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Paper 2

Milton's Match Made in Paradise

Abstract:

In Paradise Lost, Eve is created as Adam's inferior rather than his helpmeet. She is told to be content with her role as woman, all the while being constantly reminded that her position is not as dignified as man's. It is Eve's natural inferiority and search for meaning and purpose outside of her husband that will turn a match made in paradise into a sort of wrestling match for knowledge and power.

John Milton claims to know a great deal about the nature of an ideal marriage.

According to *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, mutual comfort, delight, and refreshment are key to a happy and healthy conjugal relationship. Above all other components of marriage, however, even above the element of physical intimacy, Milton emphasizes that "meet and happy conversation is the chiefest and noblest end of marriage," (*The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* 707). The husband and wife are meant to provide for each other "solace and satisfaction of the mind" above all other things (*The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* 707). In order for a couple to be truly satisfied, there must be meet conversation and satisfaction of the mind. And in order to have meet conversation and satisfaction of the mind, there must not be a significant imbalance of intellect and inward faculties. With these stipulations for a successful marriage in mind, I would like to propose that Adam and Eve, the main characters in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, do not meet these requirements. Even if the inferiority of Eve's mind and intellectual faculties is not fully demonstrated in the text, it is recognized and declared as an obvious fact by Adam (*Paradise Lost* 8: 536-546), Raphael (*Paradise Lost* 8: 565-574), God (*Paradise Lost* 10: 144-156), Satan (*Paradise Lost* 9: 480-483), and even by Eve herself (*Paradise Lost* 4: 444-448). In the garden of Eden, the vine and the elm come to symbolize marriage, "... Or they led the Vine /

To wed her Elm; she spous'd about him twines / Her marriageable arms..." (*Paradise Lost* 5: 215-217). The elm can stand alone, whereas the vine cannot. Eve is given the role of the vine. She is told to be content with her dependent role as a woman, and yet, is simultaneously reminded that her position is inferior to that of the strong elm's. The scene is set for marital failure and for tragedy. Eve's natural intellectual inferiority is what will turn a match made in paradise into a sort of wrestling match for knowledge and power. It is Eve's search for meaning and purpose for her life independent of the meaning and purpose given to her by Adam that will threaten to split the couple apart and will have tragic consequences that will affect all of creation and generations of humankind after them for thousands of years.

The drama begins even before Eve's creation. Adam has been given a God-like position of authority over nature, but this relationship with nature is not enough to thoroughly please him and rid him of his loneliness. He appeals to God, "Hast thou not made me here thy substitute, / And these inferior far beneath me set? / Among unequals what society / Can sort, what harmony or true delight?" (*Paradise Lost* 8: 381-384). Adam insists upon his need for an equal, a like consort. Essentially, Adam is asking for the same kind of ideal wife that Milton describes in *Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* as "an intimate and speaking help, a ready and reviving associate in marriage..." (*Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* 709). An "associate in marriage" seems like a very apt way of describing what Adam is asking for. According to a definition in the Oxford English Dictionary that was used in the 17th century, an associate is someone who is "joined in companionship, function or dignity" or who is on "terms of social equality and intimacy." The need for equality and mutuality in Adam's request is accentuated. God, in turn, claims to have heard Adam's supplication. He says, "What next I bring shall please thee, be assur'd, / Thy likeness, thy fit help, thy other self, / Thy wish, exactly to thy heart's desire." (*Paradise Lost* 8: 449-451). One may wonder, however, if God was genuinely paying attention

to Adam's plea, for scarcely had he uttered these words when He stooped down, took a rib from man's side, and began to form for Adam another unequal, another inferior.

One explanation is that God was not really listening to Adam. Another is that He listened, but chose to ignore the "equality" stipulation of Adam's request. Man asked for an associate. Instead, God gave him a subject. A central part of God's character is His position as a Ruler, Supreme and Sovereign over creation. It is of little wonder that since Adam is a representation of God in human form, God would design the Adam/Eve relationship to reflect the God/creation relationship. Just as creation is designed to be inferior to God, so Eve is designed to be inferior to Adam. Adam's dominion over brute animals is not enough to make him sovereign because the animals lack will and reason. Adam lacks a worshipper. Eve, unlike the plants and animals, has been imbued by her Creator with reason and free will. Whenever she cheerfully chooses to submit to Adam, she proclaims with her words and actions that Adam is worthy of her submission, trust, and worship.

