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English 383

Two Falls, One Redemption: The Fates of Satan and Eve

Milton's *Paradise Lost* outlines two separate and distinct falls, the fall of Adam and Eve, and the fall of the angel Lucifer. Both Satan and Eve fall because they are blinded by reasoning strangely nostalgic of Milton's *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*, losing their faith in God's perfection and re-imagining him as an inhibitor of freedom, an unjust ruler. However, though both fall, one finds redemption and surprisingly the one that escapes judgment's vicious hand with promises of hope is the weaker of the two, Eve. Though Eve is often disparaged because of her weakness, whether caused by her gender or her choices, it is in this weakness that she finds redemption. Milton's epic poem ironically contrasts his earlier work in *Tenure* by ennobling submissiveness to rule and degrading the will to oppress it; Eve finds redemption in her "weakness", while Satan remains fallen because of his "strength".

Satan begins *Paradise Lost* prideful and unyielding, having "the unconquerable will...And courage never to submit or yield" (1:106,109) to the God who cast him out of Heaven. He attempts to carve a path to his own type of redemption, a redemption found in dragging the creations of heaven down to share in his endless misery. *Paradise Lost* sets the great devil up as the hero of the epic, a character of strength who commands legions of followers and fights against all odds to reach his goals. Eve is a near opposite, described as being a creature of "meek surrender" (4:494). She is lesser in creation than Adam, she was made for him, below him (X:149) making her a possession rather than a companion. She is completely reliant upon Adam, and even seems to worship God through him, "He for God only, she for God in him" (4:299), the "true authority in men" (4:295). Satan would never allow himself to be put in such

subjection, nor would he let his freedom be stripped from him in this way. He was a true believer in liberty, setting all creation on the same level, Eve accepted her place as a lesser entity, and chose submissiveness without a second thought.

Despite extreme differences in character, both Satan and Eve find themselves facing a similar moral dilemma. Satan and Eve are both give commandments of faith, Satan to submit to and follow the Son, and Eve to not partake of the fruit of knowledge. Both fail through the same reasoning, this misapplication of logic becoming the weakness of both entities. Satan's great argument and the reasoning that ensnares him, and through him Eve, is for equality and liberty. He follows Milton's train of thought in *Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* to throw off "the falsified names of loyalty and obedience to color over their base compliances"(34461) and that "If men", or angels in this case, "within themselves would be governed by reason and not generally give up their understanding to a double tyranny of custom from without and blind affections within"(34453-34455) they would find their "rightful" place as equals with God. The sudden appearance and rise of the Son to a place above Lucifer, "of the first,/If not the first Archangel, great in power,/In favor and in pre-eminence, (5:659-661) causes him to feel as though he has been "impaired" (664). Like the political Milton oppressed under the vicious tyrants of his time does Satan view God, upsetting the freedom of the Angels and their place in the patriarchy. *Paradise Lost* makes no mention of what Satan thought of the Father before this event but either way he became no longer able to follow God faithfully having blinded himself through reason, debating the ideals of freedom and the purpose of his own creation until they conflicted with the submission he was asked to give.

Eve falls to the same logic, receiving the pattern of thought from the being who first introduced it into God's kingdom. First, Satan convinces her that the speech of the snake means that something has happened outside of what God had decreed to be truth: "The first at least of

these I thought denied/To beasts, whom God on their creation-day/Created mute to all articulate sound” (9:555-557). Here, Satan is able, for the slightest moment, to dissolve the divine authority of God so Eve can view her ruler as a imperfect Monarch. He furthers the process by reasoning her through the logical holes in commandment given of God, and how they inhibit her inherent freedom. “Forbids us good, forbids us to be wise?/Such prohibitions bind not. But if death /Bind us with after-bands, what profits then/Our inward freedom?” (9: 759-62). Suddenly Eve feels restricted, that her freedom is held back and the only way to escape and ascend to the existence she deserves is to overthrow the rule of the greater entity by partaking of the fruit, setting her on equal terms with God.

This idea is quickly dispelled, for both Satan and Eve, Satan is thrust out of heaven by the same being he thought himself superior and learns the hard way that in this case he and his followers were not “by privilege above all the creatures born to command and not to obey” (34542-34543). Satan can never be on equal terms with God and find the same kind of liberty and freedom expressed in *Tenure* when he feels his ruler has wronged him. Eve also learns that she has gained no power that would bring her closer to God and still is in complete subjection to him. The important thing to remember about these two appeals to logic is that the former fought openly for his ideals while the other fell prey to them momentarily in a moment of weakness. Eve did not fall into this logic on her own, neither did she leave Adam seeking out the fruit of the forbidden tree. Eve fell prey to another, Satan created his own situation. This is where the paths of Satan and Eve separate.

Paradise Lost seems to give Satan multiple opportunities to return to heaven and submit again to the will of God. Until the near end of the epic, Satan struggles time and time again with the goodness around him in the garden. He has to continually convince himself to move forward in his rebellion. It is through this unyielding strength that Satan loses his ability to find

redemption. He cannot submit to God: "Left for repentance, none for pardon left? None left but by submission; and that word Disdain forbids me" (2:79-82). Though he has dragged mankind down, it did not redeem him in any way, rather it caused him to sink further into his own misery. Eve, on the other hand, now turns to Adam, she will cause him to "shall share with [her] in bliss or woe" (9:31). Where God does not budge in regards to Satan, Adam relents. He knows Eve is completely dependent on him, and his love for her causes him to choose to fall himself. Eve's weakness not only convinces Adam to follow her into a fallen state but seems to excuse herself in the eyes of the Son when judgment comes. She "confessing soon, yet not before her judge /Bold or loquacious, thus abashed replied./The Serpent me beguiled and I did eat" (160-161). Christ makes no mention further of Eve's blame turning immediately to curse the serpent. He also blames Adam for Eve's transgression. "Thou didst resign thy manhood, and the place Wherein God set thee above her made of thee" (X:147-148). Eve's inherent weakness allows her to shift the responsibility of her fall onto Satan's deception and Adam's incapacity to rule over her and protect her.

Now Eve finds her redemption. Because Adam had pity on her because of his love for her and her weakness, a pair of people fell instead of one. Together they can seek redemption through their posterity and have hope in reuniting with God again. Satan could not get Eve, nor Adam to share in his misery because their "strength" did not match his. Eve's rebellion was not formed in her mind first, rather forced on her by this stronger entity. Her inherent submissiveness causes her to immediately turn back to God while Satan's unyielding will prevents him from swallowing the same, losing any chance at making up for his failure.

Milton, John (2009-10-28). *The Complete Poetry and Essential Prose of John Milton* (Modern Library). Random House Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.