

II BA ENGLISH

BRITISH LITERATURE – BEN31

UNIT I – Poetry

Paradise Lost Book IV Excerpt – lines 131-287

Life of Milton

John Milton was born on December 9, 1608, in London. Milton's father was a prosperous merchant, despite the fact that he had been disowned by his family when he converted from Catholicism to Protestantism. Milton excelled in school, and went on to study privately in his twenties and thirties. In 1638 he made a trip to Italy, studying in Florence, Siena, and Rome, but felt obliged to return home upon the outbreak of civil war in England, in 1639. Upon his return from Italy, he began planning an epic poem, the first ever written in English. These plans were delayed by his marriage to Mary Powell and her subsequent desertion of him. In reaction to these events, Milton wrote a series of pamphlets calling for more leniency in the church's position on divorce. His argument brought him both greater publicity and angry criticism from the religious establishment in England. When the Second Civil War ended in 1648, with King Charles dethroned and executed, Milton welcomed the new parliament and wrote pamphlets in its support. After serving for a few years in a civil position, he retired briefly to his house in Westminster because his eyesight was failing. By 1652 he was completely blind. Despite his disability, Milton reentered civil service under the protectorate of Oliver Cromwell, the military general who ruled the British Isles from 1653 to 1658. Two years after Cromwell's death, Milton's worst fears were realized—the Restoration brought Charles II back to the throne, and the poet had to go into hiding to escape execution. However, he had already begun work on the great English epic which he had planned so long before: *Paradise Lost*. Now he had the opportunity to work on it in earnest. It was published in 1667, a year after the Great Fire of London. The greatness of Milton's epic was immediately recognized, and the admiring comments of the respected poets John Dryden and Andrew Marvell helped restore Milton to favor. He spent the ensuing years at his residence in Bunhill, still writing prolifically. Milton died at home on November 8, 1674. By all accounts, Milton led a studious and quiet life from his youth up until his death.

Education

Thanks to his father's wealth, young Milton got the best education money could buy. He had a private tutor as a youngster. As a young teenager he attended the prestigious St. Paul's Cathedral School. After he excelled at St. Paul's he entered college at Christ's College at Cambridge University. At the latter, he made quite a name for himself with his prodigious writing, publishing several essays and poems to high acclaim. After graduating with his master's degree in 1632, Milton was once again accommodated by his father. He was allowed to take over the family's estate near Windsor and pursue a quiet life of study. He spent 1632 to 1638—his mid to late twenties—reading the classics in Greek and Latin and learning new theories in mathematics and music. Milton became fluent in many foreign and classical languages, including Italian, Greek, Latin, Aramaic, Hebrew, French, Spanish, Anglo-Saxon, and spoke some Dutch as well. His knowledge of most of these languages was immense and precocious. He wrote

sonnets in Italian as a teenager. While a student at Cambridge, he was invited in his second year to address the first year students in a speech written entirely in Latin. After Cambridge, Milton continued a quiet life of study well through his twenties. By the age of thirty, Milton had made himself into one of the most brilliant minds of England, and one of the most ambitious poets it had ever produced.

