



**The Islamia University of Bahawalpur**

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**Department of English**

**Course: Eng. 21201 Classical Poetry II**

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**Class: M.A. (2nd Semester)**

### **Course outline:**

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| 1. John Milton | Paradise Lost Book I   |
| 2. Dryden      | Absalom and Achitophel |
| 3. Pope        | The Rape of the Lock   |

## **John Milton Paradise Lost (Book I)**

### **Contents:**

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2. Milton as a Puritan Poet
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4. Elements of Evil And Good in Paradise Lost
5. Characters of Adam and Eve (Paradise Lost)
6. Satan as a Hero in Paradise Lost

# THEME OF PARADISE LOST

Since all epics of antiquity deal with personalities and events of divine or super human dimensions, it has become a fixed rule that an epic worthy of the name should deal with an action or story which has universal or even cosmic appeal.

Modern criticism of paradise lost has taken many different views of Milton's ideas in the poem. One problem is that Paradise Lost is almost militantly Christian in an age that now seeks out diverse viewpoints and admires the man who stands forth against the accepted view. Milton religious vies reflect the time in which he lived and the church to which he belonged. He was always completely orthodox in his ideas, but he was devout. His purpose or theme in Paradise Lost is relatively easy to see, if not to accept.<sup>2</sup>

Milton begins Paradise Lost by saying that he will sing,

"Of Man's First Disobedience" (l, 1) so he can "assert Eternal Providence,/And justify the ways to God to men"(l,25-26)

The purpose or the Theme of Paradise Lost then is religious and has three parts:

- 1) Disobedience,
- 2) Eternal Providence
- 3) Justification of God to men.

## Disobedience

The first part of Milton's argument hinges on the word disobedience and its opposite, obedience. The universe that Milton imagined with Heaven at the top, Hell at the bottom, and Earth in between is a hierarchical place. God literally sits on the throne at the top of Heaven. Angels are arranged in groups according to their proximity to God. On Earth, Adam is superior to Eve; humans rule over animals. Even in Hell, Satan sits on a throne, higher than the other demons. This hierarchical arrangement by Milton is not simply happenstance. The worldview of the middle Ages, Renaissance, and Restoration was that all of creation was arranged in various hierarchies. The proper way of the world was for inferiors to obey superiors because superiors were, well, superior.

The king was king not because he was chosen but because he was superior to his subjects. It was, therefore, not just proper to obey the king; it was morally required. The significance of obedience to superiors is not just a matter of Adam and Eve and the Tree of Knowledge; it's a major subject throughout the poem. Satan's rebellion because of jealousy is the first great act of disobedience and commences all that happens in the epic. When Eve eats the fruit, one of her first thoughts is that the fruit "may render more equal" to which she quickly adds, "for inferior who is free?" Her reasoning, from Milton's point of view, is incorrect.<sup>3</sup>

Freedom comes precisely from recognizing one's place in the grand scheme and obeying the dictates of that position. By disobeying God, Eve has gained neither equality nor freedom; she has instead lost Paradise and brought sin and death into the world.

Likewise when Adam eats the fruit, he disobeys God. Further, he disobeys by knowingly putting Eve ahead of God. Disobedience and disruption of the correct order result in sin and death.

Finally, in the last two books of the epics, Milton shows example after example of the people who ignore the responsibilities they have and try to either raise themselves above God or disobey God's commands. The result is always the same: Destruction.

Eternal providence

Milton's theme in *Paradise Lost*, however, does not end with the idea of disobedience. Milton says that he will also "assert Eternal providence".

"If man had never disobeyed  
God, Death would never have entered the World."

Because Adam and Eve gave into temptation and disobeyed God, they provided the opportunity for God to show love, mercy, and grace so that ultimately the fall produces a greater good than would have happened otherwise. This is the argument about fall called *Felix culpa* or "happy fault".

In Paradise Lost, God says that Man has free will, That God knows Man will yield to Satan's temptation, but that h (God) is not the cause of that yielding; He simply knows that it will occur.

Justification of God's ways.<sup>4</sup>

Eternal providence moves the story to a different level. Death must come into the world, but the son steps forward with the offer to sacrifice himself to death in order to defeat Death. Through the son, God is able to temper divine justice with mercy, grace and salvation. Without the fall, this divine love would never have been demonstrated. Because Adam and Eve disobeyed God, can achieve salvation. The fall actually produces a new and higher love from God to Man.

