

John Milton "Paradise Lost"

Milton's Life

John Milton was born on December 9, 1608, in London. Milton's father was a prosperous merchant, despite the fact that he had been disowned by his family when he converted from Catholicism to Protestantism. Milton excelled in school, and went on to study privately in his twenties and thirties. In 1638 he made a trip to Italy, studying in Florence, Siena, and Rome, but felt obliged to return home upon the outbreak of civil war in England, in 1639. Upon his return from Italy, he began planning an epic poem, the first ever written in English. These plans were delayed by his marriage to Mary Powell and her subsequent desertion of him. In reaction to these events, Milton wrote a series of pamphlets calling for more leniency in the church's position on divorce. His argument brought him both greater publicity and angry criticism from the religious establishment in England. When the Second Civil War ended in 1648, with King Charles dethroned and executed, Milton welcomed the new parliament and wrote pamphlets in its support. After serving for a few years in a civil position, he retired briefly to his house in Westminster because his eyesight was failing. By 1652 he was completely blind.

Despite his disability, Milton reentered civil service under the protectorate of Oliver Cromwell, the military general who ruled the British Isles from 1653 to 1658. Two years after Cromwell's death, Milton's worst fears were realized—the Restoration brought Charles II back to the throne, and the poet had to go into hiding to escape execution. However, he had already begun work on the great English epic which he had planned so long before: *Paradise Lost*. Now he had the opportunity to work on it in earnest. It was published in 1667, a year after the Great Fire of London. The greatness of Milton's epic was immediately recognized, and the admiring comments of the respected poets John Dryden and Andrew Marvell helped restore Milton to favor. He spent the ensuing years at his residence in Bunhill, still writing prolifically. Milton died at home on November 8, 1674. By all accounts, Milton led a studious and quiet life from his youth up until his death.

Education

Thanks to his father's wealth, young Milton got the best education money could buy. He had a private tutor as a youngster. As a young teenager he attended the prestigious St. Paul's Cathedral School. After he excelled at St. Paul's he entered college at Christ's College at Cambridge University. At the latter, he made quite a name for himself with his prodigious writing, publishing several essays and poems to high acclaim. After graduating with his master's degree in 1632, Milton was once again accommodated by his father. He was allowed to take over the family's estate near Windsor and pursue a quiet life of study. He spent 1632 to 1638—his mid to late twenties—reading the classics in Greek and Latin and learning new theories in mathematics and music. Milton became fluent in many foreign and classical languages, including Italian, Greek, Latin, Aramaic, Hebrew, French, Spanish, Anglo-Saxon, and spoke some Dutch as well. His knowledge of most of these languages was immense and precocious. He wrote sonnets in Italian as a teenager. While a student at Cambridge, he was invited in his second year to address the first year students in a speech written entirely in Latin. After Cambridge, Milton continued a quiet life of study well through his twenties. By the age of thirty, Milton had made himself into one of the most brilliant minds of England, and one of the most ambitious poets it had ever produced.

Early Works

In his twenties, Milton wrote five masterful long poems, each of them influential and important in its own separate way: "On the Morning of Christ's Nativity," "Comus," "Lycidas," "Il Penseroso," and "L'Allegro." Through these poems, Milton honed his skills at writing narrative, dramatic, elegiac, philosophical, and lyrical poetry. He had built a firm poetic foundation through his intense study of languages, philosophy, and politics, and fused it with his uncanny sense of tone and diction. Even in these early poems, Milton's literary output was guided by his faith in God. Milton believed that all poetry served a social, philosophical, and religious purpose. He thought that poetry should glorify God, promote religious values, enlighten readers, and help people to become better Christians. Aside from his poetic successes, Milton was also a prolific writer of essays and pamphlets. These prose writings did not bring Milton public acclaim. In fact, since his essays and pamphlets argued against the established views of most of England, Milton was even the object of threats. Nevertheless, he continued to form the basis for his political and theological beliefs in the form of essays and pamphlets.

Politics

Milton's political ideals are expressed in the many pamphlets he wrote during his lifetime. He championed the absolute freedom of the individual—perhaps because he had been so often betrayed by the institutions in which he put his trust. His distrust of institutions was accompanied by his belief that power corrupts human beings. He distrusted anyone who could claim power over anyone else, and believed that rulers should have to prove their right to lead other people.

