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Abstract: This paper discusses reasons for Eve being the most revolutionary character in the work. Eve's intrinsic qualities and her distance from God lead to her ability to be revolutionary and cause the Fall in pursuit of knowledge. The argument focuses on her merits and the contrast between Eve and other characters, and the ramifications of Eve's revolutionary qualities.

Eve and Embodying Revolutionary Traits

John Milton's *Paradise Lost* is a poem filled to the brim with thoughtful concepts and questions considering God and the created reality that Milton has crafted. Revolution has been a subtle but recurrent question throughout the poem, present from Satan's beginnings and his fall to the subsequent fall of Adam and Eve. However, another question stemming from the theme of revolution is that of which character embodies and could enact revolution. Satan would be the most obvious answer, but it could be argued that other characters show revolutionary qualities in different ways. The way in which revolution is defined can also place other characters above Satan in terms of their revolutionary qualities. If being revolutionary is defined in a different way, such as by the intrinsic qualities of a character, then Eve could be considered the most revolutionary. Eve's origin and the way that she navigates God, Adam, and the angels show her ability to make her own decisions, which solidifies her as the most revolutionary character in the poem.

Revolutionary has to first be defined to understand what would make Eve the most revolutionary. For the purpose of considering *Paradise Lost*, being revolutionary will be measured through the intrinsic qualities of the character, and what makes them different from other characters and God. The intrinsic trait that will primarily be considered is independence, especially from God. With this in mind, Eve is the most revolutionary in the poem, and an essential reason for that is the vanity that she is created with. This is the first of Eve's qualities that the reader is introduced to, and arguably the most important. Eve describes the story of her creation and tells of how she felt when looking at her reflection in the pond:

A shape within the wat'ry gleam appear'd

Bending to look on me, I started back,

It started back, but pleas'd I soon return'd,

Pleas'd it return'd as soon with answering looks

Of sympathy and love; there I had fixt

Mine eyes till now, and pin'd with vain desire (*Paradise Lost* 4: 461-466).

This facet of Eve's nature is incredibly important when it comes to her being the most revolutionary character. Eve is entirely content with herself; she does not desire to rise from the pond and go to Adam until God directly prompts her to do so. Self-contentment is not a trait that is seen among other characters in the poem. Adam is not content with God's gifts to him until he is provided with Eve, whereas Eve is perfectly content to sit by the pond and look at herself in paradise. This attitude is precisely what makes Eve the most revolutionary: she is content with herself, even before she realizes that God exists. Her worth was rooted in the image that she saw

in the pond. The intrinsic worth that Satan, Adam, and the angels feel is tied to God in one way or another, while in Eve's beginning, she is separated from that. Satan may be revolutionary in a different sense, but his goal has always been to turn from God rather than submit to him. Satan also does not feel the self-contentment that Eve feels; otherwise, he likely would not have rebelled against God, since he would have been satisfied. God himself likely would not be included when considering self-worth; with God being above humans and being an omnipresent being. The same could be said for the Son, since he is considered to be God in human form; however, he likely would feel content through God, not separate from him. Eve is independent from God in her existence in her first moments, aside from the act of her creation. This vanity she has for herself is precisely what sets her apart and makes her revolutionary.

Another aspect of Eve's personality that makes her the most revolutionary compared to others is her willingness to take action on her own without prompting from others. When tending to the garden, Eve is the one to suggest that they divide their labors to accomplish more during the day. This is actually a perfectly reasonable thing to suggest, and she is not considering the temptation or Satan at all, just the need to accomplish more labor. Her innocence is what makes her want to accomplish more, in a sense. This is revolutionary, and it could even be argued that Adam's fear of the temptation was stifling him, preventing more work from being done in the garden. Eve does not even fear to question Adam's assumption that she will fall prey to temptation: "His fraud is then thy fear, which plain infers / Thy equal fear that my firm Faith and Love / Can by his fraud be shak'n or seduc't; / Thoughts, which how found they harbor in thy breast, / Adam, misthought of her too thee so dear?" (*Paradise Lost* 9: 285-289) The fact that Eve is unafraid of questioning Adam here speaks to how gender comes across in this story. While Eve is submissive to Adam and possibly not revolutionary in that aspect, Eve still does take

action when she desires to, as shown here. It can also be seen that Eve's primary focus is not the temptation, but her original goal of completing more work. This shows her ability to focus on the work that needs to be done rather than events and discussions with the angels that Adam was having. Eve also has much more faith in herself to not be tempted than others have in her, tying back to the vanity that she has. However, this makes her revolutionary in an interesting way: she does not doubt that she would be able to resist the temptation, showing that she holds worth in herself. In a way, her vanity provides the belief that she can resist on her own, and it is not necessary for Adam to be there to protect her.

Another major facet of Eve's revolutionary qualities is her love which is referenced throughout the poem. This was to be part of her purpose when she was created for Adam, and it is revolutionary in that this love does not appear in other characters besides God. Even during tense moments where Adam is angry with Eve, he always refers to her love; this is evident when he decides to eat the fruit and join her during the fall:

I would sustain alone

The worst, and not persuade thee, rather die

Deserted, than oblige thee with a fact

Pernicious to thy Peace, chiefly assur'd

Remarkably so late of thy so true,

So Faithful Love unequal'd" (*Paradise Lost* 9: 978-983).