This idea then is the final point of Milton's theme –the sacrifice of the son which overcomes Death gives Man the change to achieve salvation even though, through the sin of Adam and Eve, all men are sinful. As Adam says;

"O goodness infinite, goodness immense! That all this good of evil shall produce, and evil turn to good"

The fall of a man ,then, turns evil into good, and that fact show the justice of God's actions, or in Milton terms,

"Justify the ways to God to men".

## **Conclusion:**

To conclude the whole discussion we can say that Milton's puritanism and his great faith in the Bible made him choose his subject which was of interest to all men. His great achievement lies in making such a serious subject which is agreeable and acceptable to all. In fact, his sublimity (greatness and Grandeur) can only be maintained at high level on a very lofty subject.<sup>4</sup>

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## Milton as a Puritan Poet

John Milton, English poet, pamphleteer, and historian, is best known for writing "Paradise Lost," widely regarded as the greatest epic poem in English. The great poet of the first half of the century was John Milton, a Puritan who served Cromwell as Latin secretary.

John Milton was born in London on December 9, 1608 to John and Sara Milton. John Milton attended St. Paul's School, and in his lifetime he learned Latin, Greek, Italian, Hebrew, French, and Spanish. He attended Christ's College, Cambridge, graduating in 1629 with a Bachelor of Arts degree, and 1632 with a Master of Arts. Milton lost his eyesight at the age of 44 due to excessive writing that he had to do as a government servant. He was completely blind and had to count on others for his everyday tasks. John Milton was a seventeenth century English poet whose works have greatly influenced the literary world. Milton wrote poetry and prose between 1632 and 1674, and is most famous for his epic poetry.

The Seventeenth Century Upto 1660 was dominated by Puritanism and it may be called the Puritan Age or the Age of Milton who was the noblest representative of the Puritan spirit. Milton was a Puritan who believed in the authority of the Bible, and opposed religious institutions like the Church of England, and the monarchy, with which it was entwined.

The Puritan age was a period in which the fantasy and imagination of the Tudor and early Stuart times was gradually burning itself out under the pressures of the purifying religious reformers. A new epoch of enlightenment and scientific discovery was developing in which the ambiguity, sophistication and ornament of the Tudors and the sensual and intellectualized wit of the Meta physical poets was out of place. A new attitude was gradually growing in the literary scene that called for clarity, discipline and balance.

Milton was the greatest poet of the Puritan age, and he stands head and shoulders above all his contemporaries. Though he completely identified himself with Puritanism, he possessed such a strong personality that he cannot be taken to

represent anyone but himself.

Paying a just tribute to the dominating personality of Milton, Wordsworth wrote the famous line:

“ Their souls was like a star, and dwelt apart.”

Milton's early poetry is lyrical. The important poems of the early period are: The Hymn on the Nativity (1629); L' Allegro, Il Penseroso (1632); Lycidas (1637); and Comus (1634). Lycidas is a pastoral elegy and it is the greatest of its type in English literature. It was written to mourn the death of Milton's friend, Edward King, but it also contains serious criticism of contemporary religion and politics. Then he wrote his greatest poetical works—Paradise Lost, Paradise Regained and Samson

Agonists.

Paradise Lost is one of the most recognized works in English literature. The first version, published in 1667, contained ten books. A later edition was published in 1674, which consisted of twelve books. Paradise Lost consists of more than 10,000 lines of verse. It tells the story of Adam and Eve, including their creation, inability to resist the temptations of Satan, and subsequent fall from grace.

What though the field be lost?  
All is not lost; the unconquerable will,  
And study of revenge, immortal hate,  
And courage never to submit or yield  
And what is else, not to be overcome.<sup>6</sup>

It is written in blank verse of the Elizabethan dramatist, but it is hardened and strengthened to suit the requirements of an epic poet.

Paradise Regained which deals with subject of Temptation in the Wilderness is written, unlike Paradise Lost, in the form of discussion and not action. Since Milton was famous for his unique style of blank verse and sonnets, he won the praise of the romantic poets for his skills. However, they did not accept his religious views. William Wordsworth opens his popular sonnet with “Milton! Thou shouldst believe

at this hour.”

John Keats was also a great admirer of Miltonic verse and advocated that, “Miltonic verse cannot be written but in an artful or rather artist’s humor”.

