

# Epics in the garden: raphael's discourse on the fall of satan

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Book Six of John Milton's *Paradise Lost* is a continuation of the angel Raphael's discourse to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. He is recounting the fall of Satan, and focuses on the battles that take place between the angels and rebel angels. These battles are a prelude to the casting out of the rebels from Heaven. Raphael has to find a way to convey the details of the struggle in a manner to which humans are able to relate. Since they are not ethereal, the ways of the angels are outside their grasp. Raphael decides to tell the story as an epic battle utilizing the Homeric style and language, therefore positioning this Book as a sort of epic within an epic. In the beginning of the Book, dawn breaks over the landscape of Heaven as the angel Abdiel makes his way to God and his faithful legions. At the onset of the strife between Satan and God, Abdiel sides with Satan. After recognizing his folly in this course of action, he changes his mind and returns to God. This is a lesson offered for Adam and Eve's benefit. It illustrates the power of free will – Abdiel didn't have to side with Satan, it was not out of his control, and it was under his own free will that he made the righteous decision to return to God. Abdiel's name means " Servant of God" and he is representative of free will being directed towards the path of goodness. In the Bible, Abdiel is not an angel, but a person, and there has been speculation that Milton was using the angel as an allegorical character for himself and his quest to justify the ways of God to men. This, if true, further complicates the endeavor of keeping track of the separate allegories, because now it can be seen that there is an allegory within an allegory within an allegory. Raphael is trying to convey the fact that Adam and Eve should not sway from God's side in the first place, but that even if they do, hope is

still not lost. Upon Abdiel's return to the ranks of the faithful, God exhibits His mercy and forgiveness by welcoming him back in with open arms and no admonishment whatsoever, thusly illustrating that any of the rebel angels at any time could have recognized the wrongness of their actions and returned to God's side without fear of negative repercussions. God's justice is also shown when He requests that only as many of His angels fight as there are rebel angels in opposition. However, God also proves Himself as a force to be reckoned with by the very fact that He is mustering troops to battle. Raphael describes the righteous angels trekking across Heaven to confront the rebel angels in a way that Adam and Eve can understand; no mortal could hope to fathom the span of Heaven. Raphael puts it in terms that both humans can grasp: "Over many a tract / Of Heaven they marched, and many a province wide, / Tenfold the length of this terrene" (vi, 76-78). When the rogue angels are encountered, Raphael remarks on the irony that the two groups are now meeting in civil war who had once met "So oft in festivals of joy and love" (vi, 94). Abdiel then confronts Satan, but prior to that he speaks an aside intended not only for Adam and Eve's consideration, but for Milton's audience as well. It is following in the tradition of the chorus in Greek theatre, which exists for the purpose of asking important questions and drawing the audience's attention to significant plot points. Abdiel wonders why Satan should still retain the healthy body of an angel when his faith and virtue have begun to rot away inside. This sentiment foreshadows Satan after his fall, when he begins to shape shift into lower and lower animals, finally becoming unrecognizable to the angels in Heaven. Following this aside, Abdiel accuses Satan of thinking that he had the chance of winning a

battle against God. Satan is reminded that he could have repented and been forgiven at any point in his transgressions, but he chose not to and is now a fallen angel. This could be a lesson in disguise to Adam and Eve, whose fall has been foreseen but who still have the ability to resist temptation. Satan responds that he would prefer Hell to servility, to which Abdiel responds that Satan is servile only to himself. Abdiel then strikes Satan in anger. That blow marks the onset of battle. Michael sounds the battle cry, and Raphael describes the battle in epic terms to convey to Adam the incredible magnitude of the fight. The outcome of the battle hangs in midair for a long while because angels cannot die, and both the rebel angels and the righteous angels are evenly matched. Satan and the angel Michael meet on the field of battle, and Michael is optimistic that now the war will cease. He does not raise his sword to Satan in the hopes that Satan will yield and take his rebels down to Hell. In Michael's speech to Satan, he reminds Satan that he was unknown until he decided to revolt, and admonishes him for disturbing the peace of Heaven and bringing misery into nature. Michael gives Satan a chance to leave and take his rebel angels with him peacefully, before the sword will drive him out. Satan tells Michael not to make airy threats – he still believes that he can win the battle. Having recognized the fact that neither one will cede to the other, Michael and Satan prepare for battle. They both raise their arms to strike, but Michael's sword was given to him from the armory of God and falls first. Satan is cloven almost completely in half: "Satan first knew pain" (vi, 327). This may be seen perhaps at odds with Book II, line 752: "All on a sudden miserable pain / Surprised thee" – talking about when Sin is born from Satan's head. However, as Sin's birth

was Satan's first experience with pain, it cannot be said that he actually "knew" it, whereas Satan was able to recognize pain when it occurred again. Similarly, before the Fall, Adam was able to talk about Death but it was an empty idea to him; he did not understand what it was or how it worked. But after the fall, all men knew Death. Satan and his angels are wounded, so they retreat for the night and try to regroup. This Book is interesting in the fact that it frames the allegory of battle that Raphael presents to Adam and Eve within the larger frame of the entire play that Milton presents to his audience. This allegorical battle is told as an epic and as such, is representative of Milton's familiarity with the classical epics. In fact, there is a reference to Homer's Iliad in the first few lines of the Book. In lines 2 through 4, Raphael describes the morning as unbarring the gates of light "with rosy hand", which immediately calls to mind Homer's "rosy-fingered Dawn". Both Dawn and the Morn are personified as characters within the poem, and following close behind them, the action of the poems begins. Likewise, as Satan enters the battlefield he is described follows: "with vast and haughty strides advanced, / come towering, armed in adamant and gold" (vi, 109-110). In the Iliad, Achilles is described as entering "the city, terrible and strong, / with high and haughty steps he towered along." This is nearly the same image as the one that Milton presents, and further supports the epic feel of the battle. After Satan has been smited by Michael, the "angels many and strong, who interposed defense while others bore him on their shields back to his chariot" - this is an image modeled on the rescue of wounded Hector (vi, 336-338). Milton has gone from describing Satan as Achilles, the victor, to describing him as Hector, who ultimately loses.

Throughout the entirety of Book Six Milton vividly describes the battle between the angels, as well as the angels who fought it. However, one cannot overlook the fact that he is speaking allegorically. Indeed, *Paradise Lost* is an epic poem told entirely in allegory. The poem itself is epic, but within that larger epic exist many smaller ones. Book Six features a battle told in the style of a classical epic; it is told not as a history or to entertain, but rather to instruct and to facilitate a deeper understanding of the concepts that Raphael sought to impart to Adam and Eve, and that Milton wishes to impart to his audience.