

A Survey of Paradise Lost: Milton

To give you a working knowledge of the massive epic Paradise Lost, this survey has been especially written so that you may grasp the continuity of the whole epic, whilst working only with special selections in excerpt.

There are twelve books in the epic poem Paradise Lost.

Books I-IV deal with Satan's rallying of his forces and his journey to the earth to attempt the Fall of Man.

Books V-VIII deal with the revolt of the angels, their defeat and fall, and the creation of the Universe and of Adam and Eve.

Books IX-XII deal with the Fall of Man, his punishment and the prophecy of his ultimate redemption. Thus, chronologically speaking the story begins at the middle, since only when reaching Book V do we find the beginning of the story, and it takes the middle four books to fill us in on the background of the events that began Book I - i.e. the War in Heaven and the overthrow of the revolting angels. The climax of the story occurs in Book IX (by far the longest) with the Fall of Man, the basic theme of the poem, and the last three books give us an understanding of its permanent meaning and consequences.

Even the least of readers could not fail to find the portrait of Satan powerfully descriptive, fallen majesty in shattering proportions. This archspirit of perverseness and rebellion is magnificent as he stands indomitable and intransigent hurling defiance at his omnipotent conqueror out of the depths of darkness and despair. He cries,

-----What though the field be lost?  
All is not lost; the unconquerable Will,  
And study of revenge, immortal hate,  
And courage never to submit or yield:  
And what is else not to be overcome?  
That Glory never shall his wrath or might  
Extort from me-----lines 105-111. Book I

Satan rallies his stunned and battle-weary followers, proclaiming that the war against God, and all the good of God's world, must go on. They must strive to bring evil out of good, in perfect opposition to God's purpose to bring good out of evil. Satan is the perfect expression of the perverted will. "Evil be thou my good", he cries in a later passage of the poem.



Satan is proud as well as perverse - as the common simile "as proud as Lucifer", reminds us. "Better to reign in Hell than to serve in Heaven," says he. He does not want to be second to anyone, not even God. In Hell, as he thinks, the rebel angels are free from the dominion of the Almighty, moreover he insists.

The mind is its own place, and in itself  
Can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven.

Nevertheless, he cannot remain content with this limited security and freedom. He must carry on the struggle for power against God and His providence.

Satan calls a council of his leaders - "The great Seraphic Lords and Cherubim" - to decide whether they shall wage a hot or a cold war - i.e. - "Whether of open War or covert guile." Satan's own choice is the way of fraud and guile and the exploration of the new world rumored to have been created by God. But he sits on his throne like a good constitutional monarch and lets his associates debate the issues. The chiefs speak out: \*Moloch, \*Belial, \*Mammon, and \*Beelzebub. The proposal of the latter, to seek out new opportunities on earth, wins in the ensuing vote. Satan himself assumes the dreadful task of journeying through infinite darkness and chaos to discover the new creation (Man) and subvert it.

The crafty "Adversary of God and Man" induces the monsters Sin (his daughter) and Death (his recently begotten son) to open up the Gates of Hell, and he flies into the infinite realm of chaos and night that extends between Heaven and Hell. Chaos, the ruling spirit, gives Satan directions on how to get to the earth, in the hope that the newly created order will be reduced to its original formlessness and darkness. After a hard and dangerous journey, Satan reaches the border where nature - the physical order - begins and "the sacred influence of light appears". Above him is his native homeland Heaven, from which he is permanently exiled; below him is the earth.

Thither full fraught with Mischievous revenge,  
Accurst, and in a cursed hour he hides.

First he passes through the Limbo of Vanity, or Paradise of Fools, skirts the stairway to Heaven, and comes down to the sphere of the sun. He changes his shape into the shape of a lesser angel, and gets direction from the archangel Uriel, the guardian angel of the sphere, on how to find the earth and its new creature Man. Satan finally alights on Mount Niphates (in Assyria) and sees the earthly Paradise, The Garden of Eden. ("delight")



Satan has reached his destination but instead of feeling elated, he is overwhelmed with remorse and despair at his fall. The pleasant prospect of Eden awakens his conscience and the memory "Of what he was, what is, and what must be." He knows that he has come to his present state through his own free will, and there is no way out save repentance and submission, which his obdurate pride forbids. He is imprisoned in his self-made state.

