

Hannah Dillashaw

D. Ainsworth

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### Eve's Transformation as Examined Through Satan

*Abstract: Through a thorough examination of the characters' dialogue and the poetic elements that comprise it, this paper argues that readers can physically see Eve decide to fall in both her words and the written form of the poem as it shifts from something that is distinctively Eve's into a dialogue that is nearly identical to that of Satan.*

John Milton's *Paradise Lost* has undoubtedly set a high standard for poetry since its publication, in part because of the epic poem's use of formal elements of poetry. Milton brilliantly uses these techniques to tell the story not only narratively, but structurally as well. One example of this technique is seen through Satan and Eve. To anybody with even the most minimal knowledge of the Biblical account that Milton's story stems from, Satan and Eve appear to be clear opposites. Milton demonstrates this in their diction, with the poetic elements of their dialogue contrasting one another greatly, specifically in the length of sentences, position of caesuras and line breaks, and the lexicon itself of the characters. However, upon further inspection, the two have more in common than readers may initially think, specifically during their interaction in which Satan persuades Eve to eat the forbidden fruit. By breaking down Eve's dialogue at this moment, readers can see her very way of speaking start to shift in form until it is nearly identical to Satan's, further driving home the portrayal of her falling to sin just as Satan did.

Satan is one of the most complex characters in *Paradise Lost*, so it comes as no surprise that his speech is always elegant and well-formatted. He speaks in sentences that are short by Milton's standards, averaging four lines apiece. Also characteristic of Satan's dialogue is the placement of caesuras throughout. While not placed exactly regularly, these pauses in the lines seem to either be focused toward the center of the line or to flow back and forth across them, visually similar to a slithering snake, parallelling the form Satan has taken to delude Eve. This movement can be seen in book nine, lines 679-732, when Satan is enticing Eve to eat the fruit. He is trying to weave a convincing argument, and his efforts are seen in the technical form of the poem as well as the words of the narrative. These lines also possess an irresistible musical quality, the melody of the caesuras drawing in Eve and readers alike, luring them down a metaphorical spiral staircase toward sin. These tactics are seen specifically in lines 705-709, where it is easy to see one of the many curves in the placement of caesuras and to hear the power of Milton's poetry:

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,

Knowing both Good and Evil as they know (*Paradise Lost* 9: 705-709).

Satan additionally asks many questions, most of which go unanswered or are answered by Satan himself. While asking these rhetoric questions may appear to be a waste of time and energy—for the characters as well as Milton and the reader—this is quite possibly as a persuasive technique used to sway Eve from her original way of thinking. This staple of Satan's dialogue is also seen

in book one, lines 242-270, when he is taking the lead over the other fallen angels and showing them that they can create a Hell better than Heaven:

Is this the region, this the Soil, the Clime,  
Said then the lost Arch-Angel, this the seat  
That we must change for Heav'n, this mournful gloom  
For that celestial light?

.....

What matter where, if i be still the same,  
And what I should be, all but less than hee

Whom Thunder hath made greater (*Paradise Lost* 1: 242-245, 256-258)?

Furthering this temptive language, the breaks in the lines of the poetry in book nine often happen after very polar words. Satan appears to be using strong language to further convince Eve of the impact eating the fruit can bring her. He says, “Those rigid threats of Death; ye shall not Die: / How should ye? by the Fruit? it gives you Life” (*Paradise Lost* 9: 685-686). The last words on these lines, “Die” and “Life,” are drastic opposites, strengthening his claim that Eve’s way of living will be immeasurably better once she possesses the knowledge gained by eating the fruit. More examples of these adverse words are seen throughout this speech, such as “wise” and “ignorant,” “fear” and “awe,” and “evil” and “just.”

Eve’s diction before meeting Satan opposes his structurally in nearly every way. In book nine, lines 205-225, she speaks in long sentences, with only two taking up the entire twenty lines of dialogue. This is a major change from Satan’s short, to-the-point sentences. Another contrasting factor is the placement of caesuras, which appear highly irregular in Eve’s dialogue with no form of connection like in the words of her counterpart. The abundant number of

caesuras, which often appear as commas, create many pauses after short thoughts, making Eve's speech audibly similar to Satan's in allusion to their eventual likeness. However, the difference between the use of pauses within sentences and ending punctuation sets the two apart, arguably signifying Eve's ability to carry on in a similar way as before after her inevitable "end," the fall of humankind, and Satan's inability to do the same after his own fall. Furthering this claim, the use of words like "still" and "till" imply that Eve sees their job as neverending, always with more work to turn to after finishing a task:

*Adam*, we may labor still to dress  
 This Garden, still to tend Plant, Herb, and Flow'r,  
 Our pleasant task enjoin'd, but till more hands  
 Aid us, the work under our labor grows,  
 Luxurious by restraint (*Paradise Lost* 9: 205-210);

