

Engl. 312: Spring '12 Formal Essay
4/1/2012

Milton's *Paradise Lost*: A "Heroic" Satan

In Milton's Paradise Lost, he uses Satan to demonstrate the conflicting images of God as an almighty, compassionate ruler and God as a perverse, wrathful ruler who shows no compassion. Satan is described with great detail and the reader gets a sense of the internal and external struggles of his situation. With these detailed depictions of Satan, he becomes more appealing and even forgivable to the reader. These arguments help the reader more strongly identify with Satan's character, who is seen as an "epic hero" with human-like attributes and eternally unable to find repentance. Topic clear; argument less so.

We find Satan more appealing for many reasons throughout the text. For example, from the very beginning God is portrayed in a dark, menacing image. Far from traditional images of God, which would normally depict God as holy and compassionate, God is characterized as wrathful and demanding. He is an angry God who remains distant throughout the entire story. This distancing of God does not allow the reader to align themselves with him and are forced to view him as a dominant, omnipotent power without the characterizations of compassion and sympathy. When God comes up in the text, we do not see a welcoming God, but a God of rage and anger. God is depicted as "the almighty victor to spend all his rage" (Milton 2. 144). He displays his rage towards "lesser," fallen angels, providing the reader with a feeling of inequality between God and the other angels. Later, when referring to Adam and Eve and the Tree of Knowledge, "God hath pronounced it death to taste that Tree" (Milton 4. 428). Referring to the Tree of Knowledge, God shows his wrath in that death will occur to Adam and Eve if they ever disobey his orders. This makes the reader and other characters in the story fear God, hindering

Misty Schieberle 5/2/12 9:22 AM

Comment [1]: Need text to show, from Book 1 ideally since that's our first glimpse of "God".

their ability to view him as the hero. Another troubling part of God's absence from the text is that he never has any direct communication or interactions with humans. This limits the ability of the reader to align with God, while simultaneously allowing them to find the "true hero" in the story. Again, it's worth considering when these criticisms of God are in the voice of Satan vs. Milton to develop (or whether, we, like God, should be angry at the fallen, rebellious angels).

God is seen again as wrathful and unfair by the injustices inflicted by him on the fallen angels and Satan. The idea of Satan and his followers being forever tortured and eternally damned seems unjust and excessive?: Need context: who's talking? When? Why?

"Fear to be worse destroyed: what can be worse
Than to dwell here, driven out from bliss, condemned
In this abhorred deep to utter woe;
Where pain of **unextinguishable fire** _____ Some of these words are worth exploring
Must exercise us without hope of the end _____ or explaining.
The **vassals of his anger**, when the **scourge**
Inexorable, and the torturing hour
Calls us to **penance**?" (Milton 2. 85-92)

Quoted here from Book II, we hear Satan speaking of life in eternal damnation and his inability to pull himself out of a place that he abhors. He and the fallen angels have no opportunity at God's grace and are subject to "unextinguishable fire," with no hope for change. The torture is inevitable and impossible to cease due to God's great strength and power. This allows one to feel pity for Satan, as God is not seen giving any reasoning or argument in defense for his actions. This would allow many readers to feel more connected to Satan, as he is unable to pull himself out of from under God's powerful foot.

This sense of alignment with Satan's character can also be correlated to Satan's characterization as an "epic hero." Do you mean to suggest that Milton wrote him that way, that Satan IS an epic hero, or do you mean to argue that he is? SHOW your process/argument An epic hero is a character with good intentions but who carries a grave character flaw that proves to

Misty Schieberle 5/2/12 9:25 AM
Formatted: Highlight

Misty Schieberle 5/2/12 9:25 AM
Formatted: Highlight

Misty Schieberle 5/2/12 9:25 AM
Formatted: Highlight

Misty Schieberle 5/2/12 9:25 AM
Formatted: Highlight

place them in a difficult situation (source?). Normally, these heroes would be mortal human beings, but in Satan's case he is primarily depicted with human characteristics. The reader is made aware of every step Satan takes and his constant internal struggle for what is right and wrong, good and evil. These are characteristics that most people must face sometime in their lives, which shines light on Satan's human-like struggles, allowing the reader to more easily appreciate his character. ← Vague but potentially useful In Book IV, Satan's attempts have become subdued and he begins to show his heroic attributes by not ceasing to fall at the unequal demands of God. "So farewell hope, and with hope farewell, Farwell remorse: all good to men is lost; Evil be thou my good" (Milton 4: 108-10). When all hope is lost he is forced ? to take the next step in order to stand up against the dictatorship that God's reign represents. After losing all hope he still chooses to fight, unafraid, representing him as a masculine and heroic figure in the face of danger. He also shows immense pride and recognizes his ability to overthrow the divine kingdom of God, all characteristics of an epic hero.

