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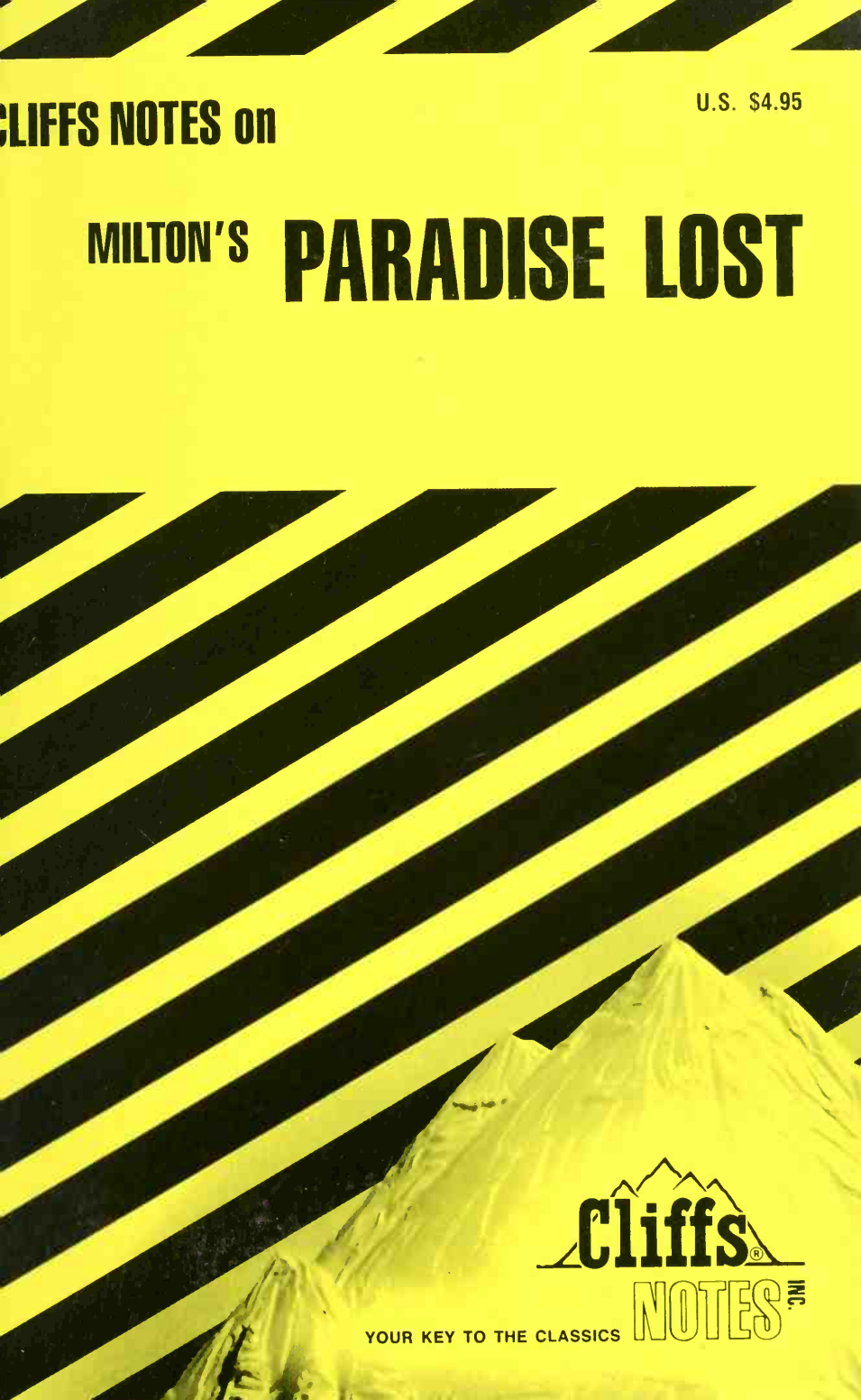
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MILTON'S PARADISE LOST



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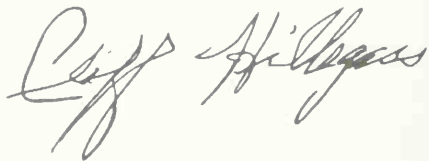
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PARADISE LOST

NOTES

including

- *Milton's Life and Work*
- *Brief Synopsis*
- *List of Characters*
- *Summaries and Commentaries*
- *Review Questions*
- *Selected Bibliography*

by

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Paradise Lost Notes

MILTON'S LIFE AND WORK

John Milton was born in 1608 into the small family of a fairly well-to-do London scrivener, a combination of lawyer, money-lender, and real estate agent, who was also a composer of some reputation. The poet got along well with his family; his father, he wrote, was generous with him and "destined me from a child to the pursuits of Literature." In his youth he was tutored privately and sent to the excellent St. Paul's School, adjoining the famous cathedral in the center of London. At an early age he distinguished himself in the study of languages (he was reading even Hebrew before he went to college) and in the translation and composition of poetry.

