

INVISIBLE EVIL

Language, Deception and Authorial Intent in *Paradise Lost*

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This essay aims to explore the nature of narrative intent in John Milton's 'Paradise Lost', in addition to his depictions of language and deception. Before I delve into the poem, however, I will examine the purpose behind language and ideas, and the role of readers and writers. Milton's interpretation of language and deception, and his concern with his own authorial intent, are vital to this essay as he considers these themes in 'Paradise Lost', but laying a foundation in ideas and authorship before broaching the poem provides a firm ground from which to explore these topics alongside Milton.

What does it mean to explore an idea? What is an idea? An idea is a formulated thought or opinion. One aspect of exploring a thought or opinion is to examine it and see its relationship to other thoughts and opinions. One idea may complement or be opposed to another idea. The examination of one idea in its relation to another idea could also have a recursive effect. In looking into one idea, others can, and will, also be examined. Not only in a back and forth between two ideas but also in a web, following paths of inquiry into related thoughts and opinions.

Examining ideas can also be an exploration of the internals of the idea itself. Is it in accord with its own ideas? (What makes up an idea but other smaller, simpler ideas?) Is it robust and consistent in its own structure? An idea that is not consistent cannot hold up during examination alongside other ideas. How can it be compared to another idea if is not sound and valid to itself?

At St. John's College we explore ideas from diverse areas of Western history. We explore mathematical ideas, scientific ideas, philosophical ideas, theological ideas. Ideas about emotion, language, music, morals, justice, reality. Ideas about what it is to be human.

Ideas about the universe. Ideas in the form of questions and assumptions. Is there a God? What is truth? Is that how parallel lines work? How do you define a tree?

Education at St. John's means to dive in and examine, to question, and to grow and learn from the experience. But ideas, without a means of communicating them, can only exist within the mind of the one who thought it. On its own an idea cannot stand and be explored except only inside the individual mind that has the access to cross examine it.

Language is the means of communicating ideas between humans. Language uses words to symbolize meaning as a method of expressing a thought or opinion between users of the language. Language is the medium enabling the opening and exchanging of ideas between one mind and others. Using written language to preserve an idea lets others examine it without ever encountering the originator themselves or long after the originator has died. Language allows ideas to persist through time, freed from attachment to an individual mind. Written language expands the dissemination of ideas and can also aid a thinker in developing their own thoughts. Not everyone can think through ideas like Socrates, and written language allows a mind to have a dialectic with itself through time.

Written language makes St. John's College possible. The students and the tutors could meet and discuss ideas we have about the universe and ourselves, and those conversations could be beneficial or illuminating, but it would not be sustainable in a classroom. In a classroom with more than two or three people there must be a common basis for the conversation. For a discussion without a shared written text to function it would require someone to present a well formulated idea from a static position of reasoning and then to defend it throughout the conversation unerringly.

The texts we read at St. John's are the thoughts and ideas of great minds left for us through written language. Instead of a student or tutor presenting an idea to the table for discussion, a great mind from the past is offering us ideas for consideration. The text is what is common to all members of the seminar, and unlike an active participant in the conversation, the text is unchanging. Preserved in written language the seminar text is the foundation of the discussion. Other participants in the conversation may have a change in opinion or thought at the table, but the text cannot. The text is a nexus for everyone to return and depart from when exploring the ideas presented therein.

The selection of a text is difficult. How do we decide what texts to discuss and which we do not? What qualifies a text for discussion at the table? If we are to rely on texts, rather than our own ideas, what sets them apart? The students and tutors could provide a topic and idea to explore, what do these texts have that we do not? Longevity is one element. The persistence through time of written works and their ideas provides some credence to their contents. But longevity alone is not enough. There are documents from thousands of years ago that would not provide a good basis for a seminar.

It is the ideas themselves. It is not enough to say an author can provide a foundation for discussion based on external qualities such as name, sex, religion or historical recognition. It is the ideas themselves that merit consideration and discussion. Could a student present an idea as the foundation of a conversation at the seminar table and defend it well? Probably. Can they do it better than an author on the program? No.

Writers from the past have bequeathed to us ideas and explorations that have withstood time. They apply to all of us and provide foundations for ample exploration and discussion without faltering and buckling under the pressure of examination.