Summary of Book IV

Satan lands atop Mount Niphates, just north of Paradise, the Garden of Eden. He becomes gripped with doubt about the task in front of him; seeing the beauty and innocence of Earth has reminded him of what he once was. He even briefly considers whether he could be forgiven if he repented. But Hell follows him wherever he goes—Satan is actually the embodiment of Hell. If he asks the Father for forgiveness, he knows it would be a false confession; he reasons that if he returned to Heaven, he still could not bear to bow down. Knowing redemption or salvation cannot be granted to him, he resolves to continue to commit acts of sin and evil. He does not notice that during his internal debate, he has inadvertently revealed his devilish nature. He is observed by Uriel, the archangel he tricked into pointing the way. Uriel notices his conflicting facial expressions, and since all cherubs have permanent looks of joy on their faces, Uriel concludes that Satan cannot be a cherub. Satan now approaches Eden, which is surrounded by a great thicket wall. He easily leaps over it like a wolf entering a sheep's pen. Inside he sees an idyllic world, with all varieties of animals and trees. He can see the tallest of the trees, the Tree of Life—and next to it, the forbidden Tree of Knowledge. He perches himself on the Tree of Life, disguised as a cormorant, a large sea bird. Finally, he notices two creatures walking erect among the other animals. They walk naked without shame, and work pleasantly, tending the garden. Satan's pain and envy intensifies as he sees this new beautiful race, created after he and his legions fell. He could have loved them, but now, his damnation will be revenged through their destruction. He continues to watch them, and the man, Adam, speaks. He tells Eve not to complain of the work they have to do but to be obedient to God, since God has given them so many blessings, and only one constraint: they must not eat the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. Eve agrees wholeheartedly, and they embrace. Eve tells Adam of her first awakening as she came to life and how she wondered who and where she was. She found a river and followed it upstream to its source. Her path led to a clear, smooth lake, and Eve looked into the lake, seeing an image in its surface, which she soon discovers is her own. She hears a voice explaining to her that she was made out of Adam, and with him she will become the mother of the human race. Overlooking Adam and Eve, Satan sees his opportunity. If the Father has given them a rule to follow, then they might be persuaded to break it. He leaves the two for a while, going off to learn more from other angels. Meanwhile, Uriel comes before the Archangel Gabriel, at the gate of Eden, and tells him about the shape-changing spirit that he saw from the hilltop. They both suspect that it might be one of the fallen ones. Gabriel promises that if the spirit is in the garden, they will find it by morning. Around this time, Adam and Eve finish their day's work. They go to their leafy bower, praising God and each other for their blissful life, and after a short prayer, they lie together—making love without sin, because lust had not yet tainted their natures. Night falls, and Gabriel sends search parties into the Garden. Two of his angels find Satan, disguised as a toad, whispering into the ear of Eve as she sleeps. They pull him before Gabriel, who recognizes him, and demands to know what he is doing in Paradise. Satan at first feigns innocence, as they have no proof that he means harm. But Gabriel knows him to be a liar, and threatens to drag him back to Hell. Enraged by this threat, Satan prepares to fight him. The two square off for a decisive battle, but a sign from Heaven—the appearance in the sky of a pair of golden scales—stops them. Satan recognizes the sign as meaning he could not win, and flies off. Analysis

Analysis

As **Book IV** opens, Milton presents Satan as a character deeply affected by envy and despair. Earlier in the poem, Satan seems perfectly confident in his rebellion and evil plans. His feeling of despair at the beauty of Paradise temporarily impairs this confidence. While in Hell, Satan tells himself that his mind could make its own Heaven out of Hell, but now he realizes that the reverse is true. As close to Heaven as he is, he cannot help but feel out of place, because he brings Hell with him wherever he goes. For Satan, Hell is not simply a place, but rather a state of mind brought on by a lack of connection with God. Satan's despondent recognition of this fact corresponds with what Milton sees as the worst sin of all: despair. If even this beautiful new world cannot make Satan forget Hell, then he can never hope to seek forgiveness and return to Heaven. As the Bible says, the one sin that cannot be forgiven is despairing of forgiveness; if one cannot even ask for mercy, it cannot be granted. Satan realizes this, and decides that the only course of action is to enjoy his own wickedness, and pursue it with all his strength. Milton preempts the crucial question of whether Satan could have successfully repented back in Book III. There, God said that he would give grace to humankind because Satan would prompt humankind's sin. But he would not help the fallen angels, and especially Satan, because their sin came out of themselves and from no other source. Satan's continuing process of degradation is reflected in his use of progressively despicable, lowly disguises. Through these first three books of *Paradise Lost*, Satan's physical presence takes many different forms. In Book I, he is a monumental figure so large that the largest tree would seem a paltry wand in his hand. In Book III, he disguises himself as a cherub, but his inner turmoil ultimately ruins this benign-seeming appearance. Satan is later described as leaping over Eden's fence like a wolf into a sheep's pen. While he does not exactly take the form of a wolf, he continues to be compared to and associated with wild, predatory animals. He takes the shape of a bird atop the Tree of Life, then morphs into a toad to whisper temptation into Eve's ear. Satan's shapes become progressively less impressive and stately. Once an imposing figure, he shrinks himself to become a lesser angel, then a mere bird, and finally a much less appealing animal: a toad. In this book, we are presented with Eve's first memories of awakening to consciousness, though we have to wait until Book VIII to see Adam's first memories. Eve's account subtly underscores her distance from God and need for guidance. She awakens in shade rather than daylight, suggesting her separation from the light of God's truth. Almost immediately, she finds herself captivated and deceived by an image—her reflection in the water, which she does not recognize as merely an image. She admits that she would probably still be by the water's edge, fixated there in vain desire, if it wasn't for God's calling her away. This image recalls the story of Narcissus from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, a story that Renaissance poets such as Petrarch used to show that erotic desire is based on visual images that are inherently vain and deceptive. Milton's allusion to Narcissus makes a similar point: human beings, especially women, need God's help to escape the trap of desire based on images. Significantly, it is the voice rather than the visual image of God that calls her away. Also noteworthy in this context is the fact that in his first speech to Eve, God says that Eve is herself an image—the reflection of Adam. After God leads Eve away from her reflection, she first encounters Adam under a platan tree. Platan is the Greek name for plane tree, and by giving the name of the tree in Greek rather than English, Milton alludes to Plato, the Greek philosopher, whose name is etymologically linked with that of the plane tree. The most well-known of Plato's arguments is the thesis that reality consists of ideal forms that can only be perceived by the intellect, in contrast with the deceptive shades or reflections of these ideal forms that human beings perceive in everyday life. Milton associates the platan tree, or Plato, with Adam, suggesting that he is closer to the ideal forms or essences of things, whereas Eve is more part of the world

