

Madison King

Ainsworth and Wilson

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Poisoned with Pride: How Adam Became Truly Like God

In Milton's *Paradise Lost*, God gives Adam and Eve one lone command: "of the Tree / Which tasted works knowledge of Good and Evil, / Thou may'st not (eat)" (*Paradise Lost* 7: 542-544). Infamously, they break this command and start a chain reaction of sin and disjunction between God and man. The fate of all of humanity, then, revolves around one simple but extremely powerful piece of fruit grown from a tree in a garden. However, the exact capability of the fruit is debatable. Although the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge is purported by God and his angels to sequester Adam and God by placing Adam in an intimacy with evil, analyses of Adam's uses of reason evidence that in reality the fruit makes Adam God-like, as foretold by Satan to Eve, by nurturing in him a maniacal selfishness and self-glorifying pride.

In the moments of self-reflection before the imminent fall of man, Adam is the epitome of compassion and understanding towards Eve. Even though he already knows what Eve has done before she ever approaches him and the propagative peril in which her decision has placed them, he still refers to her as the "fairest of Creation" (*Paradise Lost* 9: 896). Adam also immediately and with a decisive lack of hesitation points the dagger of blame away from Eve. In a bout of compelling and important language, Adam first calls Eve "defac't" and "deflowr'd;" both of these adjectives imply that some other

person or entity has affected Eve and coerced her into the position of the victim in the fall of man (*Paradise Lost* 9: 901).

Also in line 901 of Book 9 in *Paradise Lost*, Milton creates an alliteration with the word “defac’t,” “deflowr’d,” “Death,” and “devote.” This alliteration indicates that Milton intends for the reader to think of these four words as one wholly inseparable group. Therefore, it is also advantageous to zoom in on the lexical use of the word “devote,” which, coming at the end of the line, bears all of the weight and the importance of the line. The word “devote,” in its most obvious sense, refers to the action of obedience and loyalty; which is an understandable first reading of the word in this context. However, when taking into account the use of negation in the words “defac’t” and “deflowr’d” right before this, the word “devote” takes on a new meaning. “Devote,” then, bearing the same “de-” prefix seen in the words before it, could signify the negation of “vote,” meaning that, here, Adam is beginning to doubt the infallibility of his wife and his world (*Paradise Lost* 9: 901). Because he continues to side with Eve, though, it is obvious that he is not totally conscious of the doubt that is rising in his heart, blazing the wide path to the fall of humanity.

Adam, continuing in this scene to further delineate the lack of fault Eve bears in her fault, says that “some cursed fraud / Of Enemy” has “beguil’d” Eve, pointedly removing blame from Eve and placing it onto a “fraud” and an “Enemy,” which, by the capitalization used in this instance, signifies Satan (*Paradise Lost* 9: 904-5). The syntax of these lines is also crucial to the overall tone of the actions that are about to occur, namely Adam deciding to eat the fruit; Milton ends line 904 with the word “fraud,” placing emphasis on it and leading the reader to question what is genuinely true and what

is false in the coming scenes. Again, as in the case of the word “devote,” the syntax and word choice indicates a blurring of the line between truth and lie and, between righteousness and wickedness, between good and evil. This is another instance of Milton foreshadowing the fall of man before Adam eats the fruit of the tree.

Since Adam posits Eve as the matter being acted on, he places the “cursed fraud,” Satan, as the efficient cause of the sin of Eve and ultimately the fall of man. Adam’s line of reasoning purposefully takes away Eve’s freedom to choose whether or not to eat the fruit and therefore puts her in the position of a victim to gain sympathy from Adam and from the reader. Because of this, Adam decides, before Eve ever confesses to what has happened, that he will also eat the fruit so that he can be with Eve, whatever God and fate bring, even if that includes death (*Paradise Lost* 9: 908). This entire argument is motivated by Adam’s desire to spare Eve’s feelings; before Eve tells him anything about the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, Adam decides what he is going to do about it in what amounts to an aside, so that he can best navigate how to comfort Eve when she reaches him.

