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Seasons and Foliage in Milton Paradise Lost (Book IX)

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Abstract

The paper deals with the herbage and the season that would have prevailed in the times of Adam and Eve and their subsequent fall. The scanty sources available in the text have been used to bring out the climate of the period. The flowers, trees, and bushes in the text help the study to conjecture the climate of the times. Though certainty eludes, speculation animate.

Keywords: Cedar, Conjecture, Foliage, Herbage, Hyacinths, Myrtles, Speculate

1. Introduction

Not much remains for a critic of the twenty-first century in the lofty verses of John Milton, as years of critical harvest had left the poetic land fallow and unusable for a new reader of recent times. Every aspect of the 'Majesticity' has been probed, and with hesitant hands, the mind imprints the title "Season and Foliage in Milton's Paradise Lost (Book IX)" for a new analysis.

On a cursory reading, the questions of the season do arise, and being a lover of nature, the present writer does tend to ask if there were seasons in the times of creation. If so, what was the climate when Satan descended on earth, and in what season the greatest sin of Adam and Eve did happen? Based on the riverine tracts, it is presumed that the Garden of Eden was somewhere near the erstwhile Mesopotamia where the climate was more or less warm. Does Milton use this warmth in his Paradise Lost? Does Adam and Eve sweat in their meager work? What do the hanging dews mean? Since the presence of roses and myrtle denotes the season of spring or summer, and so was it an unchanging season throughout or does Milton try to complete the fall of man in one single season itself? Too many questions clog the flow, and the wand works to clear the mist.

2. Season

The entry of Satan into the Garden of Eden is significant, as the text uses the word "thicket" which is dank or dry. The ambivalence of the poet is misleading, as he is unable to come to terms with the season of Eden. It is natural for Milton to tarry a bit regarding seasons as there is no clear-cut mention of the prevalent seasons in the Book of Genesis. It speaks of 'Seed and Harvest', 'Cold and Hot', and 'Day and Night' but the absence of four seasons is a point to ponder on. Milton should have pondered and brought in a 'thicket' that is either 'dank' or 'dry'. If the expression 'Dank' or 'Dry' appertains to dewfall, readers need to construe that dewfall is a possibility only when the skies are clear, and the weather is calm without winds. In a way, Satan's entry might have happened on such a calm night, when stars were pretty clear and the leaves remained motionless.

In line 192[1], the poet brings in the light through the form of dawn, and the very next line deals with the humid flowers daubed with the first rays of the sun. In the imagery 'humid flowers breathing incense' (193)[1], the poet has brought in flowers even before dawn. The expression humid is another reminder of the warm Mediterranean climate in Eden, as dew drops can be found only in a

salubrious climate that chills out everyone. As much has been said and written about fragrant mornings, the sudden swerve that happens on the poet's side regarding seasons is convincing. In line 200, "*The season, prime for sweetest scents and airs*"[1], is it a subtle persuasion of the readers to guess that it is spring since it is a season of productivity wherein flowers bloom densely as in the climes of England.

3. Eve's Assertion

When Eve speaks of 'separation', she articulates on herbage as their daily labor hinges on the greens like 'woodbine', 'ivy', 'roses', and 'myrtle', but on the topical point of view, it further affirms the prevalent clime that coheres to the spring or summer in England. Expressions like 'grove', 'garden plot', 'fields', and 'bower' go on to showcase the power of creation as it strengthens the claims of creation of Eden longer before man did come about. "Grove" is an interesting addition as only intentional labor could bring about a grove of trees in the same place, and mostly it would be for a utilization purpose. So it is given to perceive that when the duo Adam and Eve entered Eden it was not an untamed wilderness but a labored landscape. "Fields" is another term found in Paradise Lost Book IX probably denoting the paddy and wheat farms created for the first man and woman. Finally, "bower" is more identical to a place deliberately intended to please its inhabitants, for all leisure happens in the thick bowers spread out for Adam and Eve. Adversely, it becomes a place that offers refuge to the bestial Satan when the poet uses the expression, "*Such ambush, hid among sweet flowers and shades*" (408)[1]. Thus the foliage is an indomitable and permeating presence throughout the work of John Milton.

Furthermore, the poem lends space to the significance of herbage in man's destined fall. Why did the fragrant flowers and thickets offer refuge to the enemy of God? Is not that flora created at God's will? Why did He not punish them for the deception? This may be due to the benevolence, magnanimity, and forgiving nature of the Almighty showing humanity his neutrality.

