

Tucker Godek

Dr. Ainsworth

EN 335 - Milton's Satan

25 April 2014

Milton's Satan and Eve's Temptation

Abstract: The contrasts between Adam and Satan are most identifiable and compelling in their respective relationships to Eve. This paper argues that Adam is not a figure of patriarchal constraint to Eve, and that Satan offers a truer sense of restriction for Eve by exploiting the nature of her creation. Satan does not conceive of a benevolent, progressive end for Eve, while Adam has no choice but to support Eve. Satan represents a perversion of Eve's agency and identity as a woman, while Adam acts as a force of preservation.

The titular action of *Paradise Lost* comes not through a grandiose show of power or will but a nuanced argument of sophisticated syllogistic strength. Satan's deception through the serpent continues to develop his identity as an unparalleled orator who orchestrated a rebellion against God through words alone rather than the warrior depicted in the earlier books. Deception characterizes the passages of Eve's temptation above all else. Satan appears disguised, with "her ruin" as his intent, and he delivers a barrage of empirical and spiritual lies. Satan is contrasted by Adam, who reluctantly leaves Eve in seeming opposition to the first woman's initial act of independence before Satan approaches her. This sequence invites sympathy for a reading of Satan as a liberator or proponent of egalitarianism but downplays the reasons that Satan actually chooses to tempt Eve or intervene in the garden at all. Milton makes Satan's reasoning appeal to human hearts and minds through rhetoric so convincing that it commands respect or even awe. However, the relationship between Satan and Eve is born from revenge and ends in the loss of

in her refusal of the fruit that “God so commanded, and left that Command / Sole Daughter of his voice; the rest, we live / Law to ourselves, our Reason is our Law” (*Paradise Lost* 9.652-654).

This is illustrative of a relationship in which Satan uses Eve’s agency and reason against her, corrupting the dominion that God afforded her. Eve’s role as an instrument in Satan’s plan makes her relationship to Adam much more valuable, if not more equal. The assertion that Adam is an active symbol of patriarchal authority presupposes his belief in the same idea. As Kaitlyn Carr points out in her essay, “Eve’s Defective Character,” Adam’s good intentions actually “result in [Eve] being further driven to assert her own value, separate from Adam” because of Eve’s creation as a less capable adversary to Satan (Carr 4). Because Eve is granted the agency to go against Adam’s wishes, her standing must be reconciled with God and not with man. Although Satan does not create Eve as a more temptable being, he is more than willing to exploit this design. Adam is a foil to Satan’s revenge plot through the steadfastness of his motivations. Adam synthesizes the commandments of God and the counsel given by Raphael with his affection to Eve, but ultimately chooses a fate that binds him with Eve in a show of sacrifice. Adam, given the chance to make a much more clear headed choice than Eve, reaffirms his devotion, “However I with thee have fixt my Lot, / Certain to undergo like doom; if Death / Consort with thee, Death is to mee as Life” (*Paradise Lost* 9.952-954). Adam and Satan are divided in their intent for Eve by the divide between selfishness and selflessness.

The rhetoric of both Satan and Adam in Book 9 initially revolves around appeals to Eve’s sense of logic and obedience. The characteristics of the arguments employed by Adam and Satan, at surface level, seem counter-intuitive to the nature of the authors. Satan in the body of the Snake articulates his ascent which he wants to share with Eve while Adam argues against Eve’s unrestricted movement about the garden. A human audience is appropriately tempted to

extrapolate these apparent values and their dichotomy into a larger picture that is realistically untenable when probed further. When confronted with the doubts Adam has about their separation in the garden, Eve appears to use Adam's affection for her to bolster her argument that "Thoughts, which how found they harbor in thy breast, / *Adam*, misthought of her to thee so dear?" (*Paradise Lost* 9.288-289). Eve knows that Adam can be coerced because they are the same flesh and his devotion to her ironically puts Satan's plan in motion. Even though Adam's concerns - rooted in the truth and warnings of Raphael - are eventually proven to be very well-founded, the legitimacy of Adam's doubt ultimately has no bearing on the efficacy of the temptation to come. The impulse to push back against the complementarian ideal of Adam and Eve's relationship is undeniable in a society steeped in egalitarian values. Reading Adam's pleas to Eve as constraining falsely contextualizes their conversation in extra-textual instances of Old Testament sexism. Despite the apparent disparities between this relationship dynamic and the modern conception of personal liberty, Adam acknowledges Eve's need for personal autonomy when he unknowingly sees her off to the fall:

Go; for thy stay, not free, absents thee more;

Go in thy native innocence, rely

On what thou hast of virtue, summon all,

For God towards thee hath done his part, do thine. (*Paradise Lost* 9.372-375)