After Adam eats the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, however, his feelings toward Eve and toward himself metamorphose into the dire opposite of his views before his own fall into sinfulness. He no longer greets Eve with adulatory praise, and the lack of these compliments starkly contrasts the conversations between Adam and Eve before Adam eats the forbidden fruit. No longer is Adam concerned with sparing Eve’s feelings; he even at times attacks her for her negligence and disobedience, calling Eve “ingrateful” in the midst of his reprehension of her (*Paradise Lost* 9: 1164). Adam is now entirely motivated by selfishness and indifference instead of compassion and sympathy.

The use of the word “ingrateful” distinctly and undeniably mirrors the speech made by God to the Son in Book 3. While watching Satan make his way to Earth to tempt Adam and Eve, God says that Satan is “ingrate” (*Paradise Lost* 3: 97). God makes the point that, just as Eve will squander the infallible life she will have in the Garden of Eden, Satan has squandered the freedom and righteousness he experienced under God’s watch in Heaven. Before Satan rebels, he is second in command in Heaven, so, obviously, he is highly trusted and honored by God. However, after Satan leads the revolt, all of the compassion and empathy that God held disappears, or, rather, is forcibly expelled by God. Adam’s treatment of Eve mirrors this characteristic of God: at first, Adam is kind and empathetic towards Eve, but after she eats the fruit, Adam is cold, harsh, and disdainful of her.

Adam, after eating the fruit, additionally now cites Eve as an efficient cause of the fall of man and places himself as another mere victim of Eve’s tyrannical debut into sinfulness and greed. Adam makes the assertion that if Eve had “heark’n’d” to his commands and if she had been subordinate to his divinely appointed authority, she would not have left his side in the first place, she would not have been tempted by the serpent, and therefore, she would not have eaten the forbidden fruit (*Paradise Lost* 9: 1134). However, as Eve’s earthly authority, due to the gender roles set by God, Adam should bear responsibility for Eve’s actions, even though Adam tries to elude this fact. This change in Adam occurs because of his consumption of the fruit and has obvious correlations to God’s reaction to the fall of Satan in Book 3.

God’s reaction when confronted with the rebellion and fall of Satan and the war in heaven is at best stagnant in its adamancy. God persistently blames free will as the reason

for Satan and his army's rebellion, saying that "they themselves ordain'd thir fall" even though, as an omniscient, omnipotent Creator, he had the power to quell the rebellion before it even started and before it birthed a divine war, the utter destruction of heaven, and the eternal damnation of one third of God's angels (*Paradise Lost* 3: 128). God also asserts that he "made (Satan) just and right, / Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall" in an attempt to shirk responsibility for his creation. However, this line of reasoning falls through when pressed with the smallest ounce of logic (*Paradise Lost* 3: 98-99).

When confronted with the problem of Creator and Creation and the blame for the fall, of both Satan and humanity, readers often grasp out to the parent-child dynamic to steady themselves, saying that parents often need to let their child touch the hot stove in order to learn. However, what this analogy does not take into account is the immensity of the consequences of the fall of Satan and of humanity. When a child burns his or her hand, the wound heals, but when Satan falls, evil, sin, and death are created and have eternal effects on the state of creation and when Adam and Eve fall, they kick off the tradition of innate sin in every human to be born after them. These wounds are not allowed, due to God's judgments and commands, to heal like a burn on a hand and instead fester throughout eternity.

Alternatively, the analogy readers should be using is this: when a parent leaves a child unsupervised in a shop of expensive and fragile china and tells the child to not touch anything, and the child disobeys and destroys the shop, the parents should still pay the shopkeeper for the damages. In this case, the parent bears the full responsibility for not having control over their child, who has caused irreparable damage to the shattered china. God was supposed to have control over Satan, just as Adam was supposed to have

control over Eve. When their charges fall and make mistakes, though, God and Adam are distant and unapologetic. Therefore, once again, God and Adam share characteristics, in that they both selfishly and unrightfully avoid responsibility for the actions of those over whom they have charge.

