

## Explication: Lines from Paradise Lost, Book VIII

This analysis is from Book VIII, beginning with line 530. Adam has been talking with the angel Raphael about his and Eve's creation, and Adam is describing his first reactions to Eve. This passage is perhaps the first, blatantly clear indication of the weakness which will spell Adam's doom.

At this point, Adam's confidence and emotional state begin to change considerably from what we have seen of him thus far. Up till now, he's been happy, energetic, and relatively sensible. However, when he begins to speak of Eve's creation and the emotion he felt when he first saw her, and subsequently, about the sexual passion he feels for her now, we begin to see a change in him. He becomes discomposed, confused, and accusatory.

Adam admits that "here passion first I felt, /Commotion strange," when he sees Eve (530-31). "Commotion" in the Latin form, 'commotio,' means "a violent motion." Today's usage isn't quite so strong, meaning merely a "disturbance or agitation." But considering that Milton likes using the Latin meanings in addition to, or over, contemporary meanings, I interpret Adam's statement as being more extreme in its tone than it would otherwise appear. This view would also be supported by his use of the phrase "*vehement* desire" (*italics mine*) in line 526. The literal Latin meaning of "vehemence" is "to carry out of one's mind." Also, there's another old meaning of "commotion" which is, "disturbance of the mind." So, clearly, these meanings all apply to Adam's apparent changing state.

"Strange" also may have had a stronger meaning in Milton's time than it does today. My dictionary says, "extraordinary, remarkable," for the more antiquated definition. Considering this much more intense meaning of both words in "commotion strange," as well as a stronger meaning of "*vehement* desire," it would follow that subsequent adjectives that Adam uses regarding this subject (passionate feelings for Eve) would be colored with far stronger overtones.

For example, when Adam explains, "in all enjoyments else/Superior and unmov'd," (530) he stresses how ultra confident (Superior) and absolutely unaffected (unmov'd) he is in all other things. It sounds here as if he's over-compensating for the out-of-control state he feels regarding his passion. Throughout the passage he uses a succession of words and phrases which express dissatisfaction, are negative, or have a tendency towards exaggeration. Previously, he hadn't exhibited these tendencies. Some of these words are "Superior," "weak," "fail'd," "unmov'd," "Elaborate," "Too much," "Not proof enough," and "More than enough." So, as mentioned, these words and phrases take on added emphasis in light of the more intense meanings of "Commotion strange" and "vehement desire."

Another sign of change is that Adam's use of language is no longer as eloquent as its previously been. He normally speaks in long, fluent sentences. However, here he uses shorter phrases with numerous breaks, or pauses. He sounds insecure and distracted. For the first time, he becomes critical, which seems out of character. He makes an accusation towards Nature saying that "Nature fail'd in mee, and left some part/Not proof enough such Object to sustain" (535-36). And Eve is blamed for having "Too much of Ornament, in outward show Elaborate" (238-39). And, finally, even God is at fault because He "from my side subducting, took perhaps/more than enough" (536-37), thus bestowing on Eve too much beauty.

The sentence, in which Adam stammers out these accusations, is not a full sentence, which also indicates the confused nature of his thoughts. He begins the sentence with the word "or," and continues with the thought, then begins a new thought that he also begins with "or." Anything

following the word "or" is the second half of a comparison statement. Adam, however, begins the sentence with "or", but never states what the "or" is being compared to. Then he repeats this pattern a second time in the same sentence and fails to provide a comparison. So, the sentence, as Adam states it, is incomplete. It's as if he is speaking in only half thoughts, similar to talking to oneself. (Perhaps, I'm reading too much into this and that this sentence construction was considered correct in Milton's time--?)

It's clear that something is different about Adam. When he talks about his passion for Eve he doesn't complete his thoughts, he becomes critical and stammers on about whose fault it is that he's weak, and he loses his customary fluency of language. It appears that he is more than in love with Eve. Rather, such unrestrained feelings would indicate that he's in utter awe of her; he idolizes her. Adam is captivated overmuch by her beauty and he further exposes this when he states in line 532 that he feels "here only weak/Against the charm of Beauty's *powerful* glance" (italics mine). Here, again, he uses a word of extreme, "Powerful," which means, "possessing or exerting great force, or producing great effects." "Powerful" seems like an odd word to use with "Beauty's glance," as opposed to words like "wonderful," "comely," "lovely," etc. And, once again he puts blame elsewhere for his weakness: "Beauty." Since Beauty is embodied in Eve, then, it is essentially Eve's fault. He has, consequently, given Eve power over himself. He's dazed by her beauty, thereby impairing his own wisdom and common sense.

Adam further demonstrates how much he's succumb to the power of Eve's beauty in lines 540-559. He claims he understands that she is the inferior of the two of them, and that she "[resembles] less/His Image" (543-44). However, when he sees "Her loveliness, so absolute," he is so overcome by her that he sees "in herself complete . . . /That what she wills to do or say,/Seems wisest, virtuous, discreet, best" (547-550).

So, there are a number of signs warning that things aren't quite right with Adam and that he's not paying attention to the dangers of his run-away emotions for Eve. Even the Angel Raphael makes serious note of Adam's words and actions (line 560) and later gives him warnings. No doubt, Adam would stand resolute against Satan's temptation, for he's just a slithering serpent. It's Eve's beauty that is his trap. For Adam, Eve's beauty is as deceitful as Satan's lies are to Eve. Thus, by his actions in this passage we can observe that it's Eve's beauty that will be Adam's doom.