

12 *High on a Throne of Royal State*

THE most magnificent portrait of the traditional Devil ever composed, Milton's *Paradise Lost*, was written in the mid-seventeenth century, when Satan was already passing out of fashion. People had become weary of being terrified of the immediate threatening presence of hostile spirits—and of the prosecutions for witchcraft, which in some areas touched almost every member of the community, including the governing elites. When the elite found themselves in jeopardy, they responded more readily to the growing urge for relief. Once the field was thus prepared for change, theoretical arguments against belief in witchcraft and the omnipresence of Satan began to flourish. Protestants belatedly realized that there was little scriptural basis for belief in diabolical witchcraft. Reginald Scot's *Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584) argued vehemently against the excesses of demonology and witchcraft theory. Scot was no scientific materialist; he believed in Satan's existence; but he argued that neither Scripture nor tradition warranted the belief that we are under constant attack by evil spirits.

Such moderate skepticism was temporarily overwhelmed in the early part of the century by impassioned defenses of witch beliefs by King James VI of Scotland in 1597 and by Matthew Hopkins in 1647. Toward the end of the century, learned and reasonable defenses of witch beliefs continued to appear, including Joseph Glanvill's *Sadducismus triumphatus*, "Skepticism Defeated" (1681). Glanvill, an open-minded seeker who believed in the compatibility of science and religion, questioned every kind of dogmatism, including the religious and the materialist varieties. He refused to dismiss belief in the Devil and pleaded for objective investigation of reports of demonic activity. Eventually, how-

ever, the more thorough variety of skepticism prevailed. The final blows to the intellectual defense of witchcraft were dealt by Francis Hutcheson's *Historical Essay Concerning Witchcraft* in 1718, by which time its author was preaching to an audience already largely converted. Increasing religious skepticism was augmented by philosophical, rationalist skepticism, which held that the existence of incorporeal spirits cannot be demonstrated. Cannot be, that is, in a world view using the rationalists' assumptions; the new skeptics were not skeptical enough to see that their own views were also precarious.

The tension between skepticism and credulity in the seventeenth century produced a new phenomenon, the black mass, a strange combination of disbelief in Christianity and belief in the Christian Devil. The atmosphere for the black mass had long been building because of belief in witchcraft and demonic possession, where the force of the demonic was connected with human sexual aberrations. Satan's sexuality had usually been a repressed undercurrent in diabolology. A few commentators and dramatists had viewed Satan's seduction of Eve in sexual terms, even portraying the serpent twined lasciviously around her body, and it was believed that demons in the appearance of physical bodies could seduce sleeping men and women. But it was only during the witch craze that the sexual aspects of the Devil—the orgies and sexual submission to Satan—became both lurid and prominent. In all periods sexual repressions have doubtless engendered fantasies, but it is unclear why the Devil became especially sexualized in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Part of the explanation may lie in the shift of attention (as in Shakespeare) from the demonic as an external force to the demonic within human nature.

Some seventeenth-century accounts of possession remained traditional, especially where the possession affected a single individual rather than a group. The Devil first attacked Catherine de Saint-Augustin (1632–1668), a nun of Quebec, when she was five, and for the rest of her life he assaulted her with despair, lust, gluttony, and other temptations. The assaults increased in severity as she grew older, and from the age of thirty-two she was possessed by a horde of demons who inflicted agonies upon her body and soul, leaving her in peace at last only shortly before her early death.

Possession was at its most grotesque when Satan's powers were combined with human sexuality in an atmosphere of collective frenzy and hallucination often exploited for political purposes. At the Ursuline convent of Loudun the frenzy centered on a priest named Urbain Gran-

dier, a sexual libertine whose arrogance had earned him many enemies, some of whom concocted a plot to ruin him by accusing him of debauching the nuns. The nuns were worked into frenzies by the suggestions and accusations made during the inquiry, until some of them came really to believe that they had been sexually molested by demons. They began to exhibit the coarsest gestures and language. Even after Grandier had been convicted and burned in 1634, and in spite of all efforts to exorcise them, the nuns continued to behave as possessed until public attention finally waned.