Milton was an activist in his middle years, fighting for human rights and against the rule of England's leaders, whom he believed were inept. Knowing he was not a fighter, he demonstrated his activism by writing lengthy, rhetorical pamphlets that thoroughly and rigorously argue for his point of view. Although he championed liberty and fought against authority throughout his career, in theory he believed in a strict social and political hierarchy in which people would obey their leaders and leaders serve their people. He believed that leaders should be leaders because they are better and more fit to rule than their subjects. But despite these rigid views of authority, Milton believed that the social hierarchy that actually existed in his day was extremely corrupt, and he directly challenged the rule of Charles I, the king of England during much of Milton's lifetime. Milton argued that Charles was not, in fact, fit to lead his subjects because he did not possess superior faculties or virtues.

Religion

Milton took public stances on a great number of issues, but most important to the reading of *Paradise Lost* are his positions on religion. In Milton's time, the Anglican Church, or Church of England, had split into the high Anglican, moderate Anglican, and Puritan or Presbyterian sects. Milton was a Presbyterian. This denomination called for the abolishment of bishops, an office that exists as part of the Catholic and Anglican churches. Milton, however, gradually took his views further, ultimately calling for the removal of all priests, whom he referred to as "hirelings." Milton despised the corruption he saw in the Catholic Church, repeatedly attacking it both in his poetry and prose. In "Lycidas," he likens Catholics to hungry wolves leaping into a sheep's pen, an image similar to his depiction of Satan leaping over the wall of Paradise in *Paradise Lost*, Book IV. He saw few problems with the division of Protestants into more and smaller denominations. Instead, he thought that the fragmentation of churches was a sign of healthy self-examination, and believed that each individual Christian should be his own church, without any establishment to encumber him. These beliefs, expressed in a great number of pamphlets, prompted his break with the Presbyterians before 1650. From that point on, Milton advocated the complete abolishment of all church establishments, and kept his own private

religion, close to the Calvinism practiced by Presbyterians but differing in some ways. Milton's highly individual view of Christianity makes *Paradise Lost* simultaneously personal and universal.

In his later years, Milton came to view all organized Christian churches, whether Anglican, Catholic or Presbyterian, as an obstacle to true faith. He felt that the individual and his conscience (or "right reason") was a much more powerful tool in interpreting the Word of God than the example set by a church. Throughout *Paradise Lost*, Milton expresses the idea that Adam and Eve's fall from grace was actually fortunate, because it gives individual human beings the opportunity to redeem themselves by true repentance and faith. The importance of remaining strong in one's personal religious convictions, particularly in the face of widespread condemnation, is a major theme in the later Books of *Paradise Lost*, as Michael shows Adam the vision of Enoch and Noah, two followers of God who risk death to stand up for him.

Paradise Lost also presents a number of Protestant Christian positions: the union of the Old and New Testaments, the unworthiness of mankind, and the importance of Christ's love in man's salvation. Nonetheless, the poem does not present a unified, cohesive theory of Christian theology, nor does it attempt to identify disbelievers, redefine Christianity, or replace the Bible. Instead, Milton's epic stands as a remarkable presentation of biblical stories meant to engage Christian readers and help them to be better Christians.

Women and Marriage

Much of Milton's social commentary in *Paradise Lost* focuses on the proper role of women. In Book IV he makes clear that he does not think men and women are equals, alluding to biblical passages that identify man as the master of woman. Although Milton viewed women as inferior to men, believing that wives should be subservient to their husbands, he did not see himself as a woman-hater. In *Paradise Lost*, he distances himself from the misogyny popular in his time—the belief that women are utterly inferior to men, essentially evil, and generally to be avoided. Milton's character Adam voices this harsh view of womankind, but only after the fall, as an expression of anger and frustration. Put simply, Milton's early views in *Paradise Lost* may be misogynistic by today's standards, but he nevertheless presents Eve's wifely role as an important one, as Adam and Eve help one another to become better and more complete individuals.

