

Sarah Harden

EN335-001

29 April 2015

An Analysis of Eve's Character and the Effects of Divine Intervention

Abstract: This essay explores how Eve's lack of a heavenly mentor leads to the fall of humanity. Because Eve receives no recognition as an individual and lacks the divine knowledge that is often imparted to Adam, she is more susceptible to Satan's temptation. Through the causes such as Eve's craving for attention, Adam's failure as a mentor, and the appeal of Satan's temptation, Eve's lack of a heavenly mentor leads to her sin.

Within *Paradise Lost*, Eve is a highly important character that is often treated as an afterthought. Her silent presence and simple role within most of the epic often overshadow her overall value as a character. However, the simple, unobtrusive character that is developed over the first eight books can be attributed to a lack of heavenly guidance. Because Raphael mentors Adam, Eve's spiritual knowledge and reasoning skills are neglected. Therefore, Eve's lack of a mentor is a procatarctic cause of her sin, because it results in a desperation for attention. Eve's failed attempt to assign Adam the role of mentor is the result of Eve's desperation, therefore making Eve's desperation a proguemenic cause. Lastly, the appeal she finds in Satan's temptation is the result of her failed attempt to cast Adam as her mentor, because she was not able to find the spiritual guidance she craved, therefore leaving her vulnerable. This makes Satan's temptation the last efficient cause, specifically a proguemenic cause, that leads to the fall of humanity. Therefore, in John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, the absence of a heavenly mentor is the overall efficient cause of Eve's sin.

Eve's need for acknowledgement is expressed multiple times throughout the epic. When viewed by divine characters, Eve is often recognized for her role as the mother of the human

race, implying that she has no value as an individual. Raphael demonstrates this by greeting Eve as “Mother of Mankind, whose fruitful Womb/Shall fill the World more numerous with thy Sons” (Milton 5: 388-389). In this greeting, Eve is acknowledged for her unborn sons rather than any trait she currently possesses, which shows that Raphael only considers her important because of her future bloodline. If Eve had been supplied with her own mentor, she would have received recognition as an individual rather than a means to an end. Raphael emphasizes the lack of recognition of Eve’s individuality by greeting Adam as such: “Adam, I therefore came.../As may not oft invite, though Spirits of Heav’n/To visit thee” (5: 372-75). Raphael addresses Adam first in his greeting, then states that he has come to visit “thee.” This statement is ambiguous, and perhaps intentionally so, because Adam is the only one that has been directly acknowledged at this point, so the “thee” in this statement seems to refer directly to him. This implies that Raphael has only come with the intention of speaking with Adam, and that he does not consider Eve as capable of participating in the fall of humanity. Readers could also interpret “thee” to refer as Adam and Eve as one entity, which strips Eve of her individuality and therefore shows that Raphael does not consider her capable of acting without Adam. The fact that this statement is specifically geared towards Adam shows that Raphael is incapable of giving Eve the acknowledgement she seeks, as he prefers to focus on Adam as early as the first meeting.

Eve further exhibits her need for recognition when she leaves during Raphael and Adam’s conversation over dinner. Rather than listening to Raphael’s recount of the battle in Heaven, which is directed toward Adam, Eve “went forth among her Fruits and Flow’rs/.../...they at her coming sprung/And toucht by her fair tendance gladlier grew” (8: 44-47). Raphael focuses all of his attention on Adam, answering his questions and acknowledging his thirst for knowledge. Eve, however, does not speak throughout the entirety of the conversation, then leaves to seek attention from the plants. Therefore, Eve mentors the flowers as

a reaction to her own denied mentorship. The flowers acknowledge Eve's presence, unlike Raphael, and Eve finds their company more attractive as a result. If Eve had been granted the same amount of attention as Adam, Eve might have found Raphael's company more bearable, therefore remaining engaged in the conversation and hearing Raphael's final warning against Satan. This was an important moment, because Raphael encourages Adam to stand strong in his faith and to obey God by saying "Be strong, live happy, and love, but first of all/Him whom to love is to obey, and keep/His great command" (8: 633-34). This subtle warning allows Adam to steel himself for the coming temptation, because Raphael has reminded him of what his purpose is and how important God is. Eve is not present for these parting words, so she is only left with the understanding that there is evil present in the world, and she has no idea that she may be tested by it.

