

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Title: A Superior Inferior: Eve as John Milton's Tragic Hero in *Paradise Lost*

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John Milton's life experiences and extensive education allowed him to write a complex epic poem with many nuances. One of these nuances involved portraying Eve as the tragic hero of his epic. Using Aristotle's *Poetics* to define "tragedy" and "tragic hero," this thesis illustrates that Eve is the only character that fits the definition. Milton portrays Eve as an exceptional woman, providing her with a status equal to that of a monarch in Paradise. As a good character with high standing, Eve also demonstrates human appetites, including curiosity, desire, and ambition. These traits allow Milton's audience to connect to Eve as a heroic character, thus eliciting pity when she suffers misfortune. As Aristotle states, the tragic hero's misfortunes must be a result of an error of judgment rather than a flaw in character, and Eve, though ambitious, remains a perfect being before the Fall. Her mistake occurs when she considers Satan's argument, finally giving in to her ambitious desire to become like a god. In addition to dooming herself, Eve tempts Adam to disobey God's command, and once he eats, the Fall is complete. God sends his Son to pass judgment upon the human pair, and the tragic hero's decline begins. Eve offers to take God's punishment entirely upon herself because she accepts that the Fall occurred because of her mistake, and her ultimate punishment involves being placed permanently beneath Adam in the hierarchy. While she was an exceptional woman before the Fall,

Eve becomes inferior to Adam after the Fall; Milton confirms that most women should be inferior to men. By portraying Eve as the tragic hero, Milton “justifies the ways of God to men” by demonstrating the consequences of aspiring beyond one’s place as determined by the hierarchy and the perfect monarch, God.

A SUPERIOR INFERIOR:  
EVE AS JOHN MILTON'S TRAGIC HERO IN *PARADISE LOST*

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### Introduction: John Milton's Tragic Hero in *Paradise Lost*

While scholars have debated *Paradise Lost* for centuries, the character of Eve received attention only as a scapegoat until feminist criticism arose around 1980. Diane McColley addressed the issue of Eve first, arguing that Eve was not intrinsically evil before the Fall and that she did not have malicious intentions when she parted from Adam in Book Nine. McColley also argued that Adam and Eve were perfect beings with the opportunity for growth, presenting the Fall as possible rather than pre-determined. Bernard Paris disagreed, suggesting that Milton failed in his purpose to justify God because God is beyond justification; Paris proposed that Adam and Eve were round, flawed characters even before the Fall. Richard Arnold, while not in complete agreement with Paris, suggested that Eve's fall resulted directly from her improper application of reason, and Stella Revard argued that Adam and Eve were responsible for their own actions, even though the blame tended to be placed solely on Eve.

While the Fall has received considerable scholarship, Milton's characterization of Eve has also been debated. Charles Doyle pointed out the paradox of Eve as both "fair" and "a defect of nature," which not only involved Eve but also Milton's attitudes about women, and Joan Malory Webber admitted that Eve was an ambiguous character with many roles to which many women could relate. Christine Foula suggested that Eve was a product of seventeenth-century patriarchal values, and Sandra Gilbert simply proposed that Eve was monstrous, which was why many woman writers had a problem with her.

In addition to the scholarship involving Eve and women's responses to her, many scholars have addressed the relationship between Eve and her husband as demonstrative of marriage in a patriarchal society. Marcia Landy proposed that Eve had to be inferior to

Adam if the social order was to be maintained, but Barbara Lewalski argued that although the historical context of *Paradise Lost* required Eve to be inferior to Adam, Milton repeatedly portrayed Eve as equal to Adam. William Shullenberger agreed, stating that Milton stressed Eve's "inferiority" to encourage readers to see that Eve's "subordination" did not constitute her "inferiority." Anne Ferry took this idea a little further, arguing that although Milton used the Bible as his primary source, he altered the characterization of Eve to portray her as more intelligent than Adam.

Like Ferry, many scholars addressed the Biblical references throughout *Paradise Lost* as a way to better understand the text. Walter S. H. Lim suggested that the Biblical analogies provided a deeper understanding of the text, and Theresa Dispasquale made a specific connection between Eve and Wisdom. However, Mandy Green argued that the classical references were equally as important as the Biblical ones, particularly concerning Ovidian allusions. While Green used Ovidian comparisons to illustrate Eve's intelligence and status in the poem, Heather James used Ovidian comparisons to demonstrate that Milton created Eve as "less than" Adam because she was a copy of him.

Although scholarship abounds in regards to *Paradise Lost*, the scholarship regarding Milton's biography remains equally as abundant. However, David Masson's seven-volume biography of John Milton contains much of the biographical information that is known about Milton and is thus considered the most thorough biography currently in existence. Everything in Milton's life pertains to the works, both prose and poetry, that he wrote throughout his life because Milton's habit of weaving his life experience into his works began early and continued through his greatest work, *Paradise Lost*. Everything that occurred in Milton's life both prior to and during the composition of *Paradise Lost*

exists in the poem, in some form or another, and to address all the nuances that Milton wove into his work would require several lifetimes. Although many nuances exist in Milton's poem and elicit many interpretations, this thesis will argue that Milton portrayed Eve as the tragic hero of *Paradise Lost*. Using the Aristotelian idea of a tragedy, loosely applied by English Renaissance writers, Milton wrote *Paradise Lost* with only one character who fits the definition of a tragic hero: Eve.

According to Aristotle, "A tragedy [...] is the imitation of an action that is serious and also, as having magnitude, complete in itself; [...] in a dramatic, not in a narrative form; [and] with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its catharsis of such emotions" (1449b.24-28). Milton's tragedy describes the Fall of Man, a serious matter which involves not only Adam and Eve but all humankind, and though the poem was not meant to be performed on stage (as the word "dramatic" implies), Milton dictated *Paradise Lost*, writing a poem that lends itself to being spoken rather than read. Because Milton used the Fall of Man as his tragedy, he could also inspire fear and pity in his audience. Milton inspired the fear to sin against God and to reach above one's place in the hierarchy, and he inspired pity by illustrating what happens to those who disobey God's commands.

To arouse the most effective fear and pity in his tragedy, Milton portrayed Eve as the tragic hero. Although "hero" generally refers to a male character, Milton did not portray Eve as a "heroine." Eve demonstrates decidedly male characteristics, such as intelligence, logic, and boldness. These characteristics would not exist in a heroine to the extent that they appear in Eve. Milton does not confine Eve to the domestic sphere, so

while he portrays a woman, he develops her character in areas that apply to a “hero” rather than a “heroine,” so this thesis will focus on Eve as the tragic hero.

In regards to the tragic hero, Aristotle states, “A good man must not be seen passing from happiness to misery” because such a “situation is not fear-inspiring or piteous, but simply odious to us” (1452b.33-35). Milton, then, could not have a perfect tragic hero, or his tragedy would not achieve his purpose. As Aristotle further explains, “[P]ity is occasioned by undeserved misfortune, and fear by that of one like ourselves” (1453a.5-6). Milton needed to portray a hero to whom his audience could relate but whose decline from happiness to misery was not “odious.” Milton needed a good hero of high standing, so the decline in status would be harsh and pitiable.

Milton illustrates Eve’s high status in Book Four, when Satan first beholds Adam and Eve, and again when Satan hesitates because Eve’s beauty astounds him. Then Milton confirms Eve’s status in Book Eight when Adam relates why Eve was created and how he came to meet her. Milton’s hero, though perfect because she is a human being before the Fall, still remains accessible to his audience because she feels and dreams and aspires. Her relationship with Adam not only defines her status in Paradise; it defines her ambition as well. Adam warns her about her ambition and the consequences of disobedience in Book Five, after Eve dreams of Satan’s temptation. She receives the warning, seems to take heed, yet will still succumb because of her ambition. Although not a “flaw” in the modern definition of the word, Eve’s ambition allows Milton to create a tragic hero that is good but whose misfortune is not “odious.”

Eve’s ambition remains under control in comparison to the pride of Oedipus, and ambition does not make her imperfect. Ambition, like pride, does not constitute a sin if

controlled. Eve demonstrates her ambition in Book Nine when she desires to separate from Adam, confident in her perfection (and status) that she can resist Satan. Eve's misfortune occurs at this point in the poem. As Aristotle states, "[T]he cause of [the change in the hero's fortunes] must lie not in any depravity, but in some great error on his part" (1453a.15-16). Eve makes a mistake when she listens to the serpent and considers his argument. Satan tempts Eve by flattering her, which she coolly ignores, and by "proving" to her that eating the tree will provide her with the opportunity to become like a god. Eve's subjugation to Adam, though Milton portrays her as more intelligent than Adam, provides the conflict with her nature, and Eve succumbs to her ambition, desiring to reach beyond her place in the hierarchy of Paradise.

Repeatedly, Milton mentions Eve's inferiority to Adam, particularly in Books Six and Seven, but Eve's words and actions in Book Nine contradict Milton's statements. Although Milton considered women to be inferior, he appreciated certain women in power—the Countess of Derby, for example. To Milton, not all women were inferior; women in power deserved respect. Eve, as the first woman, counted as a woman in power, so Eve's portrayal as the tragic hero does not contradict Milton's tendencies that some scholars describe as "misogynistic." In addition, Aristotle mentions the possibility of the tragic hero's good nature occurring in unlikely people: "Such goodness is possible in every type of personage, even in a woman or a slave, though the one is perhaps an inferior, and the other a wholly worthless being" (1454a.19-21). Milton followed Aristotle's thought and portrayed the woman as his hero.

The end of a tragedy always involves the decline of the hero; as Aristotle states, "[T]he change in the hero's fortunes must be not from misery to happiness, but on the

contrary from happiness to misery” (1453a.13-15). As in *Oedipus Rex*, the tragic hero loses his high status, realizes that his own pride is responsible for the decline, and suffers the loss of his sight, though heroes in other plays lose their lives as well. In Milton’s tragedy, Eve’s ambition determines Adam’s fate; she decides to include him in her disobedience and he decides to join her. As a result, Adam and Eve become imperfect beings and are banished from the Garden. Eve, as the woman and primary instigator, is placed firmly below Adam in the social hierarchy, and though Adam and Eve do not immediately perish, their deaths remain inevitable. Eve, as the hero, realizes her mistake and her ambition are the causes of these results, as illustrated in her supplication to Adam when she offers to take God’s punishment entirely upon herself.

Throughout *Paradise Lost*, Milton comments on religious and political issues that existed at the time he wrote his poem. In particular, Milton used Adam and Eve to upset the standards of religion and society. When Eve and then Adam disobey, the earth shudders as with birthing pangs, a definitely female act. Then when Eve suggests suicide as a response to their disobedience, she adheres to the Greek idea of individual responsibility, and Adam’s response illustrates the Christian idea of service to the state when he suggests submitting themselves for judgment by a higher power. While Milton questions the standards of his society, he also enforces them.

Though a female character as tragic hero seems unlikely in the context of the English Renaissance, Milton categorized his *Paradise Lost* as a tragedy when his narrator states in Book Nine “I now must change / These notes to tragic,” and Eve remains the only character who matches the definition of tragic hero (9.5-6). Milton’s reasons for placing a woman in the role of tragic hero include the presence of powerful women

throughout his life and the pamphlet debates regarding women and their status in society. As Shannon Miller suggests, the feminist pamphlets and the responses to them influenced Milton's ideas of Eve, the pamphlets' words even appearing in Adam and Eve's conversations. The debate over women caused unrest in England, and as a poet who wanted to change things, Milton could not ignore that debate.

In addition to the issues of social hierarchy, the wars that shook England in the 1640s, the Interregnum government with the Protector who became a type of monarch, and the return of the true monarchy and Charles II caused Milton to reevaluate the governmental situation. Milton believed in a Parliament of the people, but at this time, England could not sustain such a system. Despite Milton's tendencies, he chose to reinforce the idea of a monarch, thus Heaven is a monarchy. By placing Eve as the tragic hero, he placed his own opinions of powerful women into the text, and by placing the Fallen Eve firmly beneath Adam in the hierarchy, he answers England's inevitable need to maintain the hierarchy: God over men, men over women.

## Chapter One: The Relevance of Milton's Biography

For decades, scholars have studied *Paradise Lost* and John Milton himself, with even his biographical information debated and analyzed. Although scholars can write volumes about Milton's life—and many have—Milton's biography here serves only as background information necessary to inform the argument regarding Eve's status as the tragic hero in *Paradise Lost*. Because Milton's experiences and world views permeate his prose and poetry, especially *Paradise Lost*, his biographical information remains an integral part of understanding his greatest work.

Born December 9, 1608, Milton grew up in a changing London, a city that doubled in size in the first fifty years of Milton's life (A. N. Wilson 1). His father, also named John Milton, worked as a scrivener and made a decent living, so he understood the importance of an education. As a result, Milton's learning began early, facilitated by tutors at home. As Barbara Lewalski explains, "Between the ages of five and seven, [...] Milton learned to read and write in English and to do arithmetic; seven was the usual age for beginning Latin" (*Life* 5). Likely during this time, one of Milton's tutors, Thomas Young, introduced Milton to the classics (Lewalski *Life* 6). Milton seemed eager to absorb everything and wanted to learn for the sake of learning: "Friendship, learning, laughter, and music colour the years of Milton's adolescence. [...] Evenings were spent reading late and perfecting his Latin, Greek, French, and Italian" (A. N. Wilson 16). These experiences would lead to a desire for continuous study throughout his life.