After many years of hardwork he died on November 8, 1819 at the age of 25 in Bunhill Row, London, United Kingdom

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## Paradise Lost as an Epic

An epic is an extended narrative poem, exalted in style and heroic in theme. Its unity of action, its distinguished hero and the thrilling episodes are the essentials of an epic. An epic follows certain conventions: announcement of the theme; war and preliminary verbal combat; the prophetic unfolding in future history; and participation of divine being in action.

The above mentioned elements of epic conventions are present in “Paradise Lost”. Milton’s epic, however, is not a national epic like the “Iliad” or the “Aeneid”. It is an epic of the whole human species because it presents a sublime theme. Milton states this theme in the following manner.

*‘Of man’s first disobedience and the fault  
Of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste  
Brought Death into the world and all our woe,  
With loss of Eden .....’*

This comic theme presents the fall of Satan and the rebel angels, the creation of man and the earth, man’s disobedience of God’s command and his consequent expulsion from Paradise. The vast compass of the story, its space, time, characters and purpose makes it unique among the world –epics.

It was a regular practice with the epic poets to begin with the invocation to the Muse. They had a genuine belief in poetic inspiration. They appealed to gods and goddesses but their practice showed more pedantic formality. Milton adopts this conventions but he turns instead to the Heavenly. Muse... the Muse of scared revelation. His Muse is the one that spoke to Moses and granted him prophet hood.

There is perfect unity of "Paradise Lost" The central theme is fall of man everything in the poem either leads up to it or flows from it. The plucking of the fruit of the tree of knowledge by Eva is the Epic of "Paradise lost" round which everything else in the poem turns. The war between GOD and Satan with consequent fall of Satan is only prelude to the man of action. Satan after his defeat seeks to take revenge on God by bringing about the fall of man hence the fall of Satan does not constitute a separate action. The whole action of "Paradise lost" is single and compact.

"Paradise Lost" differs from the classical epics in the number of the characters portrayed. The earlier epics were rich in characterization. They had man mortals and gods taking part in the action. Here, the subject matter of the fall of Adam and Eve obviously reduced the number of human characters. Though we do not find Adam and Eve in Heroic deeds, yet they are the Centre of our interest. The two line of the poem describe the departure of Adam and Eve:

*"They, hand in hand, with wandering steps and slow through Eden took their solitary way".*

"Paradise Lost" excels as a poetic work both for the loftiness of its theme and for the grandeur of its style. Milton's manipulation, epic similes, allusions and his use of enriched blank verse give his style a greatness fully acclaimed.

Like other epics, moral forms an integral part of Milton's poem. It seeks to "Justify the ways of God to men", to show the reasonableness of religion and the necessity of obedience to the Divine Law. There should be a balance between passion and reason. Every action of man, good or bad, has its consequence. Struggle against evil is necessary to established Virtue.

John Dryden, however, doubted its claim to be called an epic because it is not heroic enough; its main theme is not a war; unlike other epics it ends unhappy; it contains only two human characters.



These objects are either superficial or conventional. It is a needless restriction on epic poetry to say that it must always have a war as its main theme. Nor is it necessary that epic must end happily. Through the characters are not many, they are represented in more than one aspect. Adams before and after the fall; God the creator, the avenger of man's wrong and man's death; and good and bad angels are also characters, not heavenly machines. They are as many and as various as the peculiar nature of the poem allowed.

### **Conclusion:**

To conclude "The Paradise Lost" as a narrative epic poem. This comic theme presents the fall of Satan and the rebel angels, the creation of man and the earth, man's disobedience of God's command and his consequent expulsion from Paradise.

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## **Elements of Evil and Good in Paradise Lost**

Paradise Lost is an epic and an epic is a work of objective art. Modern criticism of Paradise Lost has taken many different views of Milton's ideas in the poem. The significance of obedience to superiors is not just a matter of Adam and Eve and the Tree of Knowledge; it is a major subject throughout the poem. Satan's rebellion because of jealousy is the first great act of disobedience and commences all that happens in the epic.

Further instances of the crucial importance of both hierarchy and obedience occur in both large and small matters. The deference with which Adam greets Raphael shows the human accepting his position in regard to the angel. The image is one of the proper manners between inferior and superior. Eve's normal attitude toward Adam reflects the same relationship.

