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Eve's "paradise within" in *Paradise Lost*: A Stoic Mind, a Love Sonnet, and a Good Conscience

by Joshua R. Held

The "paradise within, happier farr" that the angel Michael foretells in the final book of Milton's Paradise Lost has attracted widespread and often divisive comment. I argue that the most significant interpretive context for the phrase directly follows Michael's speech. When Adam returns to the newly wakened Eve, she greets him with a blank verse love sonnet that triangulates three sources of encouragement for the couple in their coming exile from Eden. Each source unveils a different aspect of the "paradise within": the Stoic trope of the world as a homeland, the Renaissance love motif of the lover as a world, and the divine peace of conscience, which many contemporaries described as a "paradise within."

THE meaning of the "paradise within . . . , happier farr" that Michael foretells in the final book of John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (London, 1667 and 1674) has attracted widespread and often divisive comment.¹ Perhaps the most common critical view holds that Adam and Eve attain this inner paradise through some kind of inner transformation after their expulsion from Eden.² Other critics argue

¹ Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Barbara K. Lewalski (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), 12.587; all subsequent quotations are from this edition and will be cited parenthetically by book and line number.

² See David Loewenstein, "The Radical Religious Politics of *Paradise Lost*," in *A Companion to Milton*, ed. Thomas N. Corns (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 361–62. This position is especially well represented in the 1960s and '70s. See also Louis L. Martz, *The Paradise Within: Studies in Vaughan, Traherne, and Milton* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1964), 110, 166–67; Northrop Frye, *The Return of Eden: Five Essays on Milton's Epics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965), 109–10; John C. Ulreich, Jr., "A Paradise Within: The Fortunate Fall in *Paradise Lost*," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 32 (1971): 351–66; and Thomas H. Blackburn, "Paradises Lost and Found: The Meaning and Function of the 'Paradise Within' in *Paradise Lost*," *Milton Studies* 5 (1973): 191–211.

that Adam, and perhaps Eve also, already possesses that happier paradise when he leaves Eden.³ Still other critics altogether doubt Michael's claim that any inner paradise could exceed the lost, Edenic paradise.⁴ That Michael's cryptic phrase comes in the final line of his narrative only complicates matters, for without a word of explanation he sends Adam back to meet the slumbering Eve. Barbara Lewalski overcomes this lack of interpretive context by looking ahead to *Paradise Regained* (London, 1671), arguing that "Jesus recovers the inner paradise fully by withstanding all temptation."⁵ Yet despite the significance of *Paradise Regained* in offering a more hopeful outlook on Milton's conception of paradise, I argue that the most significant interpretive context for the phrase "paradise within" is what follows directly after Michael's speech. When Adam returns to the newly wakened Eve, she greets him with a speech of philosophy, love, and prophecy, pointing ultimately to the "Promis'd Seed" who will restore "all" (12.623), including their peace of conscience, which many contemporaries described as a "paradise within."

Although Eve had been absent during Michael's narrative, she demonstrates that she has received in her "Dreams" (12.611) the message Adam has just heard. Insofar as the middle lines of Eve's speech are suffused with the language of poeticized love, they recall Michael's speech, which builds toward love or "Charitie" (12.584), itself anticipating the "paradise within." When Adam returns from his dialogue with Michael, the cryptic prophecy of the "paradise within" still perhaps perplexing him, Eve greets him with a complementary prophecy, formatted as a blank verse sonnet, clarifying the salient points of Michael's message:

Whence thou returnst, and whither wentst, I know;
For God is also in sleep, and Dreams advise,
Which he hath sent propitious, some great good

³ See Joseph E. Duncan, *Milton's Earthly Paradise: A Historical Study of Eden* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1972), 266; and Georgia B. Christopher, *Milton and the Science of the Saints* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982), 187.

⁴ See, for example, Beverley Sherry, "A 'Paradise Within' Can Never Be 'Happier Farr': Reconsidering the Archangel Michael's Consolation in *Paradise Lost*," *Milton Quarterly* 37.2 (2003): 85.

⁵ Lewalski, "Milton's Paradises," in *Renaissance Ecology: Imagining Eden in Milton's England*, ed. Ken Hiltner (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2008), 27. See also Lewalski, "Milton on Liberty, Servility, and the Paradise Within," in *Milton, Rights and Liberties*, ed. Christophe Tournu and Neil Forsyth (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007), 48–49. Lewalski's earlier discussion of *Paradise Regained* remains a crucial point of reference: *Milton's Brief Epic: The Genre, Meaning, and Art of Paradise Regained* (Providence, RI: Brown University Press, 1966).

Presaging, since with sorrow and hearts distress
 Wearied I fell asleep: but now lead on;
 In mee is no delay; with thee to goe,
 Is to stay here; without thee here to stay,
 Is to go hence unwilling; thou to mee
 Art all things under Heav'n, all places thou,
 Who for my wilful crime art banisht hence.
 This further consolation yet secure
 I carry hence; though all by mee is lost,
 Such favour I unworthie am voutsaft,
 By mee the Promis'd Seed shall all restore.

