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“For inferior who is free?”

Mom sat me down on the couch after she shooed the other kids out of the room. I couldn't believe it. She was going to tell me! It was a day or two after my 6th Christmas and I had asked the question I've since learned most parents' dread as the aging of their children, “Is Santa Claus real?” Mom sat down on the couch beside me and looked me in the eye. Taking a deep breath she proceeded to gently explain who it actually was that put the presents under the Christmas tree and drank the milk and ate the cookies. The only phrase I remember from all those years ago is “Santa Claus is not real.” What? My six-year old mind was reeling. This was not the answer I had anticipated or wanted! All that time spent straining to hear reindeer hooves on the rooftop was for nothing? I couldn't decide whether I was happy that mom had trusted me or if I was furious that she had let me in on a secret better off kept for a few more years. What if I had snuck downstairs one Christmas Eve and found out who really wore the red coat that way? What to censor, what to release, and whether censoring is an obstruction of agency is a sticky and much argued dilemma—present throughout all of history, from the qualms of revealing Santa's true identity to how much the new healthcare legislation is really costing us. Milton utilizes Adam and Eve's interactions with the angel Raphael in “Paradise Lost” to suggest that censorship and the subsequent search for knowledge is a cause for the Fall of mankind, strengthening the arguments in “Areopagitica” of the degenerative and unjust nature of censorship.

Milton adamantly refutes the use of censorship when Parliament begins to institute the practice during Milton's lifetime, using rhetoric of the origin of mankind to back up his position. He claims that censorship is in all cases counteractive to the cause placed as its goal. As a

staunch Christian humanist, Milton believes that God “trusts him [man] with the gift of reason to be his own chooser” (Loc. 32223). To have someone spoon-feeding what knowledge should be imbibed and picking out the bad bits degrades, undermines, and allows to atrophy man’s intellect and progression. Mankind can be trusted with the ability to censor their material individually, utilizing the graces and helpmeets God has given them, without the pedantry of a nagging “friend” to guide them. Thoughts of our first parents and the state at man’s creation was in Milton’s thoughts even as he wrote *Areopagitica*; “Foolish tongues! When God gave him reason, he gave him freedom to choose, for reason is but choosing; he had been else a mere artificial Adam, such an Adam as he is in the motions” (Loc. 32341). Adam, without the ability to choose, to use his agency, would have been nothing more than an automated bundle of programed responses. This visual representation of an event so closely associated with man’s agency, presented void of choice, starkly displays the contrast Milton is arguing occurs when censorship is employed.

Censorship can be seen in a more practical light than the eternal scheme of the laws of creation as Milton uses in *Areopagitica*. Censoring leaves individuals at a loss for information, whether that information is kept back or given piecemeal. Incomplete or withheld information can be just as bad as *misinformation* as it leads to faulty logic and regrettable decisions. Nearly every book or movie plot has such an element of miscommunication contained to send a tension-riddled twist through the story (*Romeo and Juliet*, TV series *Lost* as just two examples). The resulting feelings are what are key to the result of these moments of withheld knowledge. How often is the realization that information is being hidden from you (or the character) accompanied by feelings of indignation, anger, betrayal, sadness, or despair? We, as humans, naturally want to find answers and oftentimes when we realize something is missing we try to fill it up with erroneous possibilities. These possibilities lead to conclusions and then following the

same line of incorrect logic result in rash, lamentable decisions. Such is the case with Eve in the Garden of Eden.

The problems surrounding censorship in "Paradise Lost" are, as stated above, generally issues with the repercussions of withholding knowledge, such as distrust, miscommunications, and, ultimately, malformed decisions that the one censoring hoped to avoid by withholding the information. Most significantly, Raphael comes to visit and teach Adam and Eve more about their existence and what went on before they came to be in the Garden of Eden. Just before Raphael leaves, Adam asks the angel to explain the workings of celestial bodies and "by his count'nance seemed / Ent'ring on studious thoughts abstruse" (XIII, l. 39-40). Eve takes that as her cue to get up and leave to tend to her 'domestic' duties. Abstruse is defined as "hard to understand" and "secret, hidden" (Dictionary.com). Why should Eve feel obliged to leave at this point? Milton claims shortly after that it is not "not capable her ear / Of what was high" or that she was "not with such discourse / Delighted" but that she preferred to hear whatever the answer was from Adam's lips (XIII, l. 49-50, 48). No fear of taint through censorship would need be feared with this explanation but for Eve's confession as she later eats the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil; ""to add what wants / In female sex, the more to draw his love, / And render me more equal, and perhaps, / A thing not undesirable, sometime / Superior; for inferior who is free?" (IX, l. 821-825) There is plenty of ground for feminist indignation throughout "Paradise Lost" surrounding Eve, but it is especially significant that Eve herself acknowledges that she is viewed as a lesser being than Adam. She chooses to leave the discussion not because Adam will tell her everything later but because she knows she is being talked down to, that the information will be dumbed down for her apparently lesser intellect. Later we discover that upon her return Eve hid amongst the trees as Adam and Raphael finish their discussion. Listening this way she at least knows that the information is being catered to

Adam and not to her as his “weaker” part (VI, l. 908-909). I doubt that our first mother enjoyed being talked down to anymore than we do today.

Throughout all of this Eve is showered with compliments as the most beautiful, most divine, heavenly being. Even Satan in the form of the snake praises her beauty. But her response to an individual of lesser intellect than herself indicates a different response than would be expected; “Serpent, they overpraising leaves in doubt / The virtue of that fruit, in thee first proved” (IX, l. 615-116). Eve does not want flattery, she craves respect. And to have the chance of heightened knowledge and intellect (which to her mind at this point equals respect) is too tantalizing a temptation to pass up. And thus the fruit is eaten.

Censorship, and the resulting emotional repercussions lay a trail for Eve’s decision to eat the fruit. Milton, in further attempt to prove his point that censorship is an unethical practice, subtly relays Eve’s path of life until she chooses intelligence over immortality. Much like my mother and the Santa Claus revelation, would it have been less painful to painful for Eve to simply be spoken to as a cognizant human and not feel the need for higher intelligence in the first place? As Milton conveys in *Areopagitica* we fight to attain truth, not to destroy it.

Works Cited

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