

# Study questions for *Paradise Lost*, Books V-X

Just to recall (and complete) a few points from last time: Milton's comments on "The Verse" suggest that for him, the task of modern civilization was to recover ancient liberties, poetic, religious, and political. He seems to locate in the past the kinds of freedom which Montaigne associates with the geographical or cultural space of America. Yet if Homer and Virgil are in this regard more "civilized" than their later counterparts, who wrote in rhyme for kings, they are nonetheless pagans -- condemned, in Milton's view, to worship gods he tells us were really demons. Thus, his recuperation of a freer past must also reinvent or improve on a past whose liberties coexisted with false belief.

Part of Milton's "improvement" was to reinvent the idea of the epic hero. Satan's massiveness might remind us of earlier heroes like Achilles or Ajax, whose physical strength and skill as warriors form a crucial part of their portfolio *as* heroes. Yet, as Milton reminds or tries to remind us in a variety of ways, that the metrics of epic heroism -- too dependent on size, strength, and fighting power -- aren't really rational or ethical. (Among these "reminders" are numerous references to new optical devices like the telescope, which made more apparent than ever the possibility of manipulating perceptions of size). In case we still haven't gotten the point by the end of book I, he has most of the representatives to the conclave in hell shrink themselves to the size of bees simply to get inside the building. (Notice that the bee-sized angels are delegates to a conference it's not clear they actually get to attend, since the real debate will take place "far within" the building between superior angels -- "big guys" like Satan and Beelzebub -- who have retained their full size; I, 792).

After all the attention to bodies and vivid, exciting physical action in books I-II, it's worth noting that we don't actually *see* God in book III, but only *hear* him, as a voice. His character is defined principally in terms of discourse, and his language moves characteristically and easily between the present tense ("look down there where Satan is heading towards the new earth I created") through the conditional ("he wants to see *if* he can destroy or pervert man") and into the future indicative ("and *shall* pervert; for man will hearken to his... lies"). No other character can use the future tense with such assurance, while Satan -- on his own within sight of Eden -- seems to have a great deal of trouble even deciding what he thinks ("what hast thou then or what to accuse, but heaven's free love... be then his love accursed... Nay cursed be thou"; IV, 67-71). This kind of back and forth feels quite familiar to most of us, while God's implacable certainty feels rather foreign. ...Milton's blindness.

## Book V

Under the influence of Satan, whispering in her ear as she sleeps, Eve dreams that she has eaten the forbidden fruit. Adam's answer includes both a theory of psychology (how the mind works), and a particular view of agency (how to assign responsibility, and thus assess guilt). What are they?

Adam is, of course, unaware that Eve's dream has been manipulated by Satan; but he may still be right in supposing that the dream's content bears some relationship to "our last evening's talk"

(V, 115). Presumably he refers to their discussion about the stars. What ingredients of this discussion served as material for the dream of disobedience which she narrates to Adam?

God feels pity for Adam and Eve as they pray and work, unaware of what is to come. Even knowing that they will fall, he performs "due diligence" by sending Raphael to make sure Adam understands both his freedom and his danger (V, 229-45). The next four books are largely comprised of a massive information download, in which Raphael will tell Adam (and indirectly, Eve) about Satan's rebellion (V), the war in Heaven (VI), the creation of the universe and the population of the earth (VII), with a pointed reminder of the single command not to eat from the tree of knowledge (VII, 542-47). Before the fire hose is opened up, however, they have lunch. This scene (V, 308-505), allows Milton to describe the gendered division of labor in Paradise (Adam seems notably unaware of how meal preparation works) and also to pose the interesting question, do angels eat? He not only allows Adam to ask this apparently trivial question, but has Raphael answer it at some length. Why?

Milton offers us Abdiel as an example of "new model" heroism. What does his heroism consist in, and how different is it from the kind exemplified by Satan, or for that matter the Tupi?

## **Book VII**

As he invokes Urania, Milton needs a guide – why? How do the unhappy fates of Bellerophon and Orpheus (the "Thracian bard") concern him here?

## **Book VIII**

Adam's last question to Raphael, at the opening of this book, very much resembles Eve's question to him in book IV. Both worry that the natural order of things as manifested in the heavens appears to be wasteful. (Do they have the same concerns about Eden, down on earth?). Having the stars shine when there is no one to see them is like leaving the lights on at night; having the sun and the other planets revolve around the earth takes a lot more energy than having the earth move instead. Adam has an additional concern about planetary motion -- namely, that the sun is "more noble" than the earth, so to have the sun revolve around the earth and "do work" for the earth's benefit inverts the natural order of things. What kinds of assumptions are bound up in this question? What do you make of Raphael's answer, and of his refusal to specify whether the universe is in fact geocentric, or heliocentric?

Although Adam has actually *not* been "cleared of doubt" (VIII, 179), he proclaims that he has been satisfied by Raphael's answer, which teaches him to live "the easiest way" and not "interrupt the sweet of life" with "perplexing thoughts". It sounds as he's just been told not to worry his pretty/human little head about complicated ideas. Was that Raphael's point?

Given the concerns Adam expresses to Raphael about his marriage, is Eve *already* disposing him to sin? Why has God provided him with such a challenging (or "transporting") situation, and what – besides "enormous bliss" is he meant to get out of his marriage?

## **Book IX**

In a scene beginning around line 205, Eve and Adam discuss (and finally argue over) the question of how to approach tending the garden. What does each of them feel to be most important about their work? *Why* are they actually working in Paradise?

When Satan comes upon Eve alone in the passage beginning in line 424, what effect does she have on him and why?

What are some of the arguments and ideas which Satan employs to tempt Eve in this scene beginning around line 531? What actually causes her to eat the forbidden fruit? Why does Adam follow suit? In what does their transgression actually consist? At this point in the text, knowledge and food have been co-identified in the fruit of the forbidden tree; in a key passage earlier on, Raphael tells Adam that "knowledge is as food" (VII, 126-130), that knowledge and food are inherently and not accidentally similar. Have a look at this passage, and think about how knowledge and food resemble each other.

## **Book X**

Having eaten from the tree, what do Adam and Eve now know that they did not before? How do they, respectively, respond to their changed condition -- in conversation with the Son, in soliloquy, with each other?