Paradise Lost from The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide

Epic poem in 12 books, by John Milton, first published in 1667. The poem describes the Fall of Man and the battle between God and Satan, as enacted through the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. A sequel, Paradise Regained, was published in 1671 and relates the temptation of Christ in the wilderness.

Summary Article: Paradise Lost
From The Cambridge Guide to Literature in English

Poem by John Milton, published in 1667. A revised edition (1674) rearranged the 10 books as 12. Paradise Lost was begun in 1658 and completed in 1663, its appearance being delayed by both the Great Plague and the Great Fire. Milton had announced his ambition of writing an epic nearly 30 years before. He named Samson and Macbeth as possible subjects and sketched plans for an Arthurian epic as well as for biblical dramas including 'Adam Unparadized', a dramatization of Genesis probably influenced by Grotius' Adamus Exil (1601).

Book I. The argument of the poem concerns the Fall of Man, the origins of his disobedience to God's laws being traced to Satan's efforts to exact revenge for his expulsion from Heaven. Satan and the rebel angels are first shown lying in the burning lake. He rouses his followers and tells them there is hope of regaining Heaven. He orders them into legions, naming the leaders and telling them of a new world being created somewhere in the utter darkness of Chaos. Then he summons a council and the palace of Satan, Pande-monium, is built.

Book II. Satan and his followers debate whether or not to wage another war at once to regain Heaven. They finally decide to investigate the new world: Satan himself will go. He passes through Hell Gates past the twin sentinels, Death and Sin, and journeys through the realm of Chaos.

Book III. God observes Satan's journey to the newly created world and foretells how Satan will succeed in bringing about the Fall of Man and how God will punish Man for yielding to temptation. The Son of God offers himself as a ransom for Man, to answer for the offence and undergo his punishment. To rejoicing in Heaven, God accepts and ordains his incarnation on a future day. Satan meanwhile has reached the outer rim of the universe; he passes the Limbo of Vanity and arrives at the Gate of Heaven, where he changes his form to deceive Uriel, Guardian of the Sun. From him he learns the whereabouts of the new world, and about Man, the creature God has placed there.

Book IV. Satan arrives on earth and finds the Garden of Eden, where he observes Adam and Eve. They speak of the Tree of Knowledge and Satan decides to concentrate his temptation on this. Meanwhile Uriel has heard that one of the fallen has escaped from Hell, and warns Gabriel, who in Eden finds Satan
at Eve's bower, trying to tempt her in a dream. The tempter is ejected.

Book V. Eve awakens, troubled by her dream of temptation, and is comforted by Adam. God sends Raphael to Adam: so that Man may know the nature of his enemy and the need for obedience to God, Raphael tells him of Satan's revolt in Heaven. Satan had gathered many to hear him and had proclaimed his resistance to the supreme authority of God.

Book VI. Raphael continues his narrative. Michael and Gabriel command the hosts of Heaven but it is the Son of God who decides the outcome. He orders his angels to hold, then from the centre he charges straight into Satan and his legions, driving them to the wall of Heaven, and down from there into the Deep of Hell. The passage where the Son mounts his attack on the rebels is the literal and thematic centre of the poem, Man's future disgrace being the indirect consequence.

Book VII. The archangel tells Adam that God, after the defeat of Satan, decided on another world, from which Man may aspire to Heaven. He sends his Son to perform the Creation in six days.

Book VIII. Adam asks for knowledge of the celestial bodies but Raphael tells him that his first need is for knowledge of his own world. Adam then talks to him of Eve and of the passion she arouses in him. The archangel warns him to attend also to his higher instincts, lest he subordinate these to his love for Eve. Then Raphael departs.

Book IX. Satan meanwhile has returned to Eden as a mist by night and has entered into a sleeping serpent. He finds Eve working alone and speaks flatteringly to her, extolling her beauty. Eve is curious that the creature has the gift of speech, he tells her he gained it by eating the fruit of a certain tree in the garden which he shows her, the Tree of Knowledge. At length he weakens her resolve and she eats the fruit. Satan slips out of the garden and Eve, feeling transformed in awareness, takes more of the fruit and goes with it to Adam who sees at once that she is lost. He eats the fruit also in order to share her transgression: they will fall together. Their innocence departs: they look for cover from their nakedness and the seeds of dissension are shown.

Book X. After the transgression, the guardian angels return to heaven. The Son of God goes to Eden to deliver the judgement on Adam and Eve (as known from the book of Genesis). Before he leaves the garden he clothes them, out of pity for their shame in their nakedness. Satan has returned triumphant to Hell; henceforth a path is open for sin and death to enter the world of man. Adam and Eve approach the Son of God in repentance and supplication, begging for mitigation of the doom pronounced upon their children.

Book XI. The Son of God intercedes with the Father, but God declares that Adam and Eve must be expelled from Paradise. Michael descends to the garden and tells them they must go out into the world, which he shows Adam from the summit of a hill. Adam is also shown what will happen in the world until the time of the Flood.

Book XII. Michael continues his account of the world, telling of Abraham and of the Messiah promised in the Son's intercession. Adam is comforted by these revelations; he wakes the sleeping Eve and Michael leads them from the garden.

The poet's greatness is partly a function of its sheer sustained length, but also the visual immediacy with which Milton realizes the imagined scenes. Both Adam and Eve are archetypes with whom a reader can identify as humans, and the network of abstract influences surrounding their central transgression...
rarely threatens to obscure their essential characteristics. As an embodiment of malicious cunning, Satan is a dramatic and almost recognizable character. Milton has been criticized for glossing over certain contemporary developments in scientific and intellectual thought (the astronomical ambiguities in Book VIII, for example) but the poem's realism is that of myth, and its credibility dependent on the shapes of Christian belief rather than any specific historical details. As a long poem it is a monumental achievement, both intellectually as a work of the literary imagination and for the powerful expanses of its verse which, with the strength of classical precedents behind it, proved inimitable.

APA

Chicago

Harvard

MLA


APA

Chicago

Harvard

MLA