

# [Humanity of satan in john milton’s paradise lost assignment](https://assignbuster.com/humanity-of-satan-in-john-miltons-paradise-lost-assignment/)

[Art & Culture](https://assignbuster.com/essay-subjects/art-n-culture/)

It can be argued that Satan is the hero of Paradise Lostand God is the ruler of an oppressive hierarchy in heaven according to the way Milton initially portrays each of them. Milton uses literary devises such as tone and characterization to make Satan appear as the true martyr of the poem. Because of Christianity, Satan is commonly viewed as purely evil. There are images of him as a jealous, venomous snake, whose sole purpose is to tempt man to disobey God. Milton paints a more complex picture that shows Satan as dynamic character, and God as a being capable of unfair and unjust behavior.

They have more sides to them than just classic good and evil. In the beginning, Milton shows God as an unforgiving, all-consuming force that expels His rebellious angels out of His supreme kingdom as well as damns them to an eternity of miserable torment. Since Satan led the angels in a revolt against God’s thrown and God Himself, he suffers the most torture. This initially allows readersto feel sorry for Satan. They come to the conclusion that it was not entirely Satan’s fault that he got expelled from heaven. He is pushed by the injustice, unfairness, and close-mindedness of God.

God’s attitude of supreme rule and having no allowance of competition and opposing force pushes Satan to stand up for what he thought was right and challenge God for power in order to show God that he was not truly qualified for the job of divine king. Milton mentions the fact that God gives all His creations free will to choose to do what they feel is right or wrong. However, Milton highlights the fact that He punishes the people that use this power by denying them the glory and majesty of Heaven. Using this argument, Milton sparks disbelief and conflict in the reader. Is God truly the epitome of good?

Are His actions just or does He go against His own will when it’s convenient for Him or when He feels threatened? These questions play in the mind of the reader, and he questions all of the biblical lessons taught to him as a child or at some point in his life. If he believes in God, he wonders if he believes in the right thingor the right person. Milton adds to this reaction by raising more supportive evidence for Satan’s side of the argument. He writes, “ The Arch-Fiend lay Chained on the burning lake nor ever thence/Had rise or heaved his head but that the will and high permission of all-ruling Heaven. One could almost thinkthis is some sort of a twisted game in God’s mind. He is an advocate of free will and allows Satan to spread evil throughout the world despite knowing that He could easily destroy him. It could seem as if He’s waiting for the right moment to overthrow and destroy Satan one time for all eternity. God, here, is pictured as a tyrant. To the reader, God seems less like the kind, caring, merciful Heavenly Father, and He appears more as a selfish, hypocritical, and uncaring Diety or Supreme Being.

He is portrayed as a God that does not truly care about what He has created ‘ He is only out for personal gratification. Milton’s argument and support for it makes it easy for the reader to disregard the clear definitions of good and evil. He makes it almost simple to sympathize with Satan’s plight. Satan was exiled from his heavenly home just because he disagreed with the King or harsh master and is abased to become a deformed, less majestic being that faces torture for the rest of eternity. Therefore, Satan is justified and right in his actions to wage war against the Tyrant.

He has no other choice; he must do this for the greater good of all the angels. He says, “ To be weak is to be miserable. ” It is not even an option for Satan to go back and submit to God’s rule and lie passive. Satan remarks, “ Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven. ” It is unacceptable to him, just as it is to any other tragic, epic hero. Though the reader sees these characteristics, he is still hesitant to discard the previous negative connotations society has taught him about Satan. Milton’s depiction of Satan makes the reader re-evaluate what evil truly is.

He must look at the opposing forces: God, the “ benevolent” Creator that allows his creatures free will and then denies them that gift, and the creation himself given free will but is punished when he chooses to use it. Satan shows an internal conflict in Book I: he goes back and forth between determination and utter despair. He is wracked by “ torture without end” and chained “ where peace and rest can never dwell, hope never comes . . . in utter darkness. ” He is motivated by “ the unconquerable will . . . Courage never to submit or yield . . . He promises to persist in his battle against the “ tyranny of heaven” through “ open war or guile. ” He claims that he no longer fears God and anything the “ potent Victor in his rage can else inflict. ” Though he shows an outward confidence and bravado, he frequently looks at his followers with feelings of regret and remorse because he knows he was the cause of their condemnation to an eternity of torture and darkness, “ far from the light of Heaven. ” Satan’s initial discussion with Beelzebub, his second ‘ in ‘ command, in Book I show his fears and uncertainty. Milton rites that Satan, the Archangel himself, is lost as he asks Beelzebub “ Is this the region, this the soil, the clime . . . /We must change for Heaven,/this mournful gloom For that celestial light? ” Still, Satan’s tone changes and grows in intensity as he realizes that he is now the ruler of hell. Although he has been thrown out of Heaven, he now controls this new area and domain. However, Satan’s tone changes again, even after he has this epiphany. He continues his speech triumphant, but yet bitter. He says,” Hail horrors! Hail Infernal World! / And thou, profoundest Hell/ Receive thy new possessor . . /Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven. ” This speech is filled with irony. Satan’s greatest and deepest desire has come to past ‘ he now is the Ultimate Ruler of his very own kingdom. His wish, however, is granted at the expense of his expulsion from the only place he ever loved and knew ‘ he loses the beauty of Heaven forever. Was the price worth it? Do his new gains adequately replace what he has sacrificed? Satan’s constant mood shifts ‘ from despair, to acceptance, to defiance ‘ reveal his chaotic emotions and make him more human and an empathetic character to the reader.

