Paradise Lost Book 1
by John Milton
Facts about book 1
Full title Paradise Lost
Author John Milton
Type of work Poem
Genre Epic
Language English
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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
Themes The Importance of Obedience to God; The Hierarchical Nature of the Universe; The Fall as Partly Fortunate
Symbols The Scales in the Sky; Adam's wreath
Lines 722

Summary and Analysis Book I
Summary
Milton introduces his subject: "man's first disobedience" against God and its sorrowful consequences. In the first line Milton refers to the consequences as the "fruit" of disobedience, punning on the fruit of the forbidden Tree of Knowledge, which Adam and Eve will eat against God's commandment. This single act will bring death and suffering into the world, until "one greater man" will come to restore humanity to purity and paradise.
Milton then invokes a Muse(a muse is a person who serves as an artist's inspiration), but clarifies that this is a different Muse from the inspirational goddesses the ancient Greek poets called upon – he asks for the Muse that inspired Moses to write Genesis(The Book of Genesis is the first book of the Hebrew Bible and the Christian Old Testament. Its Hebrew name is the same as its first word, Bereshit. Genesis is an account of the creation of the world, the early history of humanity, and of Israel's ancestors and the origins of the Jewish people.). This Muse is greater than the classical Muse, so Milton hopes that his poem will achieve "things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme." He associates his Muse with the Holy Spirit, which is part of the Trinity (The Christian doctrine of the Trinity defines one God existing in three coequal, coeternal, consubstantial divine persons: God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, three distinct persons sharing one homoousion) and a force in the creation of the universe. He asks for this divine inspiration that he might "assert Eternal Providence, / And justify the ways of God to men."
After this prologue, Milton asks the Muse to describe what first led to Adam and Eve's disobedience. He answers himself that they were deceived into "foul revolt" by the "infernal Serpent," who is Satan. Satan was an angel who aspired to overthrow God, and started a civil war in Heaven. God defeated Satan and his rebel angels and threw them out of Heaven. They fell through an abyss for nine days and then landed in Hell, where they lay stunned for nine more days.
The poem then focuses on Satan as he lies dazed in a lake of fire that is totally dark. Next to him is Beelzebub, Satan's second-in command, and Satan speaks to him, finally breaking the "horrid silence." Satan laments their current state, and how far they have fallen from their previous glorious state as angels. He admits that he has been defeated, but he does not regret his war against God

(though he never calls God by name). He claims that his heavenly essence cannot be killed, and as long as his life and will remains Satan vows to keep fighting against the "tyranny of Heav'n."
Beelzebub answers, saying that God (whom he also avoids naming) seems to be omnipotent as he had originally claimed, and he may have let the rebellious angels live just so they could suffer forever. Satan doesn't contradict this, but he remains resolved to "ever do ill" and try to pervert God's works into evil, especially when God "out of our evil seek[s] to bring forth good." Satan then suggests they leave the burning lake and find shelter on a distant shore.
Milton describes the terrible size and appearance of Satan's body, which is like a whale or a Greek Titan floating on the waves. Slowly Satan drags himself from the "liquid fire." Beelzebub follows, and they spread their wings and fly over the lake to a place of dry land. They are pleased that they can do this of their own strength and "Not by the sufferance of supernal power."
Satan makes this comment rather glibly now, but he will later feel its full implications when he realizes that he carries the pain of Hell within him even in Paradise. "Better to reign in Hell, than serve in Heav'n" becomes something like his life motto, as he steadfastly refuses to accept God's rulership, and struggles against his creator in whatever way he can.
Satan takes up his terrible armor, and he calls to his legions to join him on land and take up the fight again. The rebel angels obey and pull themselves from the fiery lake despite their pain and shame. Milton says that all these angels have had their names erased in Heaven, but they are later given new names by humans and some will be worshipped as false gods.
Among these more prominent devils are Moloch, who later becomes a god requiring the sacrifice of children, Astoreth (the ancient fertility goddess called Astarte), the sea-monster Dagon, the animal-headed Egyptian gods, the ancient Greek gods, and lastly Belial, a lustful and violent god who will corrupt places like Sodom. These fallen angels are given hope by Satan's strong appearance, and they flock to him. They are still dressed in their war gear and have their banners raised, and they create an awesome spectacle as they form ranks and lift their spears.
Satan is encouraged by the sight of his glorious army, which is far more magnificent than any of the famous human armies of later wars. Satan feels a moment of remorse for causing the suffering of so many millions by leading them into rebellion, but then he is strengthened in his resolve. He addresses his legions and commits himself to continue his fight against God – his only question now is whether to go back to open war or use more deceitful tactics. He mentions that God had spoken of creating a new world, and that the devils might escape there and make a new home.
At Satan's words the rebel angels all draw their flaming swords and reaffirm their defiance against Heaven. They then fly to a nearby hill and begin to dig into the earth, unearthing gold and other raw minerals. They are urged on by Mammon, a vain devil who even in Heaven kept his eyes always on the ground, admiring the golden pavement. Milton warns the reader about admiring the rich minerals of Hell, as they are nothing but vanity.
With their supernatural powers the devils construct a massive temple in a short amount of time. This temple is larger and more magnificent than the pyramids of Egypt or any temple humans ever built. The architect is a devil called Mulciber, who will become the Greek god Hephaestus, thrown by Zeus from Olympus. The devils call the temple "Pandaemonium" ("all demons" in Greek). The devils can change in size and shape, so they shrink from giants into dwarfs and then all the hundreds of thousands enter Pandaemonium. They sit on golden seats and then begin their debate.