Adam enables Eve's decision and avows her innate abilities and God's providence. The way Adam extols his wife's virtue and offers counsel that aims to preserve necessarily makes Satan's temptation hinged upon weakness less empowering. Satan's pride is exhibited in this instance not as arrogance, but a claim to illegitimate power based on his message of human inadequacy. The liberation Satan offers is contingent upon a state of depravity in which human existence is the

end. Like Satan's temptation of Jesus in *Paradise Regained*, this line of reasoning attempts to relate a supernatural state or reward with a terrestrial one. Satan does not affirm Eve, but casts her as a lesser being when he questions God's reasoning for denying them the fruit:

Why but to keep ye low and ignorant,
His worshippers; he knows that in the day
Ye Eat thereof, your Eyes that seem so clear,
Yet are but dim, shall perfectly be then
Op'n'd and clear'd, and ye shall be as Gods (*Paradise Lost* 9.704-708)

Adam describes Eve as complete and sufficient in and of herself with the blessing of God, but Satan promulgates a message of insufficiency. When Satan tempts Eve, he suggests that Eve be "Deterr'd not from achieving what might lead / To happier life, knowledge of Good and Evil" (*Paradise Lost* 9.696-697). This is Satan's transcendent lie - that Eve will be fulfilled not through the contentment in her relationship with Adam, but by reaching towards an unknown and forbidden power. Satan's power of persuasion is so immense that Eve begins to believe that paradise is not enough. Eve finds the truth Adam proffers dissatisfying but sees a source of false Divinity in the lies that Satan knowingly advances. Satan's empowerment is artificial at best and destructive at worst but Adam as the created match for his partner provides her a full and fitting place in Paradise.

Although it is easier to make more out of Eve's character through Adam and Satan alone, Eve herself offers a compelling amount of context for both of these relationships. Eve is largely excluded from the action of *Paradise Lost* and thus her select dialogue is necessarily brimming with identity. Because Eve is so often described from Satan's perspective as a potential means for corruption or as a direct comparison to Adam, the personal insights into her character become

even more valuable. It is telling then that Eve's first lines affirm Adam's preeminent role:

O thou for whom

And from whom I was form'd flesh of thy flesh,

And without whom am to no end, my Guide

And Head, what thou hast said is just and right. (*Paradise Lost* 4.440-444)

Eve's description of Adam in this passage seems to foreshadow the rising action of the ninth book's climax. Eve professes the providential nature of her relationship with Adam, which is juxtaposed by the predatory image of Satan perched in the garden, observing the two and looking for a means of revenge. Satan sees that by any measure, God has created Eve with a necessity upon Adam and that her separation from him would lead to her downfall. While this is a problematic aspect of Eve's makeup from a feminist perspective, it reflects much more heavily on God than on Adam. Adam actually permits a rebellion against the principles laid out by God's creation in this passage. While this is potentially harmful to Eve's preservation in the state of Paradise, it does enable her as an agent. The fruit's role as a prospective equalizer is explored in Jessica Lauren Stephenson's essay "Milton's Match Made in Paradise" as Eve regards "the fruit primarily as the means to correct the imbalance of intellect and inward faculties between her and Adam... if [the fruit] could raise a beast's low and abject thoughts, could it not also raise her intellect so that she might provide solace and satisfaction of the mind to her husband" (Stephenson 7)? Eve's grasp for independence and equality is commendable, but ultimately impossible due to her design. While Adam attempts to help Eve overcome this deficit by allowing her to part with him in the garden, Satan manipulates it, and uses it to affirm her subjection by bringing about the fall through her actions. Adam attempts to eschew the prescribed identity of his partner, but Satan exacerbates the influence of Eve's identity.

The human propensity to identify with Satan's logic is derived from an inability to comprehend what Paradise means. Eve's desire to gain more than her allotment is a natural sentiment but one that is out of place in the context of the garden. She is unfortunately created with a deficit, and this inherent intellectual inability dooms her efforts to equalize the power balance in the garden. However, this is not due to Adam's oppression, but Satan's exploitation of God's design. The contrast between Eve's relationship with Satan and Adam would appear to make Adam a servant to the tyrannical, misogynistic God against whom Satan rebels. However, even without the anachronistic domestic role that is assigned to Eve, there is a strong case for Adam's characterization as a more fitting partner and arbiter of truth and liberty. Satan's paradoxical empowerment is constraining in its inherent selfishness as a part of his heavenly revenge and the heavy toll that it takes on Eve as she is made a subject to sin and a master over little. Adam's selfless choice to fall with Eve is the antithetical point of characterization to Satan. Adam enables and encourages Eve in vain, but when she succumbs to the very temptation he feared, Adam still chooses to stay beside her. This initial sacrifice is indicative of the sacrifice that Michael eventually says will be made by the Son, and renders Satan an inarguable foe to the only human he encounters through the whole of the poem. As the agent of *Paradise Lost's* most important event, Eve illustrates that Satan offers, both in intent and design, a source of power that only a fallen humanity could adore.