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Satan and Eve

Jacey Heldrich '08

Book IV

“The smell of Grain, or tedded Grass, or Kine, (450)
Or Dairy, each rural sight, each rural sound;
If chance with Nymphlike step fair Virgin pass,
What pleasing seem’d, for her now pleases more,
She most, and in her look sums all Delight.
Such Pleasure took the Serpent to Behold (455)
This Flow’ry Plat, the sweet recess of Eve
Thus early, thus alone, her Heav’nly form
Angelic, not more soft, and Feminine,
Her graceful Innocence, her every Air
Of gesture or least action overaw’d (460)
His Malice, and with rapine sweet bereav’d
His fierceness of the fierce intent it brought:
That space the Evil one abstracted stood
From his own evil, and for the time remain’d
Stupidly good, of enmity disarm’d, (465)
Of guile, of hate, of envy, of revenge;
But the hot Hell that always in him burns,
Though in mid Heav’n, soon ended his delight,
And tortures him now more, the more he sees
Of pleasure not for him ordain’d: then soon (470)
Fierce hate he recollects, and all his thoughts
Of mischief, gratulating, thus excites.

In this passage from Book IV of *Paradise Lost*, Satan encounters Eve alone in the Garden. Though not Satan’s first glimpse of Eve, this particular instance encompasses a profound and unique, albeit brief, shift in Satan’s demeanor. Satan’s complex reaction to Eve and her presence in the Garden illustrates important facets of his character. First, Eve’s beauty, innocence, and femininity momentarily disarm Satan. Here, a break in both his facade of fierce pride, and his tumultuous feelings of vengeance both subside. Secondly, once Satan overcomes this temporary

change, he reacts with an even more intense resentment toward Eden and its inhabitants, spurring him to continue his temptation. Thus Milton offers several significant observations within this passage. Eve, in her pre-fallen state, exists with such purity she almost succeeds in reforming the world’s worst evil. Yet despite her innocence, Eve’s potential for corruption continues to affect her. This imperfection lends itself to Satan’s ability to ultimately overcome Eve’s influence. Also, the triumph of Satan’s vengefulness demonstrates the

ferocity of his intentions. Eden's characteristics, and closeness to God's presence, serve as reminders of what he lost in his own fall. The resulting pain surpasses any tranquility the Eve and the Garden manage to instill in Satan and prepare him to instigate his temptation of Eve.

The first lines of this passage serve to establish Eve's position in Eden. Milton utilizes language that create a multi-sensory experience of the garden. In line 451 he refers to "each rural sight," thus forming the garden in a pastoral scene. Not only does Milton being to create a visual image of Eden, but he invokes other senses. Line 450 imbues the garden with a distinct smell, "the smell of Grain, or tedded Grass, or Kine,/ or Dairy." By demonstrating the olfactory condition of the garden, Milton layers onto the visual experience of Eden. Similarly, the word "tedded" in line 450 adds texture to the grass in this "rural sight" by scattering it across the garden. The following line then refers to "each rural sound." Here, Milton evokes a common sounds that occur in a pastoral environment. Sounds come from the cattle, or "Kine," as they graze on grain and grass. Milton relies on the common auditory experience of rural settings to continue to layer on to the experience of Eden. Thus Milton uses sight, sound, smell, and touch to create sense of Eden that transcends words, thus creating a multi-layered environment capable of demonstrating Eve's deep connection to her home.

The picturesque description of Eden prepares the scene for Eve's classical entry. She comes into the picture "with Nymphlike step." (Book IV, Line 453). Mythologically, a nymph is a creature bound to a specific place, typically a wooded area, and usually

heavenly serves as a sort of guardian. Hence, the allusion to Eve as a nymph works on several levels. First, it solidifies her attachment to Eden. The sensory descriptions of the previous two lines serve to surround Eve. They create a tangible atmosphere that helps to substantiate her presence. She exists amidst a vibrant sensory experience, in which she is the focal point. The guardian aspect of a Nymph also attests to Eve's position as a care-taker in the garden. In her relationship with her flowers, for instance, she uses care and protection, just as a nymph would treat her charged area.

