

PARADISE LOST ~ MILTON'S ARGUMENTS

In 1667 John Milton bestowed (some beleaguered students might say 'inflicted') his great masterpiece, Paradise Lost, upon the world. In 1674 the revised second edition was published, where he divided the original ten books into twelve and added the following introductory summaries or "Arguments" for each book at the request of confused early readers.

BOOK I

This first book proposes, first in brief, the whole subject: man's disobedience and the loss thereupon of Paradise wherein he was placed; then touches the prime cause of his fall, the serpent, or rather Satan in the serpent, who, revolting from God and drawing to his side many legions of angels, was by the command of God driven out of heaven with all his crew into the great deep. Which action past over, the poem hasts into the midst of things, presenting Satan with his angels now fallen into hell—described here, not in the center (for heaven and earth may be supposed as yet not made, certainly not yet accursed) but in a place of utter darkness, fitliest called chaos. Here Satan with his angels lying on the burning Lake, thunder-struck and astonished, after a certain space recovers, as from confusion; calls up him who, next in order and dignity, lay by him; they confer of thir miserable fall. Satan awakens all his legions, who lay till then in the same manner confounded. They rise; their numbers, array of battle, their chief leaders named, according to the idols known afterwards in Canaan and the countries adjoining. To these Satan directs his speech, comforts them with hope yet of regaining heaven, but tells them lastly of a new world and new kind of creature to be created, according to an ancient prophesy or report in heaven; for that angels were long before this visible creation, was the opinion of many ancient fathers. To find out the truth of this prophesy, and what to determine thereon, he refers to a full council; what his associates thence attempt. Pandemonium, the palace of Satan, rises, suddenly built out of the deep; the infernal peers there sit in council.

BOOK II

The consultation begun, Satan debates whether another battle is to be hazarded for the recovery of heaven; some advise it, others dissuade. A third proposal is preferred, mentioned before by Satan, to search the truth of that prophesy or tradition in heaven concerning another world, and another kind of creature, equal or not much inferior to themselves, about this time to be created. Their doubt who shall be sent on this difficult search; Satan, their chief, undertakes alone the voyage; is honored and applauded. The council thus ended, the rest betake them several ways and to several employments, as their inclinations lead them, to entertain the time till Satan return. He passes on his journey to hell gates, finds them shut, and who sat there to guard them; by whom at length they are opened, and discover to him the great gulf between hell and heaven;

with what difficulty he passes through, directed by chaos, the power of that place, to the sight of this new world which he sought.

BOOK III

God, sitting on his throne, sees Satan flying towards this world, then newly created; shows him to the Son, who sat at his right hand; foretells the success of Satan in perverting mankind; clears his own justice and wisdom from all imputation, having created man free and able enough to have withstood his tempter; yet declares his purpose of grace towards him, in regard he fell not of his own malice, as did Satan, but by him seduced. The Son of God renders praises to his Father for the manifestation of his gracious purpose towards man; but God again declares, that grace cannot be extended towards man without the satisfaction of divine justice; man hath offended the majesty of God by aspiring to godhead, and therefore with all his progeny devoted to death must die, unless someone can be found sufficient to answer for his offence and undergo his punishment. The Son of God freely offers himself a ransom for man; the Father accepts him, ordains his incarnation, pronounces his exaltation above all names in heaven and earth; commands all the angels to adore him; they obey, and hymning to their harps in full choir, celebrate the Father and the Son. Meanwhile Satan alights upon the bare convex of this world's outermost orb, where wandering, he first finds a place since called the Limbo of Vanity; what persons and things fly up thither; thence comes to the gate of heaven, described ascending by stairs, and the waters above the firmament that flow about it. His passage thence to the orb of the sun, he finds there Uriel the regent of that orb, but first changes himself into the shape of a meaner angel, and pretending a zealous desire to behold the new creation and man whom God had placed here, inquires of him the place of his habitation, and is directed; alights first on Mount Niphates.

