
The True Hero of Paradise Lost

It is important to note that a hero is not always someone who is working for the sake of furthering a just cause and that he does not have to be admired by everyone, including the reader. In fact, John Milton presents his audience with a quite unconventional hero in his *Paradise Lost*. Instead of highlighting God and his Son as the heroes of his epic, Milton opts to deem a much darker Satan as the hero of *Paradise Lost*. It would have been quite easy for Milton to appeal to his Protestant background and to render God as the hero. However, it is interesting to see how Satan classifies as more of a hero than the Creator Himself. By definition, a hero is an individual who faces conflict, has the ability to easily sway and motivate his followers and accomplishes some type of major objective. It is very rare for God to be portrayed as the foil to a character that has been epitomized as the antithesis to a supposed Ultimate Hero.

Satan's role as the story's hero is quickly established as the reader is introduced to his struggle in hell during the opening pages of *Paradise Lost*. If a character faces nothing but compliant characters and situations throughout a storyline, it would be virtually impossible for him to prove his courage; the most vital characteristic of any hero. Instead, Satan finds himself in quite a contrary position as "the thought / Both of lost happiness and lasting pain / Torments him." (Book 1, lns. 54-56) He has fallen from heaven and been placed in a dark, fiery hell where the only assurance he receives is the fact that he will be subject to anguish for the rest of his life. When it comes to obstacles, attempting to overcome eternal damnation mandated by The Creator is most definitely a daunting hurdle to overcome. Through the earlier books of *Paradise Lost*, Satan finds himself battling the situations in which God has placed him in, not with God himself. However, he clashes with a direct representative of God for the first time when he enters a skirmish with Abdiel. Abdiel's name literally means "servant of God" as he is the only angel to stand up to Satan and considered to be the most courageous for his decision to stand up to the face of evil. The fearless angel practically warns Satan of his impending downfall as he states "I alone seemed in thy world erroneous to dissent from all: my sect thou seest, now learn too late how few sometimes may know, when thousands err." (Book 6, lns. 145-48) This exemplifies how God once again averts conflict by sending someone in his place to fight "The better fight" (Book 6, ln. 30). Even though Satan is eventually forced "over the wall of Heaven" and "swallowed up by Hell" (p. 801), he is successful in creating disarray among the God's angels by directly confronting the battle instead of hiding behind his men and allocating all of the fighting amongst the dark angels.

An imperative trait a hero must possess is the gift to be able to cast away any fear his men may be harboring and instead instill courage and enthusiasm in order to keep his supporters loyal

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and confident towards his cause. Satan exhibits his talent for persuasion time and time again as he lifts the spirits of the demoralized dark angels and inspires them to fight for a cause that seems virtually impossible. His most persuasive technique is exhibited when he admits to his supporters that he has erred. He confesses that if he had known the full capabilities of God, he would have never challenged the Almighty Being. (Book 1) Consequently, Satan and the dark angels are forced to face a God who will continuously "frustrate all plots and wiles" (Book 2, ln. 193) as he is said to have an eye that "views all things." (Book 2, ln. 190) By speaking as if they have absolutely nothing to lose at this point, Satan creates the new objective of making "a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven." Even though hell is a place for those who have worked against God, Satan is pictured to only become increasingly stubborn and conniving towards Him. By taking time away from dwelling on their bleak situation and placing a focus on a new objective, Satan gets the dark angels excited about tackling a new mission. Their success may be attributed to the fact that Satan quickly changes the dark angels' focus on something that cannot be achieved to a much more reasonable, attainable endeavor, the corruption of mankind.

Given any heroic story, the tale never ends until the hero accomplishes what he has set out to achieve. Paradise Lost does not stray from this formulaic setup as Satan successfully introduces both death and sin to mankind while he sees to the corruption of Adam and Eve. Instead of making use of brute force like he does earlier in the epic poem, Satan makes use of his manipulation skills as he introduces deception to a world that is said to be free of any wrongdoing. His victory is carried out by planting a simple thought of "offense and trouble" that Eve's "mind knew never till this irksome night." (Book 5, lns. 34-35) Unfortunately, Satan's victory is short-lived as his accomplishment is quickly negated by the work of God's Son. Since God is aware of Satan's actions before he even commits them, He sends for his Son to cancel out Adam and Eve's sins by having His Son die for them. Even though Satan's accomplishment is quickly remedied, it still does not change the fact that he completed his main objective of corrupting mankind.

Even though he had been brought up according to the teachings of the Protestant church, Milton creates a hero out of a character who has always been looked down upon by members of the Protestant faith. It is interesting to note that many of Christianity's morals are highlighted by contrasting them to the actions of Satan. However, Milton makes use of unconventional methods in Paradise Lost to portray God as a power working against a heroic Satan who is forced to face conflict as he attempts and successfully completes a specific objective. The reader is able to learn about many of the hero's characteristics, especially his perseverance and bravery, as Satan is placed in countless situations where he must prove himself. While God may be considered to be the hero in other epics and stories, He resorts to secondary actions in Paradise Lost by sending others to accomplish his goals. The only attributes about God that the reader knows are the ones that are explicitly detailed by the author. In contrast, Satan's

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characteristics are divulged through his actions and thinking patterns as he clashes with characters in Paradise Lost.

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