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*Paradise Lost* and Human Nature

All humans are gifted with the ability to observe beauty, better defined as the certain formation of items within the universe that is deemed to be pleasurable, whether that be natural or in the form of art. Across all media, art is created to illicit a certain response out of the consumer, whether that be emotional, thoughtful or any other number of impulses that one may feel. As it is in music, or painting, or whatever other form, beauty is a central idea that many gravitate toward as being desirable or pleasing, but the definition of beauty is very subjective and personal; defining beauty is necessary to discovering and consuming beautiful art. In *Paradise Lost*, beauty can be found in multiple areas other than simply descriptive language or subject matter, as many would associate with a poem, especially one of this quality.

Beauty comes through *Paradise Lost* in Milton's language and his technical abilities, such as meter and punctuation, but it is what these add to his philosophies and characterizations that make the entirety of his epic truly legendary and beautiful. As it pertains to the heavy Christian lean in *Paradise Lost*, many Christians see God as the ultimate representation of beauty, or the highest standard of knowing, which can never be attained by humanity. This natural condition of our unknowing of God and his truths is given voice in Book VII. Its seemingly obscure placement within *Paradise Lost* gives Milton an opportunity to gracefully

portray our natural human curiosity through the character of Adam, particularly on the nature of God and the separation between us and him, on lines 86 to 108.

This section of *Paradise Lost* begins with Adam enquiring about the origin of the universe to Raphael, particularly on the origins of God and displaying the distance he feels between God and himself. On lines 85 through 93, he uses words such as “distant,” “innumerable,” and “all space,” showing the great expanse between heaven and earth, both literally and metaphorically. To add to the limitless and spacious feeling of Adam’s questioning, Milton uses only enjambed lines until line 97, allowing the thoughts of Adam to continue past its seeming end. Caesuras create emphasis on terms such as “so high,” and “all space,” while also countering the enjambment. Lines 89-90, particularly, “...the ambient air wide interfus’d / imbracing round this florid Earth...,” stuck out independent from the others due to its wonderful assonance and vivid adjectives. Milton’s language in particular is what truly adds to this great sense of distance that Adam feels toward God in *Paradise Lost*. Adam’s abstractions of God’s presence, as displayed on lines 89-90, show his understanding of God’s complete and overarching rule over Adam’s universe, while being unable to truly comprehend the nature of it. This theme of a desire for knowledge that he cannot comprehend rears its head throughout this section of poetry. His distance from God is juxtaposed soon after with an understanding of the origins of his personhood.

Adam, although ignorant of nearly all scientific or religious doctrine, still has a sense of a before to his existence, as he acknowledges that something “...mov’d the Creator in his holy Rest / Through all Eternity so late to build...” (Line 91-2) While he seemingly only has a curiosity complex, similar to that of a child, Adam is beginning to show seeds of innate knowledge of the universe that he exists in. He finds the Creator as a being that exists long

before any of his creations, as opposed to Genesis 1, which begins with, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” This version places us directly into creation, in contrast to this quote from Adam which places existence on God before he creates our universe. The inclusion of line 92 furthers this assertion by stating that the Creator was “late to build.” Milton is proposing that there is a before to God and, in this, he brings us much closer to God as opposed to the omnipresent, everlasting Father found in most Christian doctrine; since God seemingly has a period of hibernation at the least, he can similarly relate to our human life cycle, making him seem to have an inkling of humanity in him. As much as this does for the human cause of knowledge of our relationship with God, there is still a very present gap between him and humanity that cannot be filled despite our best efforts.

Often within *Paradise Lost*, *Chaos* occupies the shady corners of the separation of humans and our celestial rulers in a way that is truly incomprehensible to our human minds. In line 93, Milton emphasizes “*Chaos*” by using italics and by placing a comma directly afterwards, which is preceded by two lines that lack punctuation, adding to the harshness of the stop. The italics establish *Chaos* as a character, and also a place in the poem, that precedes God. The weirdness of *Chaos* is explored in *Book II* of *Paradise Lost*, where Satan has to journey through it to get to Earth, while facing many of *Chaos*’ cohorts such as *Confusion* and *Discord*. *Chaos* eventually agrees to show him the way, further making him a legitimate character, while presenting this odd gap between us and God as all the more pronounced with its constant ambiguity. The beauty within this conscious divide between the higher knowledge of God and our lower knowledge is found in our unyielding desire to learn about the universe in its purest form, despite our inability to do so.

Lines 94 through 97 pointedly represent Milton's ideas on human inquisition through Adam's calculated inquisition. On line 94, he cautiously approaches Raphael to ask of his origin story with "if unforbid thou mayst unfold," a lovely, flowing piece of writing that, by using alliteration with "un-," gives us Adam's submissiveness and acceptance in a very eloquent, passive manner, while still maintaining his curious mind. He then states something that is a theme throughout *Paradise Lost*, and one of a possible litany of reasons that Milton wrote this: "...not to explore the secrets ask / of his Eternal Empire, but the more / to magnify his works, the more we know." (Lines 95-7) The repetition of "more," along with the simplicity of the sentence in both language and structure conveys a sense of clarity and importance in what Adam is saying, especially given *Paradise Lost's* often onerous style. Although the preceding enjambed lines indicate a question is being asked, the use of a period as an emphatic end stop builds a sense of fact with the reader in a section filled with questioning.