BOOK IV

Satan now in prospect of Eden, and nigh the place where he must now attempt the bold enterprise which he undertook alone against God and man, falls into many doubts with himself, and many passions, fear, envy, and despair; but at length confirms himself in evil, journeys on to Paradise, whose outward prospect and situation is described, overleaps the bounds, sits in the shape of a cormorant on the Tree of Life, as highest in the garden, to look about him. The garden described; Satan's first sight of Adam and Eve; his wonder at their excellent form and happy state, but with resolution to work their fall; overhears their discourse, thence gathers that the Tree of Knowledge was forbidden them to eat of under penalty of death; and thereon intends to found his temptation by seducing them to transgress; then leaves them a while, to know further of their state by some other means. Meanwhile Uriel, descending on a sunbeam, warns Gabriel, who had in charge the gate of Paradise, that some evil spirit had escaped the deep and passed at noon by his sphere in the shape of a good angel, down to Paradise, discovered after by his furious gestures in the mount. Gabriel promises to find him out ere morning. Night coming on, Adam and Eve discourse of going to thir rest; their bower described; their evening worship. Gabriel drawing forth his bands of night-watch to walk the round of Paradise, appoints two strong angels to Adam's bower, lest the evil spirit should be there doing some harm to Adam or Eve sleeping. There they find him at the ear of Eve, tempting her in a dream, and bring him,

though unwilling, to Gabriel; by whom questioned, he scornfully answers, prepares resistance, but hindered by a sign from Heaven, flies out of Paradise.

BOOK V

Morning approached, Eve relates to Adam her troublesome dream. He likes it not, yet comforts her. They come forth to their day labors; their morning hymn at the door of their bower. God, to render man inexcusable, sends Raphael to admonish him of his obedience, of his free estate, of his enemy near at hand—who he is, and why his enemy, and whatever else may avail Adam to know. Raphael comes down to Paradise; his appearance described; his coming discerned by Adam afar off, sitting at the door of his bower. He goes out to meet him, brings him to his lodge, entertains him with the choicest fruits of Paradise got together by Eve; their discourse at table. Raphael performs his message, minds Adam of his state and of his enemy; relates, at Adam's request, who that enemy is, and how he came to be so, beginning from his first revolt in heaven, and the occasion thereof; how he drew his legions after him to the parts of the north, and there incited them to rebel with him, persuading all but only Abdiel, a seraph, who in argument dissuades and opposes him, then forsakes him.

BOOK VI

Raphael continues to relate how Michael and Gabriel were sent forth to battle against Satan and his angels. The first fight described; Satan and his powers retire under night. He calls a council; invents devilish engines, which, in the second day's fight, put Michael and his angels to some disorder; but they at length, pulling up mountains, overwhelmed both the force and machines of Satan. Yet, the tumult not so ending, God on the third day sends Messiah, his Son, for whom he had reserved the glory of that victory. He, in the power of his father, coming to the place and causing all his legions to stand still on either side, with his chariot and thunder driving into the midst of his enemies, pursues them, unable to resist, towards the wall of heaven; which opening, they leap down with horror and confusion into the place of punishment prepared for them in the deep. Messiah returns with triumph to his Father.

BOOK VII

Raphael, at the request of Adam, relates how and wherefore this world was first created: that God, after the expelling of Satan and his angels out of heaven, declared his pleasure to create another world, and other creatures to dwell therein; sends his Son with glory and attendance of angels to perform the work of creation in six days; the angels celebrate with hymns the performance thereof, and his reascension into heaven.

BOOK VIII

Adam inquires concerning celestial motions, is doubtfully answered, and exhorted to search rather things more worthy of knowledge. Adam assents, and still desirous to detain Raphael, relates to him what he remembered since his own creation: his placing in Paradise, his talk with

God concerning solitude and fit society, his first meeting and nuptials with Eve; his discourse with the angel thereupon, who, after admonitions repeated, departs.

BOOK IX

Satan, having compassed the earth, with meditated guile returns as a mist by night into Paradise; enters into the serpent sleeping. Adam and Eve in the morning go forth to their labors, which Eve proposes to divide in several places, each laboring apart. Adam consents not, alleging the danger lest that enemy of whom they were forewarned should attempt her found alone; Eve, loath to be thought not circumspect or firm enough, urges her going apart, the rather desirous to make trial of her strength; Adam at last yields. The serpent finds her alone; his subtle approach, first gazing, then speaking, with much flattery extolling Eve above all other creatures. Eve, wondering to hear the serpent speak, asks how he attained to human speech and such understanding, not till now. The serpent answers that by tasting of a certain tree in the garden he attained both to speech and reason, till then void of both. Eve requires him to bring her to that tree, and finds it to be the Tree of Knowledge forbidden. The Serpent, now grown bolder, with many wiles and arguments induces her at length to eat. She, pleased with the taste, deliberates a while whether to impart thereof to Adam or not; at last brings him of the fruit; relates what persuaded her to eat thereof. Adam, at first amazed, but perceiving her lost, resolves through vehemence of love to perish with her, and, extenuating the trespass, eats also of the fruit. The effects thereof in them both; they seek to cover thir nakedness; then fall to variance and accusation of one another.