The private tutoring continued until approximately 1620, and Milton then attended St. Paul's (Lewalski *Life* 6). Literature began to influence Milton early. At St. Paul's, he read *The Faerie Queene*, the reading of which A. N. Wilson calls "one of the

most important features of Milton's childhood" (11). In fact, according to A. N. Wilson, the headmaster at St. Paul's "would have taught [Milton] to love poetry above all other forms of literature" (12). Milton's aspiration to become a poet started to develop at this time, though he would not fully realize his path until later, and the idea of a feminine hero could have begun to develop in Milton's mind at this time. Not only was Milton introduced to *The Faerie Queene*, written to glorify Queen Elizabeth I, Milton greatly appreciated Spenser as a poet, calling him "a better teacher than Scotus or Aquinas" (A. N. Wilson 11). Milton remembered everything he read, which shaped his mind for the poetry and prose he would write later.

While Milton attended St. Paul's, he met and became friends with Charles Diodati. As Lewalski explains, Diodati "seems to have been one of those bright students to whom everything in the realm of conventional academic expectation comes very easily. Milton admired and loved Diodati for his virtue, his liveliness, his conversation, his learning, and his poetry" (*Life* 9). Milton's friendship with Diodati carried him through several years of uncertainty. From 1625 to 1632, Milton attended Cambridge University, where he received Baccalaureate and Master of Arts degrees (Lewalski *Life* 15). During his time at Cambridge, Milton decided that he could not be a minister in the church; not only was the church in need of reform but Milton could not tolerate having peers who were "embarrassingly stupid" (A. N. Wilson 31).

Also while Milton attended Cambridge, he began to write poetry and prose that melded his classical knowledge with issues that he currently faced. To Diodati, for example, he wrote "a Latin verse letter" in which he called Diodati his "Platonic soulmate" and compared "Ovid's unhappy exile from Rome" to "Milton's delightful

exile from Cambridge to London” (Lewalski *Life* 21-22). Not only did Milton infuse a letter to a friend with references to classic literature, he referenced Greek philosophy and the yearning for ideal companionship, the kind of fulfilling relationship that could only exist between men according to the Platonic philosophy. This yearning for the perfect companion appears in *Paradise Lost*, in Adam’s appeal to God for “[c]ollateral love and dearest amity” (8.426).

Another of Milton’s poems, commonly referred to as the Nativity ode, appeared in 1629. As A. N. Wilson explains, “[T]he poem is infinitely more than a Nativity painting. Compressed into its inexhaustibly rich few lines is a whole vision of Christianity. It draws on innumerable traditions, historical, theological, iconographical” (32). Unrest existed in the church because of the people’s desire for reform and the controlling nature of the church hierarchy, and Milton answered the unrest with this poem. In addition, as Albert C. Labriola points out, Milton included “allusions to mythology and their assimilation to the Hebraic-Christian tradition, the conflict between the godhead and numerous adversaries, the emphasis on voluntary humiliation as a form of Christian heroism, the paramount importance of the redemptive ministry of the Son, and the Christian view of history” (161). Hierarchy, reform, Christian religion, and classic mythology reappear in *Paradise Lost*, all of which Milton addressed early in his life and continued to consider. Labriola’s list of religious implications maintained importance throughout Milton’s life, so Milton placed them into his greatest work. Milton’s ability to weave knowledge and learning and life into his poetry only improved with time.

After Milton graduated from Cambridge with his Master of Arts degree, another incident occurred that would influence his future thought—a scandal involving the granddaughter of the Countess of Derby, patroness of Spenser. The Countess’s son-in-law committed horrible atrocities against his twelve-year-old daughter, which resulted in his execution (A. N. Wilson 43). Milton, who loved Spenser and thus appreciated his patroness, had previously worked with Henry Lawes, a musician, to produce musical entertainment for the Countess of Derby. After the scandal, Milton and Lawes again worked together to produce entertainment, the masque commonly referred to as *Comus*. Milton, writing the poetry, did not avoid the subject of the recent scandal. Rather, as A. N. Wilson explains, “The *Masque* is Milton’s first and most glorious expression of his belief, from which he never wavered, that virtue and the good are their own protection” (51).

Milton, as he was apt to do later in life as well, did not avoid controversial issues, and as Labriola explains, *Comus* deals with “the vulnerability of humankind to misdirection [...] or the consequence of having been deceived by an evil character who professes ‘friendly ends’” (164). Milton experimented with the idea of “innocence abused,” and the situation that exists in *Comus*—the virtuous Lady tempted by the evil Comus—would reappear in *Paradise Lost*, with similar circumstances but different results. Just as the granddaughter of the Countess of Derby did not escape the loss of her innocence, Eve will not escape temptation unscathed. While the brothers of *Comus*’s Lady come to her rescue before she gives into temptation, Adam will not come to Eve’s rescue before her ambition causes her to fall.

For the next five years, Milton's life stayed comparatively quiet, while he was living with his parents in the country. He considered his path in life, trying to determine what he was destined to do; despite his father's impatience on the subject, "Milton [was] aware that he [was] capable of greater, much greater things. [...] He [felt] that the great poem which he [would] one day write must be prepared for, by learning, by scholarship, by solitude, by withdrawal, by prayer. For never, at any stage after this point in Milton's life, [did] he have any doubt that he [was] a man with a divine vocation" (A. N. Wilson 60). This self-confidence appears in *Paradise Lost* as well. Milton, speaking through the narrator, places himself and his epic among the classics by alluding to them often throughout the text. In addition, the narrator demonstrates his status as a great poet by stating his high purpose (and Milton's)—to "justify the ways of God to men" (1.26). The narrator in *Paradise Lost* does not doubt his place in history. Neither did Milton.

Milton still wrote during this time, particularly the poem "Lycidas," which brings Milton's fear of death to the fore. Milton had not fulfilled his potential by this time, and time suddenly seemed short (A. N. Wilson 62). Even though "Lycidas" was an elegy for Milton's friend Edward King, Milton wove himself into the poem, particularly his fear of death and unfulfilled destiny, continuing his habit of putting more into a poem than merely the surface matter. The fear of death and the fear of unfulfilled potential also appears in the narrator's words in *Paradise Lost*. As Labriola explains, "the narrator [...] alludes to his work's half-finished state, expressing anxiety that his inspiration may be interrupted or that his personal safety is threatened" (180). While Labriola mentions that these fears may arise from the issues surrounding Milton during the Restoration, Milton's fear of death and unfulfilled destiny existed before the Interregnum.

In 1638, Milton began to travel, to expand his knowledge and experience and to speak with the great men of the age (Lewalski *Life* 87). Milton's first experience of Europe, however, involved civil war. According to A. N. Wilson, "Milton must have been struck immediately, on setting foot in France, by the very prickly and war-like atmosphere, which prevailed, compared with the comparative calm of home. The French provinces were in a perpetual state of rebellion" (74). As a result, Milton stayed only a brief time, enough to meet Lord Scudamore and Hugo Grotius and talk with them (Lewalski *Life* 89). Milton then traveled on to Italy, where he found good companionship: "Here were groups of young men formed into sessions worthy of the title (worthy in that precise Platonic mind) of *academic*. [...] [Milton] was overwhelmed by their intelligence, and by the affection and warmth with which they received him" (A. N. Wilson 81). His friends in Italy appreciated his talent as a poet more than anyone in England had up to this point. He felt his choice of occupation confirmed. He also found companions similar to Diodati in terms of the Platonic sense of friendship.

Also while Milton stayed in Italy, he attended various cultural events, particularly a performance of *Adamo*. An Italian play dedicated to Mary de Medicis, Queen of France, *Adamo* considered the tragedy of the Fall of Man in a comedic setting (A. N. Wilson 83). This may very well have been Milton's first encounter with the subject that would later become the topic for his epic poem. Additionally, the original Italian play was dedicated to a woman, a fact that Milton would not have missed. Men could appreciate a woman if the woman surpassed the standards of her gender—a queen, for example, or the mother of the human race, for another. Milton could accept that if a

woman was “exceptional,” she could be elevated above the inferior status most women deserved.

Milton continued his travels, arriving in Rome and visiting various colleges and meeting with various priests; A. N. Wilson comments, “Everything about Rome must have impressed Milton: as great potentates and princes and scholars, the men he met there charmed and impressed him” (84-85). However, Milton questioned the Roman Catholic religion and the “magnificence” of the churches, and he “evidently made no secret of expressing these thoughts” (A. N. Wilson 85). Because of his outspoken tendencies, Milton could not visit certain places, and some of his friends worried about the danger to his life (Lewalski *Life* 99). Milton’s time in Rome could possibly account for the extravagance of his descriptions of Heaven in *Paradise Lost*. If the architecture did not directly fit into Milton’s poem, the luxury surely inspired Milton’s imagination.

Soon, Milton heard about the unrest stirring in his native England, but he traveled home rather indirectly (A. N. Wilson 88). He returned to Italy and saw his academic friends again and made several excursions to surrounding, smaller communities (Lewalski *Life* 102). Home and civil unrest called, however, and Milton returned to England, though his trip abroad remained in his mind and heart. As Lewalski explains, “Milton drew upon his travel experiences constantly but in subtle and often indirect ways” (*Life* 111). Milton now had more experience and knowledge to weave into his works, both prose and poetry.

When Milton arrived again in England, a “precarious peace” existed but could not last (Lewalski *Life* 120). Writers printed pamphlets, arguing the controversy on paper, and Milton joined in. Whether the arguments concerned religion or clergy, economy or

aristocracy, as Lewalski states, “Milton clearly thought the revolution was about profound religious and political differences, and intended his polemical tracts to participate in the fierce parliamentary debates and pamphlet wars prompted by those conflicts” (*Life* 120). Milton placed himself in the middle of the political battle, determined to change the world, for he believed he could.

In the summer of 1642, Milton met and married Mary Powell, the daughter of Richard Powell, who owed money to Milton because of a financial agreement made by Milton’s father (Lewalski *Life* 156). Mary did not stay long with Milton after the marriage before she returned home to visit her family, and Lewalski suggests that though Milton was familiar with women and their beauty, he “had little direct experience of women,” resulting in compatibility issues after the marriage (*Life* 156-57). John T. Shawcross disagrees, proposing instead that the marriage was arranged: “Milton at thirty-three and Mary at seventeen fit the pattern” (40).

When Mary returned home to visit her parents, the marriage essentially fell apart. As A. N. Wilson explains, “Milton’s marriage, very evidently, got off to a poor start. [...] But soon, national events of much greater moment were to play their part in tearing the young Miltons apart” (115). Milton and Mary did not have time to work out their differences before civil war descended; with Milton’s previous political tendencies known, once Mary went home, it became unsafe for her to return to Milton (A. N. Wilson 116).

The result of Mary’s estrangement from Milton became *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*. As Annabel Patterson explains, “Marriage was always, since Genesis, Milton now argued, intended to be less for sex or procreation than for emotional

solace or intellectual support, a meeting of the minds” (9). According to Patterson, Mary’s abandonment did not incur Milton’s pained cries for divorce, as Lewalski would argue (165). According to Patterson, Milton wanted companionship, something akin to the male friendship he shared with Diodati and his Italian friends. Lewalski bases her account of the reason for *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* on Edward Phillips’s biography of Milton. However, as Hugh Wilson suggests, Phillips’s account is “highly unreliable” because Phillips “is evasive about his sources” (61). Because Phillips was Milton’s nephew and Phillips’s relationship with Milton is still debated, Phillips could be considered biased and therefore unreliable; in addition to Phillips’s questionable relationship with his uncle, Phillips has no concrete proof regarding the relationship between Milton and Mary because Phillips was only a boy at the time.

The war that interrupted Milton and Mary’s marriage involved Charles I’s attempt to maintain control of his crown. As Shawcross explains, “Many of the [...] struggles between the king and the people revolved around religious matters, and the Civil Wars that ensued in the 1640s had more to do, for many people, with religion than with economics” (138). Charles I attempted to enforce the divine right of kings, and many people wanted a republic instead. Although Milton does not seem to have taken an active role in the Civil War at this point, because of the rejection of *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* which he considered to be part of the liberty people desired, he could not have avoided being aware of the issues the war involved (A. N. Wilson 121). For example, the uprising of the people and the monarch’s attempt to maintain control appear in Satan’s attack on Heaven, though in *Paradise Lost*, of course, the monarchy wins because it is a celestial monarchy rather than a mortal one.

The Civil War progressed, and Milton became active in the political debates again when, as A. N. Wilson states, “Liberty of speech and liberty of the Press were at stake[....] If these presbyters were to set themselves up as inquisitors of what should or should not be read, England would be in a worse case than she had been in the worst days of Archbishop Laud’s censors” (138). Milton’s ideas of liberty remained one of the driving forces in his life. In addition to *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, he wrote *Of Education*, in which he demonstrated that education was another area of necessary liberty—the freedom to learn (A. N. Wilson 142). The idea of freedom largely appears in *Paradise Lost* under the guise of free will; Adam and Eve were created free to resist temptation, yet free to give in as well.

In 1645, some relatives of Milton reunited him with Mary, though the only evidence that we have is Edward Phillips’s account of the situation, who was only a boy at the time (A. N. Wilson 148). As Lewalski states, “However it happened, there was a reconciliation. [...] The attraction Milton initially felt toward Mary was perhaps rekindled, and he no doubt hoped that she, now three years older, would prove more conformable to his ways and more conversable” (*Life* 185). Other scholars have written somewhat more romantically about the reunion. The story as A. N. Wilson tells it, for example, strongly resembles Eve’s supplication to Adam when she recognizes their doom: Mary “knelt before [Milton], in tears of confusion, paying homage to her lord and her lover” (148). Either way, Mary’s apparent apology appears in *Paradise Lost*, a memorable event such as that could not have been forgotten.

