance between Adam, Eve, and God. This increased distance between Eve and God is what allows her to explore and embrace her sensual side, something that Adam is unable to do without the aid of Eve.

Finally, Eve’s susceptibility to sensual desires and her own curiosity set her apart from Adam before the fall, and eventually play a key factor in her helping Adam out of his despair after the fall. This susceptibility is seen clearly in book 5, when Satan appears to Eve in her dreams. Satan persuades Eve to partake in the forbidden fruit, making empty promises of achieving godhood and of a status far above her current position. When he forces the apple under her nose, “so quick’n’d appetite, that I, methought, could not but taste” (Milton, p 115). Eve giving into her appetite and consuming the fruit in her dream portrays her curiosity towards her own sensual desires, and foreshadows the events of the actual fall later in the poem.

After the fall occurs in book 9, Adam and Eve quickly despair; feeling as though there is no way for them to get back in the good graces of God. However, although each are filled with a storm of emotions that up until this point in the poem neither had had any reason to feel, they both express these emotions in different ways. Before this, however, they each begin blaming the other for the unfortunate situation they are in. Eve blames Adam for not stopping her from going off on her own, and Adam blames Eve for succumbing to base desires and disobeying the one decree laid out by God.

After Adam places the blame on Eve, he retreats into his own mind, attempting to rationalize his and Eve’s new positions in relation to God through an extensive inner monologue. During this soliloquy, Adam spirals down a rabbit hole of depression, failing to find any way out of the predicament they find themselves in. This display of extreme rationality harkens back to Adam’s thought processes from the beginning of the poem. In his speech, he focuses solely on himself, speaking as though he does not know his own place in the world now that his connection with God is lost. His cerebral approach to redemption is ultimately in vain however, as true redemption is not solely based on rational reasoning but a combination of reason and emotion. Thus, Adam is unable to achieve redemption by himself. He needs Eve due to her innate ability to tap into her more emotional side. However, throughout the speech he contemplates forsaking Eve, viewing her as the sole reason for their despair, and regretting having taken part in the fruit at Eve’s request. He goes so far as to compare Eve to the serpent that tempted her, essentially declaring her as equivalent to the lowest of vile creatures and declaring a warning to other creatures that “but that they shape, like his, and color Serpentine may show they inward fraud, to warn all Creatures from thee henceforth; lest that too heav’nly form, pretended to hellish falsehood, snare them.” (Milton, p 259).

Eve’s reaction to the realization of their dilemma is considerably more extreme than Adams. Unlike Adam’s internal, analytical modus operandi that focuses exclusively on himself, Eve draws on her emotions,pleading to Adam not to forsake her. This comes out as Eve, “with Tears that ceas’d not flowing, and tresses all disorder’d, at his feet fell humble, and imbracing them, besought his peace” (Milton, p 260). The act of humbling herself before Adam is Milton tying Eve to the Virgin Mary kneeling before God, and setting Eve up to be the key factor in redemption for both Adam and herself, and vicariously the rest of the human race to come. After kneeling before Adam, Eve finally suggests that rather than continue on living and producing children who would invariably be tainted with the same sin that they now carried within themselves, they should sacrifice themselves to prevent sin from continuing in the world. This suggestion again sets Eve apart from Adam, who was merely concerned with how future generations would view his own transgressions, whereas Eve was more concerned with the welfare of the future generation itself. Eve willing to sacrifice herself so as to prevent sin from continuing in the human race is a direct tie to the future son Jesus Christ who would do the same thing, thus again setting Eve up as the prime component in redemption.

The act of Eve, “his life so late and sole delight, now at his feet submissive in distress, creature so fair his reconcilement seeking” (Milton, p 261), is what ultimately pulled Adam away from the abyss he was so closely teetering over. Once again, we see Adam showing emotion not of his own accord, but through provocation by Eve. This emotion is an overwhelming sense of love towards his one mate in the now much more terrifying world that they brought upon themselves. Adam sees Eve praying before him, and realizes that death would not be the best course of action. Killing themselves would only allow God’s adversary, Satan, to win. Rather, much like Eve knelt before Adam asking for forgiveness for her sins, they both should do the same for their offenses towards God. Thus Eve, through introspectiveness, emotion, and passion, laid the groundwork for redemption for Mankind after the Fall.

This redemption is the reason most call the Fall the Fortunate Fall. Milton explains this through defining what he believes to be true paradise. Paradise is not a physical place to abide in happily forever, blissfully unaware of what lies outside of it. Rather, paradise is a state of mind that one should strive for continuously, and something that does not come easily. Adam relates all of this in the final book of *Paradise Lost* when conversing with the angel Michael. Michael finally asks before leading both Adam and Eve out of Eden “only add deeds to thy knowledge answerable, add Faith, add Virtue, Patience, Temperance, add Love, by name to come call’d Charity, the soul of all the rest: then wilt thou not be loathe to leave this paradise, but shalt possess a paradise within thee, happier far” (Milton, p 306). Here, Milton lays out all that is required to attain happiness in one’s own life. By adopting all of these virtues and living each day with them in mind, one can achieve spiritual enlightenment, as well as a closer connection with God. This is true paradise.

When Adam and Eve leave the “paradise” of the Garden of Eden, they are carrying with them an eternal paradise through their continued piety towards God, and through living their lives with the knowledge and wisdom gained from the Fortunate Fall.