Milton's views on marriage are mainstream today, but they were viewed as shocking and heretical in his own time. Milton was a pioneer for the right of divorce in an age when divorce was prohibited by nearly all denominations. In fact, the only grounds for a lawful divorce in Milton's time was usually sexual incompatibility due to unlawful relations with other parties. But in his *Doctrine of Discipline and Divorce*, Milton expresses his belief that any sort of incompatibility—sexual, mental, or otherwise—is justified grounds for a divorce. In the same essay, he argues that the main purpose of marriage is not necessarily procreation, as most people thought at that time, but to bring two people together in completion. He felt that conversation and mental companionship were supremely important in a marriage, and admits that his first marriage might have failed due to a lack in this regard. He also argued that the partners in a marriage must complement each other. His portrayal of Adam and Eve after the fall is a vivid example of his belief that two people can complement each other, smoothing out one another's faults and enhancing each others' strengths.

The Epic

At the early age of sixteen, Milton already aspired to write the great English epic. As he read the classical epics in school—Homer's *Odyssey* and *Iliad* and Virgil's *Aeneid*—he began to fantasize about bringing such artistic brilliance to the English language.

Milton considered many topics for his epic. Early on, he thought that the story of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table was a noble topic. Then, as he grew slightly older, he hoped to write an epic about Oliver Cromwell, who took control of England in 1653 after helping to dethrone and execute King Charles. Judging from these two topics, it is clear that Milton wanted to write his epic on a distinctly British topic that would inspire nationalist pride in his countrymen. Such a topic would also mimic Homer's and Virgil's nationalist epics of strong, virtuous warriors and noble battles. However, Milton abandoned both of these ideas, and for a time gave up the notion of writing an epic at all. But in the mid-1650s, Milton returned to an idea he had previously had for a verse play: the story of Adam and Eve. He concluded that the story might fail as a drama but succeed as an epic. In 1656 the blind Milton began to recite verse each morning to one of his two daughters, who wrote his poem down for him. Milton continued to dictate *Paradise Lost* for several years, finishing in 1667 when it was first published in ten books. Milton soon returned to revise his epic, redividing it into twelve books (as the classical epics were divided), and publishing it in its authoritative second edition form in 1671. Later in 1671 he published his final work: *Paradise Regained*, the sequel to his great epic. Due to his strong religious beliefs, Milton thought that this work surpassed *Paradise Lost* in both its art and its message, though most readers today would disagree.

Plot Overview

MILTON'S SPEAKER BEGINS *Paradise Lost* by stating that his subject will be Adam and Eve's disobedience and fall from grace. He invokes a heavenly muse and asks for help in relating his ambitious story and God's plan for humankind. The action begins with Satan and his fellow rebel angels who are found chained to a lake of fire in Hell. They quickly free themselves and fly to land, where they discover minerals and construct Pandemonium, which will be their meeting place. Inside Pandemonium, the rebel angels, who are now devils, debate whether they should begin another war with God. Beelzebub suggests that they attempt to corrupt God's beloved new creation, humankind. Satan agrees, and volunteers to go himself. As he prepares to leave Hell, he is met at the gates by his children, Sin and Death, who follow him and build a bridge between Hell and Earth.

In Heaven, God orders the angels together for a council of their own. He tells them of Satan's intentions, and the Son volunteers himself to make the sacrifice for humankind. Meanwhile, Satan travels through Night and Chaos and finds Earth. He disguises himself as a cherub to get past the Archangel Uriel, who stands guard at the sun. He tells Uriel that he wishes to see and praise God's glorious creation, and Uriel assents. Satan then lands on Earth and takes a moment to reflect. Seeing the splendor of Paradise brings him pain rather than pleasure. He reaffirms his decision to make evil his good, and continue to commit crimes against God. Satan leaps over Paradise's wall, takes the form of a cormorant (a large bird), and perches himself atop the Tree of Life. Looking down at Satan from his post, Uriel notices the volatile emotions reflected in the face of this so-called cherub and warns the other angels that an impostor is in their midst. The other angels agree to search the Garden for intruders.

Meanwhile, Adam and Eve tend the Garden, carefully obeying God's supreme order not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge. After a long day of work, they return to their bower and rest. There, Satan takes the form of a toad and whispers into Eve's ear. Gabriel, the angel set to guard Paradise, finds Satan there and orders him to leave. Satan prepares to battle Gabriel, but God makes a sign appear in the

sky—the golden scales of justice—and Satan scurries away. Eve awakes and tells Adam about a dream she had, in which an angel tempted her to eat from the forbidden tree. Worried about his creation, God sends Raphael down to Earth to teach Adam and Eve of the dangers they face with Satan.