His will and ability to stand in the face of God and seek answers from him display his heroic abilities, encouraging Milton's audience to side with Satan? show. His human-like features do not stop there. Before losing all hope and being forced to stand in the face of God, Satan unsuccessfully attempts to seek repentance from God. His hope and attempt for repentance is something that details his human-like emotions and actions:

"is there no place
 Left for repentance, none for pardon left?
 None left but by submission; and that word
 Disdain forbids men, and my dread of shame
 Among the Spirits beneath, whom I seduced
 With other promises and other vaunts
 Than to submit, boasting I could subdue
 Th' Omnipotent

While they adore me on the throne of Hell.” (Milton 4. 79-86, 89) It’s not clear what’s here to analyze beyond the content level of the text.

Satan is willing God to give him some sort of pardon that will bring him out from the underworld. He wishes for repentance but will not give into submission, where he would be accepting and yielding to the superior force of God. This questions God’s role as the single, absolute ruler of all the angels and creatures. Satan brings to light the question of equality of all angels, where he would not have to be obedient to one almighty god. He is tormented by the position of power he is in and wishes for equality among all. He is “adored on the throne of Hell”, something he finds terribly upsetting. He believes that he should not be forced to align himself with God but should return to his “former state” (Milton 4. 94). If he were to side with God, his “vows” would be forced and “made in pain, as violent and void” (Milton 4.97). This says something about Satan’s democratic nature, where he believes that all should participate and take part in ruling and decision making. Overall, this is useful – but you might be more direct and state that Milton puts Satan in the position of any human, repentant sinner (not as if he is evil personified).

This urge for equality between all men and angels is another facet to Satan’s appealing nature to the reader. God, who remains the one ultimate ruler over all, who calls out orders that must be abided by in fear of damnation, is too hard to align one’s self with. Satan takes the alternative, asking for equality by seeking out volunteers (fallen angels) to help decide what steps to take: whether to go to war or abide by God’s rules. Satan’s democratic nature can easily be identified by saying, “and by what best way, whether of open war or covert guile, We now debate; who can advise, may speak” (Milton 2. 40-2). We find Satan even more appealing after he asks for his fallen angels to help him decide what to do. Not only do we not see God doing similar things when creating rules for which to abide by, but also God is the sole creator and would never typically be seen asking anyone for guidance. Satan uses the characteristics of

consideration and compassion, traditional traits of God, to his advantage. We find God demanding and distanced while Satan demonstrates human qualities and fights for equality.

God again is described as a tyrant, unwilling to give into the opinions of others and remaining steadfast in his sole decisions. In Book II, Satan describes Heaven in terms that would normally be appropriate for Hell. “Thick clouds and dark doth Heav’n’s all-ruling Sir Choose to reside, his glory unobscured, And with the majesty of darkness round Covers his throne, from whence deep thunders roar” (Milton 2. 263-66). Here we see Heaven portrayed with images of darkness, with “thick clouds” and “deep thunders,” painting an image of Heaven as an eternally looming storm. Satan also uses words such as “Sire” and “throne” to present God in the image of a tyrannical ruler, where he is the single ruling King watching over all the angels and the land. ←

Analysis – useful! Do more of this! This is when Satan finally considers staging a fight against God. He must use evil, as “Heav’n resembles Hell” (Milton 2. 168). Lines throughout should be cited as poetic lines, not prose.

Although Satan does not achieve his ultimate goal, he is admired for his attempt to stand up to the immense power of God, something most mortal men would fear. Satan also makes many correlations to God as the enemy and himself as the hero saying, “Better to reign in Hell, than serve in Heav’n” (Milton 1. 263). He ultimately realizes that to follow God would mean to become a slave to his orders, which he feels is unjust and one-sided. Satan successfully masks himself as appealing and forgivable to the audience, who find God seemingly distant and menacing in his actions and rules. The additional details of Satan’s character allow the reader to identify him as the hero in the story; one who displays normal human emotions and seeks out to fight for equality in the face of this massive God. Through the human-like characteristics and details of Satan and the conflicting images of God, the reader ultimately is more drawn to

Misty Schieberle 5/2/12 9:30 AM

Comment [2]: You use this kind of phrase often – seen by whom? Admired by whom? You? Milton?

Satan's character, creating a clear deviation from traditional Christian thought during Milton's age. AWK conclusion that introduces new material (reign in Hell) that ought to be in the essay as a point for analysis.

This essay covers some important points and draws on useful details and some examples. It's readable and organized fairly well, but it rarely goes beyond the surface level of the text. It also does not press to clarify how its thesis is arguable – shift to something more like that Milton portrays Satan as sympathetic (true) and almost human, which allows Milton to explore (something important that can be the basis for your argument).

B

Works Cited

Milton, John. "Paradise Lost." The Norton Anthology of English Literature. Ed. 8. Logan, Greenblatt, Lewalski, Maus. New York, 2006. 1831-2055. Print.