

(SLIDE: cartoon #1)

There's a tendency, any time the name or idea of Eve comes up, to assume that she represents the advent of sin and especially of mortality. For this reason, I suspect none of you has any difficulty understanding the meaning of this cartoon. Some version of this image, and the enormity of culpability it expresses, is likely to pop automatically into our mind, when we hear the name of Eve.

So it shouldn't be surprising, that, when people are looking at an ancient work of fiction about Adam and Eve, like the *Greek Life of Adam and Eve*, they have a tendency to feel like they are in the midst of that courtroom drama, and this can influence the kind of research questions that get asked.

(SLIDE: reporter #1) Sometimes, when you ask a certain question, a text will give you a passage that looks like it is the answer to the very question you are asking—and yes, as you'll see in a moment, Eve's answer is more or less a direct quote from the *Greek Life*.

The difficulty here is that it's not clear that the *Greek Life* itself is asking this question. In the narrative environs of this passage, Eve's husband is on his deathbed, worried about meeting God in the posthumous life. He asks her to pray, and this is what she comes up with (SLIDE: the prayer of repentance) (read it). Eve's prayer *performs* culpability, but it does not *inform* anyone of that culpability, not even God, to whom it is addressed—its purpose is not to provide information, but to do something else.

(SLIDE: structure of talk) The research of this thesis has been to get a handle on what is going on here by looking at the *Greek Life* structurally: structures of narrative (I), repentance (II), and genre (III), in order to understand (IV) its theme. This passage turns out to be pivotal for understanding the *Greek Life*, but not because the *Greek Life* is any sort of arraignment of Eve. Rather, what Eve does in that prayer is the best thing—the most virtuous thing—that a human being can do in relationship with God.

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## PART I

Speaking of relationships, they turn out to be the most important component for understanding the *narrative* structure of the *Greek Life*, even though it might not be the first thing we think of. When I tell people what I study, I usually say, “It’s an ancient story about Adam and Eve.” (SLIDE: Benjamin) So if we were to represent that idea visually it would look something like this. Adam is in the middle, Eve is next to him, and we’re looking at *them*—mostly Adam, because we’re kinda androcentric in the ancient world.

(SLIDE: Harmonia) But actually, the *Greek Life* is about the *relationship* between humans and God, more like this. When you’re not paying attention to relationship as the focus of the narrative, the *Greek Life* kind of seems like an odd assortment of little snippets of story that only barely go together. Looking at relationship buys you a narrative that hangs together enough that it looks like a single story, and it goes something like this (SLIDE: plot structure).

Most of the story takes place in Adam's last week of life. Adam is sick, he's upset because he's sick, and he tells a version of the Eden story to explain that being sick is the result of God's getting mad at him way back when. Eve is also very upset about his illness, and she and Seth go on a journey to the gates of Paradise to get healing oil, but Michael turns them away. When they get back, Eve tells the Eden narrative in much greater detail. That's the first maybe two-thirds of the narrative, up to the bit I showed you, and everything that happens in that first section is oriented around exposing in greater and greater detail God's wrath: how it started, what that means for human life in the world, what humans have tried to do about it, and the hope they still have that it will get better.

God's wrath continues to be relevant because of what happens after death: throughout the *Greek Life*, people are worried about what will happen at the Day of Resurrection. This also shows up in the bit we were looking at: Adam says to Eve, God has been angry, but he may yet have mercy, so please go pray. Eve prays as we have seen—Adam is presumably backstage breathing his last—and at the close of the prayer, an angel shows up and says to Eve, you've been doing repentance, but now it's time to move on and have a vision.

So Eve looks into the heavens and sees God and his retinue enter with a great deal of pomp and circumstance, God's mercy is announced, God addresses Adam and promises him good things at the Resurrection, and angels bury Adam in Paradise. There's a short epilogue in which Eve also dies and is buried, the end. So whereas the first section of the story lays out God's wrath, the visionary section lays out God's mercy. And right here, at the tipping point between wrath and mercy, that's where Eve's prayer comes in.

When you see it laid out like that, Eve's prayer is definitely something seriously important. We definitely want to understand it, because if you miss something about Eve's prayer, you've probably missed something about the entire story, because the whole thing hangs on it.