Secondly, a nymph invites a loaded sexual connotation. The previous Books of *Paradise Lost* have already established Eve as a sexual being. Scenes in the bower between Adam and Eve are explicit in their descriptions of their sexual activity, yet, the descriptions always encompass love and purity. Adam and Eve act sexually in "the way God likes best." (Book II Line 456). The sexuality of a Nymph, however, is notably more salacious. Nymphs are associated with both Dioynisus and satyrs, figures who traditionally represent a kind of pagan sexuality. These associations drastically differ from the Puritanical chastity Milton extolls through the actions of the pre-fallen Eve. Thus, by associating her with a nymph, Milton alludes to the kind of sexuality that the fall eventually brings out of Adam and Eve. The seduction and lust that characterizes the relations the post-fallen couple relate more closely to the traditional concept of a Nymph's activities. However, Milton confuses the "nymphlike" perception of Eve takes by also describing her as a "fair Virgin." Again, while not referring to sexual

virginity, Milton references her innocence and chastity, both in her sexual experience and her current state of being. Thus the entire line “If chance with Nymphlike step fair Virgin pass” (Book IV Line 453) perfectly illustrates Eve’s disposition. God has filled Eve with purity and goodness, yet there remains an element of corruption, or the potential for corruption, within her. Just as her hair forms in “wanton curls,” (Book IV line 304) her beauty is somewhat tainted by the failing in her that causes her inevitable fall from grace. Milton remains fixed in the idea that something inherent in Eve results in her acceptance of temptation. The juxtaposition of nymph and virgin that encompass Eve’s entrance set up the complexity of her character, and provide a basis for the intense reaction Satan has at her presence.

Even before Eve’s entrance, Satan softens to the surroundings of Eden. His time in the garden seems “pleasing.” (Book IV Line 453) Thus, even before glimpsing Eve, his feelings of anger, spite, and vengefulness have begun their descent into a brief reprieve. When Eve appears, though, she calms Satan further; “What pleasing seem’d, for her now pleases more.” (Book IV Line 453) This line has several intents. Along with demonstrating Satan’s pleasure at Eve’s presence, it becomes clear that Eve’s existence enhances the already pristine Eden, again emphasizing Eve’s connection to the garden. As the line continues, “What pleasing seem’d, for her now pleases more/She most, and in her look sums all Delight,” Eve becomes the focal point of the picture of Eden. As she walks into the foreground, the idyllic scene described in the first two lines drops behind her. The background now exists to complement

Eve’s beauty. She embodies all the charms of the garden, “in her look sums all Delight.” (Book IV, Line 454) The synthesis of the garden’s splendor and Eve’s attractiveness affects Satan, and his subsequent reaction lays outside his previously established range of emotion.

When Satan first enters the garden in Book IV, despite being surrounded by the “goodliest Trees loaden with fairest Fruit,/Blossoms and Fruits at once of golden hue,” (Lines 147-184), he does not react with the same sense of pleasure evident in this passage from Book IX. Instead, during his first moments in Eden, he acts as a “prowling wolf/Whom hunger drives to seek new haunt for prey” (Book IV, Lines 183-184). He transforms himself into a greedy cormorant and perches himself on a tree to contemplate the destruction of Eden. When Adam and Eve come onto the scene later in the book, instead of responding to the figures with pleasure, Satan becomes infuriated, “O Hell! What do mine eyes with grief behold/Into our room of bliss thus high advanc’d/Not Creatures of other mould, earth-born perhaps/Not Spiritys, yet to heav’nly Spirits birght/Little inferior.” (Book IV, Lines 358-362). The sight of Adam and Eve living peacefully in Eden incites in Satan an even greater anger towards God, causing Satan to vow to cause the destruction of Eden, “Thank him who puts me loath to this revenge” (Book IV, Line 385).