This speaks quite a bit to Eve's character. Although she is vain, she also holds great love inside her, and much of this love is for Adam. Even after the fall, Eve still holds love for Adam and

expresses how deeply sorry she is. Adam also has love for Eve, but it is not repeatedly described as a trait for him in the way that it is for Eve. As stated, Eve's love is faithful, which sets her apart from the other characters, and in a way makes her similar to God. While Adam may be more "perfect" than she is, Adam does not possess the same inherent love that she has, and that God supposedly has. Adam does concede and eat the fruit for Eve; however, he has to do this unless he wants to risk losing her. Adam loved out of necessity in this situation, as opposed to Eve's constant love. This is revolutionary for her character, exemplifying that even when Eve makes poor decisions, she still embodies that love that she was created by God to have in tumultuous situations.

Eve's revolutionary qualities and abilities are not born with her at her creation, though. As a character, Eve is able to progress over time in the novel, and her choices reflect her growing ability to reason and make her own decisions. In his paper "The Consequence of Independence," Hubbert discusses this notable progression of Eve's over the course of the work: "Eve grows between the time of her creation and the eventual fall, and her character does not remain stagnant. Instead we see her character grow and become more confident in her wants and choices" (Hubbert 4). Eve, upon creation, first desires herself and her own image, but then falls in line with God's instruction once she hears his voice. The letter of the text states that God warned her of her own image: "A voice thus warn'd me, What thou see'st, / What there thou seest fair Creature is thyself" (*Paradise Lost* 4: 467-468). This point is where Eve grows and develops from, as Hubbert mentions. After she is created, Eve obeys God immediately, heeding his warning that the reflection is her image, and follows his instructions of letting his voice lead her. However, Eve clearly progresses over time, with certain actions implying that she is revolutionarily making her own decisions and choices. As stated, Eve is the one to request that

she and Adam go their separate ways in the garden to labor; this request is clear evidence of her progressed ability to create her own solution and enact it, rather than waiting for instruction from Adam or God. The strongest scene where Eve's progression is evident is the fall when she eats the fruit by her own choice after being manipulated by Satan. Eve's want for knowledge without considering God is revolutionary, as she deliberately separates herself from his will:

Back to the Thicket slunk

The guilty serpent, and well might, for Eve

Intent now wholly on her taste, naught else

Regarded, such delight till then, as seem'd,

In Fruit she never tasted, whether true

Or fancied so, through expectation high

Of knowledge, nor was God-head from her thought (*Paradise Lost* 9: 786-790)

Here, Eve's revolutionary qualities are evident in her lack of consideration for God in the equation of deliberately eating the fruit. She desires knowledge and her own capacity for that knowledge above her desire to be close to God. It states that until then, nothing else gave her the very same delight that she received from eating the fruit. Eve placed God aside and chose knowledge. She does this even while lacking the power that Satan has; Satan has great power that Eve does not have, and she chooses to make the not so God-pleasing choice anyway, being aware that she can be punished. The fall is the ultimate point of progression in the poem for Eve; her ability to reason and choose her own actions culminate in her decision to choose knowledge, making her the most revolutionary.

Eve is also revolutionary in how she moves through this story being the only female character, and the one character that is seen as weak and to be blamed for the world's woes after the fall. Eve is constantly diminished by the other characters in the story. An example of this is Satan's description of her when he states that she and Adam are "Not equal, as thir sex not equal seem'd" (*Paradise Lost* 4: 296). Right from the start, Eve is viewed as lesser in the story in her physical and intellectual beings, as well as within the hierarchy of her, God, and Adam. In her paper "How a Damaging Inferiority Complex Led to Eve's Fall," Michaels points out the actions of male characters and the effect this has on Eve and the fall. In discussing Milton's comment about Eve and Adam that "Hee is for God only, Shee for God in him" (*Paradise Lost* 4: 299), Michaels notes that "Here, Milton deprives Eve of a direct link to God, who intended for Eve to be secondary both in the order of her creation and her relation to Adam; thus, God reveals his intention to create Eve as inferior" (Michaels 2-3). This lack of a direct link between Eve and God could actually contribute to Eve's revolutionary qualities, and her ability to make decisions. Even while Eve is constantly seen as lesser, her separation from God in this way lets her reason and make the decision to eat the fruit. After she eats the fruit, it is stated that her thought to do so was not led by God. It is possible that Eve's ability to be revolutionary is because of this lack of a direct connection between herself and God that Michaels points out. This interpretation brings up many questions, however, like if women are intentionally further from God, and why that is. In this story, although Eve sets in motion what is considered to be the fall of humanity, she does so in search of reason, which is revolutionary in and of itself.

Eve is the most revolutionary character in *Paradise Lost*, evident by her willingness to act in ways that the other characters do not, and her intrinsic qualities. When defining revolutionary through the lens of values that are different from the norm, it is evident that Eve is

very different from other characters in the poem. Eve is willing to adapt to her separation from God, and this manifests in the fall of humanity. However, it is interesting to note that while Eve is the most revolutionary, she is viewed by the other characters as the weakest and most lacking. This speaks to how women are generally understood, both within the poem and in reality. Eve can be considered a microcosm of what women can sometimes experience; women are typically viewed as inept, only to be the ones held responsible. Despite this, Eve acts with reason after being underestimated and makes her own logical choices within the story. Eve's actions and traits show the depth of difference between her and the other characters, making her the most revolutionary.