of images, shade, and illusion, and is led away from illusions only reluctantly. Milton's presentation of Adam and Eve was controversial in his time. Milton paints an idyllic picture of an innocent, strong, and intelligent Adam, whereas Christian tradition more typically emphasizes Adam's basically sinful nature. The Puritans, like many other Christians, viewed the sexual act as inherently sinful—a necessary evil that cannot be avoided precisely because man has fallen. Milton, in contrast, makes a point of noting that Adam and Eve enjoy pure, virtuous sexual pleasure without sin: they love, but do not lust. Milton implies that not only is sex not evil, but that demonizing it goes against God's will. He persuasively argues that God mandates procreation, and that anyone who would advocate complete abstinence (as St. Paul does in the New Testament) would be an enemy to God and God's magnificent creation. Furthermore, Eve's story about seeing her reflection in the water hints that her vanity may become a serious flaw—and weakness—later on. Her curiosity is sparked by her lack of understanding about who she is and where she is. She traces the river back to its source just as she wishes to trace herself to her source, through emotional self-reflection, in search of answers to her difficult questions. Also, her willingness to listen and believe the voice she hears, which tells her about her identity, also foreshadows that she will trust another voice she will hear later—Satan's. Milton's presentation of Adam and Eve is controversial in our own time because the discourse between Adam and Eve strikes many modern audiences as misogynistic. Milton portrays Adam as her superior because he has a closer relationship to God. The idea that Adam was created to serve God only, and Eve is created to serve both God and Adam, illustrates Milton's belief that women were created to serve men. The narrator remarks of Adam and Eve that their difference in quality was apparent—"their sex not equal seemed" (IV.296). Milton implies that she is weaker in mind as well as body than Adam. Eve herself freely admits her secondary and subordinate role. When she explains her dependence on him she explains to Adam that she is created because of him and is lost without him. Having Eve herself possess and verbalize these misogynistic, submissive views adds a peculiar and somewhat disturbing power to the conversation. Milton's views on the relations between men and women were certainly common, if not dogmatic, in his time. Milton's reading of the Bible dictated that in marriage the woman is to obey the man, and that he is her ruler. The relationship between Adam and Eve, though unequal, remains perfectly happy, because they both in the end live in praise of God. Eve accepts her role as Adam does his own, and God loves both equally.

Explanation

The excerpt (lines 131-287) describes the beauty of Eden gardens. Satan reaches paradise with the intention to make Adam and Eve disobey God. He stands at the gate and takes a good look at the garden. Paradise stands on a steep hill and is surrounded by wilderness. It is so high that anyone who looks at it will understand that they are not welcome there. There grew tall trees like cedar, pine, fir and branching palm. The enclosure of the garden had one set of greenery above the other. Over and above the enclosure of wild plants and trees appeared the walls of Paradise. It was covered with vine of all sort. Above that wall were seen trees with fruits of brilliant gold and other beautiful colours. They colors were so bright and shiny that even the rainbow looked dull before them when the sun shined on them. Then Satan comes to feel the pure air of the garden. The air is so pure that it is capable of driving away any negative feeling that anyone might have in their hearts except the feeling of despair. Milton states this exception with Satan in mind. Having banished to the underworld forever by God, all that Satan feels is hopelessness. The air also carried the sweet odors of the garden. Milton here compares the wind of Eden to the winds coming from Arabia. Traders who are travelling around Cape of Hope and Mozambic caught the wind coming from Saba filled with all the smell of the Arabia. They change plans and go to Arabia to buy the