BOOK X

Man's transgression known, the guardian angels forsake Paradise and return up to heaven to approve their vigilance, and are approved, God declaring that the entrance of Satan could not be by them prevented. He sends his Son to judge the transgressors, who descends and gives sentence accordingly; then in pity clothes them both, and reascends. Sin and Death sitting till then at the gates of hell, by wondrous sympathy feeling the success of Satan in this new world, and the sin by man there committed, resolve to sit no longer confined in hell, but to follow Satan, their Sire, up to the place of man. To make the way easier from hell to this world to and fro, they pave a broad highway or bridge over chaos, according to the track that Satan first made; then preparing for earth, they meet him, proud of his success returning to hell; their mutual gratulation. Satan arrives at Pandemonium; in full assembly relates, with boasting, his success against man; instead of applause, is entertained with a general hiss by all his audience, transformed, with himself also, suddenly into serpents, according to his doom given in Paradise. Then, deluded with a show of the forbidden tree springing up before them, they, greedily reaching to take of the fruit, chew dust and bitter ashes. The proceedings of Sin and Death; God foretells the final victory of his Son over them, and the renewing of all things; but for the present commands his angels to make several alterations in the heavens and elements. Adam, more and more perceiving his fallen condition, heavily bewails, rejects the condolment of Eve; she persists, and at length appeases him; then to evade the curse likely to fall on their offspring, proposes to Adam violent ways, which he approves not, but, conceiving better hope, puts her in

mind of the late promise made them, that her seed should be revenged on the serpent, and exhorts her with him to seek peace of the offended deity, by repentance and supplication.

BOOK XI

The Son of God presents to his Father the prayers of our first parents now repenting, and intercedes for them. God accepts them, but declares that they must no longer abide in Paradise; sends Michael with a band of cherubim to dispossess them, but first to reveal to Adam future things; Michael's coming down. Adam shows to Eve certain ominous signs; he discerns Michael's approach; goes out to meet him; the angel denounces their departure; Eve's lamentation. Adam pleads, but submits; the angel leads him up a high hill; sets before him in vision what shall happen till the flood.

BOOK XII

The angel Michael continues from the flood to relate what shall succeed; then, in the mention of Abraham, comes by degrees to explain who that seed of the woman shall be which was promised Adam and Eve in the fall; his incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension; the state of the church till his second coming. Adam, greatly satisfied and recomforted by these relations and promises, descends the hill with Michael; wakens Eve, who all this while had slept, but with gentle dreams composed to quietness of mind and submission. Michael in either hand leads them out of Paradise, the fiery sword waving behind them, and the cherubim taking their stations to guard the place.

PARADISE LOST ~ A BRIEF OVERVIEW

In the mid-seventeenth century, John Milton was a successful poet and political activist. He wrote scathing pamphlets against corruption in the Anglican Church and its ties to King Charles. In Milton's day Puritanism meant having politically radical views. And at one point Milton was actually jailed for recording them on paper. Paradise Lost, as much as anything, is a series of arguments put forth by the characters, which in turn ultimately expresses Milton's personal truth. It is, in that sense, a Puritanical work.

Milton had contemplated the composition of an epic poem for many years. For his subject matter he chose the fundamentals of Christian theology. By the time he began writing Paradise Lost in the late 1650's, Milton had become blind. He dictated the entire work to secretaries.

Paradise Lost has many of the elements that define epic form. It is a long, narrative poem; it follows the exploits of a hero (or anti-hero); it involves warfare and the supernatural; it begins in the midst of the action, with earlier crises in the story brought in later by flashback; and it expresses the ideals and traditions of a people. It has these elements in common with the Aeneid, the Iliad, and the Odyssey.

The poem is in blank verse, that is, non-rhyming verse. In a note he added to the second printing, Milton expresses contempt for rhyming poetry. Paradise Lost is composed in the verse form of iambic pentameter—the same used by Shakespeare. In this style, a line is composed of five long, unaccented syllables, each followed by a short, accented one.

