

Q. What is the theme of 'Paradise Lost' Book-I ?

Ans: John Milton was among the most ambitious of poets, and there was never any doubt that he would write an epic poem. The very opening lines of Milton's famous epic 'Paradise Lost' states the subject of the whole poem: 'Man's first disobedience' and the consequent fall of man from heaven i.e. the Biblical story of 'Adam Unparadised'.

The Book I deals with the story of another fall: the fall of Satan and his followers from heaven into the bottomless pit of hell to suffer endlessly. The brightest of angels, proud and ambitious, disobeyed the Almighty and waged 'an impious war' in heaven. He suffered from 'a sense of injured merit' and misled a large number of angels to a regicide. Satan and all his followers were struck with thunderbolt, and they were thrown into the dark and fiery pit of hell.

The narrative begins with their fall, with Satan regaining his consciousness to discover himself confined in a hell like situation. As Satan further discovers his second-in-command, Beelzebub, still lying unconscious close to him, he addresses Beelzebub to begin the process of remobilising his forces for a new offensive. Book I contains five speeches of Satan addressed to Beelzebub and the other followers lying defeated and scattered all over the burning pool in hell. We have Satan's speech and the fallen angels return to consciousness, re-assemble, and march in battle in response to the call of their leader. Then Satan's architectural brigade builds 'Pandemonium' in hell where the new king of hell sits with his compatriots in 'a secret conclave' to work out the new mischief: to tempt the loved creatures of God--Adam & Eve--to disobedience and fall. Many critics raised questions on Milton's Justification the Ways of God to Man

Some critics believe that the poet instead justifies the ways of Satan to men, he has not justified the ways of god on the poetic level. Milton has tried to do so through arguments which are unconvincing.

Moreover, the punishment given to Adam and Eve is out of proportion to their sin of disobedience. However, the justification of divine ways lies in the representation of Adam as a free agent and in the revelation of the working of God's Grace at the end.

Q. Who is the Hero of "Paradise Lost" Book-I ? Elucidate.

Or

Sketch the character of Satan with reference to Book 1 of 'Paradise Lost'.

Ans: It can not be readily remarked that who is the hero of the epic 'Paradise Lost' by simply reading a book or two. In this context, the most famous quote about 'Paradise Lost' is William Blake's statement that Milton was "of the Devil's party without knowing it." While Blake may have meant something other than what is generally understood from this quotation. But, the idea that Satan is the hero, or at least a type of hero, in Paradise Lost is widespread. However, the progression, or, more precisely, regression, of Satan's character from Book I gives a much different and much clearer picture of Milton's attitude toward Satan.

Writers and critics of the Romantic era advanced the notion that Satan was a Promethean hero, putting himself against an unjust God. Most of these writers based their ideas on the picture of Satan in the first two books of Paradise Lost. In those books, Satan rises off the lake of fire and delivers his heroic speech still challenging God. Satan tells the other rebels that they can make "a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n" and adds, "Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heav'n". Satan also calls for and leads the grand council. Finally, he goes forth on his own to cross Chaos and find Earth. Without question, this picture of Satan makes him heroic in his initial introduction to the reader.

Besides these, Satan also appears heroic because the first two books focus on Hell and the fallen angels. The reader's introduction to the poem is through Satan's point of view. Milton too, gives Satan the first scene in the poem. A fact that makes Satan the first empathetic character. Moreover, Milton's writing in book 1 and his characterization of Satan, make the archfiend understandable and unforgettable.

These facts certainly make Satan the most interesting character in the poem. He may be, to some extent, called the hero of the epic. But the reader hears Satan's version first and the reader

is unaware of the exaggerations and outright lies that are parts of Satan's magnificent speeches. Moreover, the reader can easily overlook the fact that Milton states. Whatever powers and abilities the fallen angels have in Hell, those powers and abilities come from God, who could at any moment take them away.

In essence then, Milton's grand poetic style sets Satan up as heroic in Books I and II. The presentation of Satan makes him seem greater than he actually is and initially draws the reader to Satan's viewpoint. Further, because all of the other characters in the poem – Adam, Eve, God, the Son, the angels – are essentially types rather than characters, Milton spends more artistic energy on the development of Satan so that throughout the poem, Satan's character maintains the reader's interest and, perhaps, sympathy – at least to an extent.

No matter how brilliantly Milton created the character of Satan, the chief demon cannot be the hero of the poem. For Milton, Satan is the enemy who chooses to commit an act that goes against the basic laws of God, that challenges the very nature of the universe. Satan attempts to destroy the hierarchy of Heaven through his rebellion. Satan commits this act not because of the tyranny of God but because he wants what he wants rather than what God wants. Satan is an egoist. His interests always turn on his personal desires. Unlike Adam, who discusses a multiplicity of subjects with Raphael, rarely mentioning his own desires, Satan sees everything in terms of what will happen to him. A true Romantic hero has to rebel against an unjust tyranny in an attempt to right a wrong or help someone less fortunate. If Satan had been Prometheus, he would have stolen fire to warm himself, not to help Mankind.

Milton shows his own attitude toward Satan in the way the character degenerates or is degraded in the progression of the poem. Satan is magnificent, even admirable in Book 1. But the review of other books shows that he is changed. In his soliloquy, Satan declares that Hell is wherever he himself is. Away from his followers and allowed some introspection, Satan already reveals a more conflicted character.

Similarly, Satan's motives change as the story advances. At first, Satan wishes to continue the fight for freedom from God. Later his motive for continuing the fight becomes glory and renown. Next, the temptation of Adam and Eve is simply a way to disrupt God's plans. And, at the end, Satan seems to say that he has acted as he has to impress the other demons in Hell. This regression of motives shows him quite unheroic.

Though Satan is not heroic in *Paradise Lost*, he at times does border on tragedy. Ironically, he also borders on comedy. The comic element associated with Satan derives from the absurdity of his position. As a rebel, he challenges an omnipotent foe, God, with power that is granted him by his foe. God simply toys with Satan in battle. But Satan's motives in destroying the human couple may be arguable, but the effect and its implications are not. Satan brings the humans down and causes their removal from Eden. In so doing, he also provides the way to salvation for those humans who choose freely to obey God. However, Satan provides nothing for himself. Hell is where Satan is because he has no way to rejoin God. Unlike humanity, Satan and the other fallen angels have already sealed their fates. They live always with the knowledge of Hell.

In the end, Satan calls to mind the Macbeth of Shakespeare. Both characters are magnificent creations of evil. Both are heroic after a fashion, but both are doomed. Both are fatalistic about the afterlife. Satan knows that he must remain in Hell and finally both create a kind of Hell; Macbeth's on Earth, Satan's in the universe.