In 1649, the war came to a close, and Charles I was tried and executed. Milton accepted the post of Secretary of Foreign Languages, and as Lewalski explains, “He was

gratified to be part of the daring experiment in republican government in a post that made use of his formidable linguistic and polemical skills. It was the kind of public service his whole life had prepared him for” (*Life* 236). His first assignment involved refuting the pamphlet *Eikon Basilike* or “King’s Book”; in response Milton wrote *Eikonoklastes* or “Imagebreaker,” which Labriola calls a “personal attack on Charles I” (157). Shawcross, however, states that Milton “does not argue against kingship (or the latter-day Protectorate), nor against kings: he argues against tyranny, which a Protector could exhibit as much as any king” (154).

Many scholars have suggested that Milton had anti-monarchal sympathies (Shawcross 132). He wrote several pamphlets which he felt addressed the liberty of the people, and he did not appreciate what Shawcross calls “Charles I’s misuse of power” (154). However, his loyalties remained with England rather than the Parliamentarians. Cromwell, though his idea of a republican government remained something that Milton supported, could not maintain the republic. When Cromwell died and his son stood ready to take the position of Protector, the reality of a monarchy returned. Lewalski explains, “Milton viewed with alarm the growing threat to his cherished goals of religious liberty and church disestablishment” (*Life* 283). The republic could not be maintained, and Cromwell seized control (A. N. Wilson 180). This proved to Milton that republicanism could not yet exist in England, so a monarchy must. Indeed, Milton preferred a monarch over civil war; thus in *Paradise Lost*, Heaven is a monarchy, not a republic.

Several of these issues appear in *Paradise Lost*, not only because they occurred closer to the time of composition but because they remained large disappointments in Milton’s experience. Monarchy exists in Heaven, tyranny exists in Hell, and Adam and

Eve possess the liberty that should exist in the Commonwealth. Another possibility that Shawcross points out concerns Cromwell as the Satan figure; Shawcross explains, “[P]erhaps some of the reading of Satan-as-hero and Milton’s being of the Devil’s party hangs over that identification. In general, at least, we can read in this period Milton’s approval of Cromwell’s foreign policies and action, and continued hope that domestic matters [...] can be altered” (156). Milton’s experiences, then, involve politics and men over his interactions with women; Milton would not have considered the women in his life at this time to be exceptional.

In 1652, during his employment as Secretary of Foreign Languages, Milton lost both his eyesight and his first wife. While Lewalski suggests that the loss of his sight was not unexpected—his eyes had been weakening for years—she explains that “the loss of Mary following so soon upon the total loss of his vision surely made his daily life more lonely and more difficult” (*Life* 278, 280). The loss of sight reappears in *Paradise Lost* with the blind narrator, and the loss of a partner exists in Eve’s fear of losing Adam.

After Milton became blind, he met and married Katherine Woodcock, whom A. N. Wilson describes as a “domestic helpmate who could look after the little girls, supervise the running of the household, prepare the meals, and above all provide [...] dear companionship” (188). Their marriage seems happy from what evidence exists, and this happiness appears in *Paradise Lost* before the Fall, when Adam and Eve enjoy each other socially and physically. Unfortunately, as Lewalski states, “Milton’s marital happiness with Katherine Woodcock was cut short by her death on February 3,” 1658 (*Life* 350). Though Katherine made a better wife than Mary, Katherine still could not be

considered an exceptional woman in terms of power and status because Katherine did not rise above the domestic, submissive role that suited most women.

When Charles II returned to claim the throne in 1660, Milton retired from political life, resuming his quiet life as a blind poet. With the help of various individuals who recorded his words, Milton dictated *Paradise Lost*, some of the influences of which have already been mentioned. As Labriola explains, “Because of its length, complexity, and consummate artistry, *Paradise Lost* is deemed Milton’s magnum opus, the great work for which he had prepared himself since youth” (181). Now, because of his blindness and lack of popularity with the current government, Milton had time to compose his epic, and since he may have felt his destiny coming to a close, he poured his knowledge and experience into his poem. As Labriola has pointed out, for example, Milton’s “description of Hell incorporates accounts of the volcanic fury of Mt. Aetna. [...] Coupled with this analogue and others, including classical descriptions of Hades, is Milton’s adaptation of details from Dante’s *Inferno*” (176). Milton, who loved to learn, included allusions to all the works he had read.

Perhaps Milton wanted to write an epic that scholars would debate for years. Perhaps he wanted to write a poem of epic proportions rather than simply a poem in a certain genre. Perhaps he wanted to include allusions for all the learned individuals to recognize and appreciate. Perhaps he wanted to write the best poem he could, despite his handicap. Milton had a great mind, and as Jack Lynch has stated, “[F]ew poets were more deeply involved in the recalcitrant facts of their time than Milton, whose most important work is a product of the Restoration” (405). Milton, who respected the exceptional

woman personified in Mary de Medicis and Elizabeth I, idealized his estimation of the extraordinary woman in the character of Eve before the Fall.

## Chapter Two: The Status of the Tragic Hero

According to Aristotle, the tragic hero must pass from “happiness to misery,” suffering a decline from his high status (1453a.15). Milton, proclaiming his epic a tragedy, would have been familiar with the Aristotelian tradition of tragedy and thus followed the formula. Milton relates a series of events in the life of Eve, although it necessarily involves Adam because he is her husband, and the poem ends in misery with Adam and Eve being forced out of Paradise. Milton deals seriously with the subject matter evident in his choice of the difficult epic poetry form and portrays Eve as his tragic hero. At the beginning of the poem, Milton portrays Eve with high status as an exceptional woman, illustrates that her ambition makes her accessible to the audience, and describes the warning she receives regarding her ambition.

Milton first addresses the human pair when Satan sees Adam and Eve for the first time; Milton describes the pair as

Two of far nobler shape erect and tall,  
 Godlike erect with native honor clad  
 In naked majesty, seemed lords of all.  
 And worthy seemed for in their looks divine  
 The image of their glorious Maker shone. (4.288-92)

Milton’s first words describe both Adam and Eve as “lords,” almost like gods of the earth. As in classical tragedies, Milton’s hero begins the tragedy as a king—or rather, in this case, a queen. Although a queen would have high status simply by being a queen, Elizabeth I’s recently successful reign brought out issues of class hierarchy. As a strong Queen Regnant, Elizabeth proved that a woman could be a figure of true power, despite

the accepted idea of women as the weaker vessels. However, Eve need not have been a monarch to have the high status necessary to match the formula of a tragic hero; taking *Antigone* as an example, even the daughter of the king has high status. In addition, Milton portrays *both* Adam and Eve as the “image” of God, “divine” in fact, thus stationed above a king or queen because monarchs existed after the Fall and so were imperfect.

After Milton presents Adam and Eve as the perfect human pair, he then differentiates between Adam and Eve, stating the often-quoted lines,

Not equal as their sex not equal seemed:

For contemplation he and valor formed,

For softness she and sweet attractive grace:

He for God only, she for God in him. (4.296-99)

Milton first mentions the woman’s inferiority, creating the hierarchy that remains necessary for his native England; as Elaine B. Safer explains, “The whole poem is structured on the concept of the hierarchy in which Adam’s dependence on God and Eve’s on Adam is central. Eve is subordinate to Adam. He, in turn, is lower than the angels, and they are lower than the Son, who acts as mediator between them and the Father” (10). Safer’s interpretation matches the beliefs of seventeenth-century English society in that hierarchy is necessary: merchants over peasants, nobles over merchants, monarch over everyone. Hierarchy also determined that women were always inferior to men.

However, Milton states “not equal seemed” rather than “not equal were.” Milton would not have made the choice of “seemed” carelessly. Milton does not say, for example, “He for God, she for Adam”; the inclusion of God in Eve’s purpose, though for

Adam, remains relevant. Eve may be delegated to the second position in Paradise because women were inferior to men in contemporary society, but Eve, as the exceptional woman, is still the first woman, mother of mankind, and “joint monarch [...] of an earthly paradise” (Lim 116). Therefore, the idea of Eve’s subordination to Adam does not affect Eve’s high status, if indeed she is inferior to Adam.

When Eve relates the first moments of her life, she describes how amazed by her own reflection she was. As she will later astound Adam with her beauty, she astounds herself, but she has the wisdom to follow the voice that calls to her. Even in submitting herself to Adam as his wife, “Eve preserves her own majesty and prerogative, stressing her capacity for insight and intimating the sapiential nature of her own character” (Dipasquale 51). She may be less knowledgeable or experienced, but as Milton portrays her, Eve is not inferior to Adam in intelligence, which becomes apparent in Book Nine.

The titles that Milton attributes to Eve, through Adam and other characters, also indicate Eve’s high status. Adam calls her “Fair consort,” (4.610) “Daughter of God and Man, accomplished Eve,” (4.660) and “Best image of myself and dearer half” (5.95). Raphael addresses Eve as “Mother of Mankind” (5.388). Milton would not bestow such grand titles on someone of low station. In fact, the comparison with Mary adds to Eve’s position; Diane McColley explains, “[B]y comparing *unfallen* Eve with Mary, Milton focuses attention on Eve’s virtues: if she had continued in obedience, he implies, Eve might have done her part in the generation of souls as fully as Mary was to do her part in the regeneration of souls” (“Shapes” 54). As Eve stands at this point in the poem, she has a status as high as any exceptional woman in history.

Eve is an exceptional woman because Milton portrays her as such. Being the mother of mankind does not make Eve exceptional, just as being a noblewoman did not make the Countess of Derby exceptional. Actions and attributes made the difference. Milton gave Eve virtues befitting an exceptional woman, particularly those virtues that would have made her the perfect wife. When Adam first speaks to God, he asks, “In solitude / What happiness? Who can enjoy alone / Or all enjoying what contentment find?” (8.364-66). Adam, though he lives in Paradise, wants more. However, he does not want more animals or inferiors:

Among unequals what society  
 Can sort, what harmony or true delight,  
 Which must be mutual in proportion due  
 Given and received?  
 [.....]  
 Of fellowship I speak  
 Such as I seek, fit to participate  
 All rational delight wherein the brute  
 Cannot be human consort. (8.383-86, 389-92)

As Anne Ferry explains, “This kind of union cannot take place, they say, between ‘unequals,’ but only between human beings both made in the image of God and therefore ‘fit to participate’ in ‘All rational delight’” (120). In Milton’s society, such a union could not truly exist between a man and a woman because of the equality issue. As Gregory Chaplin explains, “While traditional social arrangements, the reformed church, and numerous cultural traditions stressed the preeminence of the marital bond, works by

Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, and other classical authors taught that a friendship between two men, if practiced properly, was the perfect human relationship” (267). Though society stressed the marital bond, the woman remained inferior to the man, so Milton’s use of the perfect union in *Paradise Lost* has significance. Milton portrays Eve as the exceptional woman by making her suitable to fit Adam’s needs. Adam wants a partner who feeds his mind, his body, and his soul. Eve speaks intelligently with him, loves him (both emotionally and physically), and shares his devotion to God. No woman by English society’s standards could do such a thing. Eve, then, is an exceptional woman of high status.

Eve’s status, however, will be undermined by her ambition, which serves to make Eve a pitiable character rather than an “odious” one. Eve, being perfect, could not have a flaw, but she does have desires. As Thomas H. Blackburn explains, “Milton goes to lengths unprecedented [...] to make clear his belief that Adam and Eve were created with a full complement of human appetites” (130). For instance, when Adam and Eve return to their bower for the evening, Milton’s narrator states,

Not turned I ween

Adam from his fair spouse nor Eve the rites

Mysterious of connubial love refused,

Whatever hypocrites austerely talk

Of purity and place and innocence,

Defaming as impure what God declares

Pure and commands to some, leaves free to all. (4.741-47)

Milton clearly sexualizes Adam and Eve's relationship, despite the religious assumption that sex was sinful. Adam and Eve's love is merely one of their human appetites.

These human appetites would include not only those of the body but of the mind as well; Blackburn goes on to state, "None of these passions, however, is of itself incompatible with innocence: 'rightly tempered,' that is, exercised according to the dictates of reason and not 'sovrán' over it, the passions are the 'very ingredients' of that virtue which defines innocence" (131). Eve's ambition, then, constitutes merely an appetite of the mind, similar to curiosity and the yearning for knowledge. By giving Eve a variety of human appetites, Milton allows his audience to connect to his hero, a necessity if his tragedy was to succeed. However, none of Eve's appetites, even her ambition, constitutes a flaw unless pursued in excess.

Milton portrays the first hint of Eve's ambition after Satan whispers a dream into her ear at the end of Book Four. She seeks comfort from Adam, her true companion, saying that she dreamed "of offense and trouble which my mind / Knew never till this irksome night" (5.34-35). Though she has desired to learn, she has not to this point aspired to be more than her mortal form; this dream allows her the opportunity to explore the possibility. In the dream, thinking Adam called her in the night, she walks the garden, sees an angel, and hears him address the Tree of Knowledge and ask it, "Deigns none to ease thy load and taste thy sweet, / Nor god, nor man? Is knowledge so despised?" (5.59-60). Eve does not despise knowledge, so subconsciously the idea would deeply affect her. The angel eats the fruit in the dream and says, "Forbidden here, it seems, as only fit / For gods yet able to make gods of men" (5.69-70). The idea of eating the fruit herself enters Eve's mind; to aspire to be a god turns her innocent ambition into dangerous ambition.

As Labiola explains, “[W]hen reason is misled by the appetites, it is no longer effective” (179). When Eve’s reason no longer controls her ambition, she will fall.

Some scholars may argue that Eve disobeyed God’s command because she was inherently flawed, not merely taking a virtue to excess; for instance, Fredson Bowers suggests that Milton portrayed Eve with “weaker reason” and “vanity,” only two of her various “weaknesses” (265-66). Millicent Bell suggests that Adam and Eve had “corrupt” characteristics of fallen mankind even before the Fall; for if they had been free from all evil, the Fall would not have occurred (863). Blackburn disagrees, stating, “In the state of innocence, Adam and Eve live a total *experience* of good; their knowledge of evil, on the other hand, is conceptual” (126). Eve’s dream, then, merely informs Eve’s knowledge of evil, yet because she did not actually commit a sin, she remains untarnished by the dream, an argument Adam will use later to explain why Satan cannot harm them. Regardless, the dream scares Eve because she fears the consequences of disobedience, and the audience shares her fear.