When an author writes a text, they are committing an idea into written language to convey that idea to another mind. The texts we use at St. John's are the ideas of great minds that have been selected as the cornerstones of the discussions around the seminar and tutorial tables. Preparation for seminar and class is simple: read the text.

Reading a book is a one-way transmission. The writer is telling the reader his or her ideas and thoughts. This is not a conversation. The text cannot change based on who is reading it. The presentation is fixed regardless of audience or circumstance. A reader will have questions based on the book, but the book cannot answer those queries in any active manner. The answers might be found within the text, and the reader may even discover them, but the book is passive throughout this process. The author has said their piece and the reader must do the active part in finding the answers to any questions that arise.

Reading a book is intimate. It is not a shared experience. Participants in a seminar all read the same text, but each has a closed experience independent of all others. It is a connection between the writer and the reader. The words written by the writer enter the mind of the reader, and only there do they come alive and do the work prescribed of them in presenting the writer's thoughts and ideas. To the reader only, one on one. No one else can enter the connection and influence how those two minds interact.

The opinion of a book can be swayed or influenced beforehand, but the process of communication between writer and reader remains closed. The text serves as a vessel for ideas. The writer has put them into human language and written them down, but without a reader the ideas are dead. Entering the mind of the reader they come to life again as the words translate backward into meanings and once more into ideas, this time in the mind of

the reader. This rebirth can tinge the idea as words symbolize different meanings, or nuances of meaning, for people based on their personal understanding and experience.

Everyone sits at the seminar table having had an idea communicated to them by a writer. But no one at that table shares the same experience or the same idea. The final idea in each mind at the seminar table is each one slightly, or drastically, different.

Why do we have a discussion based around a text? Each member of the seminar reads the text and has some form of understanding of the ideas it presents, so why bother to hold a discussion of those ideas? It is because each member of the classroom has their own perspective and understanding of the ideas found in the text that we hold a discussion.

Some understandings of the text, while valid, may also be flawed. If a reader misreads a passage or accidentally skips over something, the author's idea is not complete in the reader's mind. Due to varied understandings of words someone may interpret a passage different or misconstrue the meaning behind a thought or idea.

Bringing all these understandings together allows for a broader unfolding of the ideas the text offers. Instead of one understanding present there are a dozen or more at the table. The presentation of the idea through the lenses of different life experiences allows someone to see a text in a different manner than their own, and that in turn can influence their understanding of the idea. Or, barring that, open that mind up to seeing how another mind interprets the same source. This can reveal more of the myriad forms of the human understanding to that mind, but only if that mind is receptive and open.

The onus of the discussion falls upon the participants, not the text. The participants must express their own ideas and their understanding of the text. In the same manner that a writer is using written language to explain an idea, seminar participants must now use

the same process to take the ideas in their mind and present them to the table. As the text multiplied within the minds of the readers, so now does one idea multiply in the minds present to hear one seminar member speak.

Language facilitates this exchange, but language is a diverse and varied medium. Just as the same words took on varied meanings to each member of the seminar, so too does the discussion. Not only does language enable a member of the seminar to tell the rest what their idea is, but language also allows them to control how it is presented. The idea exists within the mind and language is a translation of that idea. Translations come with their own flaws and quirks. No translation is perfect. But to persuade another mind is a function of human language and a key element in the exploration of ideas.

People disagree with each other. No two humans on the planet are in perfect agreement in all possible scenarios. Disagreement leads to a conflict and the resolution of that conflict can come about in many ways. While a country may elect to go to war to resolve a conflict, or someone might take offense and use whatever means available to them to resolve the issue, such means are not available to the participants in a seminar. They must rely on debate and discussion to resolve the conflicts that will arise.

Debate is often viewed as an “us vs. them” platform where someone is right, and someone is wrong, and one of them will win the argument. Seminar is not an oppositional scenario, it is a collaborative exploration. The “I’m right and you’re wrong and I’m going to prove it to you.” method is not suitable to address the inevitable disagreements. The only recourse available is language and speech in a cooperative discussion.

Using cooperation as the starting point enables a more collaborative process. In this way a possessive attachment to “my idea” and “your idea” can fall to the wayside. Instead it

should become “this idea” and “that idea” and the goal of winning would then become determining whether “this idea” or “that idea” is the superior idea. This way the better and stronger ideas will remain while the weaker ideas are left behind.