Raphael arrives on Earth and eats a meal with Adam and Eve. After the meal, Eve retires, allowing Raphael and Adam to speak alone. Raphael relates the story of Satan's envy over the Son's appointment as God's second-in-command. Satan gathered other angels together who were also angry to hear this news, and together they plotted a war against God. Abdiel decides not to join Satan's army and returns to God. The angels then begin to fight, with Michael and Gabriel serving as co-leaders for Heaven's army. The battle lasts two days, when God sends the Son to end the war and deliver Satan and his rebel angels to Hell. Raphael tells Adam about Satan's evil motives to corrupt them, and warns Adam to watch out for Satan. Adam asks Raphael to tell him the story of creation. Raphael tells Adam that God sent the Son into Chaos to create the universe. He created the earth and stars and other planets. Curious, Adam asks Raphael about the movement of the stars and planets. Raphael promptly warns Adam about his seemingly unquenchable search for knowledge. Raphael tells Adam that he will learn all he needs to know, and that any other knowledge is not meant for humans to comprehend. Adam tells Raphael about his first memories, of waking up and wondering who he was, what he was, and where he was. Adam says that God spoke to him and told him many things, including his order not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge. After the story, Adam confesses to Raphael his intense physical attraction to Eve. Raphael reminds Adam that he must love Eve more purely and spiritually. With this final bit of advice, Raphael leaves Earth and returns to Heaven.

Eight days after his banishment, Satan returns to Paradise. After closely studying the animals of Paradise, he chooses to take the form of the serpent. Meanwhile, Eve suggests to Adam that they work separately for awhile, so they can get more work done. Adam is hesitant but then assents. Satan searches for Eve and is delighted to find her alone. In the form of a serpent, he talks to Eve and compliments her on her beauty and godliness. She is amazed to find an animal that can speak. She asks how he learned to speak, and he tells her that it was by eating from the Tree of Knowledge. He tells Eve that God actually wants her and Adam to eat from the tree, and that his order is merely a test of their courage. She is hesitant at first but then reaches for a fruit from the Tree of Knowledge and eats. She becomes distraught and searches for Adam. Adam has been busy making a wreath of flowers for Eve. When Eve finds Adam, he drops the wreath and is horrified to find that Eve has eaten from the forbidden tree. Knowing that she has fallen, he decides that he would rather be fallen with her than remain pure and lose her. So he eats from the fruit as well. Adam looks at Eve in a new way, and together they turn to lust.

God immediately knows of their disobedience. He tells the angels in Heaven that Adam and Eve must be punished, but with a display of both justice and mercy. He sends the Son to give out the punishments. The Son first punishes the serpent whose body Satan took, and condemns it never to walk upright again. Then the Son tells Adam and Eve that they must now suffer pain and death. Eve and all women must suffer the pain of childbirth and must submit to their husbands, and Adam and all men must hunt and grow their own food on a depleted Earth. Meanwhile, Satan returns to Hell where he is greeted with cheers. He speaks to the devils in Pandemonium, and everyone believes that he has beaten God. Sin and Death travel the bridge they built on their way to Earth. Shortly thereafter, the devils unwillingly transform into snakes and try to reach fruit from imaginary trees that shrivel and turn to dust as they reach them.

God tells the angels to transform the Earth. After the fall, humankind must suffer hot and cold seasons instead of the consistent temperatures before the fall. On Earth, Adam and Eve fear their approaching doom. They blame each other for their disobedience and become increasingly angry at one another. In a fit of rage, Adam wonders why God ever created Eve. Eve begs Adam not to abandon her. She tells

him that they can survive by loving each other. She accepts the blame because she has disobeyed both God and Adam. She ponders suicide. Adam, moved by her speech, forbids her from taking her own life. He remembers their punishment and believes that they can enact revenge on Satan by remaining obedient to God. Together they pray to God and repent.