## PART II

So that prayer is the subject of part 2: both the name the angel gives it, "repentance," and the things that Eve actually does.

The type of repentance that shows up in Eve's prayer is a type that I call supplicatory repentance (SLIDE: some kind of diagram of supplicatory repentance): it takes place in a situation that I call the "repentance scenario" in which person A (of lower status) has committed some offence, person B (of higher status, or more power, usually both) gets angry and threatens retaliation against person A, and person A would like to avert anger and escape retaliation. Supplicatory repentance is one strategy for doing that—or, rather, a constellation of strategies. The idea is for person A to enact submission as a way of attracting mercy, but the specifics can vary: they might perform culpability, the way Eve does through reciting "I sinned". They might also give the appearance of being in pain, or physically debase themselves, or talk about how awesome person B is, and so on, and Eve does some of those things, too.

Supplicatory repentance shows up in both Greek and biblical sources that would have formed the cultural background for Greek-speaking Jewish writers, and in a lot of ways, they actually aren't that different from each other. The repentance scenario is always pretty much the same; sometimes the specific strategies are different, but sometimes not. So (SLIDE: David and Cadmus) here's a side-by-side comparison of two literary figures confronted with the wrath of a deity and threat of punishment.

In the biblical example, Nathan has just threatened David with dire consequences for his adultery with Bathsheba. In Euripides' *Bacchae*, Dionysus has just said all the bad things that are going to happen because he was not properly honoured. David and Cadmus are both in the repentance scenario, and as you can see, their utterances are more or less alike, and both involve the performance of culpability. Neither of them is asking explicitly for what he wants: it's sufficiently obvious from the repentance scenario and the performance of culpability that they're seeking mercy.

Early Jewish literature sometimes has a field day with supplicatory repentance and expands out prayers of repentance to some length. We see this in the book of Aseneth, the Prayer of Manasseh, and biblical Daniel.

(SLIDE: 3-panel comic of GLAE) Eve's prayer is one more example of this popular motif. Eve is in the repentance scenario through having committed an offence against person B, in this case God. God has enacted some punishments, but he might enact even more after death. Eve's extravagant performance of culpability is a type of supplicatory repentance that Eve carries out on Adam's behalf in hopes of a more favourable posthumous fate.

As we saw in part 1, it works. Eve's prayer is a well-formed supplication for mercy, in a situation that we might expect to see it, and it comes at a timely moment, at the linchpin of the narrative, the tipping point between God's wrath and God's mercy.

### PART III

I'm going to put a pin in that for a moment to talk about genre, and the fact that the *Greek Life* reads like a tragic narrative—that is, a story in the style of Greek tragedy.

To be able to talk about this, we can't use strict categories with necessary and sufficient inclusion criteria, because the *Greek Life* just couldn't be entered into a tragedy contest, and that would be the end of the story.

(SLIDE: radial category) Instead, we need to use everyday types of categories, which are arranged radially, with more prototypical examples towards the centre, less prototypical examples at the fringes, and no hard boundary. Membership isn't defined but recognized. In this example, "dairy-free cheddar shreds" couldn't be entered in a cheesemaking contest, but it's still useful to notice that they belong at the fringes of the category of dairy, because that can help us find them in the grocery store, if we need them.

With radial categories, looking at features, even if they're not necessary or sufficient, is still useful for characterizing the category and getting the "ah-ha" moment of recognition. (SLIDE: Adam groaning, Eve weeping) Here's my favourite example for illustrating the tragic style of the *Greek Life* (read melodramatically).

This scene—and the several passages that depict weeping, fretting, and physical suffering—participate in the tragic convention of the depiction of suffering, as well as storytelling through dialogue. Aside from this, there is an abundance of large and small features of the *Greek Life* that are extremely common in tragedy, such as the retelling of a novel episode in the life of a mythic hero, the abundance of dialogue, and the orientation of the story around slow discovery—in this case, of the wrath and mercy of God.

