

Paradise Lost

JOHN MILTON

Key Facts

FULL TITLE · *Paradise Lost*

AUTHOR · John Milton

TYPE OF WORK · Poem

GENRE · Epic

LANGUAGE · English

TIME AND PLACE WRITTEN · 1656–1674; England

DATE OF FIRST PUBLICATION · First Edition (ten books), 1667; Second Edition (twelve books), 1674

PUBLISHER · S. Simmons, England

NARRATOR · Milton

POINT OF VIEW · Third person

TONE · Lofty; formal; tragic

TENSE · Present

SETTING (TIME) · Before the beginning of time

SETTING (PLACE) · Hell, Chaos and Night, Heaven, Earth (Paradise, the Garden of Eden)

PROTAGONIST · Adam and Eve

MAJOR CONFLICT · Satan, already damned to Hell, undertakes to corrupt God's new, beloved creation, humankind.

RISING ACTION · The angels battle in Heaven; Satan and the rebel angels fall to Hell; God creates the universe; Satan plots to corrupt God's human creation; God creates Eve to be Adam's companion; Raphael answers Adam's questions and warns him of Satan

CLIMAX · Adam and Eve eat the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge.

FALLING ACTION · The Son inflicts punishment; Adam and Eve repent; Adam learns about the future of man

THEMES · The Importance of Obedience to God; The Hierarchical Nature of the Universe; The Fall as Partly Fortunate

MOTIFS · Light and Dark; The Geography of the Universe; Conversation and Contemplation

SYMBOLS · The Scales in the Sky; Adam's wreath

FORESHADOWING · Eve's vanity at seeing her reflection in the lake; Satan's transformation into a snake and his final punishment

Context

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.

Character List

Main Characters

Satan - Head of the rebellious angels who have just fallen from Heaven. As the poem's antagonist, Satan is the originator of sin—the first to be ungrateful for God the Father's blessings. He embarks on a mission to Earth that eventually leads to the fall of Adam and Eve, but also worsens his eternal punishment. His character changes through-out the poem. Satan often appears to speak rationally and persuasively, but later in the poem we see the inconsistency and irrationality of his thoughts. He can assume any form, adopting both glorious and humble shapes.

[Satan \(In-Depth Analysis\)](#)

Adam - The first human, the father of our race, and, along with his wife Eve, the caretaker of the Garden of Eden. Adam is grateful and obedient to God, but falls from grace when Eve convinces him to join her in the sin of eating from the Tree of Knowledge.

[Adam \(In-Depth Analysis\)](#)

Eve - The first woman and the mother of mankind. Eve was made from a rib taken from Adam's side. Because she was made from Adam and for Adam, she is subservient to him. She is also weaker than Adam, so Satan focuses his powers of temptation on her. He succeeds in getting her to eat the fruit of the forbidden tree despite God's command.

[Eve \(In-Depth Analysis\)](#)

God the Father - One part of the Christian Trinity. God the Father creates the world by means of God the Son, creating Adam and Eve last. He foresees the fall of mankind through them. He does not prevent their fall, in order to preserve their free will, but he does allow his Son to atone for their sins.

[God \(In-Depth Analysis\)](#)

God the Son - Jesus Christ, the second part of the Trinity. He delivers the fatal blow to Satan's forces, sending them down into Hell, before the creation of Earth. When the fall of man is predicted, He offers himself as a sacrifice to pay for the sins of mankind, so that God the Father can be both just and merciful.

[God \(In-Depth Analysis\)](#)

Devils, Inhabiting Hell

Beelzebub - Satan's second-in-command. Beelzebub discusses with Satan their options after being cast into Hell, and at the debate suggests that they investigate the newly created Earth. He and Satan embody perverted reason, since they are both eloquent and rational but use their talents for wholly corrupt ends.

Belial - One of the principal devils in Hell. Belial argues against further war with Heaven, but he does so because he is an embodiment of sloth and inactivity, not for any good reason. His eloquence and learning is great, and he is able to persuade many of the devils with his faulty reasoning.