As Satan moves closer to the couple in Book IV to muddle Eve’s dreams, he continues to do so with a “Devilish art” (Line 801). Every inclination towards the couple up until this moment in Book IX with Eve are ones of destruction and vengeance. So why does Satan react with pleasure at

the sight of Eve alone in the garden? Instead of resentment, towards Eve “Such Pleasure took the Serpent to Behold”(Line 455). In his previous observations of the humans, Satan does react with fascination, but here Eve intoxicates him. In lines 455-459, the words becoming flowing and peaceful. Milton describes the plot of land they stand on as “Flow’ry,” Eve’s movements as “sweet,” and her disposition “graceful” and “Feminine.” The euphony of sounds in these lines act to lull Satan into tranquility. Satan has already been exposed to the beauty of Adam and Eve, yet here her mythic look entrances him. Milton describes Eve as both “Heavn’ly” and “Angelic.” (Lines 457-458). As seen in Book IV, the god-likeness of Adam and Eve particularly affects Satan. In his first glimpse of the pair, he notices “in thir looks Divine/The image of thir glorious Maker shone.” (Book IV, Lines 291-292). Thus the emphasis on Eve’s supernal qualities in Book IX further demonstrates Satan’s sensitivity to heavenly attributes.

There appear to be several reasons why Eve’s presence overcomes Satan. The first is the timing of the encounter. At this moment in the story, Eve has left Adam to begin their daily tasks. Fresh from sleep, untouched by the work of the day, her excitement at trying her hand at working alone, and the way Eden looks at this time of morning create a unique sheen around Eve. Secondly, Eve is alone for the first time. Prior to this moment, Eve as only appeared before Satan walking with Adam, and sleeping with Adam. By placing her alone, Milton can explore her distinctive characteristics. Now in a position where Adam’s splendor cannot overshadow from her own, Eve exudes her own feminine qualities. Now, as

Eve becomes the focal point of this picture, Satan must focus on her looks, her disposition, and her movements. Through these elements, Milton explores the transforming power of chastity, similar to the theme of *Comus*. Milton likens Eve to the character of the Lady, as both cause a change in their tempters through their virtue. Eve’s “graceful Innocence” affects Satan. Here, Eve exists in exactly the form God intended her to exist. Enjoined with her surroundings, comfortable in her immortality, and untouched by the evil lurking near her. She is like the Lady seated in her “enchanted chair”(*Comus*, Line 658). As Satan reacts to Eve’s angelic qualities with pleasure and delight, so does Comus towards the Lady, “Can any mortal mixture of Earth’s mold/Breathe such Divine enchanting ravishment?” (*Comus*, Line 244-245).

Now separated from Adam, Eve’s distinctive characteristics begin to transform Satan; “and Feminine,/Her graceful Innocence, her every Air/Of gesture or least action overaw’d/His Malice...” (Book IX, Lines 458-461). Her slightest movement, or “least action” (line 460) create a mesmerizing affect that continue to calm Satan. The use of sound in the next lines demonstrates the magnitude of a possibility of change in Satan. The gentle language that Milton uses to describe Eve gives way to harsher, rougher words that characterize Satan’s temper. Milton segues into Satan’s character by juxtaposing the words “rapine” and “sweet.” ‘Rapine’ evokes more typical Satanic associations, such as raping, pillaging, violence, and pain, whereas ‘sweet’ invites pleasant, even happy connotations. For a moment, the ‘sweet’ overtakes ‘rapine’. Eve’s

sweetness has “bereav’d/His fierceness of the fierce intent it brought” (Book IX, Line 462). The violent urge for revenge drives Satan out of Hell and into Eden temporarily dissipates in Eve’s presence. With this development, Milton turns the passage away from Eve and focuses on Satan. The euphony of the lines describing Eve’s entrance, “If chance with Nymphlike step fair Viridin pass/What pleasing seem’d, for her now pleases more/She most, and in her look sums all Delight,” (Lines 452-454) gives way to a cacophony accompanying Satan’s disposition, “His Malice, and with rapine sweet bereave’d/His fierceness of the fierce intent it brought:/The space the Evil one abstracted stood” (Lines 461-463). The words become harsh. The harmonious sounds that characterize the first half of the passage give way to minor notes.