At the convent of Saint Louis de Louviers, Sister Madeleine Barent, who had been seduced by her confessor before entering the convent, was the focus of the group possession. Several elements distinguish such phenomena from witchcraft: first, the focus was more exclusively on sex; second, the obscene rites were presided over by a priest. Orgies, desecration of the Eucharist, and even the occasional attendance of clergy at the sabbat were all part of witch beliefs, but at the sabbats the clergy did not participate but were only part of the congregation. That the orgiastic and anticlerical elements now became central illustrates the rebellious anticlericalism of seventeenth-century psychology. Nothing could be more blasphemous in Catholic Europe than the sexual misuse of the Eucharist, the Body of Christ, by an ordained priest.

Such fantasies plumbed the lowest depths in the black masses of the 1670s. A brisk trade in fortunetelling, aphrodisiacs, and poisons was uncovered by the Paris police in 1678. As the scope of the crimes among reputable families and the nobility was revealed, a special court was established to deal with them. The investigations brought to light magic and black masses as well as drugs and poisons. The affair got out of hand as people began to see how they might use lurid accusations against their enemies for their own political and economic advantage. In 1680 a number of priests were indicted for saying mass on the bodies of naked women at the center of a ring of black candles, of leading the congregation in sexual intercourse, of ritual copulation on the altar, of sacrificing animals, of murdering children and using their blood in the preparation of aphrodisiacs, of desecrating the Eucharist, of using the chalice to mix children's blood with sexual fluids, of invoking the Devil, and of making written pact with him. These black masses were supposedly offered at the request of courtiers and other influential people in order to procure political or sexual favors. One of Louis XIV's mistresses was accused of seeking by magic to make the queen barren and to fix the king's attentions on herself. As in the witch craze, once delusion began to touch people of

such power and rank it was doomed. The king terminated the proceedings of 1682, issuing an edict eliminating prosecution for witchcraft. The black mass, a product of the cynical, skeptical, yet credulous seventeenth century, was not revived until the late nineteenth century.

In contrast to the cynical black mass, serious and moral plays and poems dealing with the war in heaven, the fall of the angels, and the temptation of Adam and Eve continued to be popular all over Europe both before and after John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, but it was Milton who knit the traditional stories into a fabric so coherent and compelling that it became the standard account for all succeeding generations. Milton was born in 1608. Brought up a staunch Protestant, he eventually formulated a somewhat idiosyncratic theology of his own, which he expressed in his treatise *Christian Doctrine* (1655-1660) and his poems *Paradise Lost* (1667) and *Paradise Regained* (1674).

These two epic poems cover almost the entire span of Christian salvation history; their express purpose was to "justify the ways of God to men." God created the world good; moral goodness is impossible without free will; humans and angels are free to choose evil; some do so; God's providence, turning everything to good, makes our fall the occasion for teaching us wisdom through trials and suffering; God ultimately redeems us through the Incarnation and Passion of Jesus. Milton intended God and man—not Satan—to be the dramatic center of the poem.

Still, Satan seems to be the protagonist, the character that most moves the plot along. Milton also deliberately made Satan appear magnificent at the beginning so that his audience might feel all the glamour of evil. Only if readers are attracted by Satan can they recognize their own tendencies to evil and grasp the ignominy and pathos of Satan's eventual ruin. Milton also seems to have inadvertently made the characters of God and Christ less interesting and dramatic than that of the Evil One. But he had absolutely no intention of portraying Satan in a positive light.

Milton followed the traditional chronology of salvation history. "In the beginning is God," and in the moment after the initial act of creation and before making the material universe, God creates the angels through the power of his Son, the Word. Then, summoning all the hosts of heaven before his throne, he calls the angels to witness the exaltation of his Son. One of the greatest of these angels was Lucifer. Milton is deliberately unclear as to Lucifer's rank in heaven: he calls him an archangel yet sets him in command of seraphim and cherubim. Milton judged that the only point he needed to make was that Satan had such high dignity in heaven that after his fall he naturally became king of hell.

the poet took pains to describe his godlike, princely nature and his terrifying stature:

On th'other side Satan alarm'd
Collecting all his might dilated stood,
Like Teneriff or Atlas unremov'd:
His stature reach'd the Sky, and on his Crest
Sat horror Plum'd.

[He] extended long and large
Lay floating many a rood, in bulk as huge
As whom the Fables name of monstrous size.

This great power is moved to envy and anger at the elevation of the Son above himself:

Fraught
With envy against the Son of God, that day
Honour'd by his great Father, and proclaim'd
Messiah King anointed, could not bear
Through pride that sight.
[Therefore] he resolv'd
With all his Legions to dislodge, and leave
Unworshipt, unobey'd the Throne supreme.