These lines also run parallel to Satan's patronizing of Uriel, the angel who showed up to Satan's rally as a follower of God; he says in response to Uriel's devotions to God, "...thy desire tends to know / the works of God, thereby to glorify / the great Work-Master, leads to no excess / that reaches blame, but rather merits praise / the more it seems excess..." (*Book III*, Lines 684-8) This stark resemblance gives nod to Adam's role as a submissive disciple to God, just as Uriel was, while also filling out Milton's idea of being able to be a part of, but never truly understand God, his "secrets", or the realm in which he resides. This lack was also explored in *Chaos* and the incredible absurdity of the War in Heaven (*Books V-VI*). As humans, we will never grasp the reasons for the angels deliberately wearing armor to get hurt, or that they could throw mountains, but the beauty of our endless query is that we will never stop in our search for knowledge of such things.

The final lines 98 through 108 are more of Adam convincing Raphael to tell him the universe's origin story. Two prominent features of lines 97-103 are a pronounced meter with a sing-song rhythm, and the emphasis on the word "Deep" at the end of this section. On the rhythm of this section, Milton often places key words at stressed syllables, such as on line 99: "Much of his Race though steep, suspense in Heav'n." Even when reading in prose style, the bouncy pattern of this combination of words gives a natural rhythm to them, most notably in "suspense." The caesura following "steep" also gives a pause to show that the day may not make its way fast enough for this tale to occur in one sitting. His use of "His Generation" in line 102 signals to the reader the metaphor of God being the "Light of Day," while implying that God is waiting on Raphael to tell this story on line 100. Here, his implication stands out in context of his willful submissiveness to God as his servant because he simply accepts that God is in control of all things. Although it states his acceptance of God's reign over him, Adam seems emboldened by the coming night and is more desperate in his requests for information, while still honoring the will of Raphael to tell or not.

In an incisive quip, Milton places large emphasis on the word "Deep" by both placing it at an end-stopped line and capitalizing it on line 103. Along with this, its placement after "unapparent" gives "Deep" stark phonetic contrast and, therefore, weight within his queries. The unapparent Deep is Milton referencing Chaos, pointing toward the beginning of creation as coming out of the dark edges of God's universe. As the notation indicates at the bottom of page 348, "Milton regarded it as confused and formless. For him, the act of creation itself was the imposition of forms on upon unformed matter." An assertion such as this gives cause for us to believe that Adam is in fact speaking for Milton in the idea of creation coming from Chaos. This adds more to the claim that God rose from Chaos to build creation and that Adam has some

comprehension of it without being told the origin story, adding to the idea that Adam has inherent knowledge of the universe.

In concluding Adam's inquisition, Milton uses very interesting meter changes and punctuations to make the ending feel more drawn out than the lines before, while Adam makes an ode to the forces of nighttime. Line 104 has the same sing-song rhythm as the previous lines, but line 105 and 106 are disrupted early on. Line 105, when spoken without meter, naturally focuses on "Haste" instead of "to," and although it follows iambic norms, "audience" is interrupted by a caesura directly after. On the next lines, "silence" is both naturally in opposition to the iamb and is immediately followed by a caesura, completely destroying the rhythm of the line. This ends up bringing attention to "Haste," "Night," "Silence," and "Sleep," making obvious notions toward the days impending culmination, and that these are characters, not just things, by using personification and gendered pronouns; when "Night" becomes a character, it is given a similar connotation to that of Chaos. Milton's further representation of things we consider to be constant as dynamic characters pushes the idea of the separation of ours and God's comprehension of the world, in that what we see as fixed, God sees as flowing. Chaos, Night and the other godly entities are given a rank that is above human comprehension, forcing us to accept them as static beings, when they seemingly are not when looked at from God's perch. Adam concludes this section of poetry by stating the characters listed before can wait for this story to be told on lines 107 and 108, a subtle display of power against the control of God and the beautiful mysteries of the celestial universe, which are so compelling to Adam and his descendants.

God is what most people in the world consider the standard of beauty and purity; we find that his grandeur is only enhanced by our inability to fathom the scope and nature of his realm,

despite our constant efforts. Adam's natural aspiration of coming to possibly grasp God's origin, along with his connate information, show our propensity for research that persists throughout humanity. The oddity of *Chaos* and the War in Heaven emphasize a distance in us and God, although Adam only wants to "...magnify his works." (Line 97) The mystical personification of Night and his familiars breeds more length between us and Above, but it is Adam's persistence that shows the beauty of the author's philosophies. The beauty of this poem is found in Milton's somewhat romantic characterization of Adam as representative for humanity; he is constantly wanting to understand, even though he is simply incapable. Milton sees the story of him, and of human nature, as a beautiful underdog story in which we have hope for education, but will never reach the depths of true knowledge that God has for us.