At this point in the poem, Eve as tragic hero receives a warning of what will happen if she allows her ambition to rule her decisions. Adam tells her,

Evil into the mind of god or man  
 May come and go, so unapproved, and leave  
 No spot or blame behind. Which gives me hope  
 That what in sleep thou didst abhor to dream  
 Waking thou never wilt consent to do. (5.117-21)

Adam reminds Eve that God created her without imperfection, cautions her to follow Reason before Fancy, and concludes that she will not act as she did in the dream because

it made her fearful to think she could. According to Mandy Green, “Adam’s task [...] must include the pruning of any ambitious desire for pre-eminence on Eve’s part and the guidance of her back to his side should she attempt to reach beyond him” (“Vine” 311). Adam’s response to the dream and his advice to Eve constitute his attempts to “prune” Eve’s ambition. Believing her beyond temptation, Adam warns her in a short speech; considering the consequences of disobedience, perhaps Adam should have taken his task more seriously.

After Adam explains away the dream, the couple praises God’s creation. Then they turn to their work, caring for the garden. As Mandy Green states, “Milton rightly saw the interpretive possibilities in gardening; the first man and woman are both gardeners whose own right relation is often viewed in horticultural terms, suggesting deeply-rooted affinities between Adam and Eve and the garden they are themselves tending” (*Milton’s* 123). Despite Eve’s unsettling dream, Adam and Eve attend to their duties in the garden, sharing the responsibilities God has given them. That Adam and Eve continue life as normal without any difficulties or arguments proves that Eve’s dream did not affect her yet sinless nature, and Milton uses the imagery of the vine and the elm, an Ovidian allusion, to illustrate Adam and Eve’s current relationship.

As Milton describes Adam and Eve’s work in the garden, he also compares Adam and Eve directly to the Ovidian image of the vine and elm:

[S]he espoused about him twines  
 Her marriageable arms and with her brings  
 Her dow’r, th’ adopted clusters, to adorn  
 His barren leaves. (5.211-19)

As Green explains in her article “The Vine and her Elm,” “The vine is a composite image[....] On the one hand, it proclaims [Eve’s] weakness, her dependence on Adam, and her vulnerability without his supporting presence; on the other it becomes a symbol of her active and independent power, a celebration of her beauty and fruitfulness” (302). Green has made the connection that the vine and elm imagery came directly from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, particularly from “Vertumnus’s wooing of the fair gardener and goddess of fruit trees” (“Vine” 305). In the *Metamorphoses*, Vertumnus points to the perfect wedding of the vine and the elm as an example of why Pomona should accept his marriage proposal; however, Milton not only uses Ovid’s device of the vine and elm, he expands upon it: “While Ovid does concede that without his female companion the elm’s shady leaves would still be of intrinsic worth, Milton, as if deliberately answering him on this point, denies even this attribute to be of any value” (Green “Vine” 306). Adam and Eve depend on each other. After Eve’s horrible dream, she needs Adam’s comfort. After hearing about Eve’s dream, Adam needs to comfort her. Their relationship remains intact.

At this point in the poem, Eve maintains her high status, though the dream has awakened her ambition. However, Eve remains perfect; as Blackburn explains, “Informed and sophisticated rather than naïve or childlike, [Adam and Eve’s] innocence consists not of no acquaintance with evil but of no taint by it, of sinless rather than ignorance of sin” (124). Adam and Eve receive further education regarding sin and evil from Raphael, including Satan’s attacks against God and the angels. Thus, “Adam and Eve thereby know *of* evil (though it is not until their Fall that they know evil in the same sense as Satan does)” (Blackburn 124). Through Raphael’s speeches regarding Satan’s actions, Adam and Eve receive strict warnings against disobedience.

During Raphael's visit and after Eve has left the bower, Adam voices his concerns about Eve's influence over him. Raphael admonishes him with the standard Biblical ideas, such as the man is the "head" and the woman will "acknowledge" his superiority (8.574). Adam's response, however, reflects the more equal, perfect relationship that remains impossible according to Milton's contemporary society. In fact, as Ferry explains, "Adam's speech is therefore the culmination of Milton's efforts to lift Eve's unfallen nature out of the place assigned to it in the Old and New Testaments" (124). Milton, through Adam, again confirms Eve's status as an exceptional woman because she does not fall into the standard form dictated by the Bible. Despite the dream, Eve remains an exception; Milton develops Eve's exceptional nature further in Book Nine when he portrays her as equal to Adam in status and superior to him in intelligence.

The first mention of Adam and Eve in Book Nine refers to the work that God gave them, the tending of the Garden, and the fact that the Garden continues to grow, past what Adam and Eve are able to handle. Eve offers a solution to this, illustrating her desire to do God's work and to do it efficiently. They will separate and accomplish more because as Eve explains, "For while so near each other thus all day / Our task we choose what wonder if, so near, / Looks intervene and smiles" (9.220-22). Eve here shows a higher calling than Adam. She wants to do God's work well, not in some haphazard fashion, always distracted by him and he by her. According to Diane McColley, "Eve's awareness of this responsibility is also an awareness that what concerns her most, [Adam and Eve's] growing love for one another, will remain harmonious in proportion to their responsiveness to the harmony of all creation" ("Free" 115). Eve not only wants to do God's work, she wants to deepen her relationship with Adam.

In contrast, Adam does not concern himself with the work undone or the lack of progress. They live in Paradise after all. His proximity to Eve, his companion, comes first in his mind because her presence makes him happy. However, seeing his companion concerned about their work, Adam reminds Eve of the danger lurking in the Garden. While Eve's suggestion addresses one problem, Adam states, it ignores another. If they remain together, Satan's attempts to subvert them will fail because Adam will be there to support and protect Eve. At this point, Milton interjects some of Eve's personality and intelligence. Milton writes, "To whom the virgin majesty of Eve / As one who loves and some unkindness meets / With austere composure thus replied" (9.270-72). Eve hears an insult in Adam's words, and she reacts. She loves, Milton states, but she feels offended too. Instead of shouting at Adam as a child or an inferior might, she reminds him calmly that she heard the warning—from him and the angel—and she has not forgotten it. Eve then proceeds to voice her concern that Adam doubts her.

Adam, having hurt his companion rather than consoled her, tries to make amends. He wishes to avoid the temptation altogether because Satan's tempting of Eve will "dishonor" her (9.297). Adam then states that he remains a stronger person in her presence, and she should feel the same in his presence, which seems to confirm in Eve's mind that Adam believes her to be imperfect. Once Eve voices this response, Adam loses his calm composure. As Milton states, "[T]hus Adam fervently replied: / O Woman! best are all things as the will / Of God ordained them" (9.342-44). Adam attempts to make it clear to Eve that God made them perfect and gave them reason, yet free will can allow deception to lead reason astray, but God did make them perfect. As McColley explains, "Adam's reply is an argument [...] for attentiveness in making responsible choices"

(“Free” 119). However, Adam’s tone blurs the message, and he fumes until he finally tells Eve to go. Eve remains calm, accepting Adam’s dismissal even though she appreciates the implications it could have, “that our trial when least sought / May find us both perhaps far less prepared” (9.380-81).

Eve’s ambition fuels her desire to separate from Adam. She wants to do God’s work well, unhindered by the threat of Satan who she thinks cannot undo her. She aspires to be the better gardener because she feels that will please God more and will improve her relationship with Adam. She wants to be more than she is. Because of Adam’s overreaction, Eve then wants to prove that she is as perfect as God made her. Her ambition drives her to continue the argument, to seek understanding of Adam’s logic, and to leave when he tells her to go.

According to Bernard Paris, Eve “behaves as she does in the separation scene because she is rebelling against a lack of respect” (69). This interpretation implies a child or inferior reacting to the unfair assumption of status. However, the characters’ actions do not support this interpretation. Throughout the scene, Eve maintains her composure easily while an inferior might be tempted to lash out. Also, Eve rationalizes the discussion, pointing out a flaw in Adam’s argument—to be tempted does *not* mean to be dishonored, something he had explained to her earlier. Eve considers the argument in a logical fashion; she does not rebel against Adam’s control. She tries to understand his position and wants him to explain it in logical, not emotional, terms. As Barbara Lewalski states, “Adam not only ceased to press his own case forcefully and rationally under the pressure of Eve’s dismay, but at length he virtually sent her away” (“Milton” 13). If anyone rebels

in this scene, Adam does, and he does so because he would rather be with Eve than be without her.

Regardless of Adam's inner desires, Eve leaves him and tends the Garden alone. At this point, Milton shifts to Satan's perspective, and we see Eve from the outside. Separated from Adam, she continues her work, tending to the flowers she has lovingly named and supporting them as she passes. Though she seems to meander through the Garden, she acts on God's wishes as she goes. Doing God's work makes her glow with happiness, so much so that even Satan pauses to admire her. Milton portrays her here as pure and sweet, truly unfallen.

Milton's description of Eve at this point in the poem is as follows:

She, busied, heard the sound  
Of rustling leaves but minded not as used  
To such disport before her through the field  
From every beast more duteous at her call  
Than at Circean call the herd disguised. (9.518-22)

Some scholars have focused on Eve's "Circean call" to the creatures in Paradise, arguing the negative comparison of Eve to Circe, the demi-goddess who ensnared men and turned them into beasts. McColley refutes this interpretation, explaining that

the passage not only declares Eve superior [to Circe] but invites us to make distinctions. The beasts of Eden are not only more obedient than Circe's; they obey in the only way God's creatures can obey in an unfallen world—voluntarily. Circe's beasts are bewitched and debased men; Eve's are real beasts, those "Innumerable living creatures" God has called forth

from the earth, has blessed, and has pronounced good. They disport themselves before Eve out of sheer desire to please, a natural response to a guardian whose dominion is gracious, temperate, and just. Further, while the situations are analogous, the roles are reversed. This time it is the tempter who is disguised as a beast and the lady who will be bewitched. Circe's beasts obey her only after they have fallen; Eve's obey her only before she falls. ("Shapes" 52)

Eve's reasons for being alone in the Garden correspond to the way Milton portrays her here and to whom he compares her. Eve tends the Garden as God has commanded, and the beasts admire her because she is perfect, the exceptional woman.

Milton maintains Eve as the exceptional woman as long as she is pure, up to the moments before Satan begins to tempt her and her ambition completely takes over. Even Satan, who has nothing left in him but evil, perceives Eve's high status, a position which seems untouchable, and hesitates in tempting her. A woman as perfect and exceptional as Eve should not be tarnished by sin. Reminiscent of Elizabeth I and other great noble women, Eve surpasses them in this moment. Satan witnesses Eve's last perfect moments and then plans to pull the tragic hero down by her ambition.

Eve's high status as the mother of mankind and a "joint monarch" of Paradise provide her the position that is necessary for a tragic hero, according to the Aristotelian tradition. Like Oedipus or Hamlet, she has much to lose. Her ambition, though somewhat less apparent than the pride demonstrated by these two famous tragic heroes, will prove to be her downfall. She will make an error of judgment in listening to the serpent and will aspire to be a god. Eve receives a warning regarding the consequences if she follows the

path of ambition—disobedience, a decline in her high position, and possibly death. Eve presses on, desiring to work separately from Adam because of her ambition and placing herself in a position where her ambition will override her reason. Like Oedipus and Hamlet, she will fall.

### Chapter Three: The Decline of the Tragic Hero

Eve's fall occurs in Book Nine of *Paradise Lost* as a result of her ambition.

However, according to Aristotle, the tragic hero is “a man not preeminently virtuous and just, whose misfortune, however, is brought upon him not by vice and depravity but by some error of judgement” (1453a.7-11). Although Eve's ambition ultimately causes her fall, she makes the mistaken judgment of considering the serpent's argument. Through the small act of giving the serpent her attention, she listens to the words that will fuel her ambition. Although Milton portrays Eve as equal to Adam in status, he also portrays her as superior to Adam in intelligence, providing Satan with the circumstances most advantageous to a successful temptation.

From the beginning, Satan flatters her, awed as he still is by her beauty. She likes such flattery as “[a] goddess among gods adored,” but Adam flatters her often, so she knows flattery when she hears it (9.547). She appreciates the serpent's words; he admires God's creation, after all, and therefore, admires God. Some scholars, namely A. J. A. Waldock, have suggested that the line “Into the heart of Eve his words made way” (9.550) indicates “a weakening in Eve's defences [*sic*]” (35). However, Eve—“[n]ot unamazed”—addresses the issue of a talking serpent rather than the skill with which Satan flatters her (9.552). Considering that Adam compliments her often, Eve would not lower her defenses when she hears more compliments, even if those compliments are better stated and more grand than those she has heard before. If Eve lowers her defenses at all, it is because she has not encountered a talking snake before.

Eve remains calm, though, not distressed by the phenomenon nor distracted by it. She shows her perception of her adversary by calling the serpent the “subtlest of beasts of

all the field” (9.560). Eve then asks the serpent how he came to speak as a human does. Her curiosity requires her to pursue knowledge when it presents itself, and she does not turn down this opportunity. By demonstrating Eve’s human appetites, Milton portrays feelings and desires to which his audience could relate, and by allowing the audience to understand Eve’s actions, Milton gives the audience the opportunity to fear her choice and to pity her because of her choice.

