

Tazi Buchholz

EN 335

Dr. Ainsworth

2 May 2019

Fighting for Dependence

Abstract: This paper explores the supposed inaction of the Son, and later Jesus, both in Heaven and on Earth as the ultimate form of strength through his faith in the Father's will. His character has been contrasted with Satan, who appears more heroic with his independent action, but who Milton marks for failure through the larger implications of both Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained. It covers the parallel nature of the Son and Satan's characters through Paradise Lost before tackling the difference in character that arises in Paradise Regained upon the manifestation of the Son as Jesus. Ultimately, this paper argues that the Son's action in both poems comes from his consistent choice to glorify the Father and trust in His will, though it does not appear to be explored in great detail on the page.

Throughout the first two poems of John Milton's epic trilogy, *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*, Milton contrasts the forces of Heaven and Hell and the role of both in the Fall and redemption of Man. These forces take their greatest form of opposition through the Son and Satan whose actions closely mirror each other, save the important difference of allegiance. Looking at the Son through his comparison to Satan allows Milton to explore the Son's own role in the fall and salvation of man and his position as the heir apparent to Heaven's throne. What primarily differentiates the Son from Satan in *Paradise Lost* is his connection with the Father, which removes his personal agency in favor of relying upon his faith and God's omniscient and omnipotent power where Satan contrastingly puts his faith in himself. By the time Milton explores the altered dynamic of Jesus and the more jaded Satan in *Paradise Regained*, the

characters have faced fundamental changes and the surety of God's connection has been lost, but Milton presents Jesus' faith even without firm security of direct communication with the Father as the ultimate heroic deed and model. Throughout *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*, Milton venerates the dependence of the Son (and later, Jesus) on God, and through Satan demonstrates how independent action leads most directly to failure.

Early within *Paradise Lost*, Milton parallels the Son and Satan in a position of volunteered action, and although the scenes appear nearly identical in initiative to face danger, the difference lies in motivation. Initially, both volunteer for what seems a perilous task, Satan in his escape from Hell to destroy Man and the Son's sacrifice for Man's salvation. Satan volunteers first to travel from Chaos to tempt humanity without knowing how "the void profound / of unessential Night receives [the volunteer] next / wide gaping, and with utter loss of being / threatens him, plung'd in that abortive gulf" (*Paradise Lost* 2: 437-440). In volunteering, Satan arguably has more on the line; there is no real guarantee that anyone *can* escape from Chaos let alone survive such a journey, and Satan faces the decision alone. Comparatively, when the Son volunteers a book later, he faces the support of God – or at least he has faith that he does; the element of uncertainty Satan faces has been removed. The Son understands the consequences for stepping forward are that he will face "the rigid satisfaction, death for death," but assumes he "shall not long / lie vanquish't" because the Father "wilt not leave [him] in the loathsome grave" (*Paradise Lost* 3: 212, 242-243, 247). Because of his connection with the Father, he understands there is no chance of survival, but agrees anyway, removing the element of uncertainty of his fate. It is his faith that allows him to step forward and trust the Father not to do him wrong. As Milton reminds us, "what [God] will[s] is Fate" (*Paradise Lost* 7: 173). In hearing the Father declare the finality of the death that is owed, the Son cannot help but know exactly what he faces having heard the decree from the Father himself, so that when he volunteers he does so

heroically knowing he will succeed, and at great personal cost. Satan acts independently of God, which leaves him uncertain in his own victory, whereas the Son's faith in the will of the Father sets him up for success – even if he is unsure, he trusts that the Father will protect him, and He does.

The comparison continues with Satan and the Son's roles in the War in Heaven, depicting again the difference in agency between the two forces to highlight how the Son's dependence upon the Father sets him apart for success despite Satan's seeming bravery in acting independently. Both characters face a significant difference in their involvement in military affairs over the course of the three day conflict. Unlike the Son, Satan fights all three days, and “prodigious power had shown, and met in Arms / no equal, ranging through the dire attack” and invented the cannon to gain an edge over the angelic host (*Paradise Lost* 6: 247-248). Satan's attack drives the action of the war; as an Arch-angel and respected leader, Satan's drive to rebel essentially sets the events of the poem in motion long before the fall of Man. Milton also makes a point to note that Satan fights with his soldiers, but even his forces combined with his comrades is not enough to overtake Heaven, or even to defeat the Son. At God's behest, the Son waits to engage until “two days are therefore past, [and] the third is [the Son's]” to take the field alone and remove Satan and his host, but he does not act before he has been commanded to prove himself by merit before Heaven's forces (*Paradise Lost* 6: 699). After the Father has declared that the war will be “endless, and no solution will be found” without the Son's intervention, the Son finally intervenes (*Paradise Lost* 6: 694). The Son's merit to Heaven's throne stems from his action within the war, but he is not a proactive figure. His strength instead comes from trusting the Father to guide him and his actions, and it is through this trust that he is able to remove Satan and the rogue forces alone. Contrasted with Satan, the Son does not fight with his people nor does he share the victory in the same way Satan shares in his comrades' loss

– he steps forth onto the battlefield knowing he will succeed because God has willed it so.