The following dynamic is thus established: Adam is created to be like God but not equal to God. Similarly, Eve is created to be like Adam, but not equal to Adam. This relationship can be seen in the following description of Adam and Eve: "... though both / Not equal, as thir sex not equal seem'd; / For contemplation hee and valor form'd, / For softness shee and sweet attractive Grace, / Hee for God only, shee for God in him..." (*Paradise Lost* 4: 295-299). Adam is fashioned to worship and obey God. Eve is fashioned to worship and obey the God-likeness in Adam. She clearly, however, has not been fashioned to be the equal that Adam asked for. Adam has been formed for contemplation and heavy thinking. Eve has been formed to look pretty. The differences in their natures make it difficult or impossible for Eve to provide meet conversation and satisfaction of the mind for Adam.

Another way to examine the superior/inferior relationship is by considering what it means to be made in someone's image. When God made Adam in His image, His intention was not to make a God-twin. A God-twin could easily become a rival to His greatness. Rather, His intention was to paint a portrait, a living image of Himself, obviously inferior, and yet, painted so exquisitely that He may gaze into it and congratulate Himself on His majesty. With a portrait of Himself, He can maintain a happy discourse of mutual praise and flattery, without feeling any rivalry with the obviously inferior portrait. In the same way, Eve is an image of Adam. In a conversation with Raphael, Adam conveys the idea of the inferiority of his image, Eve, "For well I understand in the prime end / of Nature her th' inferior, in the mind / And inward Faculties, which most excel, / In outward also her resembling less / His Image who made both..." (*Paradise Lost* 8: 540-544). Eve is an image of an image. Like the Xerox of a Xerox, the quality decreases with every subsequent copy.

Adam is made for God, and Eve is made for Adam, but who, then, is made for Eve? Although indirectly, Eve, too, is made in the image of God with an inherent desire to be worshipped. Mute animals without reason can never fulfill Eve's desire to rule for the same reasons that they cannot fulfill Adam's desire to rule. We can see Eve's desire to be admired and worshipped even from the beginning. Shortly after being created, Eve resorts to a sort of self-worship when she sees her reflection in a lake and becomes infatuated with the portrait of herself in the water. Adam is allowed to satisfy his vanity by delighting in his image (Eve), but Eve is not allowed to satisfy her vanity by delighting in her image (her reflection in the water). Instead, she is directed by God to Adam as being more worthy of her admiration than the image of herself. When Eve concludes this story of her creation, she says, "... and from that time see / How beauty is excell'd by manly grace / And wisdom, which alone is truly fair," (*Paradise Lost*

4: 489-491). Even from her very creation, Eve is taught that she is inferior to Adam, a lesson that she will not forget.

God carefully designs Eve with the sort of factors in mind that one might have when choosing an opponent for a game of chess. An animal, for example, would be a very poor opponent in a game of chess because he/she would know nothing about the rules of the game and could do little more than knock over the pieces and chew on the chess board. The key is to choose an opponent who will present some sort of challenge and stimulation, but whose skills will always fall a little short so as to guarantee the other player a win. Eve is designed to be an interesting life partner for Adam, but so that Adam will always be the one to say “Checkmate!” This is not to say that there is open rivalry between Adam and Eve in the early parts of the poem. We do not see examples of Adam abusing his authority or bossing Eve around. But, every time that Adam, Eve, or even Raphael acknowledges Adam’s superiority and Eve’s inferiority, Adam is afforded the opportunity to recognize his preeminence over Eve. God makes Eve so that she will not be so very far beneath Adam as to be a bore, but at the same time, far enough beneath him so as not to intimidate or threaten his position of authority.