So, even though he possesses evil, he is the hero of Milton’s Paradise Lost. Milton’s words support God’s role as antagonist, Satan’s position as protagonist, and often justify his actions to the reader by juxtaposing or contrasting the negative characterization of God with Satan’s heroic attributes. However, the reader begins to see the changes in Satan in Book II and note that he is not a good person or hero. He is a tyrannical being that fell from his majesty and power in Heaven and is now seeking revenge for what he lost due to his pride. Milton writes in Book I, “ His pride/ had cast him out from Heaven, with all his host. Of rebel angels, by whose aspiring/ To set himself in glory above his peers. ” In Book II, Satan uses the power of speech to draw followers into his rebellion. He used them in Heaven, and he uses them again here. He loves attention. This is evident when the other fallen angels cheer Satan while he is making a speech and having a meeting to decide whether to wage war on Heaven or not. Pride is the deadliest of the Seven Deadly Sins, and it keeps Satan from repenting in order to have a chance at being restored to his position as Lucifer or light bearer in Heaven.

Satan possesses other qualities such as deceit and the ability to be skillful and cunning. He uses his well-chosen words to gain the support needed to wage a major war against God. Though Satan is an excellent speaker and the leader of the demons because no one will oppose him, his pride is ultimately his downfall. Milton shows the reader that it plays a role in his decisions. In several situations, Satan lets his pride interfere with his actions. He begins to worry about himself and what the others think of him. He contradicts himself a lot throughout the epic poem.

He evokes ideas into his followers that God rules by fear and should be stopped by saying, “ Should we again provoke/ Our Stronger, some worse way His wrath may find/ To our destruction. ” This speech was the highlight of Satan from the point-of-view of the fallen ones. They are now willing to work with him and help him. Meanwhile, Satan relishes the attention. His sole purpose is to gain power and leadership despite the cost. Milton writes, “ Satan except, none higher sat, with grave/ Aspect he rose and in rising seemed a pillar of state. This means that Satan was the supreme ruler of Hell, and his dreams of becoming a leader were finally coming true. Milton begins to show the reader a different side of Satan before officially deeming him the true hero of the poem. When Satan is plotting his attack, it is apparent that his only goal is choosing evil and attacking God. Satan says, “ I should be much for open war, / O peers, / As not behind in hate, if what was urged, / Main reason to persuade immediate ward, / Did not dissuade me most. ” Satan tells his angels to not dissuade him from going to war with the Supreme Ruler of the universe.

He goes alone on his flight to Heaven. Milton writes, “ Satan, with thoughts inflamed of highest design, / Puts on swift wings, and towards the gates of hell/ Explores his solitary flight. ” One might think that Satan goes alone because he feels as if he does not need help in defeating the Almighty. However, Satan goes alone because he needs space to think about his plan without the noise of a praising crowd around him. He begins to second guess himself, and in book IV he starts to acknowledge that he was wrong and shows signs of remorse. These signs are short-lived, though.

His boldness dissipates, and he shape shifts into different creatures. This shows that he must resort to debasing measures in order to get things accomplished. His countenance begins to change, and he does not appear as he did in heaven. He has sunk to low cunning. Satan acknowledges that he will have to use trickery and deceit to get to God: “ Ye powers/ And spirits of this nethermost abyss, / Chaos and ancient/Night, I come no spy/ With purpose to explore or to disturb/ The secrets of your realm, but, by constraint/ Wandering this darksome dessert, as my way/ Lies through your spacious empire up to light. Milton starts to show the reader these traits to acknowledge the truths of Satan. With this, one can see that Satan is not a hero, but merely a character with a great reliance on power that he will stoop to anything to exact revenge. Satan’s character deteriorates greatly throughout the epic. He is initially viewed as a great warrior and then as time passes, his own followers even begin to doubt him. The most heroic qualities that Milton uses to describe Satan as a rebellious hero are diminished, and Milton’s Satan is not a hero after all.

Milton’s Satan in Paradise Loststarts out whole and good, just as human beings do, but he undergoes a transformation. The transformation does not diminish him as a heroic figure as long as the reader is willing to reject the traditional archetype of the hero. When the reader can embrace the concept of a hero as a basically good person who has either a flaw or a challenging experience that is not simple to resolve, the notion of a hero is permitted to expand substantially. Satan is a hero because he is able to deal with the weight of impossible pain and suffering while still moving forward and fighting for what he believes in.

Meanwhile, he attempts to inspire others, and he successfully elicits the reader’s identification and empathy. The reader does not have to agree with Satan’s plan of revenge in order to consider him a hero. Heroes persist against all odds and plunge into the depths of his inner being, though it may be dangerous. He knows the risks of his decisions, but he acts upon them anyway. Therefore, Satan can be considered as a type of hero, but he is really the villain. Works Cited “ Characteristics of an Epic Hero. ” 2007. 12 March 2009. http://hhhknights. com/curr/human/1/herochar. htm Milton, John. Paradise Lost. London: S. Simmons, 1674.