

English 162--Milton--Spring 1994--T.A. Roze Hentschell
Discussion Questions Paradise Lost, Books VI and VII

***War in heaven**

Todd's question: Why do the angels and God have instruments of war [and an "armory" (VI,321)] if they have never fought before that battle? My addition: Prof. Guss brought up in lecture the fact that in this battle, no one can die because Angels are immortal. What tension is being produced between materiality and immortality? Why must Milton use this "war" thematic? On a similar note, Satan is wounded by Michael in the battle in heaven: "With swift wheel reverse, deep ent'ring shear'd / All his right side; then Satan first knew pain" (VI,325-26). Nicole asks, "Why now did Satan feel pain at this moment of time and not before when subsiding in Hell? Does this wound that Michael has imposed on Satan hold symbolic power over Satan?" To add, what is the difference between physical and mental torment for Milton? Which does Hell represent?

***God's inability to act alone**

Abdiel explains to Satan how futile his rebellion is because God is all-powerful. God, he says, could defeat Satan all alone: "at one blow / Unaided could have finish'd thee" (140-41). But God doesn't fight alone--he has a host of angels as his army. Abdiel says that they fight for him because they have "piety to God" (144). Why is God portrayed by Milton as constantly unable to act alone? God sends his son to expel Satan and the rebels from heaven and, as Todd points out, in Book VII, Milton interprets against tradition and has the Son create the world. What is going on here in terms of power and authority? Are they the same thing?

***Either/Or?**

In Paradise Lost we have found several of what might be called binary oppositions--issues in the text which reveal concepts that seem cut and dry, that seem either one thing *or* another. Some that have come up:

good/evil	man/woman	Satan/God	fate/free-will
sin/redemption	creation/destruction	corporeality/immateriality (body/spirit)	
saint/whore			

But as we know from our discussions, nothing is that simple in the text (i.e. Satan has been found by many of you to be both repulsive *and* attractive). Much of literary theory is concerned with *deconstructing* binaries--undoing either/or situations to show that issues in a text are never cut and dry but are instead always complicated by interpretation. Do you see this as a productive strategy for approaching PL? Why is it that this text in particular harbors so many of these binaries? Why would a reader/critic want to undo them or hold them in place?

***Satan/Sin/Adam/Knowledge**

At the end of Book VI, as Professor Guss pointed out in lecture, Raphaël tells Adam (and Eve, although she seems to have disappeared) seemingly contradictory advice about Satan: 1) understand your enemy "who is now plotting how he may seduce / Thee" (901-02) and 2) see Satan as your exemplar; "let it profit thee to have heard / By terrible Example the reward / Of disobedience" (909-11). Raphaël has just finished telling the story of Satan's rebellion in heaven and of the evil acts he performed--he uses it as a warning to Adam. At the beginning of Book VII, Adam implores Raphaël to tell him the story of the earth's creation. Raphael agrees to do so because Adam wants to know for good reasons (the more Adam knows the more he can "magnify" God's "works"). Supposedly Adam doesn't know sin yet (he has not yet tasted the apple from the tree of knowledge of good and evil). As Book VI shows, however, he has heard of (and apparently comprehended) Satan's sin. Can the contradictory advice Raphaël give Adam about Satan be a symptom of all the other contradictions surrounding Adam? Has Raphaël already "taught" Adam about evil? If knowledge should be "temperate," why does Adam thirst to know so much?