Eve continues to listen to the serpent as Satan speaks of a tree, wistfully recalling “the scent / Of that alluring fruit” (9.587-88). He narrates how he came to acquire his new-found knowledge, layering his speech with flattery that even Eve cannot ignore. She states, “Serpent, thy overpraising leaves in doubt / The virtue of that fruit in thee first proved” (9.615-16). She addresses the excessive nature of his flattery rather than basking in the pleasure of it. She seems to know intuitively that Satan’s adoration of her borders on idolatry. Although she remains consciously unaware of the name of the sin, Eve is intelligent enough to recognize the danger and warns Satan to avoid falling into it.

Eve’s curiosity and desire for knowledge drive her to ask the serpent to lead her to this tree, for she does not know all of the trees in Paradise, and she wishes to see the fruit that granted a snake the ability to speak. Satan believes he has already succeeded in causing Eve’s destruction: “Hope elevates and joy / Brightens his crest” (9.633-34). However, when Eve first sees the tree, she does not immediately take the fruit and eat. She hesitates, explaining

But of this tree we may not taste nor touch:

God so commanded and left that command

Sole daughter of His voice. The rest we live

Law to ourselves: our reason is our law. (9.651-54)

Eve clearly understands at this point in the poem what it means to follow God's command and to follow her own reason; "Eve does not say that her decision to obey God's command is one that is independent of the reason that is her law. She does not, that is, exclude reason as a ground for believing that God is just and good and worthy to be obeyed. [...] Nor does Eve say that God's commands in any way conflict with what reason tells her to do" (Walker 153). At this point, Eve has chosen by using her reason and intelligence and her knowledge of God. She chooses to obey; she chooses reason over her human appetite of ambition. At this time, Eve does not intend to disregard God's command and eat the fruit, despite the "evidence" of a talking snake. At this point, Eve makes an error of judgment. She does not immediately return to her work in the Garden; she listens to the serpent, providing Satan the opportunity he needs.

Satan, hearing Eve's position, must confuse Eve's morality and intelligence with his best rhetoric. Satan praises the tree as a "wisdom-giving plant," almost worshipping it as Eve and Adam worship God every morning (9.679). Satan flatters Eve, calling her "Queen of this universe," hoping still to use compliments to distract her from using reason correctly on his next argument (9.684). He calls God's command into question, using himself as an example. The serpent did not die; why should she? Satan even twists God's command completely around, saying that God would glorify her for her courage to face death and eat the forbidden fruit.

Waldock describes Satan's rhetoric as "a flashing string of incompatibilities, a glittering exhibition of plausible thought and spurious logic; and Eve, naturally, is bewildered" (36). Can she be blamed? Not only does a serpent, not previously endowed

with human speech, talk at length with her, but he speaks passionately, starting with logic and twisting it with deceit. Unfallen as she is, Eve must rely on her intelligence and reason, and her reasoning rests on one assumption, which as an unfallen being she cannot be expected to refute (Revard 76). Eve assumes that the serpent speaks because the tree endowed him with that power. If the serpent ate and did not die and learned the ability to speak, it follows that the tree grants knowledge and not death. As an intelligent being, Eve craves knowledge and learning. She should not be blamed for her inability to recognize a false assumption, but she is, both in Milton's text and society as a whole, because Eve is a woman.

The blame placed on Eve spurred a political debate concerning hierarchy. As Shannon Miller explains, "Social and political stability depended upon the maintenance of gender identities" and Milton attempts "to stabilize the debate about gender" (63, 64). Although women were considered inferior to men, some women fought back, writing pamphlets aligning themselves with the figure of Eve. After the absolutist monarchy of Charles I and the failure of the republic during the Interregnum, the English government again became a monarchy, but the unrest regarding hierarchy remained. Milton realized that the government and the people needed the gender hierarchy intact, particularly after the Civil War which threatened the monarchy, so Milton places the blame for the Fall on Eve, which she later accepts. Eve receives the blame because she is a woman, but she made the choice to eat the fruit based on the acceptance of a false assumption, not malicious intent.

In regards to this assumption, Northrop Frye has suggested that Eve was "fascinated by the image of the talking snake," unable to listen to Satan's actual words

(77). However, before Eve truly decides to eat the fruit, Milton tells us that she has heard Satan's words and she wants to eat the fruit: "[H]is words replete with guile / Into her heart too easy entrance won. / Fixed on the fruit she gazed" (9.733-35). If she had been enamored with the vision of the talking serpent, her gaze would still rest on his miraculous form. Yet Milton tells us that Eve turned her attention to the tree. Satan's disguise did not distract Eve from God's command; Satan's twisted logic persuaded her to follow her ambition rather than her reason and consider disobedience.

Satan's final temptation speech challenges Eve's reason in another way. According to Richard Arnold, Milton believed "that the human condition is blessed with the gift of right reason, and that this is humankind's highest faculty, which conjoins thinking *and* action" and that the failure of right reason is the descent into "pure reason," a condition that involves thinking without consideration for anything else (60). Eve's internal monologue illustrates this principle. God commanded Adam and Eve not to touch or taste of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, yet when Eve descends into theoretical considerations, she ignores God's command. She knows how she must act, yet she thinks about the serpent and reasons her way around God's command, as Arnold states, "getting totally lost in the maze of pure reason" (67). While Eve follows God's law, she acts correctly and she thinks correctly, which constitutes right reason. Her initial reaction when she sees the tree illustrates this principle. However, when Eve considers only Satan's argument—eat the fruit—and not what she *should* do according to God's commands, she strays to pure reason, a state of mind that strictly involves theory without regard for right actions. Once she relies on pure reason, she cannot do anything but fall because pure reason, fueled by her ambition in this case, overrides right reason. Her

decision to eat the fruit, then, is not an error of judgment but rather a loss of control over the human appetite of ambition.

After disobeying God's command and eating the fruit, she further sins by praising the tree as she once praised God, promising to offer thanks to it every morning for the knowledge she has gained. She glorifies her new position and the choice that raised her up (if only temporarily). She considers her new vast knowledge and wonders what to do about Adam—to share her new-found knowledge or to keep it and be superior? Then, as C. S. Lewis explains, “[P]resently [Eve] remembers that the fruit may, after all, be deadly. She decides that if she is to die, Adam must die with her; it is intolerable that he should be happy, and happy (who knows?) with another woman when she is gone” (125). Lewis states that this decision constitutes “Murder” (125). Although the reasoning makes sense, jealousy, not intended murder, motivates Eve to want Adam to join her in sin. She does not intend to extinguish his life so that she can live supreme, a choice her ambition could dictate. Instead, she chooses to be with Adam, in life or death, and at this point, she does not anticipate death; rather, she fears the possibility and wants to protect herself from it. Surely God will not destroy *both* of his creations. She knows she has disobeyed, and using more pure reason, she tries to find a way to avoid punishment. She seeks to hold on to her new status and her new knowledge. Having Adam join her solves both of her problems—she will not be alone or he with another, and perhaps God will spare them both. Her desperation makes her a pitiable character because she realizes the possible consequences of her mistake and hopes to avoid the inevitable.

Adam seeks her out when she does not return on time, and Eve rushes to him, quick to explain to him her trespass, but again, Adam and Eve's dispositions illustrate the

difference between them. Eve speaks “with bland words” (9.855) and “with count’nance blithe her story told” (9.886). She controls her words and expressions in an attempt to maintain her composure, but her body betrays her: “But in her cheek distemper flushing glowed” (9.887). Eve knows what she is doing; she knows she is tempting Adam to join her in disobedience and that she is asking him to sin with her. She speaks calmly and boldly, in an attempt to keep the upper hand that her intelligence gives her (while her superiority lasts), but her body, still made in the image of God, cannot lie. Adam overlooks Eve’s blush and responds to her calm words with only one answer—that he will eat the fruit too, “for with thee / Certain my resolution is to die!” (9.906-07)

According to Waldock, “It is to be observed that Eve has had no chance as yet to coax or persuade; within the first few appalled moments Adam has come uninfluenced to his resolve” (46). However, Eve’s mere presentation of her act constitutes her influence upon Adam. Just after she eats the fruit, Eve feels “heightened as with wine” and rejoices in her decision, yet when she explains herself to Adam, she is mild and carefree (9.793). Taking the deceit she has recently learned from Satan, she uses it intelligently on Adam. The first few lines of her address to him mention the pain of separation from him—something Adam felt dearly even as she left earlier in Book Nine—and Adam cannot ignore the implication that she would leave again if he did not join her in sin. Eve tactfully uses what she knows of Adam’s feelings and draws him into sin with her, focusing on his desire to keep her—similar to the beginnings of Eve’s ambition. In comparison, Satan had a long conversation with Eve, finally convincing her to sin after causing her to employ pure reason. Adam falls because Eve implies that he should, so he eats. Satan had to work against Eve’s intelligence and subvert her reason to her ambition;

Eve merely swept across Adam's intelligence by encouraging him to make a decision based on emotion rather than reason. Adam's disobedience is not an error of judgment because he did not use logic to make his choice.

When he finally responds to her, Adam explains the reasoning to Eve regarding why he eats the fruit, taking Eve's reasons and making them his own—the serpent *could* talk, the serpent *did* not die, maybe God *will* forgive a little disobedience, surely he will not kill them both and let Satan win, and true, separation is worse than death. Eve, quick learner that she is, praises Adam, using a similar level of flattery on Adam that Satan used on her: "Illustrious evidence, example high, / Engaging me to emulate! But short / Of thy perfection how shall I attain" (9.962-64). In her passion, Eve resembles Satan, and she thanks Adam for choosing their marriage over God, trying to reassure him that if she really thought they would die, she would not involve him, a lie in relation to her earlier statement. They embrace, Eve happy that he has chosen her, Adam sad that he must disobey to be with her.

When Adam eats the fruit, even Milton points to Adam's unintelligent act: "Adam took no thought, / Eating his fill" (9.1004-05). Eve then consoles Adam because she sees the pain he feels as he disobeys, and their lust illustrates the result of the Fall because their physical intimacy does not resemble the perfect love they once enjoyed. As Walter S. H. Lim states, "It is no mere narrative accident that Milton's depiction of the original fall coincides with, is indeed inseparable from, the disintegration of the marital relationship between Adam and Eve" (118). Eve's love becomes distorted when she chooses to bring Adam into disobedience with her; she chooses herself over her love for him. Adam's love becomes distorted when he sees Eve, not as his companion, but as an

object to possess: “He on Eve / Began to cast lascivious eyes” (9.1013-14). They no longer resemble the perfect couple they once were because they are now fallen. Their descent from the high status of perfect beings in the “image of God” begins.

However, all blame does not rest on Eve alone. Although Eve disobeys and eats the fruit first, the Fall remains incomplete until Adam eats the fruit. As a married couple, they are “one flesh” and therefore count as one unit (8.499). The Fall occurs when both halves of the one whole commit the same sin. Together, Adam and Eve bear the hope of humanity. Together they fail and lose Paradise. Adam and Eve’s marriage holds particular significance because, as Anne Ferry explains,

Their marriage is the fulfillment of ideal human experience; its near destruction is an image of human damnation. Milton of course follows the dictates of Genesis in making Eve the temptress of Adam, but by contrast with centuries of fiercely misogynist renderings of the story, Milton’s in Book IX is balanced in the presentation of their falls. He expresses toward both Eve and Adam a mixture of sorrow and anger, sympathy and judgment. (125)

In both cases, the moment that Eve and Adam eat the fruit, the earth and nature groan. In Eve’s case, “Earth felt the wound and Nature from her seat / Sighing through all her works gave signs of woe / That all was lost” (9.782-84). In Adam’s case, “Earth trembled from her entrails as again / In pangs and Nature gave a second groan” (9.1000-01). Earth and Nature personify Milton’s judgment in these lines. Milton places the blame on both Adam and Eve here. Eve began the Fall; Adam finished it. But Milton also shows sympathy, most clearly in regards to Eve: “Greedily she engorged without restraint / And

knew not eating death” (9.791-92). Sorrow and knowledge lie beneath those words, sorrow because Milton and his audience understand just what has been lost. While Eve enjoys the fruit, lost in the glorious taste of it, we feel pity that she has just lost Paradise for herself—and we feel fear because Adam will soon lose Paradise for him and us.

Further evidence that Milton placed the blame on both Adam and Eve exists in the comparison of Adam and Eve to the Biblical story of Samson (Lim 121). Lim explains, “The tragedy of the fall as a shared experience is [...] accentuated by this posture of Adam and Eve awakening simultaneously from a nightmare and finding it to have come true” (121). Just as Samson “waked / Shorn of his strength” (9.1061-62), Adam and Eve are “destitute and bare / Of all their virtue” (9.1062-63). Milton’s portrayal of the pair now recalls the pity and fear mentioned previously, perhaps even recalls the current state of all human beings.

Although the Fall remained incomplete until Adam chose to eat the fruit, Eve’s ambition caused the Fall. She made the mistake of listening to the serpent and considering his argument, which caused her to aspire to greatness. Her ambition drove her to eat the fruit and to tempt Adam into eating as well. That Eve needed Adam’s cooperation to complete the Fall does not affect Eve’s status as tragic hero. The tragic hero does not act in a vacuum; Oedipus, for example, had the help of his wife and daughters in the events that led up to his downfall. His wife and daughters also shared in his downfall. That Eve brings down Adam too only follows the tragic tradition (while following the Genesis story at the same time).

After Adam and Eve eat and engage in sinful sexual activities, Adam immediately bemoans their fallen status, blaming Eve for listening to Satan’s voice (which he

correctly assumes was Eve's error of judgment) and wanting desperately to hide from God, angels, and even Eve's glance. Eve remains curiously silent at this moment, and Milton remains silent also on her reaction and disposition. Adam could be wailing at the trees or the skies for all the response Eve gives him. When he suggests that they cover themselves with fig leaves, they "both together went / Into the thickest wood," Eve's presence found only in the plural pronoun (9.1099-1100).