To get this platform off the ground there needs to be a common basis of understanding from which the ideas originate. If Idea A does not originate from the same foundation as Idea B, who is to say that A or B is the better idea? There is no basis for comparison between them in any manner that holds its own weight.

This is another reason to use a common text while exploring these often difficult and complex ideas. Even if someone does not agree with the text themselves it is still the common foundation of all discussion in the seminar. The root assumption of Idea A and Idea B should be present in the text or else they do not fit within the scope of the conversation. The pursuit of better ideas allows for the stronger arguments to surface, but only if the discussion remains grounded in the common source.

Seminar is not a debate, but a collaborative discussion founded in a common text. But what if the common text is itself not consistent due to misinterpretation by the readers of that text? The ideas are what is important in the text, but is not the author also having their say at the seminar table? Does the author not have their own understanding of the idea meant to be conveyed through this particular piece of writing?

What a writer wants to say is as varied as any other use of language. Nor is it always apparent what the goal of a writer might be. Sometimes the writer will make a statement of intent but even that is not always clear. There is much debate to be had about authorial intention, and whether that intention even matters to the discussion of a text. But an author

would not have written the text without trying to convey a personal idea, and that intention informs much of their writing.

Intention influences how a writer or speaker chooses to present their subject. In writing there are many ways to express an idea. Stories, treatises, poems, maxims and more. Each does similar and different things, and each has strengths and weaknesses, and each helps an author to express their intended aim.

It does not make sense to write maxims if the goal is to tell a story. Nor does it make sense to write a treatise if the goal is to create an emotional experience for a reader. All these modes of expressing written language are not created equal. A treatise cannot tell a story, but a story can explore a topic like a treatise. A story is not as specific or explicit in doing so, but it is possible nonetheless. Poetry is also in the unique position of being applicable in most situations, if a bit unorthodox. Homer tells a story in epic poetry, and Lucretius explored the universe in poetry.

When deciding to write 'Paradise Lost' John Milton chose to write an epic poem that explored the Biblical story of Adam and Eve and their expulsion from the Garden of Eden. While interpreting this story from the Bible, Milton has a specific goal in mind that he aspires to accomplish, and he lays out his aims in the beginning of the first book.

Milton concludes his opening invocation by saying he is calling upon the Muse so "That to the highth of this great argument/ I may assert eternal providence,/ And justify the ways of God to men."¹ That is his statement of purpose: Milton aims to justify the ways of God to men. Whatever else might be present, and there are numerous topics in the poem aside from this one, this is the ultimate intent of the poem according to its author.

¹ 'Paradise Lost' 1.24-26

In selecting a mode of communicating, a writer must consider the desired end of the communication. If a writer wants to amuse his reader, then writing a humorous story will probably get the results he wants whereas a philosophical treatise probably would not. With Milton seeking to justify the ways of God to men, it is reasonable to assume that an epic poem is not the only method of communicating that idea. A theological treatise could probably explore the justification of God's actions just as well as an epic poem. But Milton chose to write an epic poem, and an exploration of the form may shed light on why he might have chosen this as his medium.

The typical epic poem is a long, narrative poem ordinarily taking place in a time before written memory and having to do with extraordinary actions of men and their interactions with the gods or the superhuman. The epic often contains characters meant to embody the moral or cultural ideal of a nation or people, and its subject matter often explores and questions those cultural values.

As a narrative poem an epic is, at its core, the telling of a story. Homer tells the story of Achilles at Troy in 'The Iliad' and he tells the story of Odysseus's journey home in 'The Odyssey.' Virgil tells the story of Aeneas and the founding of Rome in 'The Aeneid.' In 'Paradise Lost' Milton is telling the story of the temptation of Adam and Eve by Satan and their expulsion from the Garden of Eden. That is Milton's subject, a story, and it guides his composition just as much as his purpose of justifying the ways of God to men.

