

# Seminar Paper Proposal

In his *Divine Comedy*, Dante describes the geography of creation in a physically recognizable and immediately understandable manner. In his poem, Hell is fixed in the center of Earth, Purgatory is a mountain on Earth's surface, and Heaven lies directly above Purgatory. In *Paradise Lost*, however, Milton places Hell across an immeasurably wide chaotic void from Paradise. Many regard Dante's Ptolemaic organization as an acceptance of the cursed nature of man at the time of the poem's action, likewise considering the remoteness of Milton's Hell as a necessity in a not-yet-flawed world. Thus, the construction of the bridge between Hell and Earth by Sin and Death accomplishes what is seen in Dante's world.

Nevertheless, the location of Milton's Hell is certainly different from that of his predecessor. It can be argued that Milton's view of creation is simply consistent with the creation of Earth after Satan's fall, but theologians such as Martin Luther and even Origen supported the widely-held belief that Hell was not a physical place but rather the complete absence of God from within a person. In that case, Milton's Hell can easily be seen as one of many physical explanations for non-physical existences that mortal man cannot comprehend in *Paradise Lost* (such as the war in heaven). Strong evidence for this lies in one of Satan's most famous quotes: "myself am Hell."

If Hell is indeed a state of mind, then Milton's Satan never "reign[s] in Hell" as he claims to do. While he turns on God and seeks revenge, he admits that he feels intense pain and longs for Paradise when he first sees it. At this time, Satan has not become the entirely mechanical Lucifer of the *Divine Comedy* who thrives in the underworld. Instead, he still longs for the love of God, as Hell seems unbearable torment to him.

This paper will analyze the consequences of Milton's geographic representation of creation from a physical and mental perspective. This will consider the relative locations of Heaven, Earth, and Hell and the connections between them (the golden chain and the bridge) in terms of Man's relationship to God and Satan. Satan's actions and motivations will be discussed from the standpoint that Satan's ultimate and unachievable goal, albeit unknown to him, is the complete disconnection of himself from God.

I have not read enough critical analysis and spent enough time thinking to present a unifying thesis here yet, but I feel that I have a fair amount of material to work with so far. As I come up with more ideas and something closer to a thesis, I'll let you know in my journals.

**Bibliography [I will give more information in due course, but note that this is the correct format for a bibliography]:**

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Gardner, Helen. "The Universe of *Paradise Lost*." *A Reading of Paradise Lost*. Oxford University Press: London, 1965. p.29-50.

Hunt, Winifred. "On Even Ground: A Note on the Extramundane Location of Hell in *Paradise Lost*." *Modern Language Quarterly*, 1962. p.17-19.

Loewenstein, David. "Hell: geographical place and internal state." *Milton: Paradise Lost*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, England, 1993. p.70-75.

Martin, Catherine Gimelli. "From the Allegorical Kosmos to Miltonic Space." *The Ruins of Allegory*. Duke University Press: Durham, 1998. p. 121-161.

Samuel, Irene. *Dante and Milton: The Commedia and Paradise Lost*. Cornell University Press: Ithaca, 1966.

# Proposal for long seminar paper

For my long seminar paper I want to write about Satan as a protagonist figure. Specifically I want to address Milton's portrayal of Satan as a character struggling against the oppressive power of God and the effect of that portrayal on the reader. The question or problem here is that Satan is by all accounts an "evil" character; he is the ultimate antagonist. Yet Milton portrays Satan in such a way that he can be construed as an epic hero or simply a protagonist, most notably in the first few books. How does Milton accomplish this effect on the reader, what is the relevance and meaning of Satan as a protagonist, and why does Milton portray Satan in this way? Also, is Satan the "epic hero" of Milton's epic poem, and if so what does that entail? I will briefly discuss some relevant passages of Paradise Lost and why they are important in addressing these issues.

The first mention of Satan is in book I line 40 or so, and the description of Satan and his deeds is unattractive. The very first impression of Satan is therefore negative, so Milton does not immediately set off to portray Satan as a hero.

Satan's first speech in book I is eloquent; it is just as noble as the later speeches of God and some of the angels. We therefore see Satan as a rational and even noble creature, even though he is chained to a lake of fire at the time. This is followed by a speech from Beelzebub, who praises Satan as a prince and fearless leader. Satan is then described as a hopelessly evil character who cannot fight the power of heaven. Does this make him a tragic hero for struggling against an indomitable power, simply because of what he believes in? Or does it make the reader see Satan as a despicable evil wretch? I think there is some of both. The power of heaven also shows two sides: goodness and oppression. The issue here is that one expects to see heaven as an all-powerful goodness while Satan and the rebel angels are pure evil and despicable. But Milton shows that heaven has an oppressive rule and the rebels are virtuous in their own way, fighting for a cause that they believe in. The reader can then sympathize with the oppressed rebel leader as with an epic hero. One possible reason for Satan to be presented as an amicable character is so that the reader understands the appeal of Satan's temptation - we can appreciate how Eve can be tempted. A wretched and evil Satan would not be so effective at tempting Eve or the reader.

Satan's first moment of glory among the rebels is in the consultation in book II. After throwing out the ideas of war and complacency the rebels agree to seek out earth and tempt its creatures to rebel against God. Satan accepts this mission when no others will, like a brave epic hero. He is treated as such by the host of rebels, and again we see Satan as a character with respectable qualities (most notably courage in this case).

At the end of book II, Satan appeals to Chaos to guide him to heaven. I am not sure whether to discuss this passage at length. The relevant idea is that the realm of Chaos is encroached upon by God's creations of heaven, hell, and earth. God is seen as an oppressive power. However, the reader feels little or no attachment to Chaos, so the resentment towards God here has little effect. However, Chaos is the original state of the universe - the "roots" of all creation. That these roots resent the creator of worlds is significant. God's creations are created to be subservient, or at least

under his control (as with hell). Therefore this passage shows God as a cosmic oppressor and therefore an antagonist figure, who Satan is righteously rebelling against.