Me Miserable! which way shall I flie  
Infinite wrauth, and infinite despaire?  
Which way I flie is Hell; myself am Hell;

To his utter despair is joined the lacerating envy of the new creature Man, God's "new delight", living in joy and innocence. With all hope gone and all good lost, all that remains for him now is to DO evil. He makes his way into the Garden and perches "like a cormorant" on the Tree of Life, the highest Tree where, from which he views this "Heaven on Earth." He sees the lovely landscape, the flowers, trees, and waters. He sees these first humans, living in joyful innocence, loving without shame, going about naked, doing their gardening work, resting, and eating the fruit of the trees and the produce of the Garden. Around them play the beasts - tigers and elephants in mutual enjoyment, not destruction. Satan cries out with anguish at this pleasant sight, at the happy pair who are only slightly below the angels and who shine with divine image. He, Satan, is touched with wonder and confesses he could love them and could pity them for the disaster he is to bring on them. He has nothing against THEM, he protests; he seeks only mutual friendship and alliance, their company WITH HIM in HELL. They are the means to his revenge against God, and he pleads "The Tyrants plea" - necessity.

And should I at your harmless innocence  
Melt, as I doe, yet public reason just,  
Honour and Empire with revenge enlarg'd  
By conquering this new World, compels me now  
To do what else though damned I should abhorre.

Satan moves in closer to the human pair listening to their conversation, and at last discovering the vulnerable point through which he may work their fall. Adam remarks to Eve that their life is one of ease and freedom, with only one restriction,

.....not to taste that onely Tree  
Of knowledge, planted by the Tree of Life.



God has pronounced the penalty of death if they disobey that "One easie prohibition." Despite his previous expression of friendly feeling, Satan is full of hateful envy at the sight of the gentle caresses they exchange, and he is now eager to use, woefully, the information he has just gained.

.....O fair foundation laid whereoneto build  
Thir ruine! Hence I will excite thir minds  
With more desire to know, and to reject  
Envious commands, invented with designs  
To keep them low whom knowledge might exalt  
Equal with Gods; aspiring to be such,  
They taste and die: what likelier can ensue?

Book IV ends with Satan's presence in the Garden, (in the form of a toad attempting to influence Eve through her dreams), being detected by the angel Gabriel watchman of the Gate of Paradise. Satan is ready to offer resistance to the angelic guards but a sign from God warns him he is too weak to fight God's angels, and so he "flees from the Garden". Thus the first four books center upon Satan the task that Satan has set upon himself, to perpetually oppose God through the perversion of God's creatures, Man. The concentration upon Satan in these four books is broken only by one exception at the opening of Book III, the beautiful hymn to light expresses the contrast between the dark regions traversed by Satan in his flight, and the "Bright effluence of bright essence increate" which is the God who is light.

Hail holy light, offspring of Heaven first-born"

At this point too it must surely be added that Milton is expressing also the pain and yet the opportunity of his blindness, which shuts out forever the physical light, the sight of dawn and evening, and all the things and creatures, making nature - for him - "a Universal blanc". But though the outer sensible light is shut off, he hopes and prays that he may all the more be granted the inner light which irradiates the mind, so that he may accomplish his poetic task,

.....that I may see and tell  
Of things invisible to mortal sight.

Milton then continues to describe the scene in heaven. God, seeing Satan speeding through the darkness, foresees all that will transpire in the future, but He refuses to intervene, for He has given man free-will, the power to choose good or evil, and man must stand or fall by his own choice. Man is alone responsible for what is to happen; it is his will, not the Creator's, not pre-destination nor the force of fate or natural necessity, that will decide what is to be.



The Son of God "The radiant image of His glory", begs God not to destroy His own creations - the human race - and thus satisfy the malice of the Adversary. God assures the Son that man will be saved, through God's free grace, but insists that satisfaction must be offered for treasonable disobedience, by man himself or by a substitute. Then the Son, the voice of infinite compassion, speaks up for the unhappy creature who through his sin is incapable of seeking grace and offering atonement. He proclaims that He, the Son, will offer himself in necessary sacrifice - that He will not really die, but will be resurrected and victorious over Death and Hell and all such foes. Thus with the sacrifice of The Son, will the human race be redeemed and brought again to God's grace. What Milton has done in this passage is to dramatize the New Testament view, found especially in Paul's Epistles, that the Passion of Christ is the propitiation of Adam's sin.

It is interesting to note at this point that Milton is necessarily limited in his description of God and the Son. The poet must make the invisible visible, through sensuous imagery already used by the biblical writers as well as literal statements about God, all of which do not really describe God as He is, but only insofar as the human mind can grasp the divine reality.