One of the facets of the epic style is the presentation of a story that came before recorded history, but that presents itself as a part of that history and as having had a role in shaping the world of today. There are several ways to tell the history of an event, the two most prominent being a static recitation of the event, without embellishment or

description, and the telling of the story of the events. A static recitation is akin to a reporting of the facts while attempting to remain unbiased. Telling a story tries to recreate the events in the mind of the reader or listener by adding descriptive elements that might not seem essential to the facts of the event. In a history time does not seem important, as it is a conveyance of the events in the past so time no longer has an impact on those events. When telling the story time becomes important again, the events are happening once more, but this time in the mind of the one hearing or reading the story.

The decision between story and summary depends on what the writer is trying to communicate about those events. If the aim is to tell someone that you went to the store to buy groceries a story is probably not important, especially if it is meant to answer a question like “Where did you go?” But if you’re trying to relay how something amusing happened to you while out grocery shopping, a simple statement of facts is not going to get the humor across to your audience.

This example of a trip to the grocery store is a simple contrast, but the decision someone has to make between a summary and a story is not always so clear cut. In Book 5 Milton displays this decision inside the narrative of ‘Paradise Lost’ itself, when Raphael recounts to Adam the story of the war in Heaven.

Milton says that “God to render man inexcusable sends Raphael to admonish him of his obedience, of his free estate, of his enemy near at hand; who he is, and why enemy, and whatever else may avail Adam to know.”² The discourse between Adam and Raphael will take place over the next four books, comprising a full quarter of the epic, and of that, half is devoted to the narration of Satan’s rebellion in Heaven.

² ‘Paradise Lost’ Argument to Book 5

When Adam beseeches Raphael to give “the full relation” of what “hath passed in Heav’n”³ Raphael faces the same problem that Milton has with his own poem. The war in Heaven precedes Adam’s existence and is set in a world akin to the mythical for humans. How is Raphael to “relate/ To human sense th’ invisible exploits/ Of warring spirits”? Raphael concludes that he should tell Adam what happened in Heaven and “what surmounts the reach/ Of human sense, I shall delineate so,/ By lik’ning spiritual to corporal forms,/ As may express them best.”⁴

The problem that Raphael faces, nested inside Milton’s own epic poem, is the same problem that Milton himself faces with his own audience. Where Raphael must explain the events of spirits in Heaven to a human on Earth, Milton must convey the events of a pre-fall Eden (not to mention Hell and Heaven alike) to a post-fall world. How does one explain what is very likely to be unexplainable?

Not only does Raphael’s problem in his narration serve to parallel Milton’s own conundrum, it also highlights the intent behind the relation of a story. Adam wants to know what happened in Heaven such that “some are fall’n, to disobedience fall’n,/ And so from Heav’n to deepest Hell”⁵ and God has commanded Raphael to “tell him withal/ His danger, and from whom, what enemy/ Late fall’n himself from Heav’n is plotting now/ The fall of others from like state of bliss.”⁶ Raphael’s relation of the story in Heaven should serve to inform Adam of his enemy. Adam’s request emphasizes his wanting to know what happened because the idea of disobedience and fallen angels disturbs his assurance in himself that he could ever “forget to love/ Our Maker and obey him whose command/

³ ‘Paradise Lost’ 5.544-557

⁴ ‘Paradise Lost’ 5.563-576

⁵ ‘Paradise Lost’ 5.535-543

⁶ ‘Paradise Lost’ 5.238-241

Single, yet is so just.”⁷ Would a simple historical accounting of the events in Heaven serve to answer Adam’s question? It might, but would it aptly serve to warn Adam against the machinations of Satan? Perhaps not. Satan is not human, but in addition, Satan is also disobedient to God, which is something that Adam thus far has not even comprehended as possible. Raphael elects to narrate the events in Heaven and tell it as a story, in much the same manner as Milton. Raphael goes so far as to refer to himself in the third person during his telling of the events.⁸

Raphael’s narration is also like Milton’s in that Raphael conveys to Adam things that he cannot possibly know from firsthand experience. Much of what happened in Heaven Raphael would conceivably have been present for, but there are some events where he was not present. After God decrees the Son of God as second only to himself and commands that “to him shall bow/ All knees in Heav’n, and shall confess him Lord”⁹ Satan retreats to the north and summons all his banners. Raphael recounts that among all of Satan’s cohorts only Abdiel rejected his rhetoric and left the rebel camp, remaining loyal to God. Raphael narrates both Satan’s and Abdiel’s speeches during this confrontation, but Raphael would not have been there. Abdiel is the only one who abandoned Satan’s campaign, and Raphael is loyal to God, so presumably Raphael would not have been there to witness this exchange.