spices. In the same fashion, Satan smells the wind. Here Milton uses the story of Asmodeus to tell us beforehand that Satan will not be successful in his mission. Like Asmodeus was driven away from Sara by Tobias with the help of the angels, Satan will also be driven away by Gabriel. Satan takes his tour of the garden slowly and observing it closely. There is no gap or space for any human or animal to break into the garden. He finds only one gate looking towards the east. Satan ignores the entrance and leaps over the huge enclosures and lands inside the garden. Milton here compares his act with that of a wolf. Like the wolf which keeps watch of the herd of sheep comes stealthily in the night to take his prey, Satan had leaped over the gates and enclosures of the garden with the intention to corrupt Adam and Eve. Satan is like a thief breaking into the house of a wealthy person at night even though the doors of the house are barred. Milton gives another comparison here which shows his righteousness and disdain for corruption. He compares Satan's entry into the garden with that the entry of those into the church with only ambition in mind. Satan like a thief enters the garden and sat on the Tree of Life in the form of a cormorant. Sitting on the Tree of Life, Satan is plotting of death. He doesn't understand anything about the Tree of Life. Only God knows the true value of the tree. Satan is a person who will refuse to the good in front of him. All he can do is to pervert the truth "To worst abuse, or to thir meanest use". From the top of the Tree of Life, he takes a good look at the garden. The garden is a Heaven on Earth. Eden stretched from Auran lands in the East to the Royal Towers of Seleucia somewhere near Babylon to Telassar which is a country believed to be near Assyria. Milton having established the location of Eden goes on to describe the virtues of the Tree of life and the forbidden Tree of Knowledge. The Tree of knowledge is also called "Our Death" by Milton. He says "Knowledge of Good bought dear by knowing ill. " In the southern side of Eden ran a large river which on reaching a hill, instead of changing the direction of its flow, went underneath and emerged in the opposite side and joined a fresh fountain which was watering a mountain garden. The entire region was one of nature's bounty beyond human comprehension. After this garden with mountains and beautiful flowers with nectar was a region which was shady. The lights found it difficult to pierce into the region there. This place contained many trees with sweet odours emanating from them and with golden fruits. This place looked as if the Hesperian fables had come true. This place contained flowers of all colours and the rose bushes here didn't have thorns. On the other sides were "Grots and Caves" which provided cool shade. There were vines covering the area. In addition, the place has a waterfall which fell down and became a lake. The banks of the lake is crowned with myrtle. Birds were singing happily. The place looked as if it universal nature, the God of the shepherds pan has filled the whole of earth with spring eternally. The three sister Gods of merriment, Graces danced there. When compared to this place, the garden of Enna where Prosperine, daughter of Ceres was gathering flower when she was taken to the underworld by Dis and the beautiful grove Daphne near the river Orontes and the Castilian spring which was used for divination by the priestess of Apollo are nothing. The place could not be compared even to the Nyseian Island where Old Cham, the fourth son of Noah hid his mistress Amalthea and her son Bacchus to guard her from the jealousy of Rhea his wife. Even Mount Amara where the Abassin kings hid their children which was also called paradise can meet the beauty of Eden. Satan looked at all these beauty with no happiness at heart. Milton says "the Fiend/Saw undelighted all delight". Milton might have said this because having banished to hell Satan could never feel happiness in his heart.

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'The Tyger' William Blake (1757-1827)

Tyger, Tyger, burning bright,
In the forests of the night;
What immortal hand or eye,
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?
In what distant deeps or skies.
Burnt the fire of thine eyes?
On what wings dare he aspire?
What the hand, dare seize the fire?
And what shoulder, & what art,
Could twist the sinews of thy heart?
And when thy heart began to beat,
What dread hand? & what dread feet?
What the hammer? what the chain,
In what furnace was thy brain?
What the anvil? what dread grasp,
Dare its deadly terrors clasp!
When the stars threw down their spears
And water'd heaven with their tears:
Did he smile his work to see?
Did he who made the Lamb make thee?
Tyger Tyger burning bright,
In the forests of the night:
What immortal hand or eye,
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?