(12.610–23)

Many critics have argued, rightly, I think, that while Eve reveals her understanding of the content of Michael's lengthy message, she displays a different perspective, privileged by Milton as the final human speech in the poem.⁶ Perhaps the reason Eve's speech has been relatively under-examined as an explanation of the "paradise within" is that her speech is in a different register and form. Whereas Michael speaks overtly as a prophet and in an episodic form, Eve speaks primarily as a lover and in the form of a sonnet, as I will argue. This sharp difference in register and form, far from marking Eve's irrelevance as a recipient to or conveyor of Michael's words, reflects the consolatory nature of her own divinely inspired interpretation of the inner paradise. By encapsulating her commitment to Adam in a sonnet, a form traditionally used to express intimate love, she suggests the couple's regained unity, thus mitigating the loss of the Edenic paradise and fostering in its place the "paradise within."⁷ As she greets Adam upon his return from Michael, she functions again as a help "meet" for Adam (8.448; cf. Gen. 2:20), injecting prophetic "consolation" into their predicament. If Michael highlights "Deeds" as the way of attaining the "paradise within," Eve emphasizes the threefold grounds for that paradise: the ability of a Stoic mind to envision all the world as a homeland, the potency of love to

⁶ See Michael C. Schoenfeldt, "Gender and Conduct in *Paradise Lost*," in *Sexuality and Gender in Early Modern Europe: Institutions, Texts, Images*, ed. James Grantham Turner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 334–35; Susannah B. Mintz, *Threshold Poetics: Milton and Intersubjectivity* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2003), 167–74; and Patrick J. McGrath, "Formal Resistance: Gender Hierarchy and Eve's Final Speech in *Paradise Lost*," *Milton Quarterly* 47.2 (2013): 78.

⁷ On the sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century sonnet as contributing to a new view of self as "inner life" or "continuous inward existence," see Anne Ferry, *The Inward Language: Sonnets of Wyatt, Sidney, Shakespeare, Donne* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 3.

transcend the bounds of place and ultimately to produce the "Promis'd Seed," and the influence of the "Promis'd Seed" on all her descendants, and especially on their consciences.

STOICISM AFTER EDEN: HEAVENLY AND
COSMOPOLITAN CITIZENSHIP

Milton's Eve explains her newly broadened understanding of their world and of paradise through allusions to several classical Stoic texts, from Cicero (106–43 BC) to Lucan (AD 39–65), allusions that she may recall from Michael's prior use in book 11. If Milton reveals a slowly evolving opinion of Stoicism over his career, eventually rejecting it in *Paradise Regained*, his Eve draws on Stoic material that is carefully subordinate to—yet subtly undergirds—the amatory and biblical ideas that she features in her final speech.⁸ The range of Eve's allusions highlights her immense intellectual ability and thus presents her as an appropriate counterpart to Adam in terms of intellect, fallen yet still capable of brilliance.⁹ If these allusions recall the Stoic philosophy of the classical era, this philosophical orientation also continued into Milton's time through the influence of Neostoics such as the Dutch intellectual Justus Lipsius (1547–1606), to whom Milton refers both in his youthful *Prolusions* and in his later Republican arguments, *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* (London, 1649) and *Eikonoklastes* (London, 1649).¹⁰ Eve's allusions to Stoic philosophy cluster around the principles that all the world is a homeland and that, correspondingly, each person is a citizen of the world. Taken together, these principles radiate the Stoic emphasis on the centrality of inner disposition over outer circumstance, an emphasis that, applied to exile, provides that the mind can overcome physical hardship through equanimity, the Stoic *ataraxia*.¹¹ Eve demonstrates

⁸ Reid Barbour observes that "Milton's recantation [of Stoicism] is famously stringent in *Paradise Regained*" (*English Epicures and Stoics: Ancient Legacies in Early Stuart Culture* [Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998], 261).

⁹ On Eve's intellect and reason, see Diane McColley, *Milton's Eve* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983); A. Kent Hieatt, "Eve as Reason in a Tradition of Allegorical Interpretation of the Fall," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 43 (1980): 221–26; Ann Torday Gulden, "Milton's Eve and Wisdom: The 'Dinner-Party' Scene in *Paradise Lost*," *Milton Quarterly* 32.4 (1998): 137–42; and Rémy Roussetzki, "When Eve Answers Back: The Impossible of *Paradise Lost*," *Zeitspreunge* 4 (2000): 81–102.

¹⁰ See Milton, *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, 8 vols., ed. Don M. Wolfe (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1959–82), 1:251, 3:190, and 3:338; hereafter CPW.

¹¹ On *ataraxia* as a root for Lipsius's constancy, see Natasha Constantinidou, "Public