Analysis
Milton begins Paradise Lost in the traditional epic manner with a prologue invoking the muse, in this case Urania, the Muse of Astronomy. He calls her the "Heav'nly Muse" (7) and says that he will sing "Of Man's First Disobedience" (1), the story of Adam and Eve and their fall from grace. As the prologue continues, it becomes apparent that this muse is more than just the classical Urania, but also a Christian muse who resides on Mt. Sinai, in fact the Holy Spirit. In these first lines, Milton thus draws on two traditions — the classical epic exemplified by Homer and Virgil and the Christian

tradition embodied in the Bible as well as Dante's Divine Comedy and Edmund Spenser's The Faerie Queene.
Milton further emphasizes in the prologue that his theme will be Man's disobedience to God's will, implying not only Adam's disobedience, but all mankind from first to last. He does add that his subject will include the "greater Man" (4) who saved all others from the original disobedience. Moreover, his intention will be to "justify the ways of God to men" (26) through the aid of "Eternal Providence" (25). By "justify," Milton means more than simply to explain; he means that he will demonstrate that God's actions in regard to man are just. This goal suggests that Milton was not bothered by any sense of false modesty, an idea underscored by his statement that he will write in a high style and attempt a purpose never tried before. The one truly poignant line in this prologue is Milton's request of the muse, "What in me is dark / Illumine" (22 — 23), with its oblique reference to Milton's blindness, a subject he will return to more directly in the prologue that begins Book III. At no point in this prologue and invocation does Milton mention Satan, who, though he is the main character of the poem, is not the actual subject.
Following the invocation and prologue, Milton continues in the epic style by beginning in medias res, in the middle of things. Satan is first seen lying in the pit of Hell. That a great religious epic focuses on Satan, presents him first, and in many ways makes him the hero of the poem is certainly surprising and something of a risk on Milton's part. Milton does not want his audience to empathize with Satan, yet Satan is an attractive character, struggling against great odds. Of course, Milton's original audience more than his modern one would have been cognizant of the ironies involved in Satan's struggles and his comments concerning power. The power that Satan asserts and thinks he has is illusory. His power to act derives only from God, and his struggle against God has already been lost. To the modern audience, Satan may seem heroic as he struggles to make a Heaven of Hell, but the original audience knew, and Milton's lines confirm, that Satan's war with God had been lost absolutely before the poem begins. God grants Satan and the other devils the power to act for God's purposes, not theirs.
Also, at this point in the narrative, Satan is at his most attractive. He has just fallen from Heaven where he was the closest angel to God. He has not completely lost the angelic aura that was his in Heaven. As the poem progresses, the reader will see that Satan's character and appearance grow worse. Milton has carefully structured his work to show the consequences of Satan's actions.
The catalogue of demons that follows Satan's escape from the burning lake follows an epic pattern of listing heroes — although here the list is of villains. This particular catalogue seems almost an intentional parody of Homer's catalogue of Greek ships and heroes in Book II of the Iliad. The catalogue is a means for Milton to list many of the fallen angels as well as a way to account for many of the gods in pagan religions — they were originally among the angels who rebelled from God. Consequently, among these fallen angels are names such as Isis, Osiris, Baal, and others that the reader associates not with Christianity but with some ancient, pagan belief. Of the devils listed, the two most important are Beelzebub and Belial.
The final part of Book I is the construction of Pandemonium, the capital of Hell. A certain unintentional humor pervades this section of Book I as well as Mammon's argument in Book II. In both cases, a sense of civic pride seems to overcome the devils, and they act on the idea that "Hell is bad, but with a few improvements we can make it lots better, even attractive." In both Mammon and the hellish architect, Mulciber, the attitude of the mayor whose small town has been bypassed by the Interstate comes out. They both seem to think that with improvements Hell may be nice enough that others may want to relocate.
Milton's real goal here, though, is to establish Hell's capital, Pandemonium — a word which Milton himself coined from the Latin pan (all) and demonium (demons). Thus, the capital of Hell is literally the place of all demons. With the passage of time, the word came to mean any place of wild disorder, noise, and confusion. This idea is subtly emphasized with Milton's choice of Mulciber as the architect. Mulciber was another name for Hephaestus, the Greek God of the Forge, who was tossed

from Olympus by a drunken Zeus. Mulciber is consequently a figure of some ridicule and not the most likely architect to build a lasting monument.
One other aspect of the construction of Pandemonium is worth consideration. Mammon and the other devils find mineral resources including gemstones in their search for building materials. This discovery of resources suggests that the Hell Milton has imagined is a multifaceted place. In the first scene, as Satan and the others lie chained on the burning lake, Hell seems totally a place of fiery torture and ugliness. The construction of Pandemonium shows that there is more to Hell. Geographic features such as a plain and hill, mineral resources such as gemstones, and even the possibility for beauty seem to exist in Hell. Other aspects of Hell will be brought forward in later books. All in all, Milton depicts a Hell that has more than one essence, or, at least in the opening books, seems to.