Though it seems Satan acts more heroically by putting himself in the line of fire to fight at the forefront with his men (despite whether he could, in fact, die), Milton chooses to glorify the Son with victory. While he is not the most active agent within the story, the Son restores order, and ultimately triumphs for the good of all Heaven, not for the glory of himself.

Milton further defines the Son's character through Satan's temptation of man, where the Archfiend takes an active role in Eve's seduction and the Son's divine interference feels strangely absent. At the beginning of *Paradise Lost*, the plot to corrupt God's soon to be created Man comes directly from Satan, and it sets the action into motion. The meeting of devils in Chaos might feature Beëlzebub's suggestion, but the thought itself had been "first devis'd / by *Satan*, and in part propos'd" (*Paradise Lost* 2: 379-380). His drive to tempt man comes entirely from the promise of personal gain, and he devises his own manner in which to con the devils into allowing him to achieve it. However on Earth, Satan does not face the Son at any point. After arriving in Eden, Satan begins his task of luring man from God by singling out Eve and whispering in her ear while she sleeps to give her dreams of "the Tree / of interdicted Knowledge: fair it seem'd / much fairer to [her] Fancy than by day" (*Paradise Lost* 5: 51-53). Before Godly interference in the form of Raphael reaches Adam and Eve to herald the warning of impending treachery, the temptation had already begun, appearing as though Satan's own actions might edge out over the will of the Father. Moreover, it is Raphael who comes down as the divine messenger – not the Son, though he supposedly acts as the intermediary between Man and God, "presenting, thus to intercede" in giving voice to man's prayers in Heaven (*Paradise Lost* 11: 21). With little Heavenly resistance from the angels guarding Earth, Satan continues his plot with hope of success, certain only through his self-confidence. But God later declares to the angels that their "sincerest care could not prevent" Satan's success (*Paradise Lost* 10: 37). The

Son's absence betrays his dependence upon the will of God the Father, who no more informed his angels of Satan's actions than he sent forth the Son. In the Son's absence of Satan's temptation, Milton demonstrates that it is the Son's adherence to God's will that grants him merit, but also that he will indeed have to step forward for the sake of Man's redemption, for if Man does not fall, his great Merit shall not be achieved as God has declared.

The depiction of Man's punishment also plays a role in how Milton characterizes the role of the Son and of Satan where the Son only partially partakes in the ultimate proceedings and Satan has disappeared completely. Milton's depiction of the Son's judgment of Man gives readers a glimpse of the type of leader he is, which becomes a preface to Jesus in *Paradise Regained*. Responsibility of punishment falls to the Son's shoulders after God proclaims the right "to whom but [the] / Vicegerent Son, to [him the Father] ha[s] transferr'd / all Judgment, whether in Heav'n, or Earth, or Hell" (*Paradise Lost* 10: 55-57). The proclamation of the Son's status becomes a way for Milton to remind readers that the Son is not yet King of Heaven, he is Vicegerent. Milton contrasts the Son's position with that of Satan, who stands as "the Monarch" of Hell with no figure above him, yet it is the Son who has more power, and it is Satan who is "punish[ed] in the shape he sinn'd / according to his doom" along with his followers (*Paradise Lost* 2: 467, 516-517). Though absent from the punishment of Man, Satan's followers share in his suffering, and all face misery at his hand. Contrarily, the followers of the Son do not share the same universal punishment, and it is because of the Son's duty to act as a bridge between mankind and the divine that he reminds God of his own impending sacrifice which "to better life shall yield [man], where with [the Son] / all [his] redeem'd may dwell in joy and bliss," convincing the Father not to smite mankind (*Paradise Lost* 11: 43-44). In stepping forward to speak for man, already the Son demonstrates his loyalty to the will of the Father, and the promise he has made for the sake of Man; he does not beg that Adam and Eve be completely exonerated,

he begs that God steady his hand and be merciful. Milton's comparison of Satan and the Son's roles in their respective spheres of influence and the punishment that falls upon their followers further demonstrates the Son's strength in character over Satan; though he appears to have a more direct claim to power, both he and his followers suffer.

As Milton reaches *Paradise Regained*, the stakes of the game have changed but the struggle remains quite similar; the Son has become the human Jesus and must now rely firmly in faith alone, and Satan has in part come to terms with the role the Father has for him though he still attempts to act in his own interests in tempting Jesus. Central to the conflict of *Paradise Regained* is Jesus' status as a human, which removes the close, intimate connection he shared with God in *Paradise Lost* and instead tests him to rely totally upon his faith. The only direct contact between Jesus and the Father comes at his baptism, where God's voice "audibly heard from Heav'n, pronounc'd [Jesus] his" and no more, leaving Jesus with the vague idea of working redemption for Man, but forcing him to put his faith in the Father to reveal the path before him "for what concerns [Jesus'] knowledge God reveals" (*Paradise Regained* 1: 284, 293). Jesus does not question the summons of the spirit to guide him into the wilderness, but nor is he able to access the Father as he could in Heaven, instead trusting that he is performing what has been asked of him. Removing Jesus' connection with God tests his resolve to carry forth the promise he made in Heaven, and through his internal strength, he does so. In contrast, in the time between poems, Satan appears to have realized his unwitting role in acting in the interests of the Father, declaring "for what [the Father bids [Satan] will do" whether he intends to do so or not (*Paradise Regained* 1: 376). However, though Satan has come to recognize his unwilling role in the Father's plans, he acts in the vain hope of his own success in tempting Jesus and protecting himself from the fate that awaits him, not to aid Jesus in any way. *Paradise Regained* also presents the first scene in which both characters are present together, and though both have

undergone changes, their fundamental dynamic has not changed, further satisfying Milton's assertion that it is Jesus who holds the true power and nobility, regardless of form over Satan's own self-interest.