When he was seventeen, Milton went to Christ's College at Cambridge University. His experiences there were not especially happy at first since the serious young scholar revolted against what he thought was the irrelevant medieval scholastic curriculum of Cambridge and did not get along well with his first tutor. After a period of adjustment during which he left school temporarily and was given a new tutor, Milton seems to have made a number of good friends. He graduated from Christ's an M.A. with some distinction in 1632. By the time he finished he was interested in classical literature and history, modern history, ancient and modern languages, the study of the Bible and Christian religion, mathematics, and music, and, with his father's support, he retired to their house in the country to continue his study on his own. With his degree he might have become an Anglican minister, but the Anglican church under Charles I and Archbishop Laud, he felt, had become too corrupt and too tied up with politics.

Before he was thirty, Milton had written his famous pastoral elegy "Lycidas," on the death of a poet friend at Cambridge, and *Comus*, a masque or short musical play, as an entertainment for the new Lord President of Wales, as well as a number of other short works, mostly on Greek or Roman models.

After more than five years of continuous study, again with his father's support, Milton went abroad in 1639. He was especially anxious

to visit Italy; he spoke Italian like a native, knew the ancient and modern histories of the cities he visited, and he made friends with literate Italians everywhere, spending much time in Rome, Venice and especially Florence, the center of Italian Renaissance art and literature. He was especially interested in Italian music, such as the emergent form of opera practiced by the Venetian Claudio Monteverdi; literature, such as the epic poem *Jerusalem Delivered*, by Torquato Tasso; and science. While in Florence he visited the aging astronomer Galileo, at that time imprisoned in his home by the Inquisition.

In his travels Milton remained a Protestant Englishman and his freedom of speech in Catholic Italy seems to have almost gotten him in trouble several times. Nevertheless, when he came back to England in 1639, Milton felt a deep attachment for Italian culture. His best friend at St. Paul's and Cambridge had been Charles Diodati, an Anglo-Italian whose uncle, the famous theologian and translator of the Bible, Giovanni (or Jean) Diodati, Milton visited in Geneva in 1639 on his way back to England.

Probably from his years at Cambridge and certainly soon after he returned from Italy, Milton had the idea that he should write a long poem that would use his great education and glorify his country. He was not sure what the subject might be but he had the examples of Edmund Spenser's long romance, *The Faerie Queene* (1595), in English, and the long romantic epics, Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* and Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered* in Italian to guide him. He had practised with many shorter and often classical forms of poetry such as the sonnet, the pastoral elegy, and the ode, but all these, he felt, were preparation for some master work, perhaps an epic poem to rival the *Iliad* or *Odyssey* of Homer, or Virgil's *Aeneid*.

When Milton returned from Italy he had cut short his travels to some extent because of religious and political problems at home, and not long after he returned and had set himself up tutoring in London, he began writing political pamphlets against the corruption of the bishops in the Anglican church. Church officials, he felt, were often given positions out of political preferment rather than spiritual strength, and the Church of England was too closely tied to the king. Gradually, Milton became more sympathetic to the many causes of Puritanism, among which were the reform of the modern church based on the "purity" of the very ancient Christian church, and the consequent reform of the spiritual life of each person in England based on solid personal knowledge of the Bible.

In 1642 Milton married Mary Powell, the daughter of a Royalist (sympathizer with Charles I), just as the Civil War was about to begin. She was considerably younger than he when he brought her from the country to live with him in London, and she left him soon after to return to her parents, whether for political, family, or personal reasons, no one knows. In several years, however, she was to return, and to live out her life with him, bearing him five children.

Before Charles I was beheaded in 1649 Milton wrote a number of pamphlets, all centered on the problem of preserving individual liberty, from the liberty to obtain a civil divorce on the grounds of incompatibility (a very unpopular idea at the time) to the liberty of publishing without pre-publication censorship. Milton wrote three tracts on divorce; *Of Education* (1644), a defense of liberal and unscholastic training in a combination of high school and college; and his most famous tract, *Areopagitica* (1644), which is a defense of the liberty of the press. The ideas of Milton, generally accepted today, were considered radical at his time. He was nicknamed, in scorn, "Milton the divorcer."

