Paradise Lost

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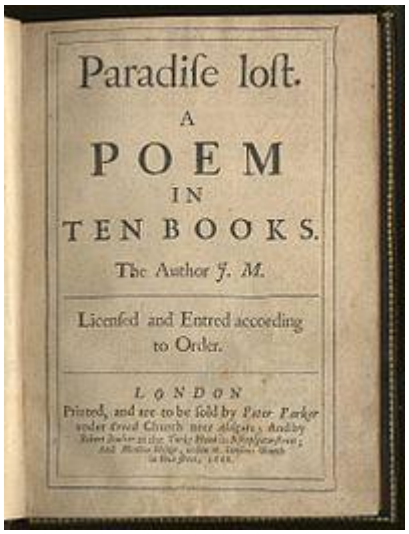
Paradise Lost


Paradiſe loſt.
A
POEM
IN
TEN BOOKS.
The Author J. M.
Licenſed and Entred according to Order.
LONDON
Printed, and are to be ſold by Peter Parker

Title page of the first edition (1668)

Author(s)	John Milton
Cover artist	J. B. de Medina and Henry Aldrich
Country	England
Language	English
Genre(s)	Epic poetry
Publisher	Samuel Simmons (original)
Publication date	1667
Media type	Print
Followed by	*Paradise Regained*

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Paradise Lost

Paradise Lost is an epic poem in blank verse by the 17th-century English poet John Milton. It was originally published in 1667 in ten books, with a total of over ten thousand individual lines of verse. A second edition followed in 1674, changed into twelve books (in the manner of the division of Virgil's *Aeneid*) with minor revisions throughout and a note on the versification.[1]

The poem concerns the Biblical story of the Fall of Man: the temptation of Adam and Eve by the fallen angel Satan and their expulsion from the Garden of Eden. Milton's purpose, stated

in Book I, is to "justify the ways of God to men."[2] *Paradise Lost* is often considered one of the greatest literary works in the English language.[3]

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[edit] Synopsis

Gustave Doré, *Depiction of Satan*, the antagonist of John Milton's *Paradise Lost* c. 1866

As previously noted, the poem is separated into twelve "books" or sections, and the lengths of each book varies greatly (the longest being Book IX, with 1,189 lines, and the shortest Book VII, having 640). In the second edition, each book was preceded by a summary titled "The Argument". The poem follows the epic tradition of starting *in medias res* (Latin for *in the midst of things*), the background story being recounted later.

Milton's story has two narrative arcs: one of Satan (Lucifer) and another of Adam and Eve. It begins after Satan and the other rebel angels have been defeated and banished to Hell, or as it

is also called in the poem, Tartarus. In Pandæmonium, Satan employs his rhetorical skill to organize his followers; he is aided by his lieutenants Mammon and Beelzebub. Belial and Moloch are also present. At the end of the debate, Satan volunteers himself to poison the newly-created Earth and God's new and most favored creation, Mankind. He braves the dangers of the Abyss alone in a manner reminiscent of Odysseus or Aeneas. After arduously traversing the Chaos outside Hell, he enters God's new material World, and later the Garden of Eden.

Partway through the story, the Angelic War over Heaven is recounted. Satan's rebellion follows the epic convention of large-scale warfare. The battles between the faithful angels and Satan's forces take place over three days. The final battle involves the Son of God single-handedly defeating the entire legion of angelic rebels and banishing them from Heaven. Following the purging of Heaven, God creates the World, culminating in his creation of Adam and Eve. While God gave Adam and Eve total freedom and power to rule over all creation, He gave them one explicit command: not to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil on penalty of death.

The story of Adam and Eve's temptation and fall is a fundamentally different, new kind of epic: a domestic one. Adam and Eve are presented for the first time in Christian literature as having a full relationship while still without sin. They have passions and distinct personalities. Satan, disguised in the form of a serpent, successfully tempts Eve to eat from the Tree by preying on her vanity and tricking her with rhetoric. Later, Adam seeing Eve has sinned, knowingly commits the same sin. He declares to Eve that since she was made from his flesh, they are bound to one another so that if she dies, he must also die. In this manner, Milton portrays Adam as a heroic figure, but also as a deeper sinner than Eve, as he is aware that what he is doing is wrong.