The first edition of Paradise Lost was published in 1667, in ten chapters or books. In 1674 Milton reorganized the poem into twelve books, by dividing two of the longer books into four. He also added an introductory prose “argument” summarizing the plot of each book, to prepare readers for the complex poetry that was to follow. Part of that complexity is due to the many analogies and digressions into ancient history and mythology throughout the poem.

The central story line is built around a few paragraphs in the beginning of Genesis—the story of Adam and Eve. The epic also uses elements from many other parts of the Bible, particularly involving Satan’s role. Focusing his poem on the events surrounding the fall of Adam and Eve, Milton intended, in his words, to “justify the ways of God to men,” by tracing the cause and result for all involved.

In the last two books of the epic, Milton includes almost a complete summary of Genesis. This lengthy section may seem anti-climactic, but Milton's mission was to show not only what caused man's fall, but also the consequences upon the world, both bad and good. A concept central to this tale is that of the “felix culpa” or fortunate fall. This is the philosophy that the good which ultimately evolves as a result of the fall—God's mercy, the coming of Christ, redemption and salvation—leaves us in a better place, with opportunity for greater good than would have been possible without the fall.

For centuries critics have both praised and derided Paradise Lost. A common observation is that, in his portrayal of the thoughts and motivations of Satan, Milton seems to unwittingly cast him as the hero. Nevertheless, the general consensus holds that Paradise Lost remains the greatest epic poem in the English language.

In 1671, Milton published Paradise Regained. The title suggests some sort of sequel, but, although a great work in its own right, Paradise Regained is a very different kind of poem, shorter and more contemplative than action oriented, and therefore less

popular than the earlier work. It centers around the confrontation between Jesus and Satan in the wilderness.

PARADISE LOST ~ A BRIEF SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Paradise Lost is about Adam and Eve—how they came to be created and how they came to lose their place in the Garden of Eden, also called Paradise. It's the same story you find in the first pages of Genesis, expanded by Milton into a very long, detailed, narrative poem. It also includes the story of the origin of Satan. Originally, he was called Lucifer, an angel in heaven who led his followers in a war against God, and was ultimately sent with them to hell. Thirst for revenge led him to cause man's downfall by turning into a serpent and tempting Eve to eat the forbidden fruit.

SUMMARY

The story opens in hell, where Satan and his followers are recovering from defeat in a war they waged against God. They build a palace, called Pandemonium, where they hold council to determine whether or not to return to battle. Instead they decide to explore a new world prophesied to be created, where a safer course of revenge can be planned. Satan undertakes the mission alone. At the gate of hell, he meets his offspring, Sin and Death, who unbar the gates for him. He journeys across chaos till he sees the new universe floating near the larger globe which is heaven. God sees Satan flying towards this world and foretells the fall of man. His Son, who sits at his right hand, offers to sacrifice himself for man's salvation. Meanwhile, Satan enters the new universe. He flies to the sun, where he tricks an angel, Uriel, into showing him the way to man's home.

Satan gains entrance into the Garden of Eden, where he finds Adam and Eve and becomes jealous of them. He overhears them speak of God's commandment that they should not eat the forbidden fruit. Uriel warns Gabriel and his angels, who are guarding the gate of Paradise, of Satan's presence. Satan is apprehended by them and banished from Eden. God sends Raphael to warn Adam and Eve about Satan. Raphael recounts to them how jealousy against the Son of God led a once favored angel to wage war against God in heaven, and how the Son, Messiah, cast him and his

followers into hell. He relates how the world was created so mankind could one day replace the fallen angels in heaven.

Satan returns to earth, and enters a serpent. Finding Eve alone he induces her to eat the fruit of the forbidden tree. Adam, resigned to join in her fate, eats also. Their innocence is lost and they become aware of their nakedness. In shame and despair, they become hostile to each other. The Son of God descends to earth to judge the sinners, mercifully delaying their sentence of death. Sin and Death, sensing Satan's success, build a highway to earth, their new home. Upon his return to hell, instead of a celebration of victory, Satan and his crew are turned into serpents as punishment. Adam reconciles with Eve. God sends Michael to expel the pair from Paradise, but first to reveal to Adam future events resulting from his sin. Adam is saddened by these visions, but ultimately revived by revelations of the future coming of the Savior of mankind. In sadness, mitigated with hope, Adam and Eve are sent away from the Garden of Paradise.

- Jay Ranpura