Mammon - A devil known in the Bible as the epitome of wealth. Mammon always walks hunched over, as if he is searching the ground for valuables. In the debate among the devils, he argues against war, seeing no profit to be gained from it. He believes Hell can be improved by mining the gems and minerals they find there.

Mulciber - The devil who builds Pandemonium, Satan's palace in Hell. Mulciber's character is based on a Greek mythological figure known for being a poor architect, but in Milton's poem he is one of the most productive and skilled devils in Hell.

Moloch - A rash, irrational, and murderous devil. Moloch argues in Pandemonium that the devils should engage in another full war against God and his servant angels.

Sin - Satan's daughter, who sprang full-formed from Satan's head when he was still in Heaven. Sin has the shape of a woman above the waist, that of a serpent below, and her middle is ringed about with Hell Hounds, who periodically burrow into her womb and gnaw her entrails. She guards the gates of Hell.

Death - Satan's son by his daughter, Sin. Death in turn rapes his mother, begetting the mass of beasts that torment her lower half. The relations between Death, Sin, and Satan mimic horribly those of the Holy Trinity.

Angels, Inhabiting Heaven and Earth

Gabriel - One of the archangels of Heaven, who acts as a guard at the Garden of Eden. Gabriel battles Satan after his angels find Satan whispering to Eve in the Garden.

Raphael - One of the archangels in Heaven, who acts as one of God's messengers. Raphael informs Adam of Satan's plot to seduce them into sin, and also narrates the story of the fallen angels, as well as the fall of Satan.

Uriel - An angel who guards the planet earth. Uriel is the angel whom Satan tricks when he is disguised as a cherub. Uriel, as a good angel and guardian, tries to correct his error by making the other angels aware of Satan's presence.

Abdiel - An angel who at first considers joining Satan in rebellion but argues against Satan and the rebel angels and returns to God. His character demonstrates the power of repentance.

Michael - The chief of the archangels, Michael leads the angelic forces against Satan and his followers in the battle in Heaven, before the Son provides the decisive advantage. Michael also stands guard at the Gate of Heaven, and narrates the future of the world to Adam in Books XI and XII.

Analysis of Major Characters

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 statesman, 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.

Adam

Adam is a strong, intelligent, and rational character possessed of a remarkable relationship with God. In fact, before the fall, he is as perfect as a human being can be. He has an enormous capacity for reason, and can understand the most sophisticated ideas instantly. He can converse with Raphael as a near-equal, and understand Raphael's stories readily. But after the fall, his conversation with Michael during his visions is significantly one-sided. Also, his self-doubt and anger after the fall demonstrate his new ability to indulge in rash and irrational attitudes. As a result of the fall, he loses his pure reason and intellect.

Adam's greatest weakness is his love for Eve. He falls in love with her immediately upon seeing her, and confides to Raphael that his attraction to her is almost overwhelming. Though Raphael warns him to keep his affections in check, Adam is powerless to prevent his love from overwhelming his reason. After Eve eats from the Tree of Knowledge, he quickly does the same, realizing that if she is doomed, he must follow her into doom as well if he wants to avoid losing her. Eve has become his companion for life, and he is unwilling to part with her even if that means disobeying God.

Adam's curiosity and hunger for knowledge is another weakness. The questions he asks of Raphael about creation and the universe may suggest a growing temptation to eat from the Tree of Knowledge. But like his physical attraction to Eve, Adam is able to partly avoid this temptation. It is only through Eve that his temptations become unavoidable.

Eve

Created to be Adam's mate, Eve is inferior to Adam, but only slightly. She surpasses Adam only in her beauty. She falls in love with her own image when she sees her reflection in a body of water. Ironically, her greatest asset produces her most serious weakness, vanity. After Satan compliments her on her beauty and godliness, he easily persuades her to eat from the Tree of Knowledge.

Aside from her beauty, Eve's intelligence and spiritual purity is constantly tested. She is not unintelligent, but she is not ambitious to learn, content to be guided by Adam as God intended. As a result, she does not become more intelligent or learned as the story progresses, though she does attain the beginning of

wisdom by the end of the poem. Her lack of learning is partly due to her absence for most of Raphael's discussions with Adam in Books V, VI, and VII, and she also does not see the visions Michael shows Adam in Books XI and XII. Her absence from these important exchanges shows that she feels it is not her place to seek knowledge independently; she wants to hear Raphael's stories through Adam later. The one instance in which she deviates from her passive role, telling Adam to trust her on her own and then seizing the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, is disastrous.