Nor would Raphael have been present to witness the command from God to the Son to end the fighting on the third day. Raphael was with Michael’s army in combat against the rebelling host when this exchange would have happened, but Raphael the narrator still relays the account of what both God and the Son say during this scene. Raphael is acting as

⁷ ‘Paradise Lost’ 5.544-557

⁸ ‘Paradise Lost’ 6.362-368

⁹ ‘Paradise Lost’ 5.607-608

an omniscient narrator to events he did not witness, just as Milton is doing. But why does Raphael give his accounting this way, with full speeches he did not witness and detailed descriptions of the events? What is the difference between a historical accounting of the rebellion and a narrated story taking 1,222 lines to tell?

God's command to Raphael to warn Adam against Satan is probably only his secondary motivation. God wants "to render man inexcusable"¹⁰ and therefore instructs Raphael to remind Adam of his free will, that to disobey God's command is his own choice to make. This is why the Abdiel story is a central element to Raphael's narration, even though he himself would not have been present to witness this defiance of Satan. Upon his return to inform God of Satan's rebellion, Abdiel finds the angels preparing to march and Raphael narrates God's commendation of Abdiel as such:

"Servant of God, well done, well hast thou fought
The better fight, who single hast maintained
Against revolted multitudes the cause
Of truth, in word mightier than they in arms;
And for the testimony of truth hast borne
Universal reproach, far worse to bear
Than violence: for this was all thy care
To stand approved in sight of God, though worlds
Judged thee perverse:"¹¹

This part of God's speech, which Raphael may have witnessed, stresses the rightness of Abdiel's standing alone against his peers in obeying the truth. Abdiel remains loyal to God despite tremendous pressure to conform. Worlds have judged his actions as incorrect, but God praises Abdiel for staying true and choosing the correct path. The emphasis here was Abdiel's choosing to remain loyal, as he could have chosen to remain with Satan's

¹⁰ 'Paradise Lost' Argument to Book 5

¹¹ 'Paradise Lost' 6.29-37

followers and not borne their derision and scorn. That is the battle that God is commending Abdiel for choosing to fight. Raphael's later narration of Abdiel's rebuking of Satan and his departure from the north may have been informed by this speech from God.¹²

Three descriptions of Abdiel emphasize the singular versus the multitude and the seraph's loyalty to God. When Abdiel first opposes Satan, he is described as "Abdiel, than whom none with more zeal adored/ The deity, and divine commands obeyed."¹³ Despite Satan's mocking of him Abdiel still stands his ground: "The flaming seraph fearless, though alone/ Encompassed round with foes."¹⁴ And after his own rebuke of Satan Abdiel departs from among Satan's followers:

"So spake the Seraph Abdiel faithful found,
Among the faithless, faithful only he;
Among innumerable false, unmoved,
Unshaken, unseduced, untterrified,
His loyalty he kept, his love, his zeal;
Nor number, nor example with him wrought
To swerve from truth, or change his constant mind
Though single. From midst them forth he passed,
Long way through hostile scorn, which he sustained
Superior, nor of violence feared aught;"¹⁵

Raphael's narration continues to stress both the singular: "fearless though alone", "faithful only he", and "Though single", as well as the surrounding nature of Abdiel's opposition: "encompassed round with foes", "among innumerable false", "from midst them he passed,/ Long way through hostile scorn". God's commendation which follows these decisions drives home Abdiel making the correct choice in remaining loyal. Abdiel is an

¹² Raphael choosing to emphasize the individuality of Abdiel's admonishment of Satan and his departure from Satan's followers, informed by God's own emphasis and praise of his choice against astounding pressure.

¹³ 'Paradise Lost' 5.805-806

¹⁴ 'Paradise Lost' 5.875-876

¹⁵ 'Paradise Lost' 5.896-905

angel with free will, just as Adam was created with free will. Both man and angel are free to fall, it is not an inevitable fate for either Abdiel or Adam.