In 1646 the first collection of Milton's poetry was published, including *Comus* and "Lycidas," and "On the Morning of Christ's Nativity," as well as poems in Latin, Greek, and Italian, but it met with no great critical response.

When Charles was defeated and finally beheaded by Parliament in 1649, Milton promptly wrote a defense of the right of Parliament to execute a bad king. In what was to become Oliver Cromwell's Commonwealth, Milton was given the post of diplomatic correspondent, writing letters to foreign countries explaining the positions of the young government. Among Milton's associates in this era were Andrew Marvell, who was to become a great poet and was one of Milton's close friends, and the man who was to be poet laureate under Charles II, John Dryden.

Milton became the scholarly defender of the moral right of the Commonwealth to execute the hereditary monarch and to rule England without a king. As a public figure he was often attacked, but he defended his own character quite well in his prose pamphlets such as his *Defense of the English People* (written in Latin in 1651), and attacked his attackers viciously and effectively.

Writing these pamphlets was difficult and often very taxing scholarly work and Milton gradually became blind, until in 1652 his eyes could only perceive the difference between light and darkness. His

wife Mary died in that year, probably in childbirth, and his only son, the baby John, outlived her only about a month. Milton was relieved of some of his duties because of his blindness, but he kept writing on various projects, including a history of Britain and a tract in Latin, *The Christian Doctrine*, which would try to summarize all his beliefs in Christianity within a systematic and coherent framework.

Milton married Katherine Woodcock in 1656, but she lived only two years after the marriage. Showing an unusual attachment to marriage for a "divorcer," Milton married again, Elizabeth Minshull, in 1663. The nurse of his old age, she was to outlive him for some years.

In 1660 the Commonwealth was dissolved and the son of Charles I, Charles II, was brought back to the throne in triumph. Because of Charles' liberality and the intercession of his friends, Milton's life was spared and he was not imprisoned, even though he had written on the side of those who had executed Charles' father and was classified as a regicide.

By 1665 Milton had completed the great epic that his whole life had prepared him to write, and in 1667 *Paradise Lost* was published. It had been planned at least since the early 1640's, and had begun as a drama on the story of the Fall of Man in Genesis, a very popular literary subject in that era. Milton decided instead to make it an epic which would be so broad in scope that it would "justify the ways of God to men," and would glorify his country, his language, and his own brand of Christianity. To write it he developed his unique epic language, which is often called the "grand style," out of English combined with the many forms, idioms, and word meanings of the other languages he had studied. He had dictated the epic to various amanuenses after he went blind, and the whole poem seems to have the concentrated quality of an orally composed epic like the *Iliad*. At the same time Milton was conscious of his competition with earlier classical, medieval, and Renaissance epics, and he worked to make *Paradise Lost* the greatest of its form, taking more care with his epic invocations and similes than did Homer, writing about more noble and less warlike characters than did Virgil, and giving his epic a Protestant and humanistic slant that would differentiate it from the Catholic Dante's *Divine Comedy*. He also rejected war as a central subject worthy of the epic and thereby differed from most of his predecessors, including Homer and Tasso. Unlike Spenser, he rejected all of what he called the "tinsel Trappings" of romance, all the chivalrous knights and ladies, and replaced them with the more substantial and solid characters of Adam and Eve.

Paradise Lost was published first in ten books, but in the second edition of 1674 Milton divided Books VII and X into two books each and thereby gave the epic the conventional twelve book form, as did Homer and Virgil.

In 1671 *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes* were published together. The idea of writing *Paradise Regained* may have been suggested to Milton by one of his friends, who said to him: "Thou hast written much of *Paradise Lost*, but what of Paradise found?" This brief epic, in four books, is concerned with the temptation of Christ in the wilderness by Satan and Christ's final renunciation of the Devil. Milton's play, *Samson Agonistes*, is the story of the final struggle and death of the Old Testament hero. Patterned after Greek tragedy, the poetic drama pictures the blind Samson's struggle with his doting father, his unfaithful wife, his taunting enemies, and his own conscience, until he brings God's wrath down on the Philistines, killing himself with them.

