

The Fall of Women

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In Adrienne Rich's essay, she writes:

Re-vision—the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction—is for women more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival. Until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves (Rich 983).

Both Judith Wright and Dorothy Livesay happen to write in the context notion of Rich's "writing as re-vision" in the poems "Eve to Her Daughters" and "Eve." Speaking from the point of view of Eve, Wright reveals that she did not cause the fall of paradise and it is actually Adam's fault because he knew better. Livesay, also speaking from the point of view of Eve, reveals that she blames herself for the fall of man, although the serpent really did incite her. "Eve to Her Daughters" helps us to better "know ourselves" by talking directly to the daughters of Eve, which no one has heard about. "Eve" helps us to better "know ourselves" by telling the story of the after-effects of the fall of paradise through the point of view of a modern-day Eve. These two poems can be seen as "acts of survival" because in "Eve to Her Daughters," Eve is telling her daughters how she survived the fall and how they will have to survive life with their submissiveness. In "Eve," Eve is expressing her hunger for life and happiness, and the apple that ruined her life is actually what keeps her alive.

In Judith Wright's "Eve to Her Daughters," Eve speaks of how she easily goes along with anything that is thrown her way, like eating the apple from the tree of knowledge that leads to the fall, as well as anything Adam wants to do. She says, "It was not I who began it," and blames the

fall on Adam because, unlike her, he knows better than she does and has more knowledge than she does (Wright 726). If Adam does not want to go against God's one rule, then he should not have taken a bite of that apple. Eve says, "He kept on brooding over the insult, / over the trick They had played on us, over the scolding" (Wright 727). Eve easily adapts to life in the new world, being the submissive person that she is, meanwhile, Adam becomes bitter and resentful that he was fooled by God and the serpent. Adam then becomes obsessed with forming this new "imperfect" world into "a new Eden" (Wright 727). While Adam is creating a modernized world with "central heating, domesticated animals, / mechanical harvesters, combustion engines, / escalators, [and] refrigerators," he then becomes obsessed with learning how the world works and comes to the conclusion that anything that cannot be physically demonstrated does not exist (Wright 727). Adam then becomes conscious of the thought that because God "cannot be demonstrated, / and what cannot be demonstrated / doesn't exist," God, therefore, does not exist, and Adam deems himself as being all-knowing and the wisest man (Wright 727). Eve speaks of how jealousy is a terrible thing for Adam, especially since once he actually realizes that not everything can be demonstrated except one's own faults, he still refuses to accept that he is wrong, and Eve then calls Adam an "egotist" (Wright 727). Adam is not the creator, he is not in charge, and he does not have all the answers like God was originally believed to have had.

Wright's poem helps us to better "know ourselves" by speaking directly to the daughters of Eve since only the sons of Adam have ever been spoken about. Many have heard the story of Abel and Cain, to which they inherit Adam's jealousy, and Cain ends up murdering his own brother because God thought Abel to be the better son. In this poem, Eve warns her daughters of their inherited submissiveness and wants them to be aware of their "faults of character" so that maybe they will not end up like Abel and Cain. From the sorrowful mood of the poem, Eve

seems to have gotten by in life with her submissiveness, and it seems it is not that she doesn't want her daughters to become like her, she just wants to make them aware of their faults she has passed on. Eve seems to be unhappy when she says, "Perhaps nothing exists but our faults? / At least they can be demonstrated" (Wright 728). Eve is expressing her submissiveness again by questioning the true existence of God, just as Adam has done. This poem conveys the faults of both man and woman, as Adam's fault is his jealousy and Eve's fault is her submissiveness. Because of this, Adam has deemed himself the new God, "who is faultless, and doesn't exist," and Eve is too submissive to tell Adam of his true faults and mistakes (Wright 728).

"Eve to Her Daughters" can be seen as an "act of survival" because in this, Eve learns to adapt to her own submissiveness and is working on dealing with Adam's jealousy of God. In order to obtain survival, one must distinguish his or her own faults so that he or she can truly know oneself. Eve accomplishes seeing her own fault and is working towards surviving life outside of Eden with her fault. Adam, on the other hand, still refuses to see that he has any fault at all, and Eve only expresses her disappointment for not being in Eden once when she says "there was none of this fall-out" in Eden like there is in this new world. Since Adam has not seen his jealousy and "it's useless to make / such a suggestion to Adam," Eve recommends "that it's time you took over," appointing her daughters who are now aware of their faults and can survive life outside of Eden while being knowledgeable of these characteristics (Wright 727-728).

In Dorothy Livesay's "Eve," the poem is told through the viewpoint of a modern-day woman, or Eve, and reveals that she is self-blaming for the fall of man. When this woman speaks of being "Beside the highway / at the motel door," it signifies that perhaps she has come to that spot to end her life because of her unhappiness and grief about no longer being in paradise (Livesay 595). Once she is there, she sees an apple tree that makes her stop those harsh thoughts.

Livesay writes a descriptive second stanza about the thought of biting into an apple. She writes that the apple has fallen to the ground and “for teeth and tongue / to bite and curl around / that spurting juice” as if a snake, or serpent, is provoking the woman’s thoughts of eating that deliciously forbidden apple and she cannot control her hunger or desire to eat it (Livesay 595).

“Eve” helps us to better know ourselves by having this poem told through the point of view of a woman, or Eve, from the modern-day. This woman knows that it is the fault of women that no one is in paradise anymore. For this, she feels complete sorrow and remorse and ends up at a motel by the highway, where all those who feel the same way about life go, most likely to end their pain. This poem tells how it is not always good to give into temptation, but at the same time, it can make one feel alive. Being at least fifty years old and on the verge of giving up hope of happiness, she eats this apple from the tree that is “the last survivor of a pioneer / orchard / miraculously still / bearing” and “fifty summers sweep / and shake” her, making her feel fantastic and lively again, almost as she was in her younger years (Livesay 595).

Livesay’s “Eve” can be seen as an act of survival because in this, the woman seems to be hungry for this apple that once signified knowledge. She, just like the last apple tree beside the highway, is out of place being at the motel, and when she smells the apple, she says, “that scent, gnarled, ciderish / with sun in it,” making it seem as if that apple actually holds happiness and life within it (Livesay 595). By the way this woman reacts to this meager apple, it makes it seem that knowledge is the key to happiness in life, and for one to survive, one must have knowledge. Unlike most writings about Eve where the apple ruins one’s life, this apple has a reverse effect in this poem. This miracle apple gives the woman life again and knowledge about how life once was for her, to which she exclaims, “I’m alive!” after taking only one bite (Livesay 595).

“Eve to Her Daughters” reveals assumptions about how Eve blames Adam for the fall because of his knowledge about the forbidden apple while “Eve” reveals a self-blaming woman because of giving into temptation. Both poems help us to “better know ourselves” by expressing Eve’s own feelings about the fall and how she has dealt with them through the years. “Eve to Her Daughters” decides it is best to inform her daughters about their character faults to better protect them and help the new world sustain itself in contrast of Adam’s jealousy. “Eve” expresses that giving into temptation can be a good thing and can even help one’s survival because knowledge and desire are the keys to survival. “Eve to Her Daughters” wants Eve’s daughters to take over the new world so that Adam won’t be obsessed anymore with figuring out the way the world works and diminish God’s power or existence. Revising ancient texts about Eve allows the reader to look at the fall of man from a different perspective and can see how the effects of the fall have molded into a modern life.

Works Cited

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