Immersion into this unmelodious language offers an exploration of the depth of change occurring within Satan. The repetition of the word fierce in line 463, “His fierceness of the fierce intent it brought,” underscores the consuming motivation Satan has to destroy Eden. Hence, when Eve’s sweetness pulls him out of his vengeful state, even if just for a moment, it demonstrates the magnitude of the power she has over him. Satan now stands “abstracted” from his “own evil” (Lines 463-464). Drawing on the lulling effect of the words in the lines describing Eve and the garden, Satan now stands in a dreamlike state. His moment of tranquility has separated him from the ferocity that has driven all his actions.

Line 463 refers to Satan as the “Evil one.” His identity is fundamentally entwined with evilness. Hence, parting from “his own evil,” (Line 464) separates him from his very self. In this

moment, Satan exists in a trance outside of himself. Milton affirms Satan’s dazed state in the following line; “and for the time remain’d/Stupidly good” (Line 465). The qualifier of “stupidly” demonstrates the irrationalism present in Satan’s behavior. The intoxication of Eve has clouded both his judgement and his fierce sense of purpose. As with any intoxication, Satan let his guard fall away for a moment; “Stupidly good, of enmity diarm’d” (Line 465). Milton accompanies this change in Satan with another cacophony. The list of emotions that briefly dissipate from Satan’s mind encompass a wide range of negativity. Along with enmity towards Heaven and Eden, Satan’s feelings “of guile, of hate, of envy, of revenge” (Line 466) also fall away momentarily. With these words, Eve and Eden leave the scene completely. The the passage shifts from the outward picture of Eve walking though Eden to an imageless description of Satan’s inner life.

The change in Satan lasts only moments. The shift into the dissonant words of Satan’s motivations never return to the peaceful, flowing language of Eve and Eden. The separation of Satan from his self abruptly rectifies itself. As if Milton’s use of the words ‘guile,’ ‘hate,’ ‘envy,’ and ‘revenge’ remind Satan of his constant inner turmoil he suddenly recalls his misery and snaps back into his agenda. Line 467. “the hot Hell that always in him burns,” refers back to Milton’s description of Satan’s cursed state in Book IV: “The Hell within him, for within him Hell/ He brings, and round about him, nor from Hell/ One step no more than from himself can fly/By change of place...” (Lines 20-23) In this passage from Book IX, Milton continues to explore those lines. In his experience

with Eve, Satan does step away from himself, as demonstrate by the line, “That space the Evil one abstracted stood/From his own evil”(Line 463-464). Yet the Hell that rages inside of him acts as a sort of leash, for “One step no more than from himself can fly.” Thus his capability for a moment of peace is predisposed to lasts only briefly.

Milton returns to the idea that Eden serves as a reminder of what Satan lost in his fall in line 468, “Though in mid Heav’n, soon ended his delight.” Satan’s reaction to the “Angelic” Eve in the Heavenly garden has now furthered the development of his character. By this point in *Paradise Lost*, Satan has revealed his outward facade of pride in his actions and his place of power in Hell, and also his inner distress at being rejected from Heaven. In this passage, Satan experiences a brief return to a moment similar to life as a Seraphim in Heaven. He views Eden as Heavenly and Eve as angelic. As such, Satan feels submerged in “mid Heav’n” (Book IX, Line 468). However, as soon as an articulation of this feeling occurs, the realization quickly ends “his delight.” (Line 468). This reminder of the feel of Heaven jerks him back into himself. His calmness vanishes, and he experiences an even more acute sense of pain and loss, “Though in mid-Heav’n, soon ended his delight/And tortures him now more” (Line 468-469).