However, Eve mentions that she prefers "Adam relating, she sole Auditress" (8: 50-51) rather than Raphael's lectures. While Eve's romance with Adam does play a part in her preference for Adam's teaching style rather than Raphael's, Eve mostly prefers the sheer amount of attention Adam showers her with during these retellings. The fact that Eve carefully refers to herself as his sole audience attests to how much his full attention pleases her. If Eve was given a mentor of her own, her craving for attention would be satisfied, therefore allowing her to learn things without relying on Adam's memory. This would also allow her to practice her own reasoning skills, as she would have the opportunity to absorb the information herself rather than accepting Adam's account of Raphael's words. Because Eve is so enthralled by Adam's attention, she never questions his knowledge, even when Adam is answering questions that he does not understand, such as Eve's question about the stars. This shows that Adam is not a reliable source of information, and that his presence does not encourage Eve to use her own reasoning skills. If Eve were less attention starved, she would be able to focus on the information

that Adam is feeding her and perhaps debate it with him rather than just soaking up his complete devotion to her. Also, the chance to practice reasoning skills in a safe environment could have helped Eve strengthen her ability to reason, therefore making her a more difficult target for Satan's temptation. Because Eve is denied recognition, Satan is able to use her thirst for praise to his advantage. He appeals to Eve's weakness by convincing her of her worth as an individual, stating "Mee thus, though importune perhaps, to come/And gaze, and worship thee of right declar'd/Sovran of Creature, universal Dame" (9: 610-12). After being denied attention for so long, such complimentary statements entice Eve to listen to the serpent. If Eve were reassured of her individual worth as Adam is by Raphael, the snake would not seem so appealing to her. Just after she eats the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge, Eve illustrates just how affected she is by the slights to her person. She considers "keeping the odds of the knowledge in my power/Without Copartner? so to add what wants/In Female Sex, the more to draw his Love/And render me more equal" (9: 820-23). Despite Adam's constant insistence that he and Eve are equal, the inattention of the heavenly beings convince Eve that she is less important than Adam, causing her to eat and consider coveting the forbidden fruit. Eve also realizes that the knowledge the fruit brings would remain in her power. This power dynamic is appealing to Eve, because all of the divine knowledge Adam receives is often fed to her second-hand. Eve sees the opportunity to become superior to her husband, and with this new, forbidden knowledge she has, she can easily place herself in that role. If Eve had been provided with her own mentor, she would not have had a reason to question her importance, and she would not find such an appeal in being superior to her husband. The lack of recognition given to Eve's individuality drives Eve to go to extremes in order to be noticed.

The misconception of equality is also something that is expressed throughout the epic. Adam considers himself and Eve equals, yet both Raphael and Eve categorize Adam as the

dominant partner. Eve seems to share the same misconception as the angel, stating that “Her Husband [is] the Relater she preferr’d” (8: 52) over Raphael. This insinuates that Eve looks to Adam for guidance, placing him in the role of mentor. This does not mean that Eve believes that she is worth less than Adam as an individual, however. In Jacob Boyd’s essay, “Faulty Machinery: An Examination of Eve’s Fate as it Relates to Her Creation,” Boyd argues that Eve “knows that she is meant to be the inferior of the two, the obedient. She follows Adam’s word because she believes that it is what she was created for: to be his graceful, sweet companion” (Boyd 3). However, Eve’s purpose for eating the fruit is to achieve equality. She adheres to her husband because he has a more complete understanding of divine reasoning, due to his close relationships with God and Raphael, but she does not see herself as less of an individual when compared to her husband. This is why she desperately seeks a mentor. Eve’s assumption of Adam’s leadership is flawed, however, because Adam still views her as his equal in knowledge and spirit, and therefore he cannot guide her as Raphael guides him. Adam has been assigned a mentor that has the capacity to answer his questions with divine knowledge, which implies that Raphael has been given information about how the world was formed and how it function by God. Under that assumption, readers can then assume that Raphael’s explanations to Adam’s questions are correct. Raphael is able to tell Adam about the fall of Satan and how the world was created because God has given him that wisdom, yet Adam has no such knowledge. This is seen when Eve asks about the stars, stating “But wherefore all night long shine these, for whom/This glorious sight, when sleep hath shut all eyes?” (4: 657-58). Adam answers that the stars rotate around the Earth, and that they shine on different portions of it as time goes on. This satisfies Eve, and Adam seems to be a capable mentor. However, when Adam meets with Raphael in Book VIII, Adam tells Raphael that “something yet of doubt remains” (8: 13), then states that he cannot comprehend how Nature’s “Orbs impose/Such restless revolution day by day/Repeated”