#### Books V-VIII

If books I-IV tell us how Satan set off to work man's fall, Books V-VIII give us the background that provides the basis and reason for Satan's attempt, including the revolt and fall of the angels. This middle section of the whole work begins with a tender and touching dialogue between Adam and Eve. Eve speaks out her disturbance at the dream she experienced (inspired by Satan) in which she was tempted to eat of the Tree of Knowledge, and become like Gods. Adam comforts her and together they join in praise of their Creator. And God sends His angel Raphael to warn Adam of the plot against him. Raphael explains that man, too, like the angels who "fell", may assume the right of his free will and choose to transgress God's one prohibition, thus incurring punishment in the same way as the fallen angels. Raphael recounts to Adam the story of the revolt of the angels; the Creation of the world; God's appointment of His Son as vice-regent ruling over heavenly powers, Satan's envy and rancour of the Son, and the outcome of the battle which ensued. Michael and Gabriel are the arch-angels who lead the forces of Heaven against the "apostate rebel". They are joined by the Son, and the enemy is decisively crushed and hurled to the bottomless pit of Hell.



So, Raphael completes the account of the strange "Warr in Heaven/Among th' Angelic Powers".

Book IX presents the main event of the story, for which the previous eight books have been a prelude and the last three books are consequence. Satan returns to Eden and enters into the body of "The Serpent suttlest Beast of all the Field".

It is Eve who gives Satan the opportunity he requires. She insists that she and Adam work apart. Satan lulls Eve's wariness by flattery, and tells her that he has attained the gift of speech through eating the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. He deprecates her feeling that she must obey the divine interdiction, and her fear of punishment, pointing out that she can become like God, just as he has become like man, attaining reason and speech. Moreover, he has eaten the fruit, he says, and he is not dead.

This argument is too much for Eve and she eats greedily, gratified by the prospect of experience, knowledge, and wisdom that lies open before her making her equal to Adam, if not even superior. Only after the first exultation of her act does she stop to really think about death. Unable to share Adam with any other, she rushes to find Adam and persuade him to eat of the fruit also, so that any consequence of the act might fall upon them both. Adam feels compelled to share her fate, and eats also. The first result of their transgression is lust, they are both possessed by carnal desire and wantonness - in sharp contrast to their previous innocent joy in conjugal love. Upon awakening, however, they realize their guilt and loss of primitive righteousness; they feel naked both within and without - "destitute and bare / Of all thir vertue". Ashamed to see each other naked now, they sew fig leaves together to cover themselves, but nothing can conceal their inner guilt and shame, and they are shaken by inner disturbance and ugly emotions. Now they rail at each other, hating each other, and blaming each other. Adam takes the same position toward Eve as God does toward man - asserting that he could not force her, but had to allow her to exercise her own freedom of will. But he admits that he was wrong to trust in her virtue, and that this behaviour of woman must be a warning to all future husbands.

#### Books X-XII

Books X-XII deal with the consequences of the original sin. On the one hand, sin and death have been brought into the world, all nature is infected with evil and death, and man is exiled from his original perfection. (Make a strong comparison here with the attributes of Malacandra). On the other hand, the assurance of redemption is held out, for the Son will eventually make the full payment for Adam's sin; the Son manifest as the Christ Child who is "Eve's seed", the "Second Adam", will conquer death and sin, and revenge the original couple's seduction by "the Serpent".

And there will be as a result of this sacrifice elevating compensations in ordinary human existence, despite a new life where love between the sexes is beset with frustrations, where joyful labour has become a painful toil, where perfect bliss and immortality have been replaced by disease, old age, and death, and man cannot enjoy full intimacy with God any more. Despite these obvious



ills and imperfections, man will have the God-given gifts of culture and productivity; through God's grace and instruction man will learn the arts and sciences and make a path for himself in the world. Work is good (this is a constant theme in Paradise Lost) and Knowledge will give man a home in the world. Moreover, through The Fall and his active repentance, man will achieve virtue, reason, and the will to do right, fulfilling the law of God through love - such will and obedience are true freedom. (Now do you better understand Oyarsa's statements to Weston on free-will?)

Adam is impelled to cry out his Felix Culpa! (Fortunate sin) at this promising and joyful picture.

O goodness infinite, goodness immense!  
That all this good of evil shall produce,  
And evil turn to good; more wonderful  
Then that by which creation first brought forth

Light out of darkness.....

This too is the tone of the archangel Michael's final words. He promises that when Adam has attained perfect obedience to God, attested in deeds and in the virtues of faith, patience, temperance, and charity.

