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Critical Analysis of Content and Illustrations in *Paradise Lost*'s Adaptation

John Milton's *Paradise Lost* excels beyond the works of other authors that we read in class (ENG 243) like Dante and Homer not only by its poetic structure and grammatical usages but also by its magnificent imagery and content. These characteristics have inspired me create an adaptation and produce illustrations of *Paradise Lost*. This adaptation of *Paradise Lost* focuses exclusively on the story's antagonist Satan. Some focal points include the time when Satan and his friends battle against the angels of Heaven, when Satan and his army are sent to hell, and when Satan tempts and persuades Eve to eat the forbidden fruit. These focal points help to truly define the personality and characteristics of Satan.

One scene in the adaptation is the battle among the angels. It provides a glimpse of Satan's willingness to defeat God and to wreak havoc in Heaven. When Satan tempts Eve at the Garden of Eden, he wants Eve to suffer the punishment of God – so that she would share his tremendous pain. In another scene—one that concerns Satan's explorations in hell after the Fall—many questions that Satan has in his mind are expressed out loud, allowing us to understand him better. One of my other scenes in the adaption is titled *Falling Friends*. Here, Satan asks, "Why abandoned them into distant land but not destroyed them?" He does not understand God's intention to punish him for eternity rather than letting him die at an instant. "Why set them to be stuck in hell forever for a crime they think they are not deserving to be blamed?" he asks further. Satan asks them because he feels that he is not in control of any

situation, will, and power. It is rather God who acts as the mastermind, controlling all things, including fate and free will.

In class, the discussion of what an epic really is appears frequently. Its notion appears to be misunderstood and broadly defined. John Milton's *Paradise Lost* is an epic that does not share what many think to be the characteristics of an actual epic: the story of an epic hero who fights in hard-won battles to earn honor and glory. *Paradise Lost* focuses instead on Satan and his exploration of life in Hell and Heaven. My adaptation, which I argue is loosely based on Milton's original work, challenges the notion of epic. Take for instance, the scene titled *She plucked, she ate*. Here, Eve bites the forbidden fruit. I include this scene in my adaptation because it deals with the problem of free will and fate. God, the maker of all creations in Heaven and Earth, knows everything that occurs in the present and future. He does not, however, rush in to prevent Eve from being lured by Satan. God has enough powers to prevent the evil serpent Satan from tempting Eve to bite the forbidden fruit. To raise awareness of this problem, the scene asks the question, "Why did the Father, he who is loving and possesses immense power to see even beyond the current pace in time, not warn the victims of the serpent's crime?" It appears that free will and agency are central issues in both my adaptation and the original work.

Creating an adaptation of *Paradise Lost* is also challenging. The original classic is widely known for stretching the fundamental basics of sentence structures and word choices to the breaking point. For instance, Milton barely uses any quotations for characters' speeches. A single sentence, connected by commas and semi-colons, might extend from one to two pages long. This makes reading *Paradise Lost* somewhat tedious and discouraging. Hence, my

adaptation is an exciting take on John Milton's classic. My decision is to embrace the use of modern English and employing a simplified narrative. The goal is to ensure that the story is easier to understand and that some of *Paradise Lost*'s most important scenes are not omitted.

Furthermore, some of *Paradise Lost*'s best quotes cannot be omitted from this adaptation. Satan once says one of *Paradise Lost*'s most famous lines: "The mind is its own place, and in itself can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven" (Book I, Lines 254-255). It represents (1) how great the mind of Satan is (2) how deeply paradoxical Satan's sentences could be, and (3) how much we come to learn Satan's personalities and brilliance. If I choose not to include this quote in my adaptation, then John Milton's work of poetry and language may be lost. Many scenes from the original *Paradise Lost* story has also been omitted because the adaptation is not meant to be treated as an actual overview of the story. Doing an adaptation of that scale will require extensive hours of analysis, selection of passages, and drawing of illustrations. The risk of covering too little of the story is also high, and the story would not make sense. I believe that what's important in my adaptation of *Paradise Lost* is how Satan's decisions and actions affect others around him—both his friends and enemies. An argument can be raised, pointing out that I do not include Satan's important soliloquy from Book IV. However, I want the adaptation to be about the impact of Satan and his actions on others around him, like his own friends, angels of God, God Himself, and Adam and Eve.

In terms of illustrations, I initially started out drawing on a physical sheet of art paper, but when they were scanned into the computer, most drawings lost quality and true color. Hence, all illustrations had to be produced digitally on the Surface Pro laptop. Each artistic drawing is drawn by hand with a paint brush on a touch screen. Most of the drawings are

meant to be abstract and not to be too realistic because *Paradise Lost* is a work of poetry and not non-fiction. The original coloring concept was black-and-white. However, some illustrated scenes would not make sense to be have a black-and-white color. Therefore, I decided to use vivid and bright colors. These illustrations were not inspired by the works of any other artists. They were my way of demonstrating an alternative version of John Milton's classic *Paradise Lost* in a less difficult and more approachable manner for all audiences. The bullet points below are discussions of how each drawing of characters and sceneries was designed and illustrated.