(8: 30-32). Adam has just admitted to Raphael that he does not fully comprehend the stars and how they move, yet he has already advised Eve on the matter with conviction. This shows that Adam cannot truly mentor Eve because he does not have divine knowledge to do so.

Adam also believes that he and Eve are on the same intellectual level, and he attempts to mentor her as such. Adam illustrates this misconception of equality by stating that a married couple should be “one Flesh, one Heart, one Soul” (8:499). Adam’s belief that Eve is his equal hinders his ability to mentor her because he assumes that they have equal levels of piety and the same capacity to understand the divine. He enjoys relating Raphael’s words to Eve, but he often forgets that she might not understand or interpret Raphael’s words exactly as he does. Adam also does not take into account that he might also be misunderstanding Raphael’s words, and he often forgets that Raphael is able to give long-winded explanations to Adam’s questions to ensure that he answers the questions as completely as possible. Adam cannot hope to recreate the exact discussion for Eve, and Eve does not comprehend the large gap between divine reasoning and human reasoning. Eve would need a heavenly figure that understood her reasoning capabilities just as Raphael knows Adam’s to be able to impart such knowledge.

Raphael is also not an ideal mentor for Eve because he constantly encourages Adam to exercise superiority over Eve. This is shown when he encourages Adam to build up his self-esteem because “of that skill the more thou know’st,/The more she will acknowledge thee her Head” (8: 573-74). Raphael’s statement is important because it not only encourages Adam to exert dominance over Eve, but also because it shows that Raphael sees Eve as too independent, although he has only seen her sit quietly and leave the table. Eve’s presence is too intrusive for the angel, showing the kind of total domination Raphael is encouraging Adam to exercise. Adam seems to overcompensate in the face of this request by stating “Sole Eve, Associate sole, to me beyond/Compare above all living Creatures dear” (9: 227-28). This shows that Adam has

elevated Eve over all living beings, and if he includes himself in ‘all living creatures,’ he makes himself inferior to her as well. This elevated status proves that Eve cannot use Adam as a mentor, because, overlooking his inferior knowledge of the divine, he will not elevate his position over her to become the superior power she is searching for.

Lastly, the appeal of Satan’s temptation shows Eve’s need for heavenly guidance. Jacob Boyd states that Eve’s obedience to Adam has made her naturally submissive, so it is “no wonder then, that the serpent appearing before her has an easy time of tempting her” (Boyd 3). However, Eve’s fall can easily be attributed to her lack of a mentor. Early in Book VII, “Raphael,/The affable Arch-angel, had forewarn’d/Adam by dire example to beware/Apostasy” (7: 40-43). According to *The Oxford English Dictionary*, apostasy means “abandonment or renunciation of one’s religious faith or moral allegiance.” This passage could either refer to Raphael warning Adam not to eat the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, which means that Adam is reminded of the severe consequences God had promised, or it could mean that Raphael warns Adam about Satan and his fall from grace. Both cases result in Adam being warned against sin, which strengthens his resolve against temptation. However, Eve is unprepared when she is confronted with temptation because Raphael has only warned her husband. Satan notices this, stating that he has no will to approach Adam, “whose higher intellectual more I shun” (9: 483). In this statement, the higher intellectual could refer to Adam’s influences, meaning that Satan can sense the presence of God or Raphael within Adam and he realizes that Adam will be difficult to tempt. This insinuates that Adam has a better grasp of what evil is, therefore making Eve the easiest target. Adam’s knowledge makes him a stronger opponent for Satan, because it will be more difficult to blur the lines between what God approves of and what humanity wants, since Adam is more in tune with what God wants out of humanity. Eve lacks such a complete understanding of God’s will, and therefore she thinks that she will be able to find a loophole in