God hears their prayers, and sends Michael down to Earth. Michael arrives on Earth, and tells them that they must leave Paradise. But before they leave, Michael puts Eve to sleep and takes Adam up onto the highest hill, where he shows him a vision of humankind's future. Adam sees the sins of his children, and his children's children, and his first vision of death. Horrified, he asks Michael if there is any alternative to death. Generations to follow continue to sin by lust, greed, envy, and pride. They kill each other selfishly and live only for pleasure. Then Michael shows him the vision of Enoch, who is saved by God as his warring peers attempt to kill him. Adam also sees the story of Noah and his family, whose virtue allows them to be chosen to survive the flood that kills all other humans. Adam feels remorse for death and happiness for humankind's redemption. Next is the vision of Nimrod and the Tower of Babel. This story explains the perversion of pure language into the many languages that are spoken on Earth today. Adam sees the triumph of Moses and the Israelites, and then glimpses the Son's sacrifice to save humankind. After this vision, it is time for Adam and Eve to leave Paradise. Eve awakes and tells Adam that she had a very interesting and educating dream. Led by Michael, Adam and Eve slowly and woefully leave Paradise hand in hand into a new world.

Analysis of Satan

Some readers consider Satan to be the hero, or protagonist, of the story, because he struggles to overcome his own doubts and weaknesses and accomplishes his goal of corrupting humankind. This goal, however, is evil, and Adam and Eve are the moral heroes at the end of the story, as they help to begin humankind's slow process of redemption and salvation. Satan is far from being the story's object of admiration, as most heroes are. Nor does it make sense for readers to celebrate or emulate him, as they might with a true hero. Yet there are many compelling qualities to his character that make him intriguing to readers.

One source of Satan's fascination for us is that he is an extremely complex and subtle character. It would be difficult, perhaps impossible, for Milton to make perfect, infallible characters such as God the Father, God the Son, and the angels as interesting to read about as the flawed characters, such as Satan, Adam, and Eve. Satan, moreover, strikes a grand and majestic figure, apparently unafraid of being damned eternally, and uncowed by such terrifying figures as Chaos or Death. Many readers have argued that Milton deliberately makes Satan seem heroic and appealing early in the poem to draw us into sympathizing with him against our will, so that we may see how seductive evil is and learn to be more vigilant in resisting its appeal.

Milton devotes much of the poem's early books to developing Satan's character. Satan's greatest fault is his pride. He casts himself as an innocent victim, overlooked for an important promotion. But his ability to think so selfishly in Heaven, where all angels are equal and loved and happy, is surprising. His confidence in thinking that he could ever overthrow God displays tremendous vanity and pride. When Satan shares his pain and alienation as he reaches Earth in Book IV, we may feel somewhat sympathetic to him or even identify with him. But Satan continues to devote himself to evil. Every speech he gives is fraudulent and every story he tells is a lie. He works diligently to trick his fellow devils in Hell by having Beelzebub present Satan's own plan of action.

Satan's character—or our perception of his character—changes significantly from Book I to his final appearance in Book X. In Book I he is a strong, imposing figure with great abilities as a leader and

public statesmen, whereas by the poem's end he slinks back to Hell in serpent form. Satan's gradual degradation is dramatized by the sequence of different shapes he assumes. He begins the poem as a just-fallen angel of enormous stature, looks like a comet or meteor as he leaves Hell, then disguises himself as a more humble cherub, then as a cormorant, a toad, and finally a snake. His ability to reason and argue also deteriorates. In Book I, he persuades the devils to agree to his plan. In Book IV, however, he reasons to himself that the Hell he feels inside of him is reason to do more evil. When he returns to Earth again, he believes that Earth is more beautiful than Heaven, and that he may be able to live on Earth after all. Satan, removed from Heaven long enough to forget its unparalleled grandeur, is completely demented, coming to believe in his own lies. He is a picture of incessant intellectual activity without the ability to think morally. Once a powerful angel, he has become blinded to God's grace, forever unable to reconcile his past with his eternal punishment.

Themes, Motifs & Symbols

The Importance of Obedience to God

The first words of *Paradise Lost* state that the poem's main theme will be "Man's first Disobedience." Milton narrates the story of Adam and Eve's disobedience, explains how and why it happens, and places the story within the larger context of Satan's rebellion and Jesus' resurrection. Raphael tells Adam about Satan's disobedience in an effort to give him a firm grasp of the threat that Satan and humankind's disobedience poses. In essence, *Paradise Lost* presents two moral paths that one can take after disobedience: the downward spiral of increasing sin and degradation, represented by Satan, and the road to redemption, represented by Adam and Eve.