The most interesting tragic feature that's being exploited by the *Greek Life* is what John Winkler calls the scenario of risk. This is something that a lot of tragedies do: they tell a story where someone is in danger—this is really attention-grabbing, we like it—we still have stories of people facing danger. In the *Greek Life*, the scenario of risk—that is, the particular risk in this case—is just the repentance scenario that I just talked about. Adam and Eve are at risk of retaliation from someone they have wronged—that's God.

This is where virtue or excellence comes in: danger puts tragic heroes in situations where they need to struggle to the utmost and stretch the limits of human capacity. In the *Greek Life*, at the moment of greatest danger, right when Adam is dying and about to meet his Maker, we get to witness the most excellent possible action, and that's Eve's prayer. So here's another point of view on how amazing that prayer of repentance is.

Now, the most popular choice for the type of danger heroes face in tragedies—Elizabeth Belfiore estimates its prevalence at around 80%—is a danger posed by people who are supposed to be safe—often kin, but also some other ritualized relationships such as suppliants. (SLIDE: IT) You can get the basic idea of the kin-endangerment plot—at least, one with a happy ending like the *Greek Life*—from *Iphigenia among the Taurians*: first Iphigenia doesn't know who the strangers are and is going to sacrifice them to Artemis; then she realizes that one of the men is her brother Orestes; then she stops wanting to kill them and escapes with them.

(SLIDE: GLAE *philos*-endangerment) The *Greek Life* has a similar structure: first, Adam is in danger from some posthumous harm by God; then Eve has her prayer of repentance; then God stops threatening bad things. This moment in the middle, in Eve's prayer, is actually doing something structurally similar to *Iphigenia*, which is to address God as kin—in this case, as father. God is not addressed as father in the *Greek Life* prior to this moment. This is the moment when this form of address begins, and thereafter, God starts acting all fatherly, and taking good care of his son Adam, making sure he gets buried properly, gets a patrimony, and so on.

## PART IV

What I've just shown you is a sketch of the 3 major component pieces of my study: narrative structure, type of repentance, and tragic patterns of storytelling. These 3 pieces fit together to characterize the *Greek Life*, and the way it puts repentance at the centre of importance. I'm going to take it just a little further with two more observations.

One is to take note of gender. Like a lot of tragedies, the *Greek Life* has a female protagonist, and also like a lot of tragedies—I'm drawing on Froma Zeitlin here—the *Greek Life* is using the feminine as a way to think androcentrically about things that are basically unthinkable for a masculine subject.

In this case, the unthinkable is supplicatory repentance. Laurel Fulkerson wrote an amazing book recently where she shows that in antiquity people—especially elite males, who had the power to do it—avoided like the plague any semblance of making a mistake or changing their minds. You can see this in tragedies: tragic figures will often blame others, they'll lament their own misery—they will talk about anything other than their own culpability. Anyone who ends up thinking too hard about culpability ends up committing suicide.

Adam in the *Greek Life* does exactly the same thing—he blames Eve, he talks about how miserable he is, and so on. Adam just can't make a prayer like Eve's because it's unmanly. Only Eve, as a woman, can undertake supplicatory repentance in a way that can be taken seriously. And, as I was saying earlier, the *Greek Life* does take it very seriously, through its plot structure, tragic conventions, and gender conventions. While she's performing her own culpability, it's Adam's ass she's trying to save from Adam's sin.

The second observation is about God. The *Greek Life* is really tragic about a lot of things—but not God. The Jewish God is kind of an unusual god to show up in a tragic narrative, because he's a lot like Zeus—not when he's chasing women, but when he's being the High God, the god who's in charge of fate. Zeus doesn't show up in tragedies, basically ever, because that kind of god is just not personable enough.

(SLIDE: rainbow connection) One of the really common things that Jews were trying to do in the Hellenistic and early Roman periods in terms of ethnic differentiation was to insist on the nature of their divinity and the cultic ramifications of that. What we're seeing in the *Greek Life* is one attempt to make Jewish cultic peculiarity comprehensible within a Greek cultural environment. The Jewish God is the High God in charge of fate; nevertheless, the *Greek Life* inventively introduces him into a tragic style of narrative, and demonstrates through its storytelling what virtue makes it possible to relate directly with the divinity Most High, and that is repentance, enacted on Adam's behalf, by Eve.

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