Eve's strengths are her capacity for love, emotion, and forbearance. She persuades Adam to stay with her after the fall, and Adam in turn dissuades her from committing suicide, as they begin to work together as a powerful unit. Eve complements Adam's strengths and corrects his weaknesses. Thus, Milton does not denigrate all women through his depiction of Eve. Rather he explores the role of women in his society and the positive and important role he felt they could offer in the divine union of marriage.

God

An omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent character who knows everything before it happens. Attempting to present such an unimaginable character accurately, Milton appropriates several of God's biblical speeches into his speeches in *Paradise Lost*. God loves his creation and strongly defends humankind's free will. He presents his love through his Son, who performs his will justly and mercifully.

God, in *Paradise Lost*, is less a developed character than a personification of abstract ideas. He is unknowable to humankind and to some extent lacks emotion and depth. He has no weaknesses, embodies pure reason, and is always just. He explains why certain events happen, like Satan's decision to corrupt Adam and Eve, tells his angels what will happen next, and gives his reasoning behind his actions in theological terms. God allows evil to occur, but he will make good out of evil. His plan to save humankind by offering his Son shows his unwavering control over Satan.

The Son

For Milton, the Son is the manifestation of God in action. While God the Father stays in the realm of Heaven, the Son performs the difficult tasks of banishing Satan and his rebel angels, creating the universe and humankind, and punishing Satan, Adam and Eve with justice and mercy. The Son physically connects God the Father with his creation. Together they form a complete and perfect God.

The Son personifies love and compassion. After the fall, he pities Adam and Eve and gives them clothing to help diminish their shame. His decision to volunteer to die for humankind shows his dedication and selflessness. The final vision that Adam sees in Book XII is of the Son's (or Jesus') sacrifice on the cross—

through this vision, the Son is able to calm Adam's worries for humankind and give Adam and Eve restored hope as they venture out of Paradise.

Themes, Motifs & Symbols

Themes

Themes are the fundamental and often universal ideas explored in a literary work.

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 know 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.

Motifs

Motifs are recurring structures, contrasts, or literary devices that can help to develop and inform the text's major themes.

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.

Symbols

Symbols are objects, characters, figures, or colors used to represent abstract ideas or concepts.

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 IX, Lines 1–403

Summary

With Raphael's departure for Heaven, the story no longer consists of conversations between heavenly beings and humankind. Milton explains that he must now turn to Adam and Eve's actual act of disobedience. The poem must now turn tragic, and Milton asserts his intention to show that the fall of humankind is more heroic than the tales of Virgil and Homer. He invokes Urania, the "Celestial Patroness" (IX.21) and muse of Christian inspiration, and asks for her to visit him in his sleep and inspire his words, because he fears he is too old and lacks the creative powers to accomplish the task himself. He hopes not to get caught up in the description of unimportant items, as Virgil and Homer did, and to remain focused on his ultimate and divine task.

Satan returns to the Garden of Eden the night after Raphael's departure. Satan's return comes eight days after he was caught and banished by Gabriel. He sneaks in over the wall, avoiding Gabriel and the other guards. After studying all the animals of the Garden, Satan considers what disguise he should assume, and chooses to become a snake. Before he can continue, however, he again hesitates—not because of doubt this time, but because of his grief at not being able to enjoy this wondrous new world. He struggles to control his thoughts. He now believes that the Earth is more beautiful than Heaven ever was, and becomes jealous of Adam and Eve and their chosen status to occupy and maintain Paradise. He gripes

that the excess beauty of Earth causes him to feel more torment and anguish. Gathering his thoughts into action, he finds a sleeping serpent and enters its body.