After eating the fruit, Adam and Eve have lustful sex, and at first, Adam is convinced that Eve was right in thinking that eating the fruit would be beneficial. However, they soon fall asleep, having terrible nightmares, and after they awake, they experience guilt and shame for the first time. Realizing that they have committed a terrible act against God, they engage in mutual recrimination.

Meanwhile, Satan returns to Hell with Sin, Death and Discord traveling to Earth corrupting Eden, making beasts eat each other. However, God reminds Satan that he is still under the power of God, transforming Satan and his rebel angels into serpents, who, upon seeing the Tree of Knowledge, desperately attempt to eat its fruit only for it to become ash.

However, Eve's pleas to Adam reconcile them somewhat. Her encouragement enables Adam and Eve both to approach God, to "bow and sue for grace with suppliant knee", and to receive grace from God. Adam is shown a vision by the angel Michael, in which Adam witnesses everything that will happen to mankind until the Great Flood. Since Adam is very upset by this vision of humankind's future, Michael also tells him about humankind's potential redemption from original sin through Jesus Christ (whom Michael calls "King Messiah").

Adam and Eve are then cast out of Eden, and Michael says that Adam may find "a paradise within thee, happier far". Adam and Eve also now have a more distant relationship with God, who is omnipresent, but invisible (unlike the previous tangible Father in the Garden of Eden).

[edit] Characters

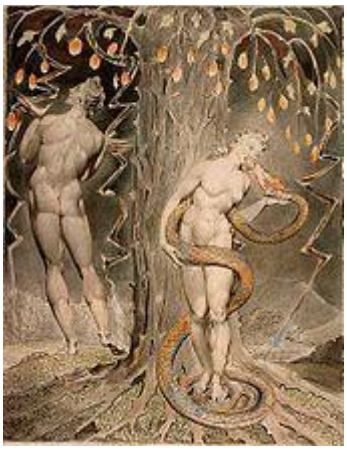
Satan: Satan is the first major character introduced in the poem. Formerly the most beautiful of all angels in Heaven, he's a tragic figure best described by the now-famous quote "Better to reign in Hell than to serve in Heaven". He is introduced to Hell after he leads a failed rebellion to wrestle control of Heaven from God. Satan's desire to rebel against his creator stems from his unwillingness to be subjugated by God and his Son, falsely claiming that angels are "self-begot, self-raised",[4] thereby denying God's authority over them as their creator.

Satan is deeply arrogant, albeit powerful and charismatic. Satan's persuasive powers are evident throughout the book; not only is he cunning and deceptive, but he also is able to rally the demons to continue in the rebellion after their agonizing defeat in the Angelic War. He argues that God rules as a tyrant and that all the angels ought to rule as gods.[5]

Satan is comparable in many ways to the tragic heroes of classic Greek literature but, Satan's hubris far surpasses those of previous tragedies. Though at times he plays the narrative role of an anti-hero, he is still commonly understood to be the antagonist of the epic. However, the true nature of his role in the poem has been the subject of much notoriety and scholarly debate. While some scholars, like the critic and writer C.S. Lewis, interpret the poem as a genuine Christian morality tale, other critics, like William Empson, view it as a more ambiguous work, and Milton's complex characterization of Satan plays a big part in that perceived ambiguity.[6]

Adam: Adam is the first human created by God. Considered as God's prized creation, Adam along with his wife rule over all the creatures of the world and reside in the Garden of Eden. He is more intelligent and curious than Eve. He is also stronger in his moral devotion to God than his wife. From the questions he asks the angel Raphael, it is clear that Adam has a deep, intellectual curiosity about his existence, God, Heaven and the nature of the world. He is completely infatuated with Eve, which while pure in and of itself, eventually contributes to his reasons for joining Eve in disobedience to God.

As opposed to the Biblical Adam, this version of Adam is given a glimpse of the future of mankind (this includes a synopsis of stories from The Old and New Testaments), by the angel Michael, before he has to leave Paradise.



William Blake, *The Temptation and Fall of Eve*, 1808 (illustration of Milton's *Paradise Lost)*

Eve: Eve is the second human created by God, taken from one of Adam's ribs and shaped into a female form of Adam. In her innocence, she is the model of a good wife, graceful and happily submissive to Adam. Eve is extremely beautiful and thoroughly in love with Adam. She consents to Adam leading her away from her reflection when they first meet, trusting Adam's authority in their relationship. One day, she convinces Adam that it would be good for them to split up and work different parts of the Garden. In her solitude, she is tempted by Satan to sin against God. Adam shortly follows along with her.