Milton died quietly on November 8, 1674, after living out a peaceful and cheerful old age in the midst of Restoration London. His last wife and two daughters of Mary Powell survived him. He was buried in London near his father in the small church of St. Giles, Cripplegate, which is still standing. At his death his literary reputation was growing steadily (he was already fairly well known politically), so that by 1688 *Paradise Lost* was published in a quite expensive illustrated edition for wealthy subscribers only, and by 1700 was already considered by intelligent literary men as a classic of English literature, the greatest epic in the English language.

BRIEF SYNOPSIS

Milton has written his own summaries of each book in the "Arguments" (*argumentum* in Latin means *subject matter*) to be found at the beginning of each book in any modern edition. Those were added by Milton between the first and second editions at the request of early readers. The whole subject, Milton says, is announced at the beginning of the poem: it will be man's disobedience and the loss of Paradise. The primary cause of all this is Satan, who had rebelled against God with a huge number of angels and had been cast out of Heaven into Hell before Adam and Eve were created.

Beginning according to the epic formula "in the midst of things," the epic tells first of the fallen angels in Hell. Satan informs them of a

prophecy about a new creature named man and suggests that the fallen angels call a council. A council hall, Pandemonium, is built by magic, and Satan begins a debate on the subject of how to recover Heaven. After some discussion it is decided that Satan should go alone to find the newly created world and man. With some difficulty he flies upward, gets through Hell's gates, maintained by Sin and Death, and is directed by Chaos to the new world.

Meanwhile God, sitting on his throne in Heaven, shows his Son the figure of Satan flying through the air, and predicts Satan's success in corrupting man. Man is created free and could stand, but will fall of his own free will. Because he is seduced by Satan, however, man will be given grace, if someone in Heaven will offer to die for man's sin. The Son volunteers to die for man and the angels join together to sing His praise in hymns.

As this is happening, Satan has flown to the rim of our universe, sees in passing the Limbo of Vanity, and comes to the orb of the sun, where he changes himself into the form of a lower angel and, pretending to be enthusiastic about finding man, tricks the angel of the sun, Uriel, into giving him directions. He finds his way to Mt. Niphates, within sight of Eden, and alights there.

Satan is almost overcome by doubts and passions as he thinks about what he wants to do, but at length he confirms himself in his evil purpose and goes into Eden. When he first sees Adam and Eve he is awestruck by their beauty but he listens to their conversation and discovers that the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge is forbidden to them. This, he decides, will be his means of seducing them. Meanwhile, Uriel has discovered Satan's fraud and has warned Gabriel at the Gate of Paradise that some evil spirit has escaped from Hell, and Gabriel and his fellow angels begin a search. After Adam and Eve have said their evening prayer and gone to sleep, the angels discover Satan at Eve's ear, tempting her in a dream. Satan is brought to Gabriel for questioning and answers him scornfully until he sees a sign from Heaven showing his destiny and he flies out of Paradise.

When Eve awakes she tells Adam her dream, which disturbs him, but he comforts her and they go out for their daily work. God sends Raphael to tell Adam everything necessary for him to know of his position with respect to God and to warn him of Satan's presence. Adam sees Raphael coming in the distance and goes out to welcome him, then Raphael sits down to a dinner prepared by Eve and tells Adam of

Satan's revolt and the War in Heaven. In that war the Son ultimately has had the victory and glory, driving Satan and his huge army over Heaven's wall and into the deep.

After Satan and his legions have been expelled from Heaven, Raphael says, God sends the Son to create the world in six days while the angels celebrate the act of creation in hymns.

Adam asks Raphael questions about the celestial bodies and Raphael suggests that man does not need to know as much as God. Adam, changing the subject, tells Raphael what he knows of his own creation and his first meeting with Eve. Raphael listens, then warns Adam again and leaves.

Night falls and Satan returns to Paradise and enters the sleeping body of the serpent. Next morning, as they prepare to go to their work, Eve suggests that she and Adam divide their labors and work in different places in order to get more done. Adam argues against this suggestion, maintaining that the Enemy would like to find her alone, but Eve persists until he finally gives in and lets her go.

The serpent finds Eve alone and subtly flatters her at first, then convinces her that he has eaten the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge and gained wisdom and speech. Gradually she is persuaded that he is telling the truth and she eats. Pleased with the intoxicating sensation of eating the forbidden fruit, she hesitates for awhile before giving Adam her new-found knowledge, then tells him the same story the serpent told her. Out of love for her, Adam eats the fruit too, and the effects of the sin are immediately apparent: Adam and Eve discover that they are naked and they begin to quarrel and accuse one another.

