

# Falls of miltons eve and doctor faustus religion essay



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In this essay I am going to be comparing the falls of Eve in John Milton's 'Paradise Lost', first published in 1667 and Doctor Faustus in Christopher Marlowe's 'The Tragical History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus', first published in 1604

The notion of the Fall of man originates in the Bible where it is recorded in the book of Genesis. It has been interpreted both literally, as a description of historical events and symbolically as a spiritual truth. 'The Fall' refers to the transition of the first created humans, Adam and Eve from their original state of perfection, to a state of guilt and disobedience to God. The notion of Adam and Eve's perfection comes from Genesis 1: 31 where we are told that " God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good." This notion was also reinforced by St. Augustine, who believed that " Man's nature indeed, was created at first faultless and without any sin."

In Genesis 2: 16-17, God forbids Adam and Eve to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil:

" And the Lord God commanded the man, 'You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.'"

This is essentially the beginning of the series of events that lead to the Fall, because it is shortly after this that Eve is deceived by the serpent into eating from that tree, and shares it with Adam. We are told that " the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the Lord God had made" (Gen 3: 1) and later, in the book of Revelations, we are led to believe that the serpent was in fact Satan in disguise:

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" The great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan." (Rev 12: 9)

Adam and Eve are consequently banished from the Garden of Eden by God and as punishment for their sin, sent to live on Earth. They are also banned from eating from the Tree of Life again, which is how Christians believe death entered the world. This is known as the Fall of Man.

The Biblical story of Adam and Eve forms the basis for Milton's 'Paradise Lost', and he too seems to adopt the Augustinian view that Adam and Eve are two perfect and fully developed humans. This is shown when:

" Adam soon repealed

The doubts that in his heart arose: and now

Led on, yet sinless"

Unlike the Biblical Adam and Eve however, Milton gives us the impression that Eve is inferior to Adam since Adam was created to mirror God's divine authority and Eve was created merely to satisfy Adam's desire for a companion. Throughout the poem we realise that Eve never experiences God directly; Adam experiences God and Eve experiences Adam, who appears to act as an intermediary between her and God:

" For contemplation hee and valour formd,

For softness shee and sweet attractive Grace,

Hee for God only, shee for God in him."

It is this sense of divine hierarchy that seems to make Eve more susceptible to Satan's temptation, because during the series of events which contribute towards the eventual Fall, Satan plays on Eve's desire for autonomy and a connection to the universe outside of Adam's shadow.

The sequence of event leading to Eve's fall begins when she is asleep one night and Satan attempts to plant his tempting thoughts in her mind. Satan's effect is reflected in her dream when an angel tempts her to eat from the Tree of Knowledge:

'Taste this, and be henceforth among the Gods

Thy self a Goddess, not to Earth confin'd.'

This plays on Eve's desire to achieve a direct relationship with God.

The second significant factor is her determination to spend time alone on the fateful day; she wakes up in an independent mood and insists that her and Adam attend to the garden separately, despite Adam's attempts at dissuading her. It is at this point, when she is pleased with herself for achieving some autonomy that she comes across the serpent.

In order to be successful in leading Eve astray, the serpent attempts to eliminate her fear of disobeying God. He begins by making her doubt the existence of death and evil:

" Those rigid threats of Death; ye shall not Die:

How should ye? by the Fruit? it gives you Life

To Knowledge? By the Threatner, look on mee,

Mee who have touch'd and tasted, yet both live,

And life more perfect have attained than Fate

Meant mee, by venturing higher than my Lot."

The serpent then continues to try and make her doubt God himself by suggesting that God has only forbidden her to eat from the Tree of Knowledge so as to keep her ignorant, rather than becoming powerful and knowledgeable:

" Of good, how just? of evil, if what is evil

Be real, why not known, since easier shunnd?

God therefore cannot hurt ye, and be just;

Not just, not God; not feared then, nor obeyed:

Your fear itself of Death removes the fear.

Why then was this forbid? Why but to awe,

Why but to keep ye low and ignorant,

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'nd and cleerd, and ye shall be as Gods,

Knowing both Good and Evil as they know."

Here Satan is playing on Eve's perception of the divine hierarchy and her feelings of inferiority to both Adam and God, by offering her an opportunity to do what she believes will lead to a direct relationship with God.

It is at this point that we begin to see Eve's final error as intellectual rather than moral. In the moment before she eats from the tree, she pauses and thinks. She still allows her reason to guide her, but Satan's deception of her mind misinforms her will. Her reasoning is quite sound, however it is based on the belief that the serpent is telling the truth. This, one of the main premises in her decision, is in fact false.

After eating from the tree of knowledge, her nature and attitude towards her relationship towards Adam have been changed by sin. Having imagined an existence outside of Adam's perception during her conversation with the serpent, she now finds herself consumed with a selfish desire to share her fate with Adam, because she can no longer conceive of separation from him.