Now, instead of falling under Eden’s spell, Satan reacts with intense jealousy over the luxury and happiness ordained for the creatures of Eden. Here, Satan reverts to the anger he felt at his first observations of Eden in time as a cormorant. His disposition at the end of this passage aligns with the sentiments expressed in Book IV, “And should I at your harmless innocence/Melt, as I do,

yet public reason just/Honor and Empire with revenge enlarged/By conquering this new World, compels me now/To do what else though damn’d I should abhor.” (Book IV, Lines 389-392). These lines essentially foreshadow Satan’s experience in Book IX with Eve. Aware of his sensitivity to the humans, “at your harmless innocence/Melt, as I do,” Satan maintains that the magnitude of his feelings of revenge will prevent him from having the natural reaction to Eden. In his time with Eve in Book IX, he does experience a type of melting, as his relaxes briefly into the tranquility of Eve’s presence. Thus in this moment, he goes beyond merely observing the pleasures “not for him ordain’d,” he feels them. Satan could only feel the contentment of Eden in his disembodied, dazed state; “That space the Evil one abstracted stood.” (Line 463) Now, reintroduced with his misery and rage, his self complete once more, a resurgence of his sense of loss occurs, and subsequently adds fire to his feelings of jealousy.

The word “fierce” comes into the passage once more. Already established as a reference to the enormity of Satan’s ambitions, Milton now combines the word with “hate,” subsequently creating an even more oppressive energy within Satan. The desire for destruction, for “mischief” return to Satan quickly, amplified by his renewed sense of loss. The tranquility of Eden has temporarily quelled his motivation for destruction. Yet with the line “soon/Fierce hate he recollects” (Line 471) he refocuses his energy back onto his plan for revenge. Now recharged by an immediate sense of loss, Satan focuses on “all his thoughts of mischief.” (Line 471) The passage ends with the word “excited.” The contrast between this word and the

calmness present in the first half of the passage demonstrate the ends of the trajectory Satan went through in this moment in Eden. The last lines have sped up. The soft, slow words of the first lines such as, ‘flow’ry,’ ‘recess,’ ‘pleasure,’ ‘pleasing,’ towards the end become mixed with fast, passionate words like ‘hot,’ ‘torture,’ ‘fierce,’ and, finally, ‘excites.’ Thus it is clear that Satan has drawn upon his transformative experience. Lines 468 to 470 demonstrate the amalgamation of feeling that has transpired; “Though in mid Heav’n, soon ended his delight/and tortures him now more, the more he sees/of pleasure not for him ordained; the soon/Fierce hate he recollects.” The words ‘delight,’ and ‘pleasure,’ were focal points of the pleasant experience of the first half of the passage, whereas the words ‘fierce’ and ‘hate’ characterize the part of the passage that describes Satan’s inner pain. The blending of the two sets of words serve to complete Satan’s character by combining all facets of his character. Now fully charged with a range of experience and emotion, Satan is ready to proceed to his ultimate goal, the temptation.

Thus Satan has begun the process of the fall within himself. Consumed by the despairs that will come to characterize the fallen couple, such as loss, anger, and jealousy, Satan introduces these feelings into Eden. Satan becomes a manifestation of what he will instill into Eve through his temptation. Now aware of the peacefulness that she feels in her pre-fallen state, and filled with the distress that will come to her once she bites into the fruit, Satan is fully equipped to seduce her into his plan. Despite the distinct change Eve’s presence creates in Satan, her purity cannot overcome his

jealousy. Ultimately, she and Eden serve as reminder Satan of what he lost in his fall. This re-ignites Satan’s pain at losing his angelic status. His mission to pass on the negative elements of his character to the inhabitants of Eden becomes fully formed within this passage. Eve stands poised in her potential for corruption, and Satan is readily prepared to exploit her.

Milton’s use of sound and word choice in this passage underscore the trajectory of Satan’s experience. He falls into a relaxed state amidst the pastoral scene and calm sounds that characterize the first half of the passage. As Satan shakes himself out of his daze, the words become harsher, more dissonant and faster, underscore his rising excitement and anger at his separation from Eden. Also, the passage shifts from a landscape image of Eden, with Eve as the painting’s subject in the first half to a in depth exploration of Satan’s tumultuous inner state in the second half. This foreshadows the future devolvement of Eden from its idyllic roots into its post-fallen state of loss and despair.

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