The general reasoning is that God created Man after the rebellion of Satan. His stated purpose is to show Satan that the rebellious angels will not be missed, that God can create new beings as he sees fit. God gives Man a free will, but at the same time, God being God, knows what Man will do because of free will. Over and over in Paradise Lost, God says that Man has free will, that God knows Man will yield to Satan's temptation, but that he (God) is not the cause of that yielding; He simply knows that it will occur.

*What though the field be lost?  
All is not lost; the unconquerable will  
And study of revenge, immortal hate  
And courage never to submit your yield*

Satan is no doubt a leader with courage and affection for his followers. His eyes show signs of remorse. He sheds angelic tears. But he revives himself. It needs mighty courage to revolt against the almighty and to hurl defiance at him even in captivity. Not only is he himself courageous but he can inspire courage in his followers. His tempting speech makes fallen angels arise.

We should not be taken in by Satan's impressive speeches. The high sounding rhetorical verse indicates that Milton had grown suspicious of rhetoric. Secondly he was aware that evil has its own attraction. If evil were never attractive there would be no problem for man. But Milton is crafty enough to give strength and glory to the speech first and then snatch it away in the next moment. After Satan's finishes his speech, Milton comments:

.....high words that bore  
Semblance of worth, not substance,

Denis Saurat Says that Satan is intellectually condemned. He is throughout called names like "arch-fiend", "arch-enemy", "apostate angel" the adversary of God and man", "the author of all ill" and "the spirit malign". Satan, in short, does not degenerate, he is degraded.

### **Conclusion:**

To sum up these lines in Paradise Lost Satan and disobedience of Adam and Eve represents to Evil. In Good is God created Man after the rebellion of Satan. His stated purpose is to show Satan that the rebellious angels will not be missed, that God can create new beings as he sees fit.

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## Characters of Adam and Eve in Paradise Lost

**Adam** - The first human, the father of our race, and, along with his wife Eve, the caretaker of the **Garden of Eden**. Adam is grateful and obedient to God, but falls from grace when Eve convinces him to join her in the sin of eating from the Tree of Knowledge.

Adam is a strong, intelligent, and rational character possessed of a remarkable relationship with God. In fact, before the fall, he is as perfect as a human being can be. He has an enormous capacity for reason, and can understand the most sophisticated ideas instantly. He can converse with Raphael as a near-equal, and understand Raphael's stories readily. But after the fall, his conversation with Michael during his visions is significantly one-sided. Also, his self-doubt and anger after the fall demonstrate his new ability to indulge in rash and irrational attitudes. As a result of the fall, he loses his pure reason and intellect.

Adam's greatest **weakness** is his love for Eve. He falls in love with her immediately upon seeing her, and confides to Raphael that his attraction to her is almost overwhelming. Though Raphael warns him to keep his affections in check, Adam is powerless to prevent his love from overwhelming his reason. After Eve eats from the Tree of Knowledge, he quickly does the same, realizing that if she is doomed, he must follow her into doom as well if he wants to avoid losing her. Eve has become his companion for life, and he is unwilling to part with her even if that means disobeying God.

Adam's curiosity and hunger for knowledge is another weakness. The questions he asks of Raphael about creation and the universe may suggest a growing temptation to eat from the Tree of Knowledge. But like his physical attraction to Eve, Adam is able to partly avoid this temptation. It is only through Eve that his temptations become unavoidable.

**Eve** - The first woman and the mother of mankind. Eve was made from a rib taken from Adam's side. Because she was made from Adam and for Adam, she is subservient to him. She is also weaker than Adam, so Satan focuses his powers of temptation on her. He succeeds in getting her to eat the fruit of the forbidden tree despite God's command.

Created to be Adam's mate, Eve is inferior to Adam, but only slightly. She surpasses Adam only in her beauty. She falls in love with her own image when she sees her reflection in a body of water. Ironically, her greatest asset produces her most serious weakness, vanity. After Satan compliments her on her beauty and godliness, he easily persuades her to eat from the Tree of Knowledge.

Aside from her **beauty**, Eve's intelligence and spiritual purity are constantly tested. She is not unintelligent, but she is not ambitious to learn, content to be guided by Adam as God intended. As a result, she does not become more intelligent or learned as the story progresses, though she does attain the beginning of wisdom by the end of the poem. Her lack of learning is partly due to her absence for most of Raphael's discussions with Adam in Books V, VI, and VII, and she also does not see the visions Michael shows Adam in Books XI and XII. Her absence from these important exchanges shows that she feels it is not her place to seek knowledge independently; she wants to hear Raphael's stories through Adam later. The one instance in which she deviates from her passive role, telling Adam to trust her on her own and then seizing the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, is disastrous.