The confrontation between Satan and Gabriel in book IV shows that Satan retains some nobility despite his fall from grace. They argue, and while Gabriel considers himself righteous, Satan appears more noble. Satan argues that he has endured more pain and suffering for his cause, is more courageous in battle, and is more of a "faithful leader" than Gabriel. After this exchange the reader is compelled to favor Satan. Even when Satan flees he is not seen as cowardly, for his strength is limited by God (who is again seen as an oppressor).

In book VI Satan faces Abdiel and is defeated. We see Satan as a rebel who has been defeated by a virtuous angel. In this case Satan is not seen as a protagonist. Why not? This should be addressed.

Also in book VI Satan faces Michael and is defeated. Here Satan shows great courage; Michael is a worthy combatant. In this case Satan is fighting a great foe to end his oppression. Satan can be seen as an epic hero character here. Contrast this with Satan's encounter with Abdiel.

I think that covers the passages from Paradise Lost. Another relevant question that I came across is more biographical. Milton was a political rebel, and Satan is a rebel hero. Is Satan perhaps an alter-ego of Milton's? Milton probably felt oppressed and righteous, and other people probably thought of him as "evil." Could this be motivation to create a character, usually considered evil, who turns out to have amicable properties?

Here is a list of references which I think will be useful:

John Milton, "Paradise Lost" (obviously)

Stanley Fish, "Surprised by Sin" (not the part we read for class though)

Possibly some passages from the bible, perhaps out of Genesis, Isaiah, or Revelations to show the more "typical" view of Satan/Lucifer as an antagonist.

John Shawcross, "An Early View of Satan as Hero of Paradise Lost"

Percy Shelly, "A Defense of Poetry" or some other essay that addresses Satan

Possibly other Romantic criticisms describing Satan as a hero (Coleridge?)

John King, "Milton and Religious Controversy"

Roland Frye, "God, Man, and Satan"

John Knott, "Milton's Pastoral Vision"

Charles Martindale, "John Milton and the Transformation of Ancient Epic" (especially on "some Homeric echoes")

William Riggs, "The Christian Poet in Paradise Lost"

John Rumrich, "Matter of Glory"

Perez Zagorin, "Milton: Aristocrat and Rebel"

# Perspectives on Technology and Science in *Paradise Lost* and *His Dark Materials*

I plan to focus my seminar paper on the role of science and technology in *Paradise Lost* and in Pullman's *His Dark Materials*. I separate science and technology as two words, and those are the two focuses of my paper. There is an immense difference between the scientific explorations of young Lyra and the technological monstrosities constructed by Mary Malone. They need each other to succeed and are inherently linked, but neither is the same as the other.

My hope is to address how both of these exist in the works of literature on a few levels. At the first level, I will address how science and technology of the day influenced the writing of Milton and Pullman. In Milton's day, the advent of the telescope gave him a fascinating perspective on the universe {the astronomy of the day was an inspiration for his work. As for Pullman, the modern day contrivances of technology seem to influence exactly what he leaves out of Lyra's world, which in many ways is his ideal "back in my day" home.

At a second level, I will talk about technology as metaphors in the books. Why does God send his son on a chariot in the great battle for heaven? Why a metaphor from that age? What heroism does it represent? (and if heroes like Achilles are sons of the pagan gods, is that really the right symbol for the son? ...). Why do the scholars of Jordan keep electrical power out of the retiring room? Why does Lyra's world have Zeppelins, but no telephones? These decisions of which technology to include in the books seem to be significant in some sense.

At a third level, I will go back to science, and discuss the perspective on science that characters in both books offer. In Lyra's world, "experimental theology" is conducted at the behest, and at the discretion of the Church. This leads to a convoluting of the scientific method {only science the Church deems appropriate is discussed. Milton's Adam and Eve awake curious about the world {Adam satisfies his curiosity through revelation, through conversation with the angels of heaven. Eve's curiosity, not taken care of by divine revelation is left to her own methods. In many ways, Eve is a scientist of heaven, and yet, it is that very curiosity that led to the fall.

What is the message in all this? Is science itself evil? Milton seems to portray Eve as evil for her actions according to a scientific method {for unallowed curiosity. Pullman paints a somewhat different picture {science may not be evil in and of itself, but it can be manipulated for evil.

Technology, on the other hand, seems to be altogether bad. It is the devils who attempt more modern weapons only to be beaten by the son in God's chariot {a symbol of ancient times, not of modern technology. Pullman casts the subtle knife as the most of evil of technologies {allowing great triumphs at first, but with tremendous "pollution" of the worlds in the form of sceptars and holes into the abyss.

I will weave these two into a conclusion about the books' perspectives on science and technology and what that teaches us about the world today {hopefully answering these two questions: should we accept restrictions on science {are there questions we should not ask? Is technology inherently evil, or is that just a manifestation of its inappropriate use?

## References

[1] John Milton. Areopagitica: A speech for the liberty of unlicensed printing. *Order of the Long Parliament for the Regulating of Printing*, June 1643.

[2] Marjorie Nicolson. Milton and the telescope. *ELH*, 2(1):1 {32, April 1935.

[3] Joanna Picciotto. Reforming the garden: The experimentalist eden and paradise lost.

*ELH*, 72:23 {78, 2005.

[4] Naomi Wood. Paradise lost and found: Obedience, disobedience, and storytelling in c. s. lewis and philip pullman. *Children's Literature in Education*, 32(4):237 {259, 2001.

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