The Son of God: The Son of God is Jesus Christ, though he is never named explicitly, since he has not yet entered human form. The Son of God shares total union with God, and indeed is understood to be a person of the Godhead, along with the Father and the Spirit. He is the ultimate hero of the epic and infinitely powerful, singlehandedly defeating Satan and his followers when they violently rebel against God and driving them into Hell. The Son of God tells Adam & Eve of God's judgment after their sin. However, he sacrificially volunteers to eventually journey to the World, become a man himself, and redeem the Fall of Man through his own death and resurrection. In the final scene, a vision of Salvation through the Son of God is revealed to Adam by Michael. Still, the name, Jesus of Nazareth, and the details of Jesus' story are not depicted in the poem.[7]

God the Father: God the Father is the creator of Heaven, Hell, the World, and of everyone and everything there is. He desires glory and praise from all his creation. He is an all-powerful, all-knowing, infinitely good being who cannot be overthrown by even the great army of angels Satan incites against him. The poem begins with the purpose of justifying the ways of God to men, so God often converses with the Son of God concerning his plans and reveals his motives regarding his actions. The poem portrays God's process of creation in the way that Milton believed it was done, that God created Heaven, Earth, Hell, and all the creatures that inhabit these separate planes from part of Himself, not out of nothing.[8] Thus, according to Milton, the ultimate authority of God derives from his being the "author" of creation. Satan tries to justify his rebellion by denying this aspect of God and claiming self-creation, but he admits to himself this is not the case, and that God "deserved no such return/ From me, whom He created what I was."[9][10]

Raphael: Raphael is an angel who is sent by God to warn Adam about Satan's infiltration of Eden and to warn him that Satan is going to try to curse Adam and Eve. He also has a lengthy discussion with the curious Adam regarding creation and events which transpired in Heaven.

Michael: Michael is a mighty archangel who fought for God in the Angelic War. In the first battle, he wounds Satan terribly with a powerful sword that God designed to even cut through the substance of angels. After Adam and Eve disobey God by eating from the Tree of Knowledge, God sends the angel Michael to visit Adam and Eve. His duty is to escort Adam and Eve out of Paradise. But before this happens, Michael shows Adam visions of the future which cover an outline of the Bible, from the story of Cain and Abel in Genesis, up through the story of Jesus Christ in the New Testament.

[edit] Composition

Gustave Doré, *The Heavenly Hosts*, c. 1866, illustration to *Paradise Lost*

In his introduction to the Penguin edition of *Paradise Lost*, the Milton scholar John Leonard notes, "John Milton was nearly sixty when he published Paradise Lost in 1667. [The writer] John Aubrey (1626-97) tell us that the poem was begun in about 1658 and finished in about 1663. But parts were almost certainly written earlier, and its roots lie in Milton's earliest youth."[11] Leonard speculates that the English Civil War interrupted Milton's earliest attempts to start his "epic [poem] that would encompass all space and time."

Leonard also notes that Milton "did not at first plan to write a biblical epic." Since epics were typically written about heroic kings and queens (and with pagan gods), Milton originally envisioned his epic to be based on a legendary English or Saxon king like the legend of King Arthur.

Having gone totally blind in 1652, Milton wrote *Paradise Lost* entirely through dictation with the help of amanuenses and friends. He also wrote the epic poem while he was often ill, suffering from gout, and despite the fact that he was suffering emotionally after the early death of his second wife, Katherine Woodcock, in 1658, and the death of their infant daughter (though Milton remarried soon after in 1663).[12]

[edit] Themes

[edit] Marriage

Milton first presents Adam and Eve in Book IV with impartiality. The relationship between Adam and Eve is one of "mutual dependence, not a relation of domination or hierarchy." While the author does place Adam above Eve in regard to his intellectual knowledge, and in turn his relation to God, he also grants Eve the benefit of knowledge through experience. Hermine Van Nuis clarifies that although there is a sense of stringency associated with the specified roles of the male and the female, each unreservedly accepts the designated role because it is viewed as an asset.[13] Instead of believing that these roles are forced upon them, each uses the obligatory requirement as a strength in their relationship with each other. These minor discrepancies reveal the author’s view on the importance of mutuality between a husband and a wife.