As previously alluded to, the aspect of time is an important distinction between a summary of events and the telling of a story. The Biblical account of the Fall takes place during Genesis 2 and 3, much of which is a description of the Garden of Eden and the words recited by God as his punishment is meted out to Adam, Eve and, the serpent. Genesis 2 and 3 are 49 verses long, a far cry shorter than the 10,550 lines of Milton's 'Paradise Lost.' Any of the twelve books from 'Paradise Lost' dwarfs the Biblical account of the Fall. Time, not only as an aspect within the story itself, but also because of the commitment of the audience, is important.

Raphael must warn Adam against a threat, but not only to make him aware of it, but also what the nature of that threat is. God commands Raphael to inform Adam that Satan will not attempt to cause Adam and Eve to fall "By violence, no, for that will be withstood" but that it will be "But by deceit and lies."¹⁶ Adam does not know what it means to lie or deceive, so how can Raphael appropriately warn him against such a foe? And is it only Satan that Adam must worry about? Satan cannot forcibly make Adam disobey God, only Adam can choose to do that. Adam has the ultimate choice in his obedience, something that Abdiel also had, and Raphael spends considerable time emphasizing this choice.

Stories, while being structurally about a plot or event, are ultimately different than historical summaries because of characters. A historical accounting tries, or at least should, to remove bias from the recounting. A story does not, as the narration of the story unfolds in time, revealing characters making choices and speaking. A story is a recreation of events

¹⁶ 'Paradise Lost' 5.240-245

within the mind of a reader. Raphael must give Adam an understanding of what Satan truly is to properly warn him, as God commanded him to do. But he must also remind Adam that he has the free will to choose. This is an option Adam did not know he had before,¹⁷ and Raphael must explain what this choice means for Adam. The best way to go about this is to give Adam a human understanding (as Raphael alluded that he would do in his initial resolution to recount the story of the war) of the characters of both Satan, Adam's adversary, and Abdiel, the seraph who made the correct choice. And the best medium to convey character is a story.

Raphael's story takes place through the latter half of Book 5 and all of Book 6. It is a significant amount of time within the epic. A summary of the events would have saved much time but probably would not have had the same impact on Adam. Because Raphael narrates the story as an omniscient narrator, all the characters' actions unfold in time within the mind of Adam. He hears God's decree and Satan's revolt against it. Adam watches Abdiel's rejection and admonishment of Satan and subsequently the opening of the battle between the angels the next day. He hears Satan's boasting during the second day and watches the Son of God's triumphant charge, driving Satan and his rebels from Heaven.

Seeing and hearing Satan speak, and bearing witness to someone choosing to oppose him, creates a better understanding of the character of Adam's adversary and the nature of his choice than a summary would. Adam could have been told that Satan deceived one third of the angels in Heaven into rebelling with him and then after three days of battle was driven out of Heaven by the Son of God. That's not an untrue account of what happened, but it does not inform Satan's nature and help Adam in identifying the threat

¹⁷ 'Paradise Lost' 5.548-549: "nor knew I not / To be both will and deed created free;"

arrayed against him. He could also be told he has a choice to obey God, but that does not explain to him what that means. Adam has never been in a situation where he must choose.¹⁸ Both Satan and Abdiel were alive in Adam's mind, birthed there from the words of Raphael, and this allowed Adam to experience things that he has never encountered.

Throughout Raphael's narration of the war there are parenthetical asides from the angel as he explains, in brief, aspects of Heaven or spirits that might be alien to Adam. There are at least ten of these asides, explaining things such as night and day in Heaven, and saying that Earth also contains veins of iron. As Raphael is narrating these events he tries to stay out of the narration as much as possible, remember, even going so far as to refer to himself in the third person, but these asides show him stepping out of the story for brief moments. The last aside Raphael makes even refers to himself in the present first person as Raphael is speaking to Adam: "And twenty thousand (I their number heard)/ Chariots of God, half on each hand were seen."¹⁹ Raphael consistently backs out of the narration to explain things to Adam, informing his listener during brief lulls in the story.

Milton himself also does the same in 'Paradise Lost', but in different ways and more often. There are several subtle hints to Milton speaking outside his narrative voice, but there are also more prominent instances of Milton the writer revealing himself. The epics whose form Milton is imitating all open featuring an invocation from the writer to the Muse to start the poem. Milton begins his poem in this manner as well, but he also has three additional invocations throughout 'Paradise Lost' and each successive invocation becomes more and more personal as the poem goes on.

