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English 312

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Parallels Between Satan and Eve

John Milton's *Paradise Lost* is set on the grandest of scales. The story is about the Fall of Man, and involves such characters as God, Satan, Adam, and Eve. But this text is not a simply rehash of Genesis. The plot is grander, the setting is larger, and the characters are more complex. Good and evil becomes more ambiguous along with its characters. Two of the figures become especially interesting, Satan and Eve. What makes the two intriguing is how similar Milton depicts them. In *Paradise Lost*, parallels are drawn between Satan and Eve. Both characters exhibit arrogance and an opposition to hierarchy. This comparison challenges the reader's perceptions of both Satan and Eve, and the issues the two wrestle with, such as freedom and knowledge. Topic: clear. Argument is present but a little vague – what perceptions are challenged?

The first similarity between Satan and Eve is their apparent surplus of pride. This hubris is a factor in both of the characters' falls from God. Satan's arrogance is enormous and a main cause of his downfall; it leads the once beautiful angel to believe he has the power to overthrow "the Almighty Power," God (Milton l. 44). The fallen angel expresses his conviction that he and his band "of rebel angels" stood a chance at overthrowing the Lord primarily in the Book I (Milton l. 38). Satan asserts that the rebel angels managed to shake God's throne "In dubious battle on the plains of Heav'n" (Milton l. 104-5). By characterizing the battle as

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“dubious,” and stating that the Almighty’s throne was shaken, Satan implies that he and his rebel force actually had a chance of usurping God. Good He reaffirms this claim a few lines on when he states God “Doubted his empire” (Milton l. 114). This leads to the question, can God be overthrown? Even though God is characterized as “Almighty, [...] Omnipotent, [...] and Eternal Justice,” Satan seems to believe he can, and was very close to doing so. These boastful statements typify Satan’s hubris. While he was excessively confident he could bring down God, he ultimately was not able to. Satan’s “next [...] in power, and next in crime,” Beelzebub, recognizes this (Milton 79). The “Lord of Flies” now believes his conqueror is “almighty, since no less/ Than such could have o’erpow’red such force” as theirs (Milton l. 144-5). Having Satan’s right-hand man, and fellow rebel, realize this solidifies and strengthens the impression that Satan’s confidence is extreme. Satan is arrogant, and this arrogance leads to his fall. Good claim!

Much like Satan, Eve also displays traits of hubris. But unlike the fallen angel and his disproportionate sense of power, Eve’s pride lies in her beauty. A pride Satan exploits to get her to eat from the Tree of Knowledge. Eve’s awareness of her attractiveness is exhibited in Book IV. Here, Eve awakes “Under a shade of flowers” and works her way to “a liquid plain” (Milton IV. 451-55). At the “Smooth lake, [...] A shape within the wat’ry gleam appeared” looking back at her, and the woman fixed her eyes upon the reflection and “pined with vain desire” (Milton IV. 459-66). The scene is a classical allusion to the story of Narcissus, who, according to the Norton Anthology, “fell in love with his own reflection and was transformed into a flower” (Logan et al. 1897, 7). Alluding to the mythological tale invites a resemblance between the two. While Eve was able to leave her reflection, both characters were captivated by their looks. The

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fact that Eve “pined with vain desire” at her own image highlights her fixation with her physical appearance (Milton IV. 466). Eve’s vanity is further displayed when she first sees Adam. Upon viewing the first man, she thinks him “less fair,/ less winning soft, less amiably mild,/ than that smooth wat’ry image” (Milton IV. 478-480). Good, but don’t forget to analyze the words of your quotations and use them to advance/support your arguments Clearly, Eve deems Adam less attractive than she. Already having observed herself, Adam is less beautiful ? and supple. The distinction in physical attractiveness enhances Eve’s concept of personal beauty. This inflated ego is exactly what Satan plays to in order to entice her to the Tree of Knowledge.

In Book IX, Satan confronts Eve in the form of a serpent to tempt her to eat one of the forbidden fruits[?]. To do so, Satan flatters the female by praising her exquisiteness. His first speech to her is flowered with commendations saying she has an “awful brow,” (meaning? Again, analyze the words of the text) is the “Fairest resemblance of thy Maker fair,” and adores her “celestial beauty” (Milton IX. 537-40). The “Empress of this fair world” is a “goddess among gods, adored and served/ By angels numberless (Milton IX. 547-8 & 568). According to the Norton Anthology footnote, “Satan’s entire speech is couched in the extravagant praises of the Petrarchan love convention” (Logan et al. 1985, n. 6). These praises certainly are “extravagant,” and much like a Petrarchan poem, lavish hyperbolic compliments onto Eve. But this is exactly Satan’s intended point; he wishes to flatter and seduce Earth’s first woman. Already spying on Adam and Eve in Book IV, the fallen angel knows exactly how to appeal to her. A reminder to Eve’s sense of superiority over Adam, Satan states, “no fair to thine/ Equivalent or second” (Milton IX. 608-9). Eventually tempting Eve to eat the fruit, Satan successfully turns Eve’s ego into hubris. Very much like Satan, Eve’s arrogance has a hand in her fall.