When examining the relationship between Adam and Eve, critics tend to accept an either Adam- or Eve-centered view in terms of hierarchy and importance to God. David Mikics argues, by contrast, these positions "overstate the independence of the characters' stances, and therefore miss the way in which Adam and Eve are entwined with each other".[14] Milton's true vision reflects one where the husband and wife (in this instance, Adam and Eve) depend on each other and only through each other's differences are able to thrive.[14]

Although Milton does not directly mention divorce, critics posit theories on Milton's view of divorce based on inferences found within the poem. Other works by Milton suggest he viewed marriage as an entity separate from the church. Discussing *Paradise Lost*, Biberman entertains the idea that "marriage is a contract made by both the man and the woman".[15] Based on this inference, Milton would believe that both man and woman would have equal access to divorce, as they do to marriage.

Feminist critics of *Paradise Lost* suggest that Eve is forbidden the knowledge of her own identity. Moments after her creation, before Eve is led to Adam, she becomes enraptured by an image reflected in the water (her own, unbeknownst to Eve).[16] God urges Eve to look away from her own image, her beauty, which is also the object of Adam's desire. Adam delights in both her beauty and submissive charms, yet Eve may never be permitted to gaze upon her individual form. Critic Julia M. Walker argues that because Eve "neither recognizes nor names herself ... she can know herself only in relation to Adam."[17] "Eve's sense of self becomes important in its absence ... [she] is never allowed to know what she is supposed to see."[18] Eve therefore knows not what she is, only what she is not: male. Starting in Book IV, Eve learns that Adam, the male form, is superior and "How beauty is excelled by manly grace/ And wisdom which alone is truly fair."[19] Led by his gentle hand, she yields, a woman without individual purpose, destined to fall by "free will."

[edit] Idolatry

Milton's 17th century contemporaries by and large criticized Milton's ideas and considered him as a radical, mostly because of his well-known Protestant views on politics and religion. One of Milton's greatest and most controversial arguments centers on his concept of what is idolatrous; this topic is deeply embedded in *Paradise Lost*.

Milton's first criticism of idolatry focuses on the practice of constructing temples and other buildings to serve as places of worship. In Book XI of *Paradise Lost*, Adam tries to atone for his sins by offering to build altars to worship God. In response, the angel Michael explains that Adam does not need to build physical objects to experience the presence of God.[20] Joseph Lyle points to this example, explaining "When Milton objects to architecture, it is not a quality inherent in buildings themselves he finds offensive, but rather their tendency to act as convenient loci to which idolatry, over time, will inevitably adhere."[21] Even if the idea is pure in nature, Milton still believes that it will unavoidably lead to idolatry simply because of the nature of humans. Instead of placing their thoughts and beliefs into God, as they should, humans tend to turn to erected objects and falsely invest their faith. While Adam attempts to build an altar to God, critics note Eve is similarly guilty of idolatry, but in a different manner. Harding believes Eve's narcissism and obsession with herself constitutes idolatry.[22] Specifically, Harding claims that "... under the serpent's influence, Eve's idolatry and self-deification foreshadow the errors into which her 'Sons' will stray."[22] Much like Adam, Eve falsely places her faith into herself, the Tree of Knowledge, and to some extent, the Serpent, all of which do not compare to the ideal nature of God.

Furthermore, Milton makes his views on idolatry more explicit with the creation of Pandemonium and the exemplary allusion to Solomon's temple. In the beginning of *Paradise Lost*, as well as throughout the poem, there are several references to the rise and eventual fall of Solomon's temple. Critics elucidate that "Solomon's temple provides an explicit demonstration of how an artifact moves from its genesis in devotional practice to an idolatrous end."[23] This example, out of the many presented, conveys Milton's views on the dangers of idolatry distinctly. Even if one builds a structure in the name of God, even the best of intentions can become immoral. In addition, critics have drawn parallels between both Pandemonium and Saint Peter's Basilica,[*citation needed*] and the Pantheon. The majority of these similarities revolve around a structural likeness, but as Lyle explains, they play a greater role. By linking Saint Peter's Basilica and the Pantheon to Pandemonium—an ideally false structure, the two famous buildings take on a false meaning.[24] This comparison best represents Milton's Protestant views, as it rejects both the purely Catholic perspective and the Pagan perspective.