Satan's rebellion occurs before the creation of the material universe, including humanity.

On one level the Almighty is the cause of Satan's ruin, for God chooses to create the cosmos such as it is; the angel Abdiel tells Satan: "I see thy fall Determin'd." On a second level, however, God does not directly will things to be as they are, for he has given his creatures true freedom. The freedom he wills, but he does not rule what choice they make. What God says of humanity's original sin also applies to Satan:

Whose fault?
Whose but his own? ingrate, he had of mee
All he could have; I made him just and right,
Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall.

If Satan fell freely, there is no cause of his fall, for there can be no cause of a truly free-will act.

But though his fall had no cause, it had motives. In the course of the

poem, Satan's motives deteriorate from pride to envy to revenge. His "obdurate pride" appears from the beginning:

He trusted to have equalld the most High,
If he oppos'd; and with ambitious aim
Against the Throne and Monarchy of God
Rais'd impious War in Heav'n.

To pride, Satan added envy of the Son of God, which overwhelmed him at the dramatic moment of Christ's elevation by the Father. Satan felt a sense of "injur'd merit" at the Son's power, which seemed to him a novel point of law introduced by an arbitrary, tyrannical God. To Milton and his audience Satan had no claim to any merit, injured or otherwise, since whatever good one has comes from God's gift. At God's request that the angels glorify the Son, Satan scornfully addresses them: "Will ye submit your necks, and choose to bend/The supple knee?" Once having made his choice, Satan adds revenge to envy, and when humanity is created, he adds hatred of our happiness in Eden and hatred that God should create us in his own image.

Satan's choice to rebel was the first of all sins: at the moment of decision, his daughter, Sin, sprang from his forehead. Satan's first act as sinner is to persuade some of his fellow angels to rebel. Withdrawing his followers from the hosts surrounding God's throne, he set up his own seat in the north of heaven. With eloquent, twisted reasoning he argues that the angels need not obey God, for because they cannot remember the act of creation, God's claim to have made them may be a lie. They may not be created at all, but rather "self-begot, self-raisd," un beholden to Father or to Son:

Our puissance is our own, our own right hand
Shall teach us highest deeds, by proof to try
Who is our equal.

The immediate effect of the rebellion is war in heaven, which Milton portrays in the epic language of the *Iliad* or the *Aeneid*. Satan's war against God is an insane action that can have only one conclusion, and the audience knows that. To make a war against an omnipotent divinity credible, Milton was obliged to give the rebellious angels a high degree of valor and courage. He did this so enthusiastically as to introduce a whole new scenario to the myth. Traditionally, the war was over in one mighty

battle, but Milton protracted the conflict and made the first stage a stalemate between Satan's armies and those of Michael, so that God is obliged on the third day to send his own Son to cast the rebels down. Where Michael has been hard pressed, the Son triumphs easily, putting forth "not half his strength."

Instead of annihilating the vanquished, God checks
His Thunder in mid Volley, for he meant
Not to destroy, but root them out of Heav'n.

God actually leaves them with the power to do more damage, which perplexes Satan, who would have shown them no mercy as victor himself:

Let him surer bar
His Iron Gates, if he intends our stay
In that dark durance.

But God wishes to teach the Devil that his every effort to do evil is inevitably turned to good:

And high permission of all-ruling Heaven
Left him at large to his own dark designs,
That with reiterated crimes he might
Heap on himself damnation, while he sought
Evil to others, and enrag'd might see
How all his malice serv'd but to bring forth
Infinite goodness, grace, and mercy shown
On man by him seduc't, but on himself
Treble confusion, wrath, and vengeance pour'd.

Whatever Satan does redounds upon his own head, and he can never be saved. Humanity was seduced by another being, but Satan has no excuse.

Satan is the author of evil as God is the author of the universe. As a result of Satan's sin, wretchedness enters the world.

How hast thou disturb'd
Heav'n's blessed peace, and into Nature brought
Misery, uncreated till the crime
Of thy Rebellion? how hast thou instill'd
Thy malice into thousands?

Having fallen from grace by their own choice, Satan and his evil angels fall from heaven by God's:

Him th' Almighty Power
Hurl'd headlong flaming from th' Ethereal Sky
With hideous ruin and combustion down
To bottomless perdition, there to dwell
In Adamantine Chains and penal fire.

With him fell the angels who had taken his side:

Lucifer from Heav'n
(So call him, brighter once amidst the Host
Of Angels, than that Star the Stars among)
Fell with his flaming Legions through the Deep
Into his place.