The guardian angels leave Paradise after God has told them that they could not have prevented the Fall. God sends the Son to judge Adam and Eve, but He also clothes them out of pity.

At the gates of Hell, Sin and Death by a miraculous empathy with Satan feel that they are due to make their appearance on earth. To make the way easier they build a broad highway or bridge over Chaos. As they prepare to go to Earth they meet Satan, proud of his success, heading back to Hell. At Pandemonium, however, where he expects to be cheered, Satan is greeted by a universal hiss; in token of his act he and the fallen angels are made into serpents.

In Heaven God foretells the final victory of the Son over Sin and Death, while on Earth Adam and Eve are bitterly grieving over their fate and accusing each other of their sin. Eve suggests suicide, but Adam reminds her that her offspring (Jesus) will eventually overcome and wipe out their sin.

The Son carries the prayers of the repenting Adam and Eve up to God and intercedes for them. God accepts the prayers but sends Michael with a band of cherubim to drive the pair out of Eden. Adam has noticed certain signs that they will have to leave Paradise and goes out to meet Michael when he comes. Michael takes Adam up to a high hill and prophesies what will happen to man before the Flood brings an end to the world. Michael surveys all human history, pointing out to Adam the transmission of the seed which will eventually lead to the Christ. Although the history is bleak, Adam is comforted by the promise of the seed as he descends the hill with Michael. He awakens Eve, who has been given the same information in a dream, and Michael, taking them both by the hand, leads them out of Paradise (now guarded by cherubim and a fiery sword), which they will never be able to enter again.

LIST OF CHARACTERS

The following characters are the most important in the epic. Numbers in parentheses indicate the book and line in which the character first appears. Most of those listed appear throughout *Paradise Lost*.

Abdiel (V, 805)

The one angel faithful to God among the legions of those who follow Satan. By defying Satan and rebuking him in the War in Heaven, he becomes an example of free service to God.

Adam (III, 285)

The general father of mankind, the first and "goodliest" (IV, 322) of men, made out of "earth's hallowed mold" (V, 321), capable before the Fall of talking with God and eating with angels, tall, handsome, and erect in stature. In Book VIII tells the story of his asking for and receiving Eve from God, but is rebuked by Raphael for all but worshipping his wife. His duties in Eden include naming the animals and helping tend the garden, but he also has the duty of protecting Eve, which he

violates by letting her go out alone in Book IX. After the Fall Adam becomes more recognizably human and argues bitterly with Eve but at the end of Book XII the couple is reconciled and leave Paradise hand in hand.

Beelzebub (I, 81)

The second most powerful fallen angel; Satan's chief accomplice and spokesman in the demonic council in Book II. Speaks last and convinces the fallen angels to follow Satan's way of thinking.

Belial (I, 490)

The most dissolute and sophisticated of the fallen angels who speak in the debate in Book II. His speech is smooth and seems reasonable but is really for "ignoble ease" (II, 227) rather than for honorable action.

Chaos (I, 543)

A personification (which Milton borrowed from mythology) of the physical and mental state of disorder or anarchy, a part of which God used when He created the universe. Consort of Night and king of the region of disorder between Hell and Heaven.

Death (II, 666)

Personification of the death brought about by Adam's sin and part of the allegory of Satan, Sin, and Death. The son of Satan, incestuously conceived of Satan's daughter Sin; also the incestuous lover of his mother. A horrible shadowy figure with many different shapes in which all the fears of mankind may be seen. Helps build the highway from Hell's gates to man's universe. Holds a dart with which he kills man. Will be defeated by Christ along with Satan and Sin at Judgment Day.

Eve (I, 36)

The general mother of all mankind, more beautiful than all women born after her, made by God from Adam's rib to be a companion for him and to bear him children. Weaker morally and physically than Adam but ideally beautiful. Has a dream in Book IV caused by Satan, which foreshadows the Fall. Her chief duty is loyalty and obedience to her husband, but she also helps tend the Garden of Eden. Argues with Adam and is allowed to leave his side; consequently tempted by Satan in the

serpent, is deceived into believing his lies, and eats the forbidden fruit. Using the same arguments convinces Adam to eat, too. Argues bitterly with Adam but is the first to repent and seek reconciliation, and leaves Paradise hand in hand with her husband.