Eve develops a temperament of self-abasement and low self-esteem. She openly acknowledges her inferiority, saying, “... O thou for whom / And from whom I was form’d flesh of thy flesh, / And without whom am to no end, my Guide,” (*Paradise Lost* 4: 440-443). In other words, Eve is declaring Adam to be her lord and saying that she has no meaning or purpose outside of her husband. She continues, “I chiefly who enjoy / So far the happier Lot, enjoying thee / Preminent by so much odds, while thou / Like consort to thyself canst nowhere find,” (*Paradise Lost* 4: 445-448). Eve feels that she is not good enough for Adam. She knows that she is always beneath him, and with time, this truth burdens her spirit and embitters her soul. Eve does not eat the fruit because of any inherent wickedness in her soul. Instead, we might say

that it is the goodness in Eve that leads her to eat the fruit. Jeff Davis argues in his essay “On Bending,” that God did not create evil. Evil comes to being by a distortion of that which was created good. Speaking of the change from good to evil, Davis writes, “This shift appears to occur via a bridge of sorts: some characteristic (perhaps different for each individual) which can easily change to serve a selfish purpose, effectively crossing over from well-intentioned to sinful,” (Davis 2). Eve was created good, and we could say, perhaps, that Eve’s decision to eat the fruit grew out of her love for Adam and her desire to please him by being the like consort that she has not been up to this point. Eve’s desire to please her husband and be a helpmeet is a good characteristic that under the influence of her feelings of inferiority and insecurity provides a bridge for her to pass over from good intentions to sinfulness and self-exaltation.

In book nine Eve suggests that she and Adam temporarily split up and divide their labors in the garden in order to get more accomplished. When Adam tries to reason with Eve, arguing that they will be more vulnerable to an attack from the enemy if they are apart, Eve responds, “As one who loves, and some unkindness meets,” (*Paradise Lost* 9: 271). Her feelings are hurt. She feels that Adam is questioning her trustworthiness and moral strength. Adam’s words, although gentle, only serve to heighten her resolve. What began as a proposal of efficiency turns quickly into what Eve sees as her opportunity to prove her own strength and independence. Eve wants to show Adam that she, too, can be an elm. She wants to show that her mind is not so fragile as to yield easily to the deceit of the foe. Also, she wants to win the argument with Adam, and, thus, show that her reasoning is better and more logical than Adam’s. No longer does Eve say as she once did, “Unargu’d I obey; so God ordains, / God is thy Law, thou mine: to know no more / Is woman’s happiest knowledge and her praise,” (*Paradise Lost* 4: 636-638). Instead, by continuing to argue with Adam she says, “My way is better.” As she works among the flowers, away from Adam for the first time, she is described once again as unsupported

foliage, "... Mindless the while, / Herself, though fairest unsupported Flow'r, / From her best prop so far, and storm so nigh," (*Paradise Lost* 9: 431-433). Eve wants to show that she is Adam's equal and that she can be independent, but she simply isn't his equal. She is weaker and intellectually inferior, making her more likely to be seduced by faulty arguments. If God had created her to be equal to Adam, things might have been different.

The Serpent slithers in at an opportune moment. His words travel directly to Eve's heart and make a marked impression there (*Paradise Lost* 9: 549-550). They are carefully chosen, on-target, and effectual. Every one of Satan's temptations addresses Eve's innate, God-designed, yet unfulfilled desires. The Serpent's words are like a soothing balm to Eve's wounded soul. He flatters Eve's need to be worshipped (*Paradise Lost* 9: 544-548), her God-likeness (*Paradise Lost* 9: 606-608), her yearning to feel superior and without equal (*Paradise Lost* 9: 608-609), and her longing to be a ruler with the capacity to command and to be obeyed (*Paradise Lost* 9: 570). Above all, he stresses that the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil has the power to elevate the intellect, promote reason, and make one wise. Eve saw the fruit primarily as the means to correct the imbalance of intellect and inward faculties between her and Adam. If the fruit had the power to make a snake speak, could it not much more allow her to engage with her husband in meet conversation? And, if it could raise a beast's low and abject thoughts, could it not also raise her intellect so that she might provide solace and satisfaction of the mind to her husband? The Tempter presented the fruit to Eve as a solution to all of her long-endured problems. He is so convincing that Eve announces, "Here grows the Cure of all, this Fruit Divine," (*Paradise Lost* 9: 775). The fruit has the potential to make her a like consort and, thus, satisfy both her and Adam. The tragedy is that the very cure to her problem of inequality with Adam, also contains the noxious poison of disobedience to God. The fruit is like a drug whose side effects cause more problems than the one malady that it cures.