The next morning, Adam and Eve prepare for their usual morning labors. Realizing that they have much work to do, Eve suggests that they work separately, so that they might get more work done. Adam is not keen on this idea. He fears that they will be more susceptible to Satan's temptation if they are alone. Eve, however, is eager to have her strength tested. After much resistance, Adam concedes, as Eve promises Adam that she will return to their bower soon. They go off to do their gardening independently.

Analysis

Milton begins Book IX as he began Books I and VII: with an invocation and plea for guidance, as well as a comparison of his task to that of the great Greek and Roman epics, the *Iliad*, *Odyssey*, and the *Aeneid*. Milton explains by way of this invocation that Adam and Eve's fall is the major event that occurs in *Paradise Lost*. Their fall is the poem's climax, even though it comes as no surprise. By describing the fall as tragic, Milton conveys the gravity and seriousness of this catastrophe for all of humankind, but he also situates Adam and Eve's story within the literary conventions of tragedy, in which a great man falls because of a special flaw within his otherwise larger-than-life character. The fall paves the way for humankind's ultimate redemption and salvation, and thus Milton can claim that his epic surpasses Homer's and Virgil's because it pertains to the entire human race, not one hero or even one nation.

Milton mocks the knightly romances of the Middle Ages on the grounds that they applaud merely superficial heroism. The idea of the chivalrous warrior was an oxymoron in Milton's view. Milton presents his hero as a morally powerful person—Adam's strength and martial prowess are entirely irrelevant. Milton voices doubts about whether his society will appreciate a real Christian hero, or whether he himself is still skilled enough or young enough to complete his literary task, balancing his confidence in his own ability with the humility appropriate to a Christian poet.

Satan's return to the story presents him as a changed and further degenerated character. Before the temptation of Eve, we see Satan go through another bit of soul-searching. This time, however, he does not waver in his determination to ruin humankind, but only makes a cold expression of regret for things that might have been. Milton notes that Satan is driven to action by the grief and turmoil he feels inside and by his wounded sense of pride. It is clear now that Satan's decision to corrupt humankind is final, yet he still thinks about how he would have enjoyed the beauty of Earth if he had not rebelled. Milton displays the internal agony that results from the sin of despair: Satan can clearly see, despite all his previous arguments, that it would have been better to remain good. However, he has forbidden himself from even considering the possibility of repentance. As a result, he degenerates further and further, making his mind and body his own personal Hell.

Milton has given absolute power to the reason and free will of both men and Satan, only to show that the mind can defeat itself—using reason to arrive at an unreasonable position. Satan's thoughts are increasingly contradictory and confusing, becoming hard for us, and perhaps for himself, to follow. Satan comes to believe his own faulty logic and his own lies. In Books I and II, his ability to reason is strong, but

now in Book IX he can hardly form a coherent argument. Ironically, Satan has proved the truth of his own earlier statement that the mind can make a heaven of hell or a hell of heaven. Satan intended to make a heaven out of Hell, where he would be an evil version of God. Instead, he has brought his torture with him, and made a hell out of the earth that, but for him, would be heavenly.

Book IX, Lines 404–1189

Summary

Satan, in the form of the serpent, searches for the couple. He is delighted to find Eve alone. Coiling up, he gets her attention, and begins flattering her beauty, grace, and godliness. Eve is amazed to see a creature of the Garden speak. He tells her in enticing language that he gained the gifts of speech and intellect by eating the savory fruit of one of the trees in the garden. He flatters Eve by saying that eating the apple also made him seek her out in order to worship her beauty.

Eve is amazed by the power that this fruit supposedly gives the snake. Curious to know which tree holds this fruit, Eve follows Satan until he brings her to the Tree of Knowledge. She recoils, telling him that God has forbidden them to eat from this tree, but Satan persists, arguing that God actually wants them to eat from the tree. Satan says that God forbids it only because he wants them to show their independence. Eve is now seriously tempted. The flattery has made her desire to know more. She reasons that God claimed that eating from this tree meant death, but the serpent ate (or so he claims) and not only does he still live, but can speak and think. God would have no reason to forbid the fruit unless it were powerful, Eve thinks, and seeing it right before her eyes makes all of the warnings seem exaggerated. It looks so perfect to Eve. She reaches for an apple, plucks it from the tree, and takes a bite. The Earth then feels wounded and nature sighs in woe, for with this act, humankind has fallen.