The pattern of action represented in the characters remains the same in *Paradise Regained*, even as they have evolved since the ending of *Paradise Lost*, and still, Milton's veneration of the Son's supposed inaction as Jesus only continues while Satan consistently comes up short. It is Jesus' decision not to cave to Satan's active attempts to tempt him that mark him as the Son of God. Satan exists as God's test; if human Jesus will choose the path he promised in Heaven to sacrifice himself from mankind, he may prove his merit. It is Jesus' "firm obedience fully tried" that allows him to regain Eden, and through his dedication to upholding a part of the public promise made in Heaven through the trial "in secret done [on Earth] / and unrecorded left through many an Age" (*Paradise Regained* 1: 3, 15-16). Throughout *Paradise Regained*, Jesus' continued obedience to God, regardless of audience, serves as the highest form of action in refuting Satan and a life independent from God's will. In his choice to abstain from Satan's temptation, he proves another facet of his Heavenly merit. Conversely, Satan's temptation of Jesus will forever fall short of success because of his power in name only. His temptation of Jesus comes in the form mostly of riches, kingdoms, knowledge, and glory – all items he imagines are his possessions to bestow. What he asks of Jesus is to "fall down, and worship [him] as [Jesus'] superior Lord" to receive the gifts he offers (*Paradise Regained* 4: 166-167). But, through their exchange, Milton reminds readers through Jesus that Satan's gifts and temptations are shallow concerns, and ones that carry no real weight past the physical world. Moreover, none of what he promises is Satan's to bestow. Satan has been deluded in his own self-interest and cannot realize that he holds no power over a character who puts his trust in what lies beyond, in his faith in God, to prove himself the Messiah.

Central to both the roles of Satan and of the Son / Jesus stems from their interaction and ties with God the Father; it is his will that Satan refutes and that the Son embraces, but the question remains, why? In Julia Miller's essay, "Is God Complicit in the Fall of Man?" Miller argues that God refused to intercede to prevent the fall because He "desire[s] for praise and glory" and when the Son steps forward to claim Adam and Eve's punishment, He receives the glory the Son commands in proposing to sacrifice himself (3-4). Which may be true, but as a larger implication, Miller's argument that God's relationship with the Son and with his followers rests in glory suggests a great deal about the Son and his motivations. In this way, the Father's desire for glory falls within his larger plan, and in allowing the Son to step forward it aligns with what Jesus says directly to Satan in *Paradise Regained*, in questioning "why should man seek glory" as man to whom has "nothing, and to whom nothing belongs / but condemnation, ignominy, and shame" and to which everything "to God alone of right belongs" (*Paradise Regained* 3: 134-136, 141). In preserving the merit the Father claims for him, the Son and Jesus choose to do that which will glorify beyond themselves, making them ultimately the strongest characters, while Satan acts in his own interest and thusly only merits the condemnation, ignominy, and shame Jesus mentions. In choosing to act in the interest of God, Jesus (and the Son by extension) exhibit the action Milton recognizes as the most noble. In acting in his own interest with the hope of personal glory, Satan condemns himself to a life separate from God, sentenced to Hell, and defeat at the Son's hands, never to be saved, no matter his actions; the Son / Jesus' adherence to the Father's will and the glory they seek in his name are what grants them the utmost merit on Earth and in Heaven.

Milton contrasts the Son's incarnations and Satan throughout both *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* in their motivation of character and choices of action. Throughout *Paradise Lost*, the primary difference between the two lies in the Son's access to the Father's

omnipotence, offering a certain sense of certainty which Satan lacks as the independent leader of Hell. By *Paradise Regained*, Jesus has lost his metaphorical training wheels, which challenges him to maintain his faith in God despite the uncertainty he faces at Satan's hands. It is the Son's dependence upon the Father's will that allows him to triumph consistently over the seemingly more recognizably heroic actions of Satan. As Milton depicts time and time again throughout *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*, the independent will may appear more heroic or noteworthy, but it will never overcome the quiet assurance of God's will, and will not triumph in Milton's Christian epics. When the Son steps forward to volunteer as Man's salvation, he does so uncoerced and with faith in his Father's plan. Throughout *Paradise Lost* he makes a great number of choices towards action that directly manifest as inaction. By not making large, sweeping gestures like Satan to propelling the story to forward, the Son instead is an incredibly active character, but he is active in his faith in the Father, and that is what marks him as the stronger character.