**Notes – from “Paradise Lost”**

**- John Milton**

*Milton begins by stating the subject of his epic*

l. 1 – “Fruit” means both fruit and “result”

l. 2 – “Mortal” means both human and “fatal”

ll. 6-8 – **invocation** – Milton uses invocation to the Muse – a convention of epic

poetry – he calls upon the heavenly muse that inspired

Moses – the implication is that Milton feels his talk here is equal

to that of Moses.

l. 15 – **allusion** – “…the Aonian mount…” – home of the Muses – Milton is invoking

pagan poetry – this signals his intention to rise above it!

l. 26 – Milton’s **thesis** – statement of purpose – “Justify the ways…” – Milton will

explore the question of whether humanity is in the hands of a just, benevolent

God or a victim of capricious, malevolent fate.

l. 53 – As an angel, Satan was created immortal – to remain immortal is part of his

punishment.

ll. 62-65 – **paradox** – fire without light – the normal rules do not apply here – under-

scores the gloom and horror of hell.

l. 75 – **style** – emphasizes the horrible circumstances in which Satan and his angels

find themselves.

ll. 84-124 – Satan’s speech – throughout, Satan talks as though he and God were

merely two generals – one of whom bested the other in battle – this does

NOT represent the real situation. This was *not* a battle between equals!

ll. 104-105 – more distortions from Satan – the outcome of the battle was never

“dubious” – God’s throne was never “shaken.”

l. 106 – Satan is defiant, claiming “all is not lost” – Again, he is wrong – all is lost,

except for his pride – his ability to exclude God from his heart.

l. 113 – Satan again flatters himself that he almost destroyed God’s kingdom.

ll. 125-126 – **characterization** – Satan is boastful, “vaunting aloud,” but we see into

his heart “racked with deep despair.”

l. 127 – “bold compeer” – Beelzebub responds

ll. 133-134 – obsequious Beelzebub praises Satan – rationalizes defeat by God by

blaming it on a lack of strength and bad luck!

ll. 143-145 – **characterization** – like Satan, Beelzebub continues to think that it’s

merely God’s strength (not his goodness) that

overcame them – the most serious sin found in hell is

*pride*!

ll. 157-165 – Satan’s reply – **characterization** – cast into irrevocable ruin, Satan

realizes God may still use him for good, so he is determined to sabotage

God’s every plan – while Satan claims that “to do ill will be our sole

delight” Milton makes it clear that there is no delight in hell – Satan’s pain

is unrelenting and eternal.

ll. 180-183 – **imagery** – spoken by Satan, this vivid description of Hell gains added

force.

ll. 183-191 – Satan attempts to “rally his troops” in these lines – superficially, it sounds

heroic, but be careful not to confuse **rhetoric** with real heroism!

ll. 198-202 – **allusion** – references to classical mythology – common to most

Renaissance era writers

l. 210 – **paradox** – Milton employs another paradoxical image to describe Hell –

usually, lakes don’t burn!

ll. 216-218 – **irony** – Satan’s evil will, ultimately, bring forth “goodness, grace, and

mercy”

ll. 232-240 – **imagery** – Milton completes his description of Hell with the image of a

violent event in nature – a volcanic eruption!

ll. 239-240 – **allusion** – having escaped the mythical river Styx (“Stygian flood”) refers

to their immortality – Milton stresses that Satan and

Beelzebub believe, mistakenly, that they are responsible for

their fates.

ll. 242-end – Satan’s final speech – Milton invests his Satan with massive physical

size and ego to match. Satan does have a dignity of a sort; God may

have cast him into utter darkness, he may be in despair, he may be with-

out hope, but one thing he is not is self-pitying. If God has chosen to

create an adversary, he is an imposing one; one more content “to reign

in Hell than serve in Heaven.”