While Adam and Eve are the first humans to disobey God, Satan is the first of all God's creation to disobey. His decision to rebel comes only from himself—he was not persuaded or provoked by others. Also, his decision to continue to disobey God after his fall into Hell ensures that God will not forgive him. Adam and Eve, on the other hand, decide to repent for their sins and seek forgiveness. Unlike Satan, Adam and Eve understand that their disobedience to God does not mean that their disobedience will be corrected through generations of toil on Earth. This path is obviously the correct one to take: the visions in Books XI and XII demonstrate that obedience to God, even after repeated falls, can lead to humankind's salvation.

The Hierarchical Nature of the Universe

Paradise Lost is about hierarchy as much as it is about obedience. The layout of the universe—with Heaven above, Hell below, and Earth in the middle—presents the universe as a hierarchy based on proximity to God and his grace. This spatial hierarchy leads to a social hierarchy of angels, humans, animals, and devils: the Son is closest to God, with the archangels and cherubs behind him. Adam and Eve and Earth's animals come next, with Satan and the other fallen angels following last. To obey God is to respect this hierarchy.

Satan refuses to honor the Son as his superior, thereby questioning God's hierarchy. As the angels in Satan's camp rebel, they hope to beat God and thereby dissolve what they believe to be an unfair hierarchy in Heaven. When the Son and the good angels defeat the rebel angels, the rebels are punished by being banished far away from Heaven. At least, Satan argues later, they can make their own hierarchy in Hell, but they are nevertheless subject to God's overall hierarchy, in which they are ranked the lowest. Satan continues to disobey God and his hierarchy as he seeks to corrupt mankind.

Likewise, humankind's disobedience is a corruption of God's hierarchy. Before the fall, Adam and Eve treat the visiting angels with proper respect and acknowledgement of their closeness to God, and Eve embraces the subservient role allotted to her in her marriage. God and Raphael both instruct Adam that Eve is slightly farther removed from God's grace than Adam because she was created to serve both God and him. When Eve persuades Adam to let her work alone, she challenges him, her superior, and he yields to her, his inferior. Again, as Adam eats from the fruit, he knowingly defies God by obeying Eve and his inner instinct instead of God and his reason. Adam's visions in Books XI and XII show more examples of this disobedience to God and the universe's hierarchy, but also demonstrate that with the Son's sacrifice, this hierarchy will be restored once again.

The Fall as Partly Fortunate

After he sees the vision of Christ's redemption of humankind in Book XII, Adam refers to his own sin as a *felix culpa* or "happy fault," suggesting that the fall of humankind, while originally seeming an unmitigated catastrophe, does in fact bring good with it. Adam and Eve's disobedience allows God to show his mercy and temperance in their punishments and his eternal providence toward humankind. This display of love and compassion, given through the Son, is a gift to humankind. Humankind must now experience pain and death, but humans can also experience mercy, salvation, and grace in ways they would not have been able to had they not disobeyed. While humankind has fallen from grace, individuals can redeem and save themselves through continued devotion and obedience to God. The salvation of humankind, in the form of The Son's sacrifice and resurrection, can begin to restore humankind to its former state. In other words, good will come of sin and death, and humankind will eventually be rewarded. This fortunate result justifies God's reasoning and explains his ultimate plan for humankind.

Light and Dark

Opposites abound in *Paradise Lost*, including Heaven and Hell, God and Satan, and good and evil. Milton's uses imagery of light and darkness to express all of these opposites. Angels are physically described in terms of light, whereas devils are generally described by their shadowy darkness. Milton also uses light to symbolize God and God's grace. In his invocation in Book III, Milton asks that he be filled with this light so he can tell his divine story accurately and persuasively. While the absence of light in Hell and in Satan himself represents the absence of God and his grace.

The Geography of the Universe

Milton divides the universe into four major regions: glorious Heaven, dreadful Hell, confusing Chaos, and a young and vulnerable Earth in between. The opening scenes that take place in Hell give the reader immediate context as to Satan's plot against God and humankind. The intermediate scenes in Heaven, in which God tells the angels of his plans, provide a philosophical and theological context for the story. Then, with these established settings of good and evil, light and dark, much of the action occurs in between on Earth. The powers of good and evil work against each other on this new battlefield of Earth. Satan fights God by tempting Adam and Eve, while God shows his love and mercy through the Son's punishment of Adam and Eve.