-----then wilt thou not be loath  
To leave this Paradise, but shalt possess  
A Paradise within thee, happier farr-----

Leaving the Garden Adam and Eve glance back and shed some tears at the loss of innocence and bliss but

-----The World was all before them, where to choose  
Thir place of rest, and Providence thir guide:  
They hand in hand with wandring steps and slow,  
Through Eden took thir solitarie way.

And with these words Paradise Lost comes to a close, and Milton's tremendous task; to justify the ways of God to men, through the story of the Creation, Fall, and Redemption of man and the world, is now complete.

Milton's Descriptions of the "burning lake" and "stygian darkness" of the bottomless pit to which the apostate angels were banished, was most surely inspired by a) his familiarity with Dante's Divine Comedy of the Saxon monk Chaucer's story of Geoffrey Hamlyn (The Creation) and b) his vast theological studies which included Augustine and Agrippa.



Paradise Lost, notes continued

Baal, Bel, Belial - Moloch

Coming from Eastern Mythology these are Assyrian deities. The names Baal and Moloch seem to have been, at first, different appellations of the Sun; later they assumed another significance. In Babylon the famous tower of Babel or Belus was devoted to the worship of the Sun under the name Belus or Baal. The Canaanites later were to make golden 'ephiges' which claimed the worship and devotion of sun worshippers. Human sacrifices were offered to Baal by apostate Hebrews at this time in their history. Moloch was a divinity of the Ammonites. The Phoenicians were also particularly devoted to his worship. Young children and infants were offered as holocausts to this cruel god. History records that when the Sicilian Agathocles threatened the city of Carthage five-hundred infants, many the first-born of noble parents were consumed in one day on the altar of Moloch. Moloch was represented by a brazen image, which was so contrived that when a child was laid upon the extended arms of the image - the arms lowered and the victim of sacrifice fell into the fiery furnace at the foot of the idol.

Moloch was worshipped by the Jews who were addicted to this idolatry before their departure from Egypt. (As indeed were the Egyptians whose history is crammed with incidents which led to The Passover, and also Herod's proclamation of death to the first-born son at the time of Christ's Nativity). It was Moses who forbade the dedication of children to Moloch in the flight out of Egypt. And it was Moses who destroyed all the idols of the Israelites bringing the apostate Hebrews firmly back to the worship of Jehovah - the one-God.

Mammon - an Aramaic word meaning riches. In Medieval times Mammon became the prince of the lowest orders of demons "those tempters in several kinds," who tempt men to relinquish their souls for the riches of the world. (\*Everyman)

N.B. Between Moloch and Mammon lie all the characteristics of Weston and Devine.

Further notes on Paradise Lost: cont.

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Note particularly the parallels that can be drawn (and which served also to inspire Milton's language) between the Titan wars in Heaven in GREEK MYTHOLOGY and the war between the angels of God and the apostate rebels of Satan's horde.

From Hesiod's story of TYPHON OR TYPHOEUS a parallel to the Satanic revolt is expressed thus: the most frightful of earth-born monsters, Zeus, the mighty, hurled back from Olympus till they were buried alive in the burning volcano.

Such rebellion is typically allegorized in medieval literature as symbolizing ambition that assails even heaven itself - and such ambition is to be met with strength which will cast it out "even into the mouth of fiery Aetna". (\*Dante)

The Serpent: note the many references in mythology to the serpent or dragon as a vehicle of death and destruction - even in early medieval mythology such as the well-known examples of Chivalry - St. George and the Dragon - noting that the destruction of the dragon rescued the fate of damsels (virgins) sacrificed to the rapacity of the dragon's evil desire.

Note further Isaiah's prophecy, (from the biblical book of that name) that the Lord "shall punish Leviathan the piercing serpent, even Leviathan, that crooked serpent: and he shall slay the dragon that is in the sea."

Why is the serpent intertwined staff the emblem used by physicians?

-----What though the field be lost?  
All is not lost; the unconquerable Will,  
And study of revenge, immortal hate,  
And courage never to submit or yield,  
And what is else not to be overcome?  
That glory never shall his wrath or right  
Extort from me-----lines 109-112. Book I

Satan rallies his stunned and battle-weary followers, explaining that the war against God, and all the good of God's world, must go on. They must strive to bring evil out of good, in perfect opposition to God's purpose to bring good out of evil. Satan is the perfect expression of the perverted will. "Evil to them as good", he cries in a later passage of the poem.