¹⁸. Would Adam have ever thought to eat of the fruit, to disobey, had Raphael not informed him it was possible to transgress against God?

¹⁹ 'Paradise Lost' 6.769-770

The invocation is a traditional piece of the Western epic poem. It begins the epic, usually presenting the theme or subject of the poem. Calling upon a Muse, or as a prayer, the writer asks the Muse for inspiration to tell the story they have in mind. While the first invocation of 'Paradise Lost' is the most traditional it is still different in kind than its predecessors. Homer's invocation in 'The Iliad' is the codifier of the form, it is addressed to the Muse and presents the subject of the poem. The invocation for 'The Odyssey' is slightly different, Homer using one singular first person pronoun. The invocation in 'The Aeneid' is similar with Virgil also using the first person singular in the first line. Aside from these brief uses of the first-person, Homer and Virgil do not appear within their poems outside of a few apostrophes. Milton follows the form of the epic passed down from Homer but instead of hinting at his appearances as the writer of the poem he embraces his role and presents himself to the reader early and often.

Milton begins revealing himself as the writer to the reader from the opening invocation. The first invocation is twenty-six lines long, and in that small space Milton uses five first person singular pronouns. The invocation follows the formula passed on from the Homeric epics, it establishes the subject and summarizes the events of the poem, but it is done in a manner that emphasizes the role of the writer rather than diminishes it. Milton makes it clear that this is his poem, it is his story to tell and that he is the one telling it, asking the Muse only for help in easing its passage.

The first invocation depicts a strong and confident writer, unafraid of revealing himself and his subject to the reader. Milton is upfront about his aim, declaring that his poem "pursues/ Things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme."²⁰ And that he seeks the aid of

²⁰ 'Paradise Lost' 1.15-16

the Muse, here by Milton said to be the Holy Spirit, so “That to the highth of this great argument/ I may assert eternal providence,/ And justify the ways of God to men.”²¹

Milton uses this first invocation to establish many different goals from the start of his poem. He is firmly following the Homeric tradition and the form of the epic, but he’s also using that structure to lay his own foundation for his work. Instead of one of the nine traditional Muses, Milton goes through the effort of establishing whom he is directing this invocation towards. Of the twenty-six lines in the invocation Milton uses half of them to clarify that the Heav’nly Muse he is addressing is the Holy Spirit. The same spirit that instructed Moses on top of Mt. Oreb and Sinai²², and who spoke with David and the other prophets.²³ While staying within the parameters of the epic tradition, Milton’s invocation firmly roots his subject matter and aligns it, and its author’s lofty aim: This is a poem concerning the fall of man, inspired by the same Holy Spirit of the Biblical prophets.

The first unorthodox invocation, Milton’s invocation to light, comes at the beginning of Book 3. This invocation is much longer than the first, coming in at fifty-five lines long, and Milton is again heavy with the first person here, using thirteen first person pronouns. The first half of this invocation discusses light and Milton’s journey into Hell as guided by the Muse during the first two books. The latter half is a meditation on blindness and inner sight, oscillating between happiness and lamentation.

Milton associates himself with other famed blind figures from myth, known for their inspired inner sight and prophecies. Milton hopes to be “equal’d ... in renown” with Thamyris and Homer (“blind Maeonides”) as well as “Blind Tiresias and Phineus prophets

²¹ ‘Paradise Lost’ 1.24-26

²² ‘Paradise Lost’ 1.6-10

²³ ‘Paradise Lost’ 1.17-18

old,” an ambition that is only possible if his verses are “harmonious numbers” inspired by the Muse.²⁴ Milton seems to view literary renown and prophetic vision and fame as a just compensation for his loss of sight, but following this aspirational section the verses turn somber again as he returns to his blindness. The verses from 3.40-50 show Milton lamenting all the natural splendors that will never return to him. Milton instead retreats inward, cut off from the sight of natural beauty, and reasserts his confidence that an inner light will allow him to “see and tell/ Of things invisible to mortal sight.”²⁵

This second invocation shows a struggling Milton. He wavers between confidence and anxiety about his lack of vision. He presents prophetic insight as a possible compensation for his blindness but does not appear appeased by this. While the invocation does end on a hopeful note that his poem will succeed due to his newfound inner vision, the entire invocation is marked by the struggles of a man plagued by his blindness.