Milton believes that any other information concerning the geography of the universe is unimportant. Milton acknowledges both the possibility that the sun revolves around the Earth and that the Earth revolves around the sun, without coming down on one side or the other. Raphael asserts that it does not

matter which revolves around which, demonstrating that Milton's cosmology is based on the religious message he wants to convey, rather than on the findings of contemporaneous science or astronomy.

Conversation and Contemplation

One common objection raised by readers of *Paradise Lost* is that the poem contains relatively little action. Milton sought to divert the reader's attention from heroic battles and place it on the conversations and contemplations of his characters. Conversations comprise almost five complete books of *Paradise Lost*, close to half of the text. Milton's narrative emphasis on conversation conveys the importance he attached to conversation and contemplation, two pursuits that he believed were of fundamental importance for a moral person. As with Adam and Raphael, and again with Adam and Michael, the sharing of ideas allows two people to share and spread God's message. Likewise, pondering God and his grace allows a person to become closer to God and more obedient. Adam constantly contemplates God before the fall, whereas Satan contemplates only himself. After the fall, Adam and Eve must learn to maintain their conversation and contemplation if they hope to make their own happiness outside of Paradise.

The Scales in the Sky

As Satan prepares to fight Gabriel when he is discovered in Paradise, God causes the image of a pair of golden scales to appear in the sky. On one side of the scales, he puts the consequences of Satan's running away, and on the other he puts the consequences of Satan's staying and fighting with Gabriel. The side that shows him staying and fighting flies up, signifying its lightness and worthlessness. These scales symbolize the fact that God and Satan are not truly on opposite sides of a struggle—God is all-powerful, and Satan and Gabriel *both* derive all of their power from Him. God's scales force Satan to realize the futility of taking arms against one of God's angels again.

Adam's Wreath

The wreath that Adam makes as he and Eve work separately in Book IX is symbolic in several ways. First, it represents his love for her and his attraction to her. But as he is about to give the wreath to her, his shock in noticing that she has eaten from the Tree of Knowledge makes him drop it to the ground. His dropping of the wreath symbolizes that his love and attraction to Eve is falling away. His image of her as a spiritual companion has been shattered completely, as he realizes her fallen state. The fallen wreath represents the loss of pure love.

Book I, Summary: Lines 27–722: Satan and Hell

Immediately after the prologue, Milton raises the question of how Adam and Eve's disobedience occurred and explains that their actions were partly due to a serpent's deception. This serpent is Satan, and the poem joins him and his followers in Hell, where they have just been cast after being defeated by God in Heaven.

Satan lies stunned beside his second-in-command, Beelzebub, in a lake of fire that gives off darkness instead of light. Breaking the awful silence, Satan bemoans their terrible position, but does not repent of his rebellion against God, suggesting that they might gather their forces for another attack.

Beelzebub is doubtful; he now believes that God cannot be overpowered. Satan does not fully contradict this assessment, but suggests that they could at least pervert God's good works to evil purposes. The two devils then rise up and, spreading their wings, fly over to the dry land next to the flaming lake. But they can undertake this action only because God has allowed them to loose their chains. All of the devils were formerly angels who chose to follow Satan in his rebellion, and God still intends to turn their evil deeds toward the good.

Once out of the lake, Satan becomes more optimistic about their situation. He calls the rest of the fallen angels, his legions, to join him on land. They immediately obey and, despite their wounds and suffering, fly up to gather on the plain. Milton lists some of the more notable of the angels whose names have been erased from the books of Heaven, noting that later, in the time of man, many of these devils come to be worshipped as gods.

Among these are Moloch, who is later known as a god requiring human sacrifices, and Belial, a lewd and lustful god. Still in war gear, these fallen angels have thousands of banners raised and their shields and spears in hand. Even in defeat, they are an awesome army to behold.