They fell "thick as autumnal leaves . . . Cherub and Seraph rolling in the flood." Nine days they fell down through the air, down through chaos, and nine days lay prostrate on the fiery lake.

Nine days they fell: confounded Chaos roar'd,
And felt tenfold confusion in thir fall
Through his wild Anarchy, so huge a rout
Incomber'd him with ruin: Hell at last
Yawning receiv'd them whole, and on them clos'd,
Hell thir fit habitation fraught with fire
Unquenchable, the house of woe and pain.

But where is hell? Milton seems to follow Dante and tradition in locating it at the center of the earth:

Here thir Prison ordain'd
In utter darkness, and thir portion set
As far remov'd from God and light of Heav'n
As from the Centre thrice to th' utmost Pole.

The problem is that in Milton's chronology the earth has yet to be created, so hell can scarcely be at its center! There appears to be another problem as well. Later in the action Milton describes Satan's voyage from hell across chaos toward heaven, from which the universe hangs pendant on a golden chain. If the universe hangs from heaven, and both

are separated by chaos from hell, where can hell be? The answer is that although Milton describes hell with physical imagery of the interior of the planet, his hell is not really in the earth. Where is it then? It is nowhere: that is the beauty of Milton's conception. The place where Satan seeks to raise a new empire is nowhere at all, a perfect metaphor for the absolute nonbeing of evil. Hell is less a place where the fallen angels dwell than a state of soul that strays with them wherever they go: "Which way I fly is Hell; myself am Hell." It is a state "where all life dies, death lives." Hell, being nowhere, is the fit abode for those who choose nothingness over reality.

Now that the angels have fallen, God proceeds to his second creation, the material universe. He summons a new world into being to make up for Satan's depredations in heaven:

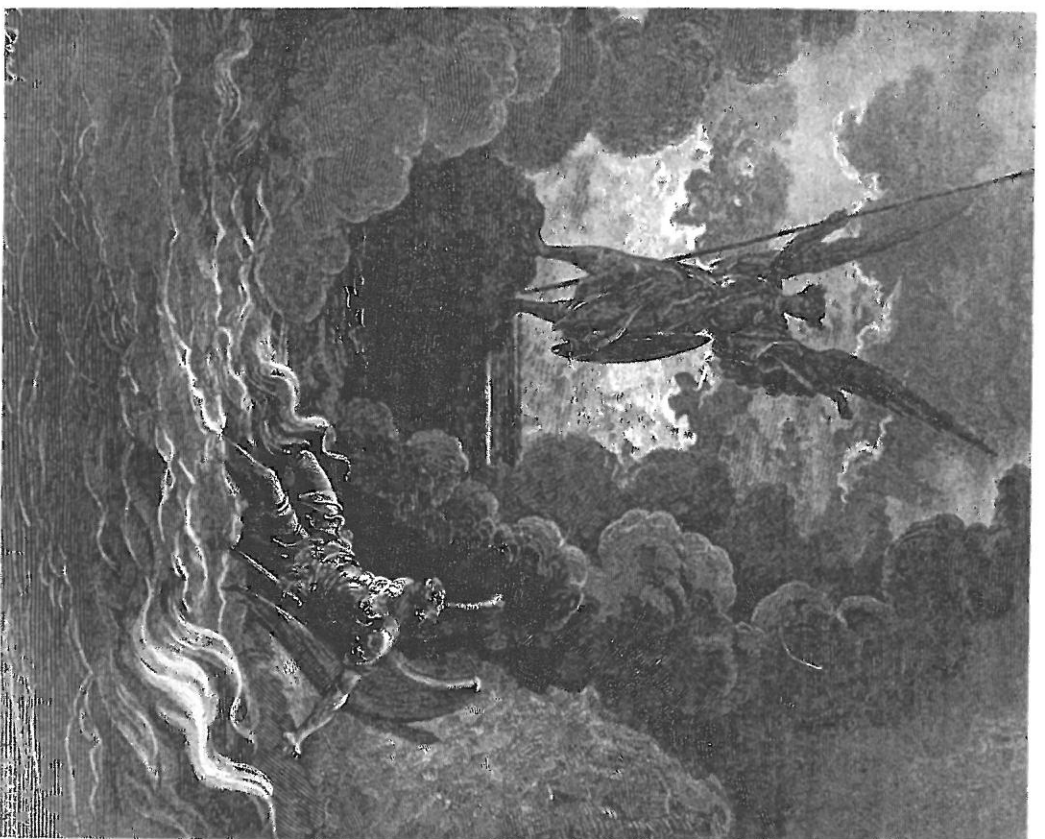
But lest his heart exalt him in the harm
Already done, to have dispeopled Heaven,
My damage fondly deem'd, I can repair
That detriment, if such it be to lose
Self-lost, and in a moment will create
Another World, out of one man a Race
Of men innumerable, there to dwell.