Gabriel (IV, 549)

Angel in charge of guarding the Gate of Paradise, searches out Satan and catches him at Eve's ear. Second to Michael in military rank in Heaven. Will later announce to Mary the coming of Jesus.

God (I, 12)

The omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent king who created and now rules the universe. Unapproachable, veiled in light ("God is light," I John 1:5), incapable of being seen or fully understood by man after the Fall. Infinitely wise, reasonable, and good. Certain of His characteristics (creation, universal love, judgment, and mercy) are demonstrated to man through inspiration and through His Son who becomes a man and dies for man's sin. Sits on an unshakable throne on the top of his mountain in the highest Heaven.

Lucifer

See Satan.

Mammon (I, 678)

Called "the least erected Spirit that fell/ From Heav'n" (I, 679-680) because in Heaven he was always looking down at the golden pavement rather than up to God. Characterized by greed for tangible wealth. Finds the underground precious minerals out of which Pandemonium is built in Book I. Argues in the debate in Book II for remaining in Hell and exploiting its wealth, rather than warring on God.

Michael (II, 294)

Chief of the angelic armies, carries a mighty sword into battle against God's enemies in the War in Heaven. After the Fall descends to tell Adam of the future history of mankind. Contrasted with Raphael, who is less stern.

Moloch (I, 392)

Fallen angel mentioned in Book I as a “horrid King” to whom children are sacrificed. In the demonic debate in Book II he advocates open war against God.

Mulciber (I, 740)

The fallen angel (whom Milton borrowed from classical mythology) who is the architect of Pandemonium in Book I.

Raphael (V, 221)

Called the “affable arch-angel” and the “sociable spirit.” Makes a friendly visit to Adam and Eve, in which he retells the story of the War in Heaven, and warns Adam and Eve of Satan’s plot to corrupt them. Is contrasted with Michael who is more stern and visits Adam and Eve after the Fall.

Satan (I, 34)

The name means “Enemy,” hence the Enemy of God. The personification of evil, originator of evil before the creation of the universe, the father of Sin and Death. Permitted by God to exist and to act in order to demonstrate the validity of goodness. Formerly one of the highest angels in Heaven, then called Lucifer (“Light-bearer”), but leads a group of angels to rebel against God out of envy for the Son and is utterly defeated and cast down to Hell. The father of lies, a master of disguise, sometimes called the “dragon” (Revelation 20:2), establishes a tyrannical monarchy in Hell, decides to corrupt man, seduces Eve and through her Adam, but gains nothing from the seduction and is greeted with a chorus of hisses when he returns to Hell. Appears huge to man but small to God.

Serpent

See Satan.

Sin (II, 650)

Personification of the mental and physical characteristics of that state and part of the allegory of Satan’s evil. The daughter and incestuous mate of Satan, mother of Death (“The wages of sin is death,”

Romans 6:23). Physically a beautiful and enchanting woman to the waist but below the waist a deadly serpent, surrounded by horrible hellhounds that crawl in and out of her womb. Opens the gates of Hell in Book II and becomes the gate-keeper of Hell. Helps to build the highway from the gates of Hell to man's universe. Will eventually be defeated along with Satan and Death by Jesus Christ at Judgment Day.

The Son (II, 678)

In *Paradise Lost* the Son of God but not yet born as Jesus Christ; not the same as or equal to God, but as close to Him as is possible for human understanding to know. Begotten by a decree of God within the limits of time as man knows it, but not co-eternal with God. Sometimes (as in the Creation) called God, but His powers were given Him by God. Volunteers in Book III to die for man's sin. Is sent by God in Book VI to end the War in Heaven and thus demonstrate His glory, easily defeating the evil angels. Chosen by God to judge man in Book X, intercedes with God for the sin of Adam and Eve.

Urania (VII, 1)

The name of Milton's Christian Muse, whom he invokes to help him write *Paradise Lost*. Believed to be the inspiration of Moses in writing the books of the Old Testament ascribed to him in Milton's era.

Uriel (III, 648)

An archangel, one of the seven that stand nearest to God's throne, regent of the sun. Deceived by Satan's disguise in Book III but recognizes him in Book IV.

SUMMARIES AND COMMENTARIES

BOOK I

Summary

The subject of *Paradise Lost* is announced at the beginning of Book I; it is "Man's first disobedience" and the consequent loss of Paradise. Milton invokes his Muse, the same Christian source of inspiration that gave Moses the Ten Commandments on Mt. Sinai, to help him rise above the pagan epic poets of the past and justify the ways