- *Cover Image*: Against the dark background was a fiery gulf of fire, a resemblance of how Hell looked like as viewed by the perspective of Satan and the descriptive narration made on Book I from lines 192 to 235. Throughout these lines, there were occasioning mentioning of the "wave", "dark designs", "pool", "flames driven backward slope", "lake with liquid fire", and "wind". These descriptions were combined to create the cover image for my adaptation. Additionally, each character of the title "Paradise Lost" was written in capital letter and in white, and had a few stokes of red lines and dashes added to create an atmosphere of torture, pain, and fear.
- *God*: is described as one who sits "above these heavens to us invisible or dimly seen in these tiny lowest works" (Book V, Lines 156-160). Therefore, in my painting of God, the only way to identify Him was to observe the white object in the middle against the blue patches of paint.
- *Son*: I drew God's Son as the operator of Earth. He did not create the Earth, but when God had begotten him and positioned him as the controller of all things, it made sense

for me to visualize the Son as holding the globe. And Paradise, to me, seemed like a place that was green and bright – so yellow and green fit the description.

- *Satan*: I pictured an image of Satan as a serpent watching over Heaven, a place he was once loved. I drew him as a red snake because within him there was evil and no joy. He had flames all visible above his upper body, meaning that although he was able to find his way back to Heaven, he would still forever belong in Hell. As Satan watched over Heaven's outer edge, he tried to a channel to break in.
- *Adam*: Throughout Book I from lines 285 to 290, Adam was described as having "nobler shape", "tall", "naked", "pure", and "true authority in men." I pictured him roaming freely in the garden that God created for him and his wife Eve. As he walked towards the bright sun, we could see the clear blue sky and tall thick leaves that covered the bottom part of his naked body.
- *Eve*: In Book I, lines 298, Eve was valued for her "softness", "sweetness", and "attractive grace." I pictured her as walking behind thick patches of flowers and dark green leaves. Roses would only compliment her good looks and presence even further.
- *Hell*: Liked how I came to visualize Hell for my drawing of the cover image, the descriptions of Hell ("dark designs", "flames driven backward slope", "lake with liquid fire") were all used to recreate the Hell that Satan and his other angels first toured after falling from Heaven. In "Strangers in A World of No Light" scene on the website, the background was an image of tall, fiery gulf of fire that were visible against the dark sky. Although Milton narrated Hell as "yet from those flames, no light but rather darkness visible" in Book I from lines 62 to 63, it would not make sense to have only a black

background behind the text. I believed that making the flames visible would make the illustration more meaningful and impacting.

- *Heaven*: Book IV described that the edge of paradise had a large hill that was covered with bushes and trees. Book V mentioned that there existed an “ocean brim” (lines 139-140). I had in mind a picture of a large land mass that was green and full of dark, green trees. Towards the left of the illustration was the appearance of a bright sun, casting its bright lights on the bright blue sea that touched the edges of paradise.
- *Battle Among the Angels*: The battle scene between Satan’s army and that of God was one of the most important sequence in *Paradise Lost*. I initially wanted to draw individual angels holding swords and using bows and arrows to fight against each other, but I later decided to draw a canvas painting of two colors (blue and red) striking against each other. Blue symbolized the angels of God, while red referred to the evil and devious army of Satan. I did not know how to represent “flaming arms” as described in line 15 to 17 of Book VI. I thought the closest replication abstractly would be a yellow dash line going across against the red and blue colors.
- *Satan Bleeds*: In Book VI, when Michael cut through the right side of Satan’s body, nectarous substances that only angels could produce were “oozing” out. Because it was nectar-like, I vision the substances being a mixture of orange, red, and yellow colors. I did not want to illustrate blood drops as red because otherwise it would have been oriented more towards humans rather than angels.
- *The Son Ends the War*: Book VI mentioned the Son ride a chariot that had rapid wheels. In line 751, the wheels of the chariot were described as having flames behind them.

Therefore, I drew a blue chariot (blue representing Heaven's good deeds, in my opinion) and had the wheels be burning in flames. The white dashes to the upper right corner of the illustration represented arrows that the Son was shooting at the rebellious angels, as described in Book VI in line 849.

- *Plucking the Apple*: I originally wanted to capture the moment when Eve plucked the forbidden fruit from the tree. But, I think the best illustration would be what was left of the fruit after Eve had taken a bite. Milton's description of Eve's action was so quick and short, and that made me realize that the illustration for this important moment in *Paradise Lost* should also be simple and grand.

John Milton's *Paradise Lost* is a challenge in and of itself because it tackles how we come to understand what an epic really is. My adaptation raises the problem further by trying to include in every scene questions that the characters ask (either to God or to themselves) about free will and agency. Having read *Paradise Lost*, it appears that none of the characters has been truly given the freedom to pursue their own goals. God is in control of everything from the beginning to the end. Any "epic" would unlikely have a problem like this for its own plot, but *Paradise Lost* is different. My adaptation is not crafted to hide the problem that an epic had. It is meant to raise the issue such as free will and agency further so that these challenges would be more visible to more audiences that prefer *Paradise Lost* in simpler words.