When their feelings overwhelm them—"anger, hate, / Mistrust, suspicion, discord," Adam speaks first (9.1123-24). He blames Eve for desiring to leave him, and he believes the Fall would not have happened if she had only stayed near him. Eve responds, though Milton's description of her at this point in the poem is unusually vague; Milton does not identify Eve's expression or tone of voice. Adam speaks "[f]rom thus distempered breast" (9.1131) while Eve is "moved with touch of blame" (9.1143). Adam, as he always seems to be in these arguments, shows his displeasure and cries out, more emotionally than Eve. Eve even responds to his vehemence, addressing him as "Adam severe" (9.1144). She feels the guilt of their disobedience, but she does not need to place the blame on anyone else—until Adam places the blame on her. The following disagreement resembles an argument between children, a he-did-she-did type of situation, with no clear ending.

While Milton illustrates the disintegration of Paradise in this episode, he also comments on the status of women in general. Many scholars have pointed to Adam's speeches, particularly his final words in Book Nine, as evidence that Milton was a misogynist and thought women should be delegated to the secondary role. Although Milton does not portray Eve as the exceptional reasoning being that she was earlier in the

poem, Milton does not portray her as the standard woman of society either; as Miller explains, “Eve’s arguments are hardly satisfying, relying as they do on redirected blame and contradictory logic[....] Yet the true significance of this passage lies not in the terms of her defense, but in the fact that she defends herself at all” (58-59). Eve remained silent during Adam’s first bemoaning of their situation. She silently followed his lead when they searched for fig leaves and sewed them together, but when Adam verbally assaults her, she fights back—because she is Adam’s equal. She knows her intelligence now, and she knows her pride. Even though she has a weak argument—Adam should have commanded her to stay—she defends herself. Even though her argument is based on the accepted principle that she *is* inferior, the fact that she fights that accepted principle illustrates that she is *not* inferior. In addition, her ambition requires her to respond; she grasps to maintain the superiority she had, though that will fall away because of the consequences of the Fall.

Throughout Book Nine, Milton states several times that Eve is inferior to Adam, but in each situation where Adam and Eve are involved, Milton portrays Eve as anything but the inferior. She intelligently spars with Satan, ignoring flattery, pointing out flaws, but inevitably losing to the deceitful logic of the serpent and her own ambition. She quickly acquires the skill of deceit and manipulation and easily tempts Adam into eating the fruit himself, and when Adam blames her viciously for their situation, she fights back with the only argument she has. Although Milton repeats that Eve is inferior, her words and actions continually disagree. Milton portrays Eve as the exceptional woman, highlighting her attributes—her beauty, her intelligence, and her status as Adam’s equal—and Book Nine proves to be the last time Milton portrays Eve as exceptional.

From this point, Eve suffers the consequences of her ambition, which include the inevitable assumption that women are inferior to men.

#### Chapter Four: The Misfortunes of the Tragic Hero

For much of *Paradise Lost*, Milton portrays Eve as the exceptional woman. From her high status to her ambition to the judgment error that she makes, Eve matches the Aristotelian idea of a tragic hero. The final piece of Aristotle's formula involves the consequences that befall the hero: "[T]he change in the hero's fortunes must be not from misery to happiness, but on the contrary from happiness to misery" (1453a.13-15). Eve, originally created equal to Adam in "the image of God," now becomes Adam's true inferior, taking her place beneath her husband as was expected of a woman in Milton's patriarchal society.

At the end of Book Nine, Adam and Eve engage in the attempt to assign blame. At the beginning of Book Ten, the Son descends from Heaven to pass judgment upon them. As in the Biblical account, Adam and Eve hide from the figure of God; in Milton's account, God's place is taken by the Son. As in the Bible story, God calls out for Adam, and the human pair appears, Adam explaining that they hid because they were naked. God asks, "That thou art naked, who / Hath told thee?" (10.121-22) Adam's long speech includes a lament for the disobedience that has occurred, an explanation of the fear to blame his "other self," and finally the act of boldly accusing Eve of giving him the fruit (10.128). Adam states in regards to Eve, "From her hand I could suspect no ill" (10.140). God responds, "Was she thy God that her thou didst obey / Before His voice?" (10.145-46) God does not immediately turn to Eve and demand why she caused Adam to disobey; He first addresses Adam's mistake. As Bernard Paris explains, "One of the greatest lessons of the Fall is the importance of male dominance and female submission" (92). God takes the first opportunity to impress this lesson upon His creation.

Once Adam has been rebuked, God turns to Eve and asks her to explain her actions. Eve's simple response—"The serpent me beguiled and I did eat"—illustrates Eve's acceptance of her sin (10.162). She does not defend her actions; she does not lament her situation as Adam does; she states the facts. Milton even describes her as not "[b]old or loquacious" but as "abashed" (10.161). Contrasted with her earlier speeches in conversations with both Adam and the serpent, this single line does not match the eloquence that Milton usually puts into her words. Milton subtly indicates that Eve realizes the mistake was hers and accepts that the punishment will also be hers.

God hears Eve's short testimony and turns directly to the serpent to cast judgment. Though God rebuked Adam regarding his responsibilities for Eve, God neglects to address Eve about her responsibilities to follow Adam and her own reason. Although some scholars could construe this omission as proof that Eve *is* inferior to Adam, the fact remains that Milton did not take this opportunity to *reinforce* Eve's inferiority. Instead Milton continues with the Biblical account of the judgment: the serpent will crawl forever, the woman will suffer the pains of childbirth, the man will face hard labor, and death will eventually come to humankind.

The judgment given, God returns to Heaven, leaving Adam and Eve to absorb the realities of the lives they will not lead. Adam does not handle the situation well, lamenting,

All that I eat or drink or shall beget  
Is propagated curse. O voice once heard  
Delightfully, "increase and multiply,"  
Now death to hear! For what can I increase

Or multiply but curses on my head?

[.....]

Be it so, for I submit, His doom is fair:

That dust I am and shall to dust return.

O welcome hour whenever! Why delays

His hand to execute what His decree

Fixed on this day? (10.728-32, 769-73)

Adam focuses on himself and his own personal sorrows, quickly expanding those sorrows to include his progeny. He does not, however, think of Eve; Adam is entirely self-centered at this point in the poem. Eve, on the other hand, thinks not of herself but of Adam. Although it is likely she could not have missed Adam's soliloquy had she tried, she seeks him out: "[A]pproaching nigh, / Soft words to his fierce passion she assayed" (10.864-65). Adam, upon seeing her, rejects her: "Out of my sight, thou serpent! That name best / Befits thee with him leagued" (10.867-68). Adam follows the same pattern he has demonstrated in other discussions/arguments with Eve; he speaks rashly and passionately while she remains calm.

Adam's reproach of Eve proves to be another long speech, at the end of which, he turns away from her, unable to continue. Adam is "repulsed" by her, but Eve, "Not so repulsed, with tears that ceased not flowing / And tresses all disordered at his feet / Fell humble" (10. 910-12). She abandons logical discourse and falls to pleading, a pitiable action. Milton has replaced the intelligent, exceptional woman who mentally sparred with Satan with a submissive, inferior woman. Eve's decline from her high status is complete. As Daniel Doerksen has pointed out, Eve's "prostration [...] signifies humility—an

essential element in biblical peacemaking” (127). At this point, Eve becomes the peacemaker: “Between us two let there be peace” (10.924). Eve needs to repair the relationship she shares with Adam because she loves him: “[W]itness Heaven, / What love sincere and reverence in my heart / I bear thee” (10.914-16). She loves Adam so much she will take all of the punishment so that he may be spared:

There with my cries importune Heav’n that all  
 The sentence from thy head removed may light  
 On me, sole cause to thee of all this woe,  
 Me, me only just object of his ire! (10.932-36)

Eve’s words illustrate just how far she is willing to go for Adam; she will bear the pain and misery alone so that Adam can remain in Paradise, where he obviously wishes to stay. Eve also recognizes that the Fall occurred because of her own ambition and error in judgment. Had she not desired to separate from Adam and had she not listened to the serpent and eaten the fruit, Eve assumes Adam would never have disobeyed; therefore, everything is her fault. She believes she can take the punishment on herself and save Adam.

Other scholars have suggested that Eve’s speech does not have such high motivations. According to Jun Harada, Eve “is engaging in self-aggrandizement by boasting of incurring all the penalty on herself alone” (547). However, Eve remains prostrate on the ground at Adam’s feet, which is hardly conducive to boasting. Another scholar, Georgia Christopher, states that Eve’s “wild offer expresses the ultimate in vulnerability: she will risk anything rather than be left totally alone. Simply because her offer is an unconsidered and almost instinctive gesture of self-preservation, it happens to

be brilliantly, though unconsciously, manipulative” (75). The image of Eve weeping at Adam’s feet results in “his heart relent[ing] / Towards her” (10.940-41) and so could be construed as successful manipulation; however, Eve offers to take the punishment completely upon herself, meaning she will be ejected from Paradise while Adam stays and she will suffer eventual death while Adam does not. If anything, Eve wants to be alone (because then Adam will be happy in Paradise) and she disregards self-preservation (because if she dies, Adam does not). As Green explains, Eve “offers her life out of love” (*Milton’s* 194).

Eve’s first supplication to Adam contrasts with her testimony to God regarding her guilt. When she admits her fault to God for judgment, she says one line, her rhetoric simple and plain. When she pleads with Adam to make peace, though she kneels at his feet, she speaks eloquently:

Thy suppliant,  
 I beg and clasp thy knees. Bereave me not  
 Whereon I live: thy gentle looks, thy aid,  
 Thy counsel, in this uttermost distress  
 My only strength and stay! (10.917-21)

Eve, though now fallen, retains the ability to speak beautiful diction. Although ultimately Milton writes the words (or rather, dictates them to someone else), Milton uses Eve’s speeches as a primary way of portraying the change in her character. Previous speeches involved complicated logic and reason; later speeches involve passion and submission; all of them (except the one to God) include complex syntax and eloquent style.

In response to Eve's supplication and her offer of self-sacrifice, Adam raises her up from the ground and says, "If prayers / Could alter high decrees I to that place / Would speed before thee and be louder heard" (10.952-54). Adam's words demonstrate his compassion for Eve and his own acceptance of their situation. Instead of the passionate and irrational nature of his words to Eve at their separation before the Fall, Adam now demonstrates reason: they cannot change the judgment God has given them. However, Adam then "proposes the idea of self-imposed repentance, and his concern is to convince Eve that confessing sins directly to the Son and God is the right thing to do to regain divine favor" (Norton 38). Adam's suggestion of confession and repentance corresponds directly to "Milton's patriarchal theology" (Norton 39). The idea of submitting to the higher authority confirms the idea of hierarchy and the idea of religion at the time Milton wrote *Paradise Lost*—surrender to the judgment of a higher power.

While Adam's response to their predicament illustrates his confirmation of religious authority and hierarchy, Eve's response, according to Christopher, demonstrates that "she is still estranged from God" (75). Although suicide was considered a sin, Eve's response does not have a necessarily religious base. Eve's response, in fact, corresponds directly to the Greek ideal that Sophocles would have relied upon; Eve states, "Let us seek Death, or, he not found, supply / With our own hands his office on ourselves" (10.1001-02). Adam and Eve have earned death with their actions, and the Greek ideal stresses the individual over the state, so the tragic hero has a responsibility to carry out his (or her) own punishment (rather than waiting for the higher authority to do so); therefore, because death is their judgment, Adam and Eve must commit suicide.

Eve's suggestion provides another comparison of her fate to Oedipus's. Oedipus, after having suffered the fall from happiness to misery, punishes himself by blinding. He knows he is due the punishment and performs the act himself. The precedent of Oedipus as tragic hero exists, so the tragic hero should carry out the punishment upon herself. However, Eve cannot commit suicide because Milton must follow the details of the Biblical account. Eve does, however, offer to take all the punishment upon herself, and Adam refuses to allow her to do so. By having Eve offer to take the punishment and then suggest suicide, Milton uses the Greek ideal but overrides it with the religious rites that his contemporary society would recognize and wish to maintain. Also by using the Greek response to judgment, Milton stresses Eve's status as tragic hero by the classical definition and illustrates her new inferiority to Adam. Just as Oedipus followed the Greek tradition, so Eve wishes to follow it as well. However, because the Greek tradition has been superseded by Christianity, Eve follows Adam's example when he chooses repentance over suicide.

Adam's choice of repentance directly results from grace; as Jackson Campbell Boswell explains, "[B]y means of prevenient grace is man brought to the point of prayer and even taught to pray for forgiveness. By virtue of his free will, God is powerless to save man from eternal death till asked" (91). God does not wish to destroy his creation, and Adam and Eve's repentance provides God the opportunity to redeem them. Without grace, Adam may not have considered the possibility of repentance and confession and instead given in to Eve's suggestion of suicide. Although this plotline would not follow the Biblical account, Milton thoroughly explains each action and decision that the human pair makes. If Milton was to be successful "[a]nd justify the ways of God to men," he

needed to fill in the details that the Biblical account left out (1.26). The fact that grace first came to reside in Adam again demonstrates Eve's status as the inferior.

In addition to mentioning the grace that comes to reside in Adam and Eve, Milton also compares the repentant pair to "Deucalion and chaste Pyrrha" (11.12). According to Jonathan Collett, "The myths, like everything else in the last two books, must be given a definite Christian reading" (95). Indeed, the comparison of Adam and Eve and Deucalion and Pyrrha corresponds to the church's belief that women are inferior to men. As Green explains, "By likening Eve to Pyrrha, Milton points to the change in Eve herself: her loss of active, independent power and her new-found submissiveness and humility. After the Fall Eve becomes more fully defined by her relationship to Adam, and, like Pyrrha, she is a model wife" (186). This last allusion confirms Eve's decline, although it has been complete since the end of Book Nine.