The human race will make up for the fallen angels; it is the crowning glory of the cosmos, but that glory Satan will soon seek to soil.

But first we see Satan, cast down into the fiery lake, surveying his dark dungeon. He spies his lieutenant Beelzebub and then the whole shadowed host. Their natures, created by God, remain angelic, but their wills have become evil, and their outward appearance gradually changes to match the distortion of their wills. The continuing deterioration of Satan's character is matched by the increasing grotesqueness of his appearance. His warping continues for ever and ever:

And in the lowest deep a lower deep
Still threatening to devour me opens wide,
To which the Hell I suffer seems a Heaven. . . .
While they adore me on the Throne of Hell,
With Diadem and Sceptre high advanc'd
The lower still I fall.

Though at first "his form had yet not lost/All her original brightness, nor appear'd/Less than Arch Angel ruin'd," it already bore the terrible marks



Satan is chained for nine days in hell's burning pool. Gustave Doré, engraving, 1882, for *Paradise Lost*.

or uterine. Upon seeing his comrade Beelzebub for the first time in hell, Satan gapes, "O how fall'n! how chang'd," sensing that the mark of ruin is already upon himself, and later an angelic messenger will confirm his fears:

Think not, revolved Spirit, thy shape the same,
Or undiminish't brightness, to be known
As when thou stood'st in Heav'n upright and pure;
That Glory then, when thou no more wast good,
Departed from thee, and thou resembl'st now
Thy sin and place of doom obscure and foul.

In order to deceive angels and humans, Satan takes on a number of animal forms, including vulture and serpent, and then whines that he is being degraded by doing so:

O foul descent! that I who erst contended
With Gods to sit the highest, am now constrain'd
Into a Beast, and mixt with bestial slime.

In the course of the poem Satan is gradually reduced from bright angel to a peeping, prying thing that ends as a writhing snake.

Rising from the fiery lake into which he has been pitched in his expulsion from heaven, Satan muses to Beelzebub about their present predicament and future prospects. Condemning God as a cruel tyrant, he calls for protracted warfare against the Deity. Beelzebub joins his master in the delusion that God can be resisted, pretending that they had nearly succeeded in toppling the heavenly despot. But in Beelzebub's thought runs an undercurrent of worry: he fears that God must really be almighty since nothing less than omnipotence could have overcome their angelic might. All the demons participating in the infernal discussions have glimpses into reality that Satan lacks, but Satan's greater blindness, which proceeds from his greater evil, causes him to ignore these insights and pursue his insane plan. His response to Beelzebub's caution exposes a completely corrupted will choosing evil for the sake of evil:

To do aught good never will be our task,
But ever to do ill our sole delight,
As being contrary to his high will
Whom we resist. If then his Providence

Out of our evil seek to bring forth good,
Our labor must be to pervert that end,
And out of good still to find means of evil.

This is a blunt plan for a counter-providence: whatever is good we will attempt to twist to evil; we hate good for the pure and simple reason that it is good. Satan embraces his own evil:

Farewell happy Fields
Where Joy for ever dwells: Hail horrors, hail
Infernal world, and thou profoundest Hell
Receive thy new Possessor; One who brings
A mind not to be chang'd by Place or Time.
The mind is its own place, and in itself
Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n. . . .
Better to reign in Hell, than serve in Heav'n.

I affirm, he says, that my sole purpose is to embrace nothingness and to obliterate whatever is good. Again, this is vain boasting, for his anti-providential schemes are nonsense: in reality divine providence will turn every evil into good. Belial and the other demons rush about with their plans to build an empire with Pandemonium as its capital, but the idea of making this stinking, filthy place, which is literally nowhere, into a comfortable kingdom is absurd.