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Arrogance is not the only characteristic Satan and Eve share; they both defy their place in the established order of hierarchy. Questioning and defying their roles as inferiors has its hand in bringing about their falls from grace. Satan's dispute is his subservient role to God. What makes this defiance interesting, and what challenges the reader's perception of Satan, is God's portrayal as a tyrant. From the beginning, Satan is said to have challenged "the throne and monarchy of God" (Milton l. 42). While God is described as "Almighty," and "Omnipotent," calling the Lord a "monarch" seems altogether different (Milton l. 42, 44, & 49). This curious description of "monarch" is enriched when Satan declares he will never "bow and sue for grace/ With suppliant knee, and deify his power/ Who from the terror of this arm so late/ Doubted his empire" (Milton l. 111-114). Here, God is the ruler of an empire requiring those below him to "bow and sue for grace" (Milton l. 111). God is not depicted as a just, kind ruler, but rather as an absolute monarch with total control. A few lines more and the Lord is said to hold "the tyranny of Heav'n" (Milton l. 124). If there was any doubt as to Satan's depiction it is clarified here. Tyranny, as defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, is "the action or government of a tyrannical ruler; oppressive or unjustly severe government" (*OED*, tyranny, n., def. 2). Do we need to define tyranny? According to Satan, to be under the rule of God is to be oppressed and unjustly severe. This depiction of the Lord challenges the reader's perception of both Satan and God. Milton certainly adds complexity and ambiguity to Satan's character. He is not just an incarnation of evil, but also a fully fleshed-out character and possible freedom-fighter. If God is a despot, then feasibly Satan is justified in pursuing an uprising. Good (do you need to take a stronger side on this?)

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Milton also establishes Eve as an inferior, but in a different hierarchy. For Eve, being inferior to God is not the issue, but being inferior to Adam is. The gender hierarchy between the man and woman is established in Book IV. In a conversation between Adam and Eve, Eve states Adam is her “guide/ And head” (Milton IV. 442-3). This passage establishes Adam as the superior of the couple. He was first, Eve was formed from his flesh, and hence he is the higher of the two. This chain of command is cemented when Eve admits “beauty is excelled by manly grace/ And wisdom, which alone is truly fair” (Milton IV. 490-1). Again, Adam’s “manly grace/ And wisdom” outranks the “beauty” of the female (Milton 490-1).

The parallel between Satan and Eve comes in shortly after their respective falls from Grace. Their speeches mirror each other in content and reasoning, both citing their freedom and knowledge to undermine their inferior status. After Eve eats the fruit she questions whether or not to share the knowledge with Adam.

“But keep the odds of knowledge in my power

Without copartner? So to add what wants

In female sex, the more to draw his love,

And render me more equal, and perhaps,

A thing not undesirable, sometime

Superior; for inferior who is free?” (Milton IX. 520-5).

Eve’s reluctance to share her “power” is because she is displeased with her social standing. Keeping the “odds of knowledge” renders the woman “more equal” (Milton IX. 520-4). She even contemplates being the superior in the relationship. While Eve previously accepted her lower position, she now contemplates reforming the hierarchy. What brings about her

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antagonism is her newfound enlightenment. "The odds of knowledge" are what separate her and her "copartner" (Milton IX. 520-1). Knowledge is what can make her equal, and "sometime/ Superior" (Milton IX. 524-5). Knowledge also makes her "free" (Milton IX. 525). And Eve poses an interesting question, how can one be inferior if they are free? The same sentiment is uttered by Satan after his fall. He states that in Hell "Here at least/ We shall be free" (Milton I. 258-9).

Good! This statement is directly paired to the "tyranny of Heav'n" Satan has already spoken against (Milton I. 124). Though the rebel angels are cast out of the "happy realms of light," it is "Better to reign in Hell, than serve in Heav'n" (Milton I. 85, 263). Directly paralleling Eve's statement of "for inferior who is free," Satan claims the same opinion (Milton IX. 525). Their freedom in Hell is better than serving the monarchy of God. Like Eve, Satan also speaks of the power of knowledge for a "mind is its own place, and in itself/ Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n" (Milton I. 254-255). For both Satan and Eve, knowledge seems to be their source of freedom, and in their freedom they are no longer inferior. What complicates this outlook on freedom is that they are both fallen from God. Satan is thrown to Hell, and Eve is cast out of Paradise. While the two may be free it comes at an awful price. Furthermore, the reader must rethink the acquisition of knowledge. Satan attempts to question a tyrant and is thrown into a lake of fire. Eve eats a piece of fruit from the Tree of Knowledge and is cast into sin. The parallels between Satan and Eve challenge the reader to rethink their assumptions on these topics. Good! These are useful and interesting insights!

The similarities between Satan and Eve in *Paradise Lost* are important because they help define and expand each of the characters. By paralleling their arrogance and opposition to hierarchy the two are made more alike than one would think. Satan becomes humanized and

even perhaps justified in his actions. Eve becomes a complex character with underlying motivations to eat the fruit. The comparison of the two also makes Satan closer to humanity. The fallen angel is much more relatable to than the omnipotent Lord of the story. The two characters and their trials make the reader rethink their assumptions on freedom and knowledge. The Fall of Man now becomes complex and ambiguous, and both good and bad.

– well done! Good insights, good use of the text and analysis of its ideas (though sometimes the words of the text could be more closely analyzed). Otherwise, nicely argued. Some awkward phrasings – don't forget to proofread.

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Works Cited

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