Despite Adam and Eve's repentance, God's punishment remains: Adam and Eve cannot remain in Paradise and death cannot be undone. Eve's children will suffer the same fate as she, just as Oedipus's family suffered his tragedy. The story of Oedipus, however, does not end with any sort of hope. In *Paradise Lost*, Michael shows Adam some of the future, explaining the misery that his progeny will endure but also the promise of redemption that awaits. Eve receives the same message while she dreams, and at the end of the poem, Adam and Eve have hope:

The world was all before them, where to choose  
 Their place of rest, and Providence their guide.  
 They hand in hand with wand'ring steps and slow  
 Through Eden took their solitary way. (12.646-49)

The angels do not have to drag Adam and Eve out of Eden; Adam and Eve simply walk out. They do, however, leave slowly, so while hope exists, it does not erase the loss of Paradise.

Eve's decline from happiness to misery may seem relatively simple. She does not lose her eyesight as Oedipus, nor does she suffer Hamlet's eventful death. Eve's death does not occur within Milton's epic. She does, however, lose that which makes her an exceptional woman. She loses her intelligence (or the power or will to use it) and her independence. She relies on Adam now, thus becoming a woman inferior to her husband in a real sense. She may remain "mother Eve" (12.624) but she is no longer "Mother of Mankind" (5.388). Although this difference may seem small, Milton could not alter the facts of the Biblical account; he worked within them.

Another concern regarding Eve's decline involves the "fortunate fall" paradox; as Arthur Lovejoy explains, "The Fall could never be sufficiently condemned and lamented; and likewise, when all its consequences were considered, it could never be sufficiently rejoiced over" (162). Adam and Eve receive promises that they will reach a "far happier place / Than this of Eden" and have "far happier days" (12.463-65). In this light, as Lovejoy mentions, Adam wants to rejoice that the Fall occurred since it brings redemption (161). Essentially, then, scholars could argue that the tragic hero's punishment turns into salvation, from happiness to misery to happiness, which Aristotle would define as comedy.

However, Milton places the *promise* of redemption near the end of his epic, but he does not include the actual redemption in the scope of the poem. At the end of *Paradise Lost*, Adam and Eve are fallen, imperfect beings, with Eve placed beneath Adam in the

social hierarchy, and they are both ejected from Eden to labor and eventually die. As Aristotle states regarding the unity of plot, “The truth is that [...] the story, as an imitation of action, must represent one action, a complete whole, with its several incidents so closely connected that the transposal or withdrawal of any one of them will disjoin and dislocate the whole. For that which makes no perceptible difference by its presence or absence is no real part of the whole” (1451a.30-35). The redemption of mankind, though promised, does not occur in Eve’s lifetime, does not occur in Milton’s lifetime, and has not yet occurred. According to Aristotle, then, actual redemption has no place in the scope of Milton’s epic and therefore has no bearing on the final misery of Eve.

However, Milton placed the promise of redemption in his epic rather than simply ending the poem with Adam and Eve’s expulsion. Milton could not ignore the fact that Christianity taught that redemption came through the Son, who entered this world through a woman. Milton addressed a Christian audience, so he departed from Aristotle’s formula of tragedy because his model dictated that he do so. Christianity teaches that the Son brings redemption, so Milton followed those teachings, allowing his tragic hero the promise of redemption but still reinforcing the idea that women were inferior. Using the reference to Mary, Milton indicated that Eve’s submission will be rewarded: “The great deliv’rance by her Seed to come / (For by the woman’s Seed) on all mankind, / That ye may live” (12.600-02). Milton portrayed the promise of humankind’s redemption because in doing so, he underscored his overall message regarding women: Exceptions exist, but women are inferior to men, and those women who willingly submit to men’s authority will be rewarded.

Eve's ending misery as a submissive woman confirms her status as the tragic hero in Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Beginning the poem as an exceptional woman and queen of Paradise, Eve begins in a state of happiness. Through the human appetite of ambition, which provides a point where the audience can connect to her as the hero, Eve makes an error of judgment, eats the fruit, and gives some to Adam. Because of her mistake, she loses her place as a monarch of Paradise and is demoted to the monarch's wife. Although Adam and Eve are promised redemption, they do not receive it in the course of the poem. Therefore, Eve matches the Aristotelian formula for a tragic hero. Milton's reasons for depicting Eve in such a role include a confirmation that exceptional women exist and a confirmation that most women are inferior to men, a conclusion that was necessary for the preservation of the hierarchy and conformed to seventeenth-century English thought.

## Chapter Five: The Purpose of Eve as the Tragic Hero

Many scholars may disagree with the interpretation of Eve as the tragic hero because of Milton's misogyny. Through Milton's *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* and marriages and reports by family, including his daughters, Milton does not appear to have had a high opinion of women nor act like a father should. However, Milton's *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* were not received well by his contemporaries because they did not understand what he was trying to say. Specific information from his wives through letters or other documentation does not exist, and the words recorded by his daughters cannot necessarily be trusted because of the nature of their upbringing. Milton's characterization of Eve as the tragic hero does not conflict with his ideas regarding women because Eve's status as an exceptional woman exempts her from the natural inferiority that seventeenth-century English society believed all women shared.

As Antonia Fraser states, "It was a fact generally acknowledged by all but the most contumacious spirits at the beginning of the seventeenth century that woman was the weaker vessel; weaker than man, that is" (1). Society based this assumption on Biblical sources like St. Peter and St. Paul (Fraser 1). Milton, being a religious individual, would have accepted these sources as credible, and so *Paradise Lost* included the idea of women as inferior. However, English society also recognized Queen Elizabeth I as a great monarch, glorifying her even after her death. Clearly women existed who defied the standard, or rather, surpassed the nature of their own birth. In Milton's domestic and political lives, Milton had contact with both exceptional women and "standard" women.

Milton's domestic interactions with women involve his three wives and his daughters. Regardless of how Milton entered into his first marriage, whether by romance

or by arrangement, he wanted companionship from Mary. With his only close friend at the time being Diodati, Milton needed someone closer physically, as Diodati did not stay in London. Without specific knowledge of actual marriages, Milton's expectations of marriage exceeded reality. He wanted from Mary the same type of companionship that he received from Diodati, despite the Platonic ideal of friendship that could exist only between men. Mary, seventeen years old, could not provide such companionship, and the English Civil War as well as the couple's inevitable separation provided the opportunity for both Milton and Mary to "grow up."

Because of the conflict between Milton's expectations of marriage and his belief that women were naturally inferior to men, Milton expected the kind of companionship from a woman that he could have expected from a man. He wanted the perfect marriage, which reality could not provide. This does not make Milton a misogynist; it makes him a man of the seventeenth century, still developing his ideas about women. Mary, however, proves to be an unexceptional woman. However, as Theodore K. Rabb points out, Milton "insisted on the equality inherent in marriage" in *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* (76). Milton did not argue for divorce based on Mary's inferiority. In fact, according to Fraser, marriage tended to elevate a woman's status if she made a good wife (41). In *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, Milton sought only to provide a way out for both parties of an unsuitable marriage.

When Mary returned to Milton three years after their separation, they resumed married life and seemed to live happily enough because Milton accepted that Mary was not an exceptional woman. Mary bore several children, three of the daughters surviving to adulthood, and died at the age of twenty-seven (A. N. Wilson 172). Milton clearly took

this hard because as A. N. Wilson explains, “[T]he year in which he lost his first wife, his son, and his sight was a time of deep and ultimately religious crisis” (173). It could be argued that the loss of a son and the loss of his sight caused Milton more grief than losing his wife, but Milton expected eventual blindness and he had not had much time to spend with John, so the loss of Mary was hard. By this time, Milton’s expectations had changed. He did not expect the companionship of a perfect marriage, but he did expect companionship.

By the time Mary died, she had given Milton three daughters. The issue of Milton’s daughters seems quite complicated to many scholars. According to Labriola, “Milton’s relationship with his three daughters by Mary Powell—Anne, Mary, and Deborah, all of whom survived their father—was troublesome, especially because they did not inherit their father’s interest in and aptitude for learning” (172). Labriola seems to suggest that the girls did not care to learn what Milton could have taught them, yet Labriola also seems to suggest that the girls could not have learned what Milton could have taught them. How would Milton have judged their ability to learn if they had not cared to try? Perhaps Milton expected his daughters to be exceptional women because they had an exceptional father, and when they proved otherwise (either by indifference or inability), Milton became disappointed in them.

Perhaps Milton did not have the opportunity to teach his daughters; as A. N. Wilson suggests, “Even had Milton wanted to bestow on them the feminine equivalent of the education which he lavished on his nephews it would have been difficult, because, during the crucial years, they had moved to and fro between their grandmother’s house and his own” (217). By the time Milton could provide his daughters with some of the

high quality education he received as a child, the girls were older, believed that they were unloved by Milton, and defied him, likely because of the influence of their maternal grandmother (A. N. Wilson 217). Thus, the records of Milton's mistreatment of his daughters—not teaching them to write or to understand the languages they read, for example—may not be entirely accurate or credible.

In one particular instance, Milton apparently forced his daughters to read to him without teaching them the meaning of what they read; as Edward Phillips, Milton's nephew, states,

[E]xcusing only the eldest daughter by reason of her bodily infirmity and difficult utterances of speech (which to say truth I doubt was the principal cause of excusing her), the other two were condemned to the performance of reading [...] the Greek, the Latin, the Italian, Spanish, and French. All which sorts of books to be confined to read, without understanding one word, must needs be a trial of patience almost beyond endurance; yet it was endured by both for a long time. (Hanford and Taaffe 47)

Phillips presents Milton's treatment of his daughters as unfair and implies an attitude that may not apply only to Milton. Phillips himself was a man of the seventeenth century and thus influenced by society's belief that women were inferior to men. Phillips assumed that Mary and Deborah could not understand one word of what they read and considered Anne to be even more inferior than her sisters because of her mental handicap. However, because Phillips remains the first biographer of Milton, Phillips is deemed the authority on most of Milton's life and opinions, despite the fact that Phillips's first edition of the biography was printed twenty years after Milton's death (Hanford and Taaffe 3).

Phillips focuses on the likelihood that Milton did not educate his daughters at all; in contrast, Lewalski believes that Milton's ability to educate his daughters was limited.

She explains,

Milton did not educate his daughters as gentlewomen of some fortune might be educated—in music, dancing, drawing, writing, and modern languages—since his circumstances gave them no access to such a station. Yet it seems unlikely that he refused on principle to teach them languages, if for no other reason [...] than that some grasp of the matter in some of the languages they read would have made them much more useful to him. He had valued such learned women as Lady Ranelagh and Lady Margaret Ley, and had any of his daughters seemed keenly interested in books it is hard to believe he would not have responded. (*Life* 408)

Milton's blindness required him to have help pursuing the studies that had occupied him for most of his life. As any child may resent a parent for forcing that child to do chores, so Mary and Deborah would have found Milton's incessant need for a reader to be tedious. If they had had any inclination to learn, being forced to read early may have discouraged them from that inclination. Unfortunately, Milton's blindness caused him to be more of a needy father than Mary and Deborah could appreciate.

In addition to Lewalski's opinion that Milton surely educated his daughters in some fashion, Kenneth Charlton adds that boarding schools for girls began to appear in the seventeenth century and to increase in number significantly by the middle and end of the century (110). Generally, daughters of middle and upper class gentlemen attended these schools, and these schools taught not only "the acquisition of feminine

‘accomplishments’” but also taught “traditional classical studies” (Charlton 110). As Charlton points out, such studies would have been taught to Lady Jane Grey, Elizabeth Tudor, and the daughters of Thomas More via a tutor; “Milton’s daughters received a similar education” (110). Milton, then, did not ignore his daughters’ education because they were female; in fact, he hoped that they would become exceptional women like those mentioned above. Thus, any lingering resentments the girls might have had for their father can be explained by his neediness. By the time Anne was six and Mary was three and a half, Milton had lost his sight, so Milton’s dependence on his children started very early, though he did have other pupils who helped him with his studies (A. N. Wilson 172).

Although Milton continues to be considered a misogynist, another consideration regarding his treatment of his daughters may be the change of the family unit at this time. As Rabb explains, “At least in the comfortable articulate classes, there is evidence of a gradual rejection of the cold, formal, patriarch-dominated family and its replacement by an atmosphere of kindness rather than severity towards children” (75). Milton grew up in the “patriarch-dominated family” with a somewhat-wealthy father who took an interest in his education. Very little survives about Milton’s mother beyond the fact of her weak eyesight and the date of her death, suggesting that Milton’s father played the more important role in Milton’s life. Milton’s father supported Milton for five years while Milton considered his poetic career; Milton also wrote a poem (“Ad Patrem”) defending himself against his father’s apparent pressure for his son to do something with his life (A. N. Wilson 60). Using his father as example, then, Milton would have leaned more toward the “patriarch-dominated family” and “severity” rather than toward kindness. Although

he may have been kinder to his children than his own father had been to him, Milton's time away from his girls and their grandmother's influence would have negated any kindness he may have shown.

In addition to Milton's first wife and the interactions with his daughter, Katherine Woodcock affected Milton's perception of women and exceptional women. Milton married Katherine in 1656 (Hanford and Taaffe 8). Information regarding Milton and Katherine's meeting and the details of their marriage remains scarce. Certainly Milton learned from his previous marriage and knew what to expect, or perhaps he needed someone as a companion and Katherine fulfilled that need where Mary had not (A. N. Wilson 188). Regardless, Milton's second marriage only lasted about a year and a half because Katherine died in 1658 (Hanford and Taaffe 8).