4. Temptation and Verdure

Satan's first meeting with Eve happens in the 'veil of fragrance', an assertion of spring where nothing lies barren in the land. In hindsight, the readers might feel that the work would not have been impressive without the description of the changing seasons and their manifestations in nature. To imagine Eve working on a snow-clad land or a barren one is a bit repulsive to read and so the first generation of roses adorning the garden with their tender stalks serves as a verdant setting. The epic is spiced with the colors of those sweet flowers. Not just 'rose and red', for purple, azure and gold were the hues of the winking flowers. From dawn to dusk irrespective of the time of the day, the spread of green reigns supreme pervading all around. In the Garden of Eden along with the Palm trees which have a strong significance as a Christian symbol of faith-a representation of spirit over the flesh- the conifers such as the Cedar and Pine are also found strewn in the poem. So, the presence of such trees is an added support to the claim of the clime that prevailed in Eden. The variety of herbage in Eden could be gleaned by the inquisitive eyes of the readers, as time and again the poet mentions it in his creative flow. Here, he uses the "arborets" as the spot where Satan sojourns to execute his office. Arboreta are small trees that are pretty thick to hide the diabolic archangel. Well-pruned or wild, the presence of the bushes goes more than a way to assist the evil.

Satan has a momentary relapse from animosity at the sight of Eve, and it is not just Eve, but the setting in which she is placed, that makes her more beautiful. Eve keeps working and the movement of Satan is brought out by the expression "rustling leaves". The phrase stokes another bout of questions about seasons and herbage, as the Serpent's movement could have taken place without making the leaves rustle. Either the garden was too thick with dry leaves or the mind envisions the presence of dry leaves that might have given rise to the rustling sound. Symbolically, if dry leaves were spread in the plane, then death's entry did take place even before the 'Fall'.

5. Fall and Foliage

After his cunning ingress, Satan begins his infamous temptation by hinting at the forbidden fruit. His introduction of the fruit happens through the expression "goodly tree" that bears fruits of ruddy gold. The omnipresence of the olfactory in the epic is stunning, for, throughout Book IX, the poet interestingly uses the spread of fragrance. Here too, Satan speaks of the savory odor of the fruit that teases the appetite of even beasts. While painting the picture of the tree that holds the fruit, the poet fails not to mention the "mossy trunk". The expression supports the wet atmosphere quite

contradictory to the earlier claims of sunny salubrious climes. Since it was a forbidden fruit, it should have been far away from the presence of Adam and Eve, and was unreachable; for poetic lines place it at an inaccessible height. Innocent Eve makes a guileless query regarding the fruit, in the course of which she pictures the different species of trees with fruits hanging undefiled and pure for future generations. The presence of innumerable trees allows the readers to envision an Eden that holds a mosaic of fauna and flora. The abundance of foliage could not have been possible without a rich clime that included a considerable wet spell. But the work has no evidence of rain. For long, the poet discusses Satan's temptation and subsequent sin committed by the ancestors of the human race, who tasted the forbidden fruit to become amorous and lascivious. Regarding the forbidden fruit, readers do wonder if it was a ripe or unripe one, but based on how Eve devoured the kernel of the fruit, it could be assumed that it was a ripe one. It is an added proof that the days in Eden were more or less sunny. The detailing that happens regarding the lusty union is quite exciting as the poet depicts the backdrop in a succulent manner. It was a shady bank with thick green covering and poetic usage of expressions like "verdant roof embowered" is enthralling. But there is no microscopic mention of the trees that spread their branches, though the flowery couch where the first human conjugal love spill happened is dealt with in a more elaborate context. The mention of violets, pansies, asphodels, and hyacinths offering space for love and love sport is an interesting interlude for a prolonged sensual interplay. Post-dalliance was quite hard for the couple as the guilt of disobedience was overpowering. Adam seeks the help of the Pine and Cedar to hide them from God and the train of holy Angels, and he further admonishes Eve to take up fig leaves to cover their skin.

6. Summation

In short, it could be presumed that all plantations found their space in God's gloried Eden which is evident from Satan's eulogium on the new Eden as something better than God's Eden. Since there is a symbiotic connection between the foliage and seasons, as the former is fully dependent on the latter for its sustenance, the presence of trees and plants in Eden signifies the functional aspects of the changing climes and seasons. It is certain from Book IX that the first parents did not experience extremities of climate. Neither in work nor in any other strenuous activity did they bead themselves with sweat drops - a clear indication that the weather was neither humid nor hot. The 'rustling sound' that emanates from the serpent's movement and the mention of a dry thicket is an affirmation of the dry climate. The poet restricts himself to a select group of trees, plants, and flowers, as flowers generally bloom not in all seasons, based on the poet's background, it could be guessed that it was Milton's Eden where the English Climes reigned and since it was a virgin land, fertility was a reality. Foliage adds color to the work and its presence is as important as the characters as it reflects the mood and tone of the happenings. Milton lived in an unscientific realm, and his usage of terms to indicate the seasonal flora is the best of his age. To conclude, it could be speculated that the poet loved to provide a pleasant clime for his characters and therefore made it equivalent to the breezy and sunny English Spring and Summer.

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