Satan nurses his own private scheme: if God is planning a new world and a new race, this presents me with an opportunity to strike a blow against the divine oppressor by fraud and by guile. Satan calls a council and feigns allowing the demons freedom of debate, all the while planning to have Beelzebub impose the master plan at the end. Satan opens the parliament:

High on a Throne of Royal State, which far
Outshone the wealth of Ormus and of Ind,
Or where the gorgeous East with richest hand
Show'd on her Kings Barbaric Pearl and Gold,
Satan exalted sat.

The throne from which Satan apes the royal state of God in heaven is, like the rest of hell, a lunatic phantasm. His opening address to his followers is equally mad, for he suggests that they can defeat the Almighty and end up with greater glory than before their fall.

Each demon makes his speech on the basis of his own ruling vice, which each disguises as a virtue. The savage Moloch rises to counsel war at all costs; even if it cannot be won, he argues, it is better than crouching here in chains. The smooth-tongued Belial speaks next, using all the arts of rhetoric and charismatic charm to oppose Moloch and advance his own lazy, sensuous scheme. Let us settle down in hell, he counsels, wait till God's anger cools, and perhaps we will eventually feel comfortable here. Mammon's advice resembles Belial's, though based more on avarice than on sensuality: Let us build a city and an empire here in the underworld, he suggests, mining the rich earth to construct palaces and so profit from our fall.

The assembled demons are inclining to the side of Belial and Mammon, but now Beelzebub rises to promote Satan's plan as if it were his own. Courty, grave, recognized as Satan's prime minister, he commands immediate respect. Calmly and politely he exposes the illusions of the previous speakers. We can never be happy in hell, he argues, because God is in reality absolute master here as he is of the whole cosmos. The conclusions that an unclouded mind would draw from that premise are obvious, but the demons no longer have clear intellects. And so Beelzebub, stirring them up to hatred and contempt of humanity, advances a plan even more insane than the others. If we cannot confront God directly, he says, we can get at him by corrupting these little pets of his. The demons enthusiastically embrace this scheme to:

Confound the race
Of mankind in one root, and Earth with Hell
To mingle and involve, done all to spite
The great Creator.

But the plan is vain from the outset:

But thir spite still serves
His glory to augment.

Now the demons must decide which will do the dirty work in Eden. Satan volunteers, vaunting his courage and his initiative to his followers—whereas his real motive is to escape, if only for a while, the punishment of hell. Sallying forth, Satan reaches the gate of hell and there encounters his daughter Sin, on whom he has incestuously begotten “the execrable shape” of his son Death, who in turn has raped his

mother and produced a brood of monstrous offspring. I he Devil, Sin, and Death parody the Holy Trinity; Sin addresses Satan in terms appropriate only to God:

Thou art my Father, thou my Author, thou
My being gav'st me; whom should I obey
But thee, whom follow? thou wilt bring me soon
To that new world of light and bliss.

The dark irony is that this new world that the perverted trio will soon make their home is the earth.

The Devil proceeds, issuing from the gate of hell into chaos, a non-place separating the nonplace of hell from the reality that is heaven and the universe depending from it. Leaving chaos, he journeys toward the universe while God watches his course across the void and already plans his response: the Son's willing sacrifice of himself for a humanity that Father and Son know will fall and will need redemption. Satan finally reaches the outermost sphere of the cosmos and, perching there, peers down, scanning the vulnerable universe like a vulture looking for prey. Descending to the sphere of the sun, he disguises himself as a cherub; thence he comes to earth, alighting upon a mountain near the Garden of Eden, the same mountain (Milton feigns) as that on which Satan would tempt Christ.

Sitting on the mountain, Satan soliloquizes in terms that we might take as honest soul-searching if we did not know that here was a being wholly committed to evil. The soliloquy is another of Satan's impostures; and yet not entirely so. His intellect, though coarsened and weakened, still retains a tiny remnant of its angelic powers, and here he seems to glance sideways at reality before rejecting it yet again. Looking at the sun, Satan hates it for reminding him of what true light really is. He recognizes that the choice of darkness was his own and that he is the author of his own misery. The thought of repentance enters his mind only to be rejected immediately. He knows which way his will is bent.

For never can true reconciliation grow
Where wounds of deadly hate have pierc'd so deep:
Which would but lead me to a worse relapse,
And heavier fall: so should I purchase dear
Short intermission bought with double smart.
This knows my punisher; therefore as far

your granting me, as I from begging peace:
All hope excluded thus.

The angel Uriel, who observes this soliloquy from afar, notices the contortions of Satan's face and realizes that here is no innocent cherub but a threat to the innocuous inhabitants of earth.

