

Paradise lost

[Literature](#), [Poem](#)



Throughout "Paradise Lost", Satan slowly degenerates both mentally and physically as he turns from a fallen archangel into the lowest form of a serpent. He possesses some of his former pre-fall qualities; however, he becomes so tormented mentally that his physical appearance slowly conforms to the evil inside of him. His "honorable" motives even become corrupted throughout. This regression of Satan's character throughout the poem illustrates the way Milton believes sin originated in the Bible. "The mind is its own place, and in itself can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n." (l. 254-255) Milton implies to the reader that he believes Satan's post-fall outcome is solely based on how he perceives it. Therefore, his obvious degeneration throughout the poem is due to his inability to cope with the fact that God has ultimate authority over the happenings of Heaven and Earth. Many of Milton's critics claim that he purposely created Satan as a sympathetic character. William Blake, for example, said that Milton was "of the Devil's party without knowing it". He is inferring that Milton took pity on Satan and therefore implies to readers that they should feel sorry for him. I, however, believe that Milton truly disliked Satan and designed his apparent degeneration throughout the poem in order to show the reader that, based on God's idea of free will, Satan's demise was by his own hand. Satan tells the other fallen angels that it is "better to reign in Hell than serve in Heav'n" (l. 263). We can see how Satan begins the poem having a positive outlook on his situation. He doesn't want his followers to see defeat in his eyes and tries to make the most out of the outcome. His strong demeanor works to his advantage in rallying his followers against the dictatorial reign of God. Aside from Satan's mental state, his physical appearance is just as radiant. He

begins the poem as a just-fallen angel of enormous stature. Milton describes Satan “ in bulk as huge/As whom the fables name of monstrous size... In shape and gesture proudly eminent/Stood like a tow’r; his form had yet not lost/All her original brightness" (l. 196-594). William Blake uses these passages of Milton’s to further add to his belief that Milton sympathized over Satan. Careful analysis of the passages, however, reveals that Milton subtly downplays Satan’s radiance. Milton states that Satan’s “ form had yet not lost/All her original brightness, nor appeared/Less than Archangel ruined, and th’ excess/Of glory obscured: as when the sun ris’n/Looks through the horizontal misty air/Shorn of his beams, or from behind the moon" (l. 591-596). Satan’s reduced radiance is a result of his battle in heaven and subsequent fall from grace. Satan’s appearance only deteriorates further from Book I and II when he imposes on the affairs of Adam and Eve. Book IV begins with Satan sitting “ in the shape of a cormorant on the Tree of Life" (IV. 6). His disguise as a bird, illustrates his second form of physical degeneration. He is no longer an angelic figure but rather an animal with wings. Here he also begins to “ fall into many doubts with himself, and many passions, fear, envy, and despair; but at length confirms himself in evil" (IV. 3-4). His mental state is deteriorating as he is conflicted with his true intentions and inevitably settles with general evil. Milton wants us to realize that Satan has no honorable or true goal in mind but chooses to act in evil regardless. Satan gradually becomes more conflicted as the poem progresses. While perched on the Tree of Life, Satan observes Adam and Eve. “ His wonder at their excellent form and happy state, but with resolution to work their fall" (IV. 7-8) shows his shift in motives. Initially, Satan’s motive

for going to battle is to fight for freedom from God's reign. This passage, however, proves that he no longer has that goal in mind but rather wants to do anything he can to corrupt God's "perfect creation". This includes his temptation of Eve to eat from the Tree of Life. Further along in Book IV, Satan regresses even more. "A lion now he stalks with fiery glare, then as a tiger, who by chance hath spied in some purlieu two gentle fawns at play" (IV. 402-404). He has now lost his wings and is earth-bound but maintains his grandeur by being the "king of the jungle" and top of the animal hierarchy. Finally, Satan takes the form of a serpent when he is caught whispering in Eve's ear while she is sleeping. This is his lowest form. There is no pride in being a slithering serpent. When Satan takes the throne in Hell after he has deceived Adam and Eve, he no longer has his once angelic appearance. His motive of impressing the rest of his followers backfires when God condemns them all to serpent creatures and forever curses them. Milton graphically illustrates Satan's fall from grace throughout the poem. Satan's physical degeneration from a fallen angel in Book I to a serpent in Book X depicts the level of corruption sin creates within us all. Satan's mental corruption is equally apparent throughout the poem. Satan's original motive of freedom from God's control morphs into pure revenge. Evil festers inside Satan's mind and forever corrupts him mentally and physically.