In addition to rejecting Catholicism, Milton revolted against the idea of a monarch ruling by divine right. He saw the practice as idolatrous. Barbara Lewalski concludes that the theme of idolatry in *Paradise Lost* "is an exaggerated version of the idolatry Milton had long associated with the Stuart ideology of divine kingship".[25] In the opinion of Milton, any object, human or non-human, that receives special attention befitting of God, is considered idolatrous.

[edit] Interpretation and criticism

The Creation of Man, engraving from the 1688 edition, by John Baptist Medina

The writer and critic Samuel Johnson wrote that *Paradise Lost* shows off "[Milton's] peculiar power to astonish" and that "[Milton] seems to have been well acquainted with his own genius, and to know what it was that Nature had bestowed upon him more bountifully than upon others: the power of displaying the vast, illuminating the splendid, enforcing the awful, darkening the gloomy, and aggravating the dreadful."[26]

The editors of *the Norton Anthology of English Literature* write, "*Paradise Lost* is ultimately about the human condition, the Fall that caused 'all our woe,' and the promise and means of restoration. It is also about knowing and choosing, about free will." In addition to these philosophical concerns, they also note, "The great themes of *Paradise Lost* are intimately linked to the political questions at stake in the English Revolution (1640–1660) and Restoration, but the connection is by no means simple or straightforward."[27]

Regarding the war in the poem between Heaven and Hell, the Milton scholar John Leonard writes:

Paradise Lost is, among other things, a poem about civil war. Satan raises 'impious war in Heav'n' (i 43) by leading a third of the angels in revolt against God. The term 'impious war'. . .implies that civil war is impious. But Milton applauded the English people for having the courage to depose and execute King Charles I. In his poem, however, he takes the side of 'Heav'n's awful Monarch' (iv 960). Critics have long wrestled with the question of why an antimonarchist and defender of regicide should have chosen a subject that obliged him to defend monarchical authority[28]

Leonard notes that some critics, like the noted Christian writer C.S. Lewis, argued that there was no contradiction at all since, from Lewis' point of view, "Milton believed that God was his 'natural superior' and that Charles Stuart was not." Others, like the literary critic William Empson argued that "Milton deserves credit for making God wicked, since the God of Christianity is 'a wicked God.'" Leonard places Empson's interpretation "in the [Romantic interpretive] tradition of Blake and Shelley."[29] As the poet William Blake famously wrote, "The reason Milton wrote in fetters when he wrote of Angels & God, and at liberty when of Devils & Hell, is because he was a true Poet and of the Devils party without knowing it."[30] And this quote succinctly represents the way in which the 18th and 19th century English Romantic poets viewed Milton. However, Empson's view is more complex. Leonard points out that "Empson never denies that Satan's plan is wicked. What he does deny is that God is innocent of its wickedness: 'Milton steadily drives home that the inmost counsel of God was the Fortunate Fall of man; however wicked Satan's plan may be, it is God's plan too [since God in *Paradise Lost* is depicted as being both omniscient and omnipotent].'"[31]

Although Leonard calls Empson's view "a powerful argument," he notes that this interpretation was challenged by Dennis Danielson in his book *Milton's Good God* (1982).

[edit] Iconography

In *Sin, Death, and the Devil* (1792), James Gillray caricatured the political battle between Pitt and Thurlow as a scene from *Paradise Lost*. Pitt is Death and Thurlow Satan, with Queen Charlotte as Sin in the middle.

The first illustrations to accompany the text of *Paradise Lost* were added to the fourth edition of 1688, with one engraving prefacing each book, of which up to eight of the twelve were by Sir John Baptist Medina, one by Bernard Lens II, and perhaps up to four (including Books I and XII, perhaps the most memorable) by another hand.[32]

Some of the most notable illustrators of *Paradise Lost* included William Blake, Gustave Doré and Henry Fuseli (1799); however, the epic's illustrators also include, among others, John Martin, Edward Burney, Richard Westall, Francis Hayman.

Outside of book illustrations, the epic has also inspired other visual works by well-known painters like Salvador Dalí who executed a set of ten colour engravings in 1974. Milton's achievement in writing *Paradise Lost* without his sight inspired a loosely biographical work in a painting by Eugène Delacroix entitled "Milton Dictating *Paradise Lost* to his Daughters".[33]

[edit] See also

- Paradise Lost in popular culture
- John Milton's poetic style
- *Paradise Regained*, a shorter, later poem by Milton about the Temptation of Christ