Satan's unrepentant evil nature is unwavering. Even cast down in defeat, he does not consider changing his ways: he insists to his fellow devils that their delight will be in doing evil, not good. In particular, as he explains to Beelzebub, he wishes to pervert God's will and find a way to make evil out of good. It is not easy for Satan to maintain this determination; the battle has just demonstrated God's overwhelming power, and the devils could not even have lifted themselves off the lake of fire unless God had allowed it. God allows it precisely because he intends to turn their evil designs toward a greater good in the end. Satan's envy of the Son's chosen status led him to rebel and consequently to be condemned. His continued envy and search for freedom leads him to believe that he would rather be a king in Hell than a servant in Heaven. Satan's pride has caused him to believe that his own free intellect is as great as God's will. Satan remarks that the mind can make its own Hell out of Heaven, or in his case, its own Heaven out of Hell.

Satan addresses his comrades and acknowledges their shame in falling to the heavenly forces, but urges them to gather in order to consider whether another war is feasible. Instantly, the legions of devils dig into the bowels of the ground, unearthing gold and other minerals. With their inhuman powers they construct a great temple in a short time. It is called Pandemonium (which means "all the demons" in Latin), and the hundreds of thousands of demonic troops gather there to hold a summit. Being spirits, they can easily shrink from huge winged creatures to the smallest size. Compacting themselves, they enter Pandemonium, and the debate begins.

Analysis

Throughout the first two or three books of *Paradise Lost*, Satan seems as if he's the hero of the poem. This is partly because the focus of the poem is all on him, but it is also because the first books establish his struggle—he finds himself defeated and banished from Heaven, and sets about establishing a new course for himself and those he leads. Typically, the hero or protagonist of *any* narrative, epic poem or otherwise, is a person who struggles to accomplish something. Milton plays against our expectations by spending the first quarter of his epic telling us about the antagonist rather than the protagonist, so that when we meet Adam and Eve, we will have a more profound sense of what they are up against. But

even when the focus of the poem shifts to Adam and Eve, Satan remains the most active force in the story.

One important way in which the narrator develops our picture of Satan—and gives us the impression that he is a hero—is through *epic similes*, lengthy and developed comparisons that tell us how big and powerful Satan is. For example, when Satan is lying on the burning lake, Milton compares him to the titans who waged war upon Jove in Greek mythology. Then, at greater length, he compares him to a Leviathan, or whale, that is so huge that sailors mistake it for an island and fix their anchor to it. In other epics, these sorts of similes are used to establish the great size or strength of characters, and on the surface these similes seem to do the same thing. At the same time, however, the effect of these similes is to unsettle us, making us aware that we really do not know how big Satan is at all. No one knows how big the titans were, because they were defeated before the age of man. The image of the Leviathan does not give us a well-defined sense of his size, because the whole point of the image is that the Leviathan's size generates deception and confusion.

More than anything, the similes used to describe Satan make us aware of the fact that size is relative, and that we don't know how big anything in Hell is—the burning lake, the hill, Pandemonium, etc. Milton drives this fact home at the end of Book I with a tautology: while most of the devils shrink in size to enter Pandemonium, the important ones sit “far within / And in their own dimensions like themselves” (I.792–793). In other words, they were however big they were, but we have no way of knowing how big that was. Finally, it is important to note that the first description of Satan's size is the biggest we will ever see him. From that point on, Satan assumes many shapes and is compared to numerous creatures, but his size and stature steadily diminishes. The uncertainty created by these similes creates a sense of irony—perhaps Satan isn't so great after all.

The devils in *Paradise Lost* are introduced to the story here in Book I in almost a parody of how Homer introduces great warriors in the *Iliad*. The irony of these descriptions lies in the fact that while these devils seem heroic and noteworthy in certain ways, they just lost the war in Heaven. As frightening and vividly presented as these creatures are, they did not succeed in killing a single angel.

In Book I, Milton presents Satan primarily as a military hero, and the council of devils as a council of war. In doing so, he makes *Paradise Lost* resonate with earlier epics, which all center around military heroes and their exploits. At the same time, Milton presents an implicit critique of a literary culture that glorifies war and warriors. Satan displays all of the virtues of a great warrior such as Achilles or Odysseus. He is courageous, undaunted, refusing to yield in the face of impossible odds, and able to stir his followers to follow him in brave and violent exploits. Milton is clearly aware of what he's doing in making Satan somewhat appealing in the early chapters. By drawing us into sympathizing with and admiring Satan, Milton forces us to question why we admire martial prowess and pride in literary characters. Ultimately he attempts to show that the Christian virtues of obedience, humility, and forbearance are more important.

(Adapted from www.sparknotes.com)