Some scholars confirm Milton's affection for Katherine through one particular poem; as Lewalski explains, "I think it a near certainty that Milton wrote his poignant sonnet, 'Mee thought I saw my late espoused saint,' sometime during the difficult weeks following Katherine's death, recording his love and grief for the wife whose face he had never seen and whose loss plunged him again into darkness and loneliness" (*Life* 351). Milton's perception of union and companionship now consisted of two marriages, one which began with failure and reconciliation and one which lasted only a brief time. He learned from his first marriage what lacked between a woman and a man, and he experienced in his second marriage what companionship could be. Milton used this knowledge when he created Adam and Eve's perfect union. Adam and Eve's love-making before the Fall (as opposed to sex after the Fall) illustrate Milton's appreciation of a union, an appreciation he would not have had given society's beliefs had Milton

himself not experienced it. Lewalski confirms this interpretation, stating that the poem “Mee thought I saw my late espoused saint” demonstrates “Milton’s capacity to love a woman deeply and respond to her love” (*Life* 356).

If Milton could love a woman and a woman could love him, Milton could not have been a complete misogynist. Milton’s intelligence and vast amount of learning caused him to have interpersonal issues throughout his life. He either meshed well with those individuals he met (Diodati and the Italians), or he had conflicts with them (peers in school and in politics). Those people who were closest to Milton either made adjustments for his personality (Mary), resented him (his daughters), or took him as he was (Katherine). Milton’s domestic interactions consisted of women whom he considered to be unexceptional; as dictated by society, women needed to be inferior. A patriarchal society needed women to be inferior in order to reinforce the hierarchy. After the Interregnum and the dictatorship of the Protector, the hierarchy needed to be maintained to keep England out of chaos. Milton understood this need and responded to it, using his domestic interactions with women to inform his portrayal of Eve.

In addition to Milton’s domestic life, Milton’s political interactions with women affected his portrayal of Eve. In particular, Milton’s experience with the Countess of Derby informed his idea of an exceptional woman. As Fraser explains, “Certainly the Countess was bred to be a heroine: in an age when royal women were among the few allowed to revel in public attention, she was by birth close to being a princess” (165). As such, her status as an exceptional woman would have been assumed. Milton, in an attempt to seek her patronage, wrote *Arcades* for the Countess and had it performed for her in approximately 1632 (Lewalski *Life* 58). According to Mary Ann McGuire, “The

*Arcades* is, in fact, a Miltonic version of the entry episode of an estate entertainment” (452). *Arcades*, then, honors a woman, granting the Countess “the power of dissolving enchantments, of banishing evil spirits, and even of converting winter to a mild summer” (McGuire 457). Courtiers often wrote these types of entertainments to impress royalty. Milton’s *Arcades* markedly resembles the *Huntingdon Entertainment*, written to honor Queen Elizabeth I, though no proof exists to connect the two works (McGuire 457). Milton, then, could appreciate a woman in power.

Even after her death, Queen Elizabeth I, the most notable woman in power in the recent history of England, continued to influence society. With James I’s unpopularity and Charles I’s absolutism, references to the previous monarch emerged. From 1600 to 1610, the *Coronation Portrait of Elizabeth I* circulated. In 1625, William Camden published *Annales*, which included *The Apotheosis of Elizabeth I* on the cover, and in 1630, Camden published his *Historie of...Elizabeth, Late Queene of England*. Although Elizabeth died before Milton was born, her status as an exceptional woman remained prominent. However, the fact that Elizabeth I was the exception rather than the standard remained important as well.

The imagery of Elizabeth I also appeared in Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene* in any number of ways. As John King suggests, “The subordination of the masculine son to the feminine moon in Britomart’s dream at Isis Church” reflects “Elizabeth’s crescent moon imagery” (63). King also references “Una wear[ing] Elizabeth’s personal colors of black and white” and “Belphoebe’s virginity” (63, 64). Spenser does not occasionally glorify Elizabeth; the references to her attributes permeate every line. Milton greatly appreciated Spenser; Milton would have appreciated Spenser’s subject as well—the first great queen

of England. As Spenser placed Elizabeth high in his great work, so Milton placed Eve high in his own. Eve's status as the mother of humankind could not be raised higher. She was the first woman. She was the exception.

Eve, however, does not maintain her high status throughout the poem. Unlike Adam or Satan who could be categorized as the protagonist, Eve does not fit that definition. As the protagonist, Eve would need to be the primary character in the epic; she is not. The Fall is not complete without Adam, so Eve cannot be the protagonist. Also, making a woman the protagonist of his epic does not suit Milton's purpose. Milton deliberately made an artistic choice when he characterized Eve as the tragic hero rather than the protagonist. Although the Biblical story lends itself to Eve as the tragic hero, Milton could have kept the facts and adjusted his characterizations to suit his purpose. Milton added a significant amount of detail and information to the story which have no Biblical source. The Bible does not specify love-making before the Fall; it does not mention Raphael's meeting with Adam; it does not refer to Eve's separation from Adam.

Milton made changes to the Biblical story to underscore certain aspects of Adam and Eve and to illustrate Eve as the tragic hero. By having Adam and Eve engage in love-making before the Fall, Milton demonstrated Adam and Eve's perfect relationship, emphasizing their sinless natures and their equality. Using eloquent phrases like "Hail wedded love, mysterious law, true source / Of human offspring, sole propriety / In Paradise, of all things common else!" (4.750-52) Milton described a perfect coupling rather than a lustful and sinful one. A perfect coupling also demands that the two people become "one flesh," which erases any line between inferior and superior, making Adam

and Eve true equals. Before the Fall, Milton uses love-making to highlight Eve's perfection and her status.

Just as love-making adds to Eve's status as tragic hero, so does Raphael's meeting with Adam. Adam and Eve receive a warning regarding disobedience, which Raphael further explains with a description of Satan's disobedience. Although Eve remains silent during Raphael's visit, she does not immediately retire to let the men talk. She hears most of the conversation before she decides that she would rather hear the rest from Adam's lips. Eve as tragic hero receives two warnings about the consequences of disobedience, one from Adam after her dream and one from an angel. Milton provides Eve with foreknowledge of the consequences, which allows her to make informed choices. Eve does not accidentally eat the fruit; she does not make a careless decision. Milton portrays an intelligent, thinking hero, not a dumb inferior that a woman might be. Milton makes Eve's decision to eat the fruit into a willful and knowing choice by the tragic hero, a choice that was made possible by Adam and Eve's separation and her error in considering the serpent's argument.

Adam and Eve's separation, often seen as the cause of the Fall, provided Eve with the opportunity to make her own decision. Milton used the couple's separation to highlight Eve's individuality and her responsibility. Eve decides to eat the fruit without any consent from Adam; the choice is entirely her own. The tragic hero decides her own fate through an error of judgment, and because Eve is alone during the temptation, the blame cannot fall on anyone else. Milton needed Eve to be alone in this scene to emphasize her role as the tragic hero. Eve's choice began the decline of humankind, and when Eve gave the fruit to Adam and he ate, the Fall was complete. At these points,

Milton reworked the story to portray Eve as the tragic hero, keeping the essential details and adjusting everything else. Adam could have been the tragic hero if Milton had wanted it that way, but in the *Paradise Lost* that Milton wrote, Adam does not fit the definition. Only Eve does. She remains the tragic hero of *Paradise Lost*.

As familiar as Milton was with the classics, he would have been aware of other female tragic heroes. As Dorothy Willner points out, “Antigone, though female, is a hero. This role was allowed a few women in Greek tragedy, but none in Greek society where women were confined to the domestic sphere” (59). English society being quite similar, Milton followed the precedent set by classic writers, using Eve rather than Adam as his tragic hero. Even Aristotle uses Sophocles as a prime example of a tragic poet. Although Aristotle focuses most often in his *Poetics* on *Oedipus Rex* as an example of a good tragedy, *Antigone* is a continuation of the same tragic story line.

In addition to the precedent of a female tragic hero, Willner states, “Antigone, despite being a hero and because of it, also is a victim as regards her life as woman. [...] [I]n heroically defying Creon, she transgresses her gender role as well as his edict, and he condemns her for the one as well as the other” (63). Milton dealt with the same issues. Society stated most women were inferior, yet Milton portrayed Eve as a perfect woman equal to Adam. He could not, however, ignore that this idea might unbalance society, so the perfect woman exists only before the Fall. Milton also makes it clear that Eve’s desire to rise above her station, to attempt to be a god, moves her out of her status as a perfect woman and as a perfect human being. God condemns both Adam and Eve, not just Eve, even though she is the reason he transgressed.

Another similarity *Paradise Lost* shares with *Oedipus Rex* and *Antigone* regards the effect on later generations. Oedipus's mistake affects not only himself but his sons and daughters; Sophocles's tale involves three generations, perhaps more (Willner 63). Since Milton dealt with religious issues (and the Biblical story called for it), Eve's mistake affects not only herself and Adam but her entire line. The consequences of a Greek tragedy span generations; Milton would have his epic poem do no less.

Other Greek tragedies demonstrate a marked focus on men as the heroes; Elizabeth Bryson Bongie explains, "Greek heroes are men and the system of heroic values evolved as a male ethic based on the idealization of the successful warrior[...]" The normal life of a woman was ill suited to such an ethic" (30). Bongie suggests that Sophocles's *Antigone* character has male characteristics rather than female, just as Euripides's *Medea* does. Both characters take an active role in society, one performing funeral rites for her father, another pursuing the preservation of honor. Just as the Greek writers use male characteristics, Milton portrays Eve with an intelligence that surpasses Adam's. Eve's choice to work separately and her use of reason also could be considered male characteristics. Milton tempers these male characteristics with statements regarding Eve's inferiority, but he follows the Greek precedent. Although tragic heroes are generally male, female tragic heroes do exist.

Milton wrote *Paradise Lost* as a tragedy; a tragedy must have a tragic hero, and the tragic hero must fall. Eve may have begun the poem as a person with high status, but she ends in submission to a higher power—not only God but her husband too. Milton not only places the exceptional woman in his poem; he places the ideal woman in it as well. Eve as the mother of mankind has high status; Eve as a mortal woman does not. Milton

attempted to reconcile his society's beliefs. According to seventeenth-century English thought, a woman remained subordinate to a man. Although debates raged on this issue, just as debates had raged about Parliament and monarchy, England could not reconcile the differences. Milton, having seen that England could not maintain a republic, chose to reinforce the hierarchy that was necessary for England to continue. England needed the monarchy, and the hierarchy needed woman placed firmly below man. Eve serves Milton's purpose, which was to "justify the ways of God to men."

### Conclusion: The Purpose of Milton's Tragedy

At the beginning of *Paradise Lost*, Milton, through his narrator, addresses the "Heav'nly Muse," requesting aid in writing his great epic. Following the classical tradition, Milton invokes divine assistance, but rather than address a pagan god or goddess, Milton follows his Christian model and addresses his invocation instead toward God and the Holy Spirit, stating "Instruct me" (1.19). Milton, through his narrator, invokes God's assistance to state boldly the purpose of *Paradise Lost*:

What in me is dark  
 Illumine, what is low raise and suppose,  
 That to the heighth of this great argument  
 I may assert Eternal Providence  
 And justify the ways of God to men. (1.22-26)

Milton wanted his audience to have no questions regarding his purpose; he wanted his audience to understand his undertaking and to appreciate his efforts. In addition, he categorized his poem as "tragic" (9.6), and as Aristotle has explained, "A tragedy [...] is the imitation of an action [...] with incidents arousing pity and fear" (1449b.24-27). By portraying Eve as the tragic hero, Milton highlights the purpose of his epic poem.

Throughout *Paradise Lost*, Milton portrays Eve's various human appetites, including love, desire, curiosity, and ambition—appetites that make her a character to which the audience can relate. In this way, Milton can avoid making his tragedy "odious" and instead make it effective. Even though Eve is ambitious, she is a good person who suffers misfortune. The audience can pity her because the error of judgment that causes her misfortune involves simply listening to and considering a deceitful argument, an error

anyone could have made, including Adam. Although the blame inevitably falls upon Eve, she did nothing more than act human.

As a consequence of her actions, Eve is placed permanently beneath Adam in the social hierarchy. Milton demonstrates that Eve's attempt to reach above her station causes her demotion. Eve's actions can be applied to women in general: Women who are not exceptional but who attempt to rise above their inferiority will suffer misfortune, and women who are not exceptional and submit willingly to their status will be rewarded. Eve's actions can be applied to anyone in seventeenth-century England: those who attempt to rise above their station will suffer misfortune. The social hierarchy, though essential to England's stability, was not itself a stable construct. Those born in the lower classes could rise in status through effective action and profitable acquaintances; those born to noble classes could lose their lands, property, or titles through careless actions or political affiliations that conflict with those in power. Milton simply took the opportunity in *Paradise Lost* to reinforce the ideals that were being challenged.

As demonstrated by Eve, the consequences of not accepting one's established status in the hierarchy involve misfortune. The necessity of status not only involves the social and political hierarchies of England but the religious hierarchy of Christianity as well. Milton used the decline of his tragic hero to illicit fear from his audience—the fear of the consequences of challenging hierarchy and the fear of disobeying God's commands. Because Milton intended to “justify the ways of God to men,” he addressed the fact that God is the Creator and thus, the ultimate monarch. Only God could be an effective and acceptable monarch to Milton because God is perfect; as a religious man, Milton used the idea of perfect hierarchy that God represented and applied that idea to

God's creations—men and women. Because God was above men, so men were above women. Unable to appeal to the higher authority, Milton suggests, men and women should accept their established places in the hierarchy or fear the consequences.

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