his decrees. If Eve had been supplied with a divine mentor, she would have had a more complete understanding of what sin is as well as a closer connection to Heaven. Therefore, it is Eve's lack of a mentor that establishes her as an easy target.

Furthermore, Satan addresses Eve as "Queen of this Universe" (9: 684), softening her suspicion of him, then directly following the flattery with logic. Satan states "do not believe/Those rigid threats of Death; ye shall not Die:/How should ye? by the fruit? it gives you Life to Knowledge" (9: 684-87). Satan's reasoning is appealing to Eve because Satan is rationalizing why the fruit is harmless. He offers himself as an example, and Eve does not have the mental resilience against evil that Adam does, since she was not present for Raphael's parting warning. Therefore, she does not comprehend that Satan could have taken on a different shape, or that he could have lied. In addition, God offers no rationalization when he forbids Adam and Eve to eat the fruit; He merely states that they must obey or the consequence is death. His lack of explanation makes it difficult for Eve when Satan continues to appeal to Eve's rationality by questioning her reasoning. Eve believes the fruit is evil because God forbade it, yet Satan asks, "if what is evil/Be real, why not known, since easier shunned?" (9: 698-99). Eve finds this plausible because she cannot truly understand what evil is while being so innocent. Raphael only warns Adam about Satan, so Eve's perception of evil is very limited and is often guided by what Adam tells her, as is the case of her dream, or what God says, as in the case of the fruit. With Satan questioning God, Eve has no other justification of God's righteousness because she was denied a divine mentor. Satan continues to take advantage of Eve's lack of divine knowledge by stating that "ye shall be as Gods,/ knowing both Good and Evil as they know./That ye should be as Gods, since I as Man" (9:708-10). This statement sounds perfectly logical to Eve, since a serpent has been granted speech, which had formerly been a human trait. Therefore, the idea that Eve would be elevated to a God-like status seems to follow naturally, and such an elevation

would give her the attention she craves. However, readers know that Raphael explains the vast differences between divinity and humanity to Adam. Therefore, Satan's logic is flawed because man cannot elevate themselves to the status of God. Since Eve was not present for this conversation, it can be assumed that she was ignorant of the impossibilities of this plan. The lack of a divine figure working to improve Eve's reasoning abilities allows Satan to act as Eve's mentor in Book IX, because he is able to give her sound advice about why she should go against God's decree. If she had the ability to question her faith in the presence of a heavenly being, she could have worked through the temptation much more efficiently, because she would understand God's complete control over humanity, and the amount of power He has over the Earth. That would have been more impressive than the knowledge that could have been imparted by the fruit. Therefore, the lack of heavenly guidance allowed her to believe the flawed logic that leads to her fall.

Throughout *Paradise Lost* there is a conspicuous absence of heavenly intervention for Eve. Raphael and God speak mostly to Adam, and when Eve is acknowledged, it is only through the children she will bear. This refusal of individual value as well as the lack of a mentor leads to Eve's fall from grace, as seen through her quest for recognition, her desperation to cast Adam as a mentor, and the appeal she finds in Satan's logic. This is important because, though Eve is attributed with the fall of mankind, the mistake that lead to her fall could have originated in Heaven. When all heavenly figures overlooked Eve, she was left ignorant of heavenly logic and therefore could not understand the lies within Satan's temptation.