Upon eating the fruit, Eve's thoughts immediately turn to Adam. At first, she considers hiding the intellectual fruit from him, so as to gain his love by being at least equal, if not superior to her husband (*Paradise Lost* 9: 817-825). Then, however, she considers the possibility of death and a new Eve for Adam, and decides to get him to eat the fruit, as well. What does Eve accomplish by persuading Adam to eat the forbidden fruit? First of all, she uses her reasoning to deceive and confound Adam's intellect. Adam had previously acknowledged that whatever Eve "wills to do or say, / Seems wisest, virtuousest, discreetest, best; / All higher knowledge in her presence falls / Degraded..." (*Paradise Lost* 8: 549-552). Even though Adam knew that he should be cautious and had even been warned by Raphael to stand firm against Eve's faulty arguments, he still fell into the trap. Adam is deceived by Eve, just as Eve is deceived by the Serpent. Her reasoning, for once, trumps Adam's. Secondly, Adam submits to Eve's will, giving her a sort of victory over him. He becomes subservient to her love. Whereas earlier in their relationship he seemed to love her freely, now he is more like a slave to that love, claiming that he is incapable of breaking the bond between them. By obeying Eve rather than obeying God, Adam makes her His God (*Paradise Lost* 10: 144-156), thus, fulfilling her desire to be worshipped. Eve exults like a victor over Adam's ensuing defeat, "O glorious trial of exceeding Love, / Illustrious evidence example high!" (*Paradise Lost* 9: 961-962). It appears that Eve has achieved her goal by raising herself up from her position of inferiority.

Eve's victory, however, is short-lived. She is beaten back into submission with God's iron rod, and it is only in repentance and submission to Adam that she is somewhat reconciled to her husband. She comes before Adam in humility, submission, and distress, acknowledging her need of him. Before the temptation, she rejected his counsel. Now she pleads, "... thy aid, / Thy counsel in this uttermost distress, / My only strength and stay: forlorn of thee, / Whither shall I betake me, where subsist?" (*Paradise Lost* 10: 919-922). Eve is lost without Adam. She

recognizes that she is completely dependent on him. It is as if she were crying out, “I am a vine! I’m not an elm! I’m sorry I ever tried to stand alone!” Adam responds, saying, “That on my head all might be visited, / Thy frailty and infirmer Sex forgiv’n, / To me committed and by me expos’d,” (*Paradise Lost* 10: 955-957). Adam forgives her. His forgiveness, however, is loaded with condescension. In the early parts of the poem, Adam never pointed out Eve’s inferiority to her face. Now he does so blatantly. Also, he reaffirms his role as her guardian and superior. The inferior/superior relationship is strengthened in Adam and Eve’s reconciliation and in God’s mandate after the fall that man should rule over his wife, and that she should submit completely to his will (*Paradise Lost* 10: 195-196). Adam has no like consort. Instead, he has a subject. Eve, like Satan, is a sort of tragic hero, defeated in her attempt to better herself and become a like consort for Adam, and yet, admirable for having been courageous enough to try. To say that foolish vanity alone led to Eve’s fall would be to over-simplify things. God programmed into Eve an appetite for reason and worship, left that appetite unfed, placed the fruit within her sight, and then bid her hungry soul not to eat. This provided all the perfect conditions for catastrophe, turning a match made in paradise into a brutal wrestling match for knowledge and power.