

Paradise Lost

by John Milton

Penguin Classics Edition

Overview

Paradise Lost is a 17th-century epic poem in blank verse that tells the story of the **fall of man**, inspired by the biblical narrative in Genesis. Written by **John Milton** after he had gone blind, the poem is a monumental work of English literature, aiming to “**justify the ways of God to men.**”

Major Themes

- **Free Will vs. Predestination**

Milton explores the tension between divine omniscience and human freedom, highlighting Adam and Eve’s ability to choose and Satan’s defiance of divine order.

- **The Nature of Evil**

Through Satan’s prideful rebellion, Milton examines the origin of evil—not as something created by God, but as the result of misuse of free will.

- **Disobedience and the Fall**

The central act—Adam and Eve eating the forbidden fruit—ushers in suffering and mortality, yet also sets the stage for eventual redemption.

- **Heroism and Redemption**

While Satan exhibits classical heroic traits, true heroism lies in **obedience, humility, and perseverance**, especially as seen in the Son of God.

Key Characters

- **Satan**
Once the most glorious of angels, Satan rebels against God and is cast into Hell. He is charismatic, complex, and rhetorically brilliant, often stealing the spotlight.
 - **Adam & Eve**
The first humans, living in innocent harmony in the Garden of Eden before their fall. Their dynamic evolves from unity to blame and then reconciliation.
 - **God the Father**
Omniscient and just, he foresees the fall but allows it to preserve human freedom.
 - **The Son (Jesus Christ)**
Voluntarily offers himself as a future sacrifice to redeem humankind.
 - **The Archangels (Michael & Raphael)**
Serve as messengers and guides to Adam, explaining the celestial war and warning him of temptation.
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Structure

The poem is divided into **12 books**, echoing Virgil's *Aeneid*. The narrative moves fluidly between:

- The aftermath of the heavenly war,
 - Satan's journey to Earth,
 - The temptation and fall of man,
 - Prophecies of redemption.
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Famous Lines

“Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven.” – Satan, Book I

“The mind is its own place, and in itself can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven.” – Satan, Book I

“Freely they stood who stood, and fell who fell.” – God, Book III

Conclusion

Paradise Lost is more than just a retelling of Genesis—it is a theological, political, and philosophical epic that reflects Milton’s deep engagement with scripture, rebellion, and the human condition. Despite Satan’s seductive rhetoric, the poem ultimately celebrates obedience, redemption, and the mysterious justice of God.