William Blake (1757 – 1827) is poet, painter and print maker. Though he was largely unrecognized during his life time, today he is chiefly remembered as a pre-romantic poet. Beginning in the 1740s pre-romanticism marked a shift from the Neo-classical “grandeur, austerity, nobility, idealization, and elevated sentiments towards simpler, more sincere, and more natural forms of expression.” The poem “Tyger” stands as the most appropriate example of pre-romantic poetry. The poem is written in six short stanzas of four lines each. Of these, the sixth stanza is a repetition of the first stanza. It follows an end rhyme pattern of aabb, ccdd... The chief emotion aroused by the poem is wonder, and the object of wonder is a single animal tiger. All these factors make it the best example of pre-romantic simplicity and anticipates the poems of the romantic age.

“The Tyger” appeared in the collection Songs of Experience published in the year 1794. It is often contrasted with “The Lamb” another poem by Blake which appeared in the collection Songs of Innocence (1789). ‘The Tyger’ is arguably the most famous poem written by Blake. The poem’s opening line, ‘TygerTyger, burning bright’ is among the most famous opening lines in English poetry. Framed as a series of questions, ‘Tyger Tyger, burning bright’ (as the poem is also often known), in summary, sees Blake’s speaker wondering about the creator responsible for such a fearsome creature as

the tiger. The fiery imagery used throughout the poem conjures the tiger's aura of danger: fire equates to fear. Don't get too close to the tiger, Blake's poem seems to say, otherwise you'll get burnt. The first stanza and sixth stanza, alike in every respect except for the shift from 'Could frame' to 'Dare frame', frame the poem, asking about the immortal creator responsible for the beast. The second stanza continues the fire imagery established by the image of the tiger 'burning bright', with talk of 'the fire' of the creature's eyes, and the notion of the creator fashioning the tiger out of pure fire, as if he (or He) had reached his hand into the fire and moulded the creature from it. (The image succeeds, of course, because of the flame-like appearance of a tiger's stripes.) It must have been a god who played with fire who made the tiger. In the third and fourth stanzas, Blake introduces another central metaphor, explicitly drawing a comparison between God and a blacksmith. It is as if the Creator made the blacksmith in his forge, hammering the base materials into the living and breathing ferocious creature which now walks the earth. The fifth stanza is more puzzling, but 'stars' have long been associated with human destiny (as the root of 'astrology' highlights). For Kathleen Raine, this stanza can be linked with another of William Blake's works, *The Four Zoas*, where the phrase which we also find in 'The Tyger', 'the stars threw down their spears', also appears. There it is the godlike creator of the universe (Urizen in Blake's mythology) who utters it; Urizen's fall, and the fall of the stars and planets, are what brought about the creation of life on Earth in Blake's Creation story. When the Creator fashioned the Tyger, Blake asks, did he look with pride upon the animal he had created? How might we analyse 'The Tyger'? What does it mean? The broader point is one that many Christian believers have had to grapple with: if God is all-loving, why did he make such a fearsome and dangerous animal? We can't easily fit the tiger into the 'All Things Bright and Beautiful' view of Christian creation. As Blake himself asks, 'Did he who made the Lamb make thee?' In other words, did God make the gentle and meek animals, but also the destructive and ferocious ones? Presumably the question is rhetorical; the real question-behind-the-question is why. (This might help to explain Blake's reference to 'fearful symmetry': he is describing not only the remarkable patterns on the tiger's skin and fur which humans have learned to go in fear of, but the 'symmetry' between the innocent lamb on the one hand and the fearsome tiger on the other. ('Fearful' means 'fearsome' here, confusingly.) Indeed, we might take such an analysis further and see the duality between the lamb and the tiger as being specifically about the two versions of God in Christianity: the vengeful and punitive Old Testament God, Yahweh, and the meek and forgiving God presented in the New Testament. What bolsters such an interpretation is the long-established associations between the lamb and Jesus Christ. The tiger, whilst not a biblical animal, embodies the violent retribution and awesome might of Yahweh in the Old Testament. But none of these readings quite settles down into incontrovertible fact. 'The Tyger' remains, like the creature itself, an enigma, a fearsome and elusive beast.

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