**Eve's strengths** are her capacity for love, emotion, and forbearance. She persuades Adam to stay with her after the fall, and Adam in turn dissuades her from committing suicide, as they begin to work together as a powerful unit. Eve complements Adam's strengths and corrects his weaknesses. Thus, Milton does not denigrate all women through his depiction of Eve. Rather he explores the role

of women in his society and the positive and important role he felt they could offer in the divine union of marriage.

## Conclusion:

To sum up Paradise lost (characters of Adam and Eve) are those who are the first man and women, father and mother, wife and husband. The first woman and the mother of mankind. Eve was made from a **rib** taken from Adam's side. **Eve's strengths** are her capacity for love, emotion, and forbearance. She persuades Adam to stay with her after the fall. Adam's greatest **weakness** is his love for Eve. He falls in love with her immediately upon seeing her, and confides to Raphael that his attraction to her is almost overwhelming. They Lost Paradise because their disobedience of God's command and his consequent expulsion from Paradise.

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## Satan as a Hero in Paradise lost

Satan is the most important character in "**Paradise Lost**". Though the action of the poem turns round **Man's first disobedience**, yet the character that gives epic grandeur to the poem is that of Satan. He is endowed with some of those qualities that make him the hero of an epic. In fact, Milton partly expressed himself through Satan.

Addison said that;

"He is the most heroic subject  
ever chosen for a poem and  
the execution is as perfect as  
the design is lofty".

Milton's Satan is endowed with heroic qualities. The outstanding trait of his character is courage. He may be wrong headed but he has infinite courage in himself. As the poem begins, we find Satan in a hopeless situation. He and his companions have been hurled down into the bottomless pit of Hell. Heaven is lost to Satan and his followers and they are doomed to live forever in the darkness of Hell. But he does not lose heart and says;

**"Fallen cherubs, to be weak is miserable,  
Doing or suffering".**

Satan is determined not to be weak under any circumstances. We see that even in Hell, he discovers an advantage. He says;

**"Better to reign in Hell, than serve in  
Heaven".**

Milton's Satan has all qualities of a leader. He has the quality to command. And he orders the angels about every act. His eyes show sign of remorse to behold his followers **"condemned forever"**. He sheds angelic tears but he revives himself. It needs mighty courage to revolt against the Almighty God and to fight with Him even in captivity. His tempting speech makes fallen angels arise. He urges Beelzebub to carry on their war and overcome pessimism.

Satan is a study of endless pride. Self-exaltation is the motive of all his conduct. Pride is the evil from which all other evils arise. He did not prostrate to Adam and so he was condemned forever. Satan's pride, sensual indulgence, selfishness and egoism are quite clear from his speeches. For example, he determines in his first speech;

**"To wage by force or guile eternal war".**

There is an epic necessity that the important epic characters should be sublime. Satan is made a mixed character with evil passions in which good still lingers. In the beginning, Satan is selfish but with abrupt touches of unselfishness. He is proud. He brings war into Heaven, yet he loves its beauty. He is God's enemy yet he allows God's justice. Thus we find that Satan is a mixed character in which there is both good and evil.

Much controversy has clustered round the question about heroism in **"Paradise Lost"**. Some critics say that Satan is the hero of this poem and others assert that Adam is the hero of **"Paradise Lost"**. According to Romantics, Satan has all qualities of a hero. He is a towering figure and able to exercise his influence upon others. He is irresponsible to spiritual tradition. He is a good speaker and a lover of independence. He revolts against a code of morality.

Robert Burns said that;

**"Give me a spirit like my favourite  
hero, Milton's Satan".**

On the other hand, according to Aristotle and all classics, a hero should be a noble person. He should neither a perfectly virtuous nor a absolute villain. If we apply this concept to Adam's character, He seems to be true hero. Adam is a noble and serious person.

### **CONCLUSION:**

To sum-up the whole debate, we can say that Satan is an epic character. He is a figure of heroic magnitude and heroic energy. He has all qualities of a good hero and a greatness of his own. He is born leader. We cannot neglect his character.

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