Even still, Adam does not stop at merely placing blame on Eve, he also places blame for the fall of man on the Son and, by association, on God. In “The Freedom of God and Man,” Clay Greene argues that “neither [Adam or Eve] dare to blame the eternal Father” for their fall; however, through close analysis of the text, it is evident that Adam executes this very thing (Greene 6). Adam posits the Son, and by extension, God, as the efficient cause of Eve, and, therefore, the efficient cause of Eve’s ultimate sin and the fall of humanity. When questioned by the Son as to what happened in the garden, Adam directly says that it is the fault of Eve, whom the Son “mad’st to be (his) help” and “gav’st (him) as (a) perfet gift” (*Paradise Lost* 10: 138-9). This implies blame on the Son for creating the vehicle of the destruction of humanity in creating Eve. This doubt in God and the accusation of the Son as being the cause of the downfall of humanity and the propagation of evil throughout it is the first instance of man’s distrust and disbelief in God.

This is further evidenced by Adam’s caustic remark concerning Eve’s “perfection” (*Paradise Lost* 10: 148). Adam describes Eve as the Son’s “perfet” gift, which, under the circumstances that Eve has so recently doomed the entirety of the human race, is a very tongue-in-cheek, and even blasphemous, comment (*Paradise Lost* 10: 148). Along with being an argument in his line of reasoning, this caustic attitude by Adam is also a byproduct of the fruit. Whereas before he eats the fruit, Adam was the

epitome of selfless compassion, he is now fiercely selfish in his adamancy to not take any of the blame or responsibility for his actions. Although there is no “higher power” that God, the Highest Power, can blame for the fall of Satan, readers can refer back to the adamancy with which God refuses to take any hint of blame for the mistakes and consequences of his creations, both Satan and Adam and Eve, to see the correlation between Adam’s adamancy to wildly, desperately throw blame onto anyone but himself and God’s absolute, unbending lack of assumption of responsibility.

These extremely similar correlations between himself and God are caused by the consumption of one simple, but obviously intensely powerful, piece of fruit. When God and the angels speak of the Forbidden Tree, they call it the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, a tree that contains only “sin” and “Death” for the consumer (*Paradise Lost* 7: 547). If this were the case, the evil and sin in the fruit, aligned with the examples of Satan and his fallen angels, would have caused Adam to reason incorrectly. In Adam’s case, though, there is nothing intrinsically wrong with his arguments against Eve: if Eve had listened to Adam, she would never have been tempted by the serpent, and if the Son had never created Eve, or if he had created her to be totally perfect, she would have never eaten the fruit. Therefore, because Adam is reasoning correctly, the fruit must have a different significance than the one ascribed to it by God.

As Greene argues, “this, then, is the revelation of eating the fruit: the revelation of disobedience” (Green 5). However, this assertion, again, is proved untrue. When Satan is tempting Eve to eat the fruit of the tree, he states that it will make Eve “as God,” a facet of the equality and independence for which she was searching in splitting from Adam in the garden (*Paradise Lost* 9: 708). In a moment of fierce clarity, it is Satan that has

illuminated the truth concerning the definition of the Forbidden Tree. This is also denoted by Adam's use of reason in these passages: if reason comes from and is of God, as Milton suggests in his work, *Areopagitica*, when he asserts, while speaking of censorship, that "whoever kills a good book, kills reason itself, kills the image of God, as it were, in the eye," and if Adam is using reason correctly, he must be in line with God, or, rather, in "the image of God," also (*Areopagitica* 720). Further, Adam picks up a few characteristics of God, specifically selfishness, pride, and disdainfulness and apathy toward those over whom he has responsibility, to truly nail down the immense, divinely equalizing power of the Forbidden Fruit.

When Adam eats the fruit and absorbs this God-like self-righteousness, it is immediately apparent that God and man can no longer exist in harmony, and God punishes Adam and Eve swiftly and fiercely and orders their exile from the Garden of Eden. This stalemate between a vehemently self-righteous Creator and his vehemently self-righteous creation spawns and establishes the greatest disjunction between man and God that Adam and Eve had ever seen. The God-like self-propagating pride that is now instilled in Adam continues on in his lineage and digs a profound chasm between earth and heaven and foreshadows the need for future reconciliation between Creator and created.