Though there is no concrete end, as both characters carry on with life after the epic poem comes to a close, their respective falls are the end of their lives as they came to know it. While Satan appears to be stuck on the concept of revenge after his fall, Eve seems to carry on more or less the same way she did before: devoted to both Adam and God, and ready to work as she is called upon to. Her language is less severe, as much of her words pertain to the garden. This literal flowery language attributes a feeling of comfort and ease to Eve. However, she also uses words that signify the passing of time, giving the initial lightness a sense of underlying desperation. In book nine, lines 223-225, Eve says to Adam, "Casual discourse draw on, which intermits / Our day's work brought to little, though begun / Early, and th' hour of Supper comes unearn'd" (*Paradise Lost* 9: 223-225). Eve is reasoning with Adam that the best course of action to deal with the overgrown garden is to separate and perform their tasks in solitude in order to complete

them faster. If the pair spends day after day tending to the garden, however, there should be no urgency to quickly finish the tasks set before them. Adam and Eve do not know what is coming, though she speaks here almost as if she does. This creates a point of suspense that otherwise would not exist for readers who already know the end result of their separation, creating a metaphorical countdown to the fall.

Although Milton uses technical devices to portray Eve and Satan as opposites throughout the vast majority of the poem, they do share a moment of similarity. In book nine, after Satan has made his case to Eve in favor of eating the fruit, readers see Eve reason with herself in lines 745-779. At the beginning of this section, Eve's dialogue is structured as it typically is, with long sentences and irregular caesuras:

Great are thy Virtues, doubtless, best of Fruits,  
 Though kept from Man, and worthy to be admir'd,  
 Whose taste, too long forborne, at first assay  
 Gave elocution to the mute, and taught

The Tongue not made for Speech to speak thy praise (*Paradise Lost* 9:745-749)

As the speech goes on, however, this normality shifts into that of routine for a very different character. Eve's sentences grow shorter, punctuated with more regular caesuras that move back and forth fluidly across the line, and her words grow more severe and polar:

But if Death  
 Binds us with after-bads, what profits then  
 Our inward freedom? In the day we eat  
 Of this fair Fruit, our doom is, we shall die.  
 And how dies the Serpent? hee hath eat'n and lives,

And knows, and speaks, and reasons, and discerns,  
Irrational till then (*Paradise Lost* 9: 760-766).

At this moment, when Satan has prevailed in seducing her to sin, the differences between Eve and Satan are nearly indiscernible. Eve also begins asking herself a great deal of questions, mimicking Satan's persuasion tactics used on her only moments earlier. Later in book nine, in lines 866-885, Eve influences Adam to eat the fruit. While this speech is decidedly more like Eve, elements of Satan's dialogue still linger, namely the flattery. In both cases, Satan and Eve lead their arguments with a shower of compliments and kind words for the other party. Just as Satan's attempts on Eve, this proved successful yet again when Adam ate the forbidden fruit as well. Adam's fall further demonstrates the change Eve has gone through to become more like Satan as the student becomes the master, both leading others down a path of defiance of God's rule.

Mariah Lawrence argues in "Falling Pawns: An Argument Against God and His Conniving Ways as Evidenced by Satan and Eve" that both characters are subjected entirely to God's will, erasing the notion of free will and the ability to choose. However, by examining Eve's speech patterns, it is clear that a conscious choice is being made. Why would God, if intending for Eve to fall, create her to be the opposite of Satan if those similar qualities lived within her all along? Furthermore, even if this were the case, why would her diction change so drastically in the moments before the fall if Satan and Eve could co-exist before without sharing such similarities? Milton believed in the concept of free will, and Eve's transformation is evidence. The fact that she goes through this change before eating the fruit arguably implies that the real fall of humankind was not due to the action of eating, but due to making the decision to disobey God instead. What is typically seen as the action that dooms humankind in typical

Christian theology is, in reality, less important than making the decision itself, as this is the point where Eve succumbs to her lowest point and is on par with the first and most heinous sinner.

While it could be argued under the concept of predestination that God's severe punishment was unjust because Eve was masterfully tricked into eating the fruit, Eve's diction argues for itself that she did, in fact, weigh the consequences and decide to disobey anyway, tilting the scales of justice in God's favor after all.

Although Milton says himself that he wrote *Paradise Lost* as an attempt to justify the works of God, a simple comparison to the Biblical account shows that he exercised his fair share of creative liberty, perhaps being most successful in the portrayals of Satan and Eve. By examining the vast array of differences and the similarities between the two, the transformation of Eve as she falls to sin reads as dramatic and suspenseful. In a story in which readers already know the ending, adding this element of contrast breathes new life into the narrative, while simultaneously making the well-known story work as beautiful and complex poetry. While the words used are obviously important, the underlying elements of poetry—such as the punctuation, line breaks, and metaphors—are arguably even more crucial. These formal elements add a depth to the work that helps scholars further understand Milton's intentions and sometimes forces them to sympathize with the characters, even when they may not want to show sympathy for them at all. It is in part thanks to John Milton's brilliant use of poetic structure that *Paradise Lost* is still in publication today and that it still holds scholars captive to its nearly-gravitational pull.

Works Cited

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