Eve's first fallen thought is to find Adam and to have him eat of the forbidden fruit too so that they might be equal. She finds him nearby, and in hurried words tells him that she has eaten the fruit, and that her eyes have been opened. Adam drops the wreath of flowers he made for her. He is horrified because he knows that they are now doomed, but immediately decides that he cannot possibly live without Eve. Eve does not want Adam to remain and have another woman; she wants him to suffer the same fate as she. Adam realizes that if she is to be doomed, then he must follow. He eats the fruit. He too feels invigorated at first. He turns a lustful eye on Eve, and they run off into the woods for sexual play.

Adam and Eve fall asleep briefly, but upon awakening they see the world in a new way. They recognize their sin, and realize that they have lost Paradise. At first, Adam and Eve both believe that they will gain glorious amounts of knowledge, but the knowledge that they gained by eating the apple was only of the good that they had lost and the evil that they had brought upon themselves. They now see each other's nakedness and are filled with shame. They cover themselves with leaves. Milton explains that their appetite for knowledge has been fulfilled, and their hunger for God has been quenched. Angry and

confused, they continue to blame each other for committing the sin, while neither will admit any fault. Their shameful and tearful argument continues for hours.

Analysis

The ease with which Satan persuades Eve to sin paints an unflattering portrayal of woman, one that accords with Milton's portrayal throughout the poem of women as the weaker sex. Eve allows the serpent's compliments to win her over, demonstrating that she cares more about superficial things such as beauty than profound things such as God's grace. Furthermore, that Eve gives in to the serpent after only a few deceptive arguments reveals her inability to reason soundly. Not only is she herself corruptible, however, but she also seeks to corrupt others: her immediate reaction upon discovering her sin is to lure Adam into her fate. Rather than repent and take full responsibility for her actions, she moves instinctively to drag Adam down with her to make him share her suffering. Eve thus comes across as an immoral and harmful being, one whose values are skewed and who has a bad influence on others.

Satan's argument that knowledge is good because knowing what is good and evil makes it easier to do what is good wrongfully assumes that knowledge is always good. This flaw in his argument is the theological thrust of this book: though the intellect is powerful and god-like, obeying God is a higher priority than feeding the intellect. Milton believes that one cannot first obey reason and then obey God; rather one must trust God and then trust reason. Raphael's wise argument from Book VIII about the limitations of human knowledge and the need to feel comfortable with this limited knowledge, is blatantly neglected or forgotten. If Eve had stayed to listen to Raphael and Adam's discussion and had recognized the dangers of working separately, then she could have been safer from Satan's temptation. Or if Adam had relayed Raphael's warning message to Eve more thoroughly and persuasively, and if he had denied Eve's suggestion that they work separately, then the fall might have been avoidable. Eve overestimates the powers of her ability to protect herself and to resist temptation, and Adam underestimates the need to protect Eve and share his knowledge with her. Both must suffer from each other's shortfalls.

Adam sins not out of a desire to gain the knowledge from eating the fruit, but out of recognition that Eve has left him with little or no alternative. Adam needs even less persuading than Eve to eat the apple, and does so knowing that he is disobeying God. He knows that he could not be happy if Eve were banished, and his desire to stay with Eve overwhelms his desire to obey God. Adam's sin of temptation is choosing Eve over God, letting physical and emotional impulses overtake reason. The wreath of flowers he makes for Eve symbolizes his love for her. When he sees that she has eaten from the Tree of Knowledge, he drops the wreath, symbolizing her fallen state. The dropping of the wreath may also hint at Adam's disappointment in Eve as a spiritual lover and companion, and even his falling out of pure love with her. After Adam eats from the apple, his attraction to Eve changes subtly, and he looks at her more like a connoisseur, eager to indulge. The sexuality the two display is now perverted, their love in the dark forest more lustful and animal-like than their earlier love in the lush, bright bower. Their arguing and blaming of each other demonstrate their lack of unity and peace, and demonstrate, as does the Earth's sighing, their fallen state.