Satan continues on to Paradise, upon whose beauties he spies in the shape of a cormorant from a tree; with envious hatred he watches Adam and his wife embracing in innocent union. Meanwhile Gabriel sets an angelic watch over Eden to protect them, and two of their guardian angels, Ithuriel and Zephon, come across Satan squatting like a toad and whispering fantasies of corruption into Eve's sleeping ear. Ithuriel touches him lightly with his spear, and at the touch Lucifer leaps up in his own shape, but so changed from his original glory that they do not recognize him. When they do, Zephon rebukes him and tells him of his true appearance. Satan is taken aback:

Abasht the Devil stood,
And felt how awful goodness is, and saw
Virtue in the shape how lovely, saw, and pin'd
His loss.

Still, his regret is not so much for the harm he is doing as for the loss of his own beauty and prestige. The two angels bring Satan before Gabriel, and the great archangels—one fallen, one elect—begin a dialogue. Satan disdains Gabriel's loyalty and boasts of his own courage and faithfulness to his comrades. Gabriel's reply is crushingly direct:

O sacred name of faithfulness profan'd!
Faithful to whom? to thy rebellious crew?
Army of Friends, fit body to fit head. . . .
And thou, sly hypocrite, who now wouldst seem
Patron of liberty, who more than thou
Once fawn'd, and cring'd, and servilely ador'd
Heav'n's awful Monarch? wherefore but in hope
To dispossess him, and thyself to reign?

As Satan sits whispering to Eve in the shape of a toad, she in her dream sees him in the form of a beautiful angel suggesting the joys that will be hers once she eats the forbidden fruit. Her husband warns her that the dream may proceed from an evil spirit, but the dream has had its effect

on the first woman, grooming her for the final temptation. To accomplish this, Satan roams the earth in search of a perfect disguise and settles upon the serpent, voluntarily shifting his shape into a form into which he later would be forced. Finding the serpent, as yet an innocent beast, asleep, Satan creeps into his mouth and possesses him. Unaware of the horror awaiting them, yet warned of possible danger, Adam suggests to Eve that they stay together, but she determines to walk in the garden alone, a situation that Satan is quick to exploit. On beholding her again, the Evil One hesitates just for a moment; a remnant of his original intellect opens his eyes to the beauty and harmony of the universe and of this its fairest inhabitant:

Her graceful Innocence, her every Air
Of gesture or least action overaw'd
His Malice, and with rapine sweet bereav'd
His fierceness of the fierce intent it brought;
That space the Evil One abstracted stood
From his own evil, and for the time remain'd
Stupidly good, of enmity disarm'd,
Of guile, of hate, of envy, of revenge.

Then his twisted will draws him back away from reality:

But the hot Hell that always in him burns,
Though in mid Heav'n, soon ended his delight. . . .
Fierce hate he recollects, and all his thoughts
Of mischief, gratulating, thus excites.

He explains to Eve how he, a poor serpent, had obtained wisdom merely by eating the fruit of the wonderful tree. Eve objects that God has forbidden the fruit, but Satan expostulates against a tyrant who would block her from growth and fulfillment. The tree, he insinuates, will give her and her husband immortality, a happier life, and higher knowledge. It will make them like gods, and the Lord's only motive in prohibiting it must be his desire to hold them under his control. Eve yields, her senses urging her to taste the fruit, her intellect bent by Satan's false reasoning.

With Eve's fall, the moment of high drama is over, for Adam will soon follow his wife into ruin. When he learns what she has done he is horrified:

O fairest of Creation, last and best
Of all God's Works, Creature in whom excell'd

Whatever can to sight or thought be form'd,
Holy, divine, good, amiable, or sweet!
How art thou lost, how on a sudden lost,
Defac't, deflow'r'd, and now to Death devote?

But he is bone of Eve's bone and flesh of her flesh, and his immediate and resolute choice is to remain by her. Whatever his motives, Adam knowingly chooses to violate God's will, and the consequences are inescapable. The two first humans are driven out of Paradise to live a life of suffering and alienation, while the serpent is cursed. Satan understands that the curse means his eventual ruin when Christ, the second Adam and son of the second Eve, will come to crush him beneath his foot. But meanwhile he shortsightedly rejoices, and his offspring Sin and Death now build their highway from hell to earth, which they subject to Satan's rule until the moment of redemption.

Satan triumphantly returns to the underworld to boast to his followers. Shining in what shreds of starlike glory yet remain to him, he mounts his glittering throne, and the fallen angels prostrate themselves in wonder and praise. I have defeated God and opened the earth to Sin and Death, he vaunts; arise and take possession of this your domain. But all of a sudden his boasts are reduced to reality, for the angels ranked round the vast throne room take on shapes more becoming to their true nature. Satan hears, not the shouts of praise that he expects, but the authentic voice of his attendant throng:

So having said, a while he stood, expecting
Thir universal shout and high applause
To fill his ear, when contrary he hears
On all sides, from innumerable tongues
A dismal universal hiss, the sound
Of public scorn; he wonder'd, but not long
Had leisure, wond'ring at himself now more;
His Visage drawn he felt to sharp and spare,
His Arms clung to his Ribs, his Legs entwining
Each other, till supplanted down he fell
A monstrous Serpent on his Belly prone,
Reluctant, but in vain, a greater power
Now rul'd him, punisht in the shape he sinn'd,
According to his doom; he would have spoke,
But hiss for hiss return'd with forked tongue
To forked tongue, for all were now transform'd



Satan planning to possess a serpent to tempt Adam and Eve. Engraving, 1882, by Gustave Doré for *Paradise Lost*.

FAUNE TO DE PERLES all as accessories
To his bold Riot: dreadful was the din
Of hissing through the Hall, thick swarming now
With complicated monsters, head and tail.

Satan, who had taken the serpent's form to seduce humankind, is doomed forever to crawl upon his belly before the dreadful majesty of God.

In *Paradise Regained*, Milton described the healing of the alienation between God and humanity by the resistance of the second Adam, Christ, to a new temptation. Satan, who has lost all his majesty in his degradation and humiliation in the earlier poem, in the new poem exhibits merely low cunning.

Satan has learned of the birth of Jesus and heard him called the son of God. He summons another infernal council and warns the demons that they must find out what this means. Is Jesus merely human, or is he divine? To find out, the Devil must determine whether he will yield to temptation. God, observing this new plot from heaven, permits the Evil One to tempt Christ in order that the Son may demonstrate that the new Adam has the strength to restore the damage done by the first Adam. The Father will use the temptation providentially. It begins the Passion, the suffering that God uses to break Satan's power over the earth. As God turns the Passion into the salvation of humankind, so he first turns Satan's test of Jesus into the confirmation of Christ's divinity.

When Jesus goes out into the desert to pray, the Devil approaches him disguised as an old man in country clothing. Still evading responsibility, Satan whines that he is an unfortunate victim whom misery, not sin, has brought low. The Son of God is not taken in: "Deservedly thou griev'st, composed of lies / From the beginning, and in lies wilt end." No joy can make you happy, for you have chosen unhappiness, and you are most miserable when in the presence of joy, "never more in Hell than when in Heaven."

Satan takes advice from his demons' parliament, and the sensuous Belial suggests that they tempt Jesus with women, but Satan prefers "manlier objects," honor, glory, and popular praise. He returns to the desert in sophisticated clothing and urbanely offers Jesus food, riches, glory, and the kingdoms of the earth. The temptations fail because Christ discerns that Satan can never offer anything but illusions. The Devil is not yet convinced and still wonders "in what degree or meaning thou art call'd / The Son of God, which bears no single sense." I too am a

son of God, he muses, or at least I used to be, and all men are sons of God.

Therefore to know what more thou art than man,
Worth naming Son of God by voice from Heav'n,
Another method I must now begin.

Setting Jesus upon the pinnacle of the Temple, Satan urges him to prove his divine power by hurling himself down and allowing the angels to catch his fall. Jesus replies: "Tempt not the Lord your God," both an affirmation of his own faith in the Father and a reproach to Satan for tempting the Son. His reply sends Satan staggering back into darkness.

Satan is surprised at the failure of his temptations. Because all he understands is power, he cannot grasp that Christ's motive in coming to earth is love. Christ warns him that he cannot hope much longer to

Rule in the clouds; like an Autumnal Star
Or lightning thou shalt fall from Heav'n trod down. . . .
Yet not thy last and deadliest wound
By this repulse received.

Milton's is the last and greatest full-length portrait of the traditional lord of evil. The concept would in the eighteenth century be worn down by rationalists and distorted by Romantics, who, ironically, regarded Milton's Satan as the most important symbol of the rebelliousness that they considered the greatest good.