The doubts continue to surface in the third invocation at the head of Book 7. Much of this invocation is marked by Milton’s preoccupation with internal and external dangers and is again rife with the first person. Nine first person pronouns appear in thirty-nine lines. Where in the first invocation he was boasting that his song “intends to soar/ Above th’ Aonian mount”²⁶ Milton is now afraid he has reached dangerous heights and wishes to be returned to his “native element” lest he fall and “Erroneous there to wander and forlorn.”²⁷ Milton says he has been “Up led by thee/ Into the Heav’n of Heav’ns I have presumed,/ An earthly guest.”²⁸

²⁴ ‘Paradise Lost’ 3.34-38

²⁵ ‘Paradise Lost’ 3.54-55

²⁶ ‘Paradise Lost’ 1.14-15

²⁷ ‘Paradise Lost’ 7.19-20

²⁸ ‘Paradise Lost’ 7.12-14

This is the first proper instance we see of Milton doubting his divine inspiration. If Milton is not a guest in Heaven, he is uninvited there and runs the risk of being cast out to wander eternally forlorn. Forlorn is a word Milton uses to describe the fallen angels²⁹ and if Milton is not an invited guest then he runs the risk of being like those angels, separated from God. Milton also recounts that his voice has “fall’n on evil days,/ On evil days thou fall’n and evil tongues;/ In darkness, and with danger compassed round.”³⁰ Milton feels himself surrounded by his enemies but relies on the Muse to protect him. He asks the Muse to ward off revelers like those followers of Bacchus who tore apart the Thracian bard Orpheus after he offended them.

Milton is expressing his concerns that he is not divinely inspired, recounting what will happen to him if he is not. He appears confident that his Muse will not fail him and that she has provided him the divine inspiration he longs for to validate his poem. While he ends on this note it is significant that he has begun to think about these things, revealing concerns that were not present in the first two invocations. There is a legitimate fear of presuming to be a guest in Heaven, to be divinely inspired by God, when he is not. He is afraid of aspiring above his station and presuming too much.

The fourth, and final, invocation in Book 9 brings Milton’s doubts and fears to the forefront of the narration. This invocation is not a strict invocation in the sense that Milton does not call upon the Muse by name, though she is mentioned. It is rather a meditation on what must happen in the rest of the poem and a reaffirmation to the reader (and to

²⁹ ‘Paradise Lost’ 1.180, 2.615, and 4.374

³⁰ ‘Paradise Lost’ 7.25-28

himself?) that his subject matter is more heroic than any epic to have come before. He also reflects again on his divine inspiration.

Where the third invocation, in which these doubts first surface, ends on a confident note that the Muse can protect him, such confidence does not mark the end of this fourth invocation. The final lines present a real concern that he has imagined his inspiration:

“higher argument
Remains, sufficient to itself to raise
That name, unless an age too late, or cold
Climate, or years damp my intended wing
Depressed, and much they may, if all be mine,
Not hers who brings it nightly to my ear.”³¹

This is the last time Milton shares his anxieties and doubts with the reader. Given that Milton did complete the poem, perhaps his doubts were unfounded. But, even with having completed the epic, Milton chose to leave these expressions of anxiety and doubt in the poem itself. Why would Milton choose to present himself to his reader so boldly and while doing so leave the reader with the narrative arc of the author’s own doubts?

By showing himself regularly in the epic Milton is reminding his reader that this epic is a story created by a writer, and that the writer is still present. Milton is inserting himself into the work in a way that allows the reader to know Milton is still there. Whereas in another text, especially a story, the author is not present (Raphael makes a point to exclude himself only revealing himself to explain things immaterial to the story at hand but that might be distracting to Adam) and Milton does not want that. He wants his reader to know that this story has a creator, and also that this creator is not perfect. He has his own doubts and anxieties about the work he has created, and he shares these with the reader.

³¹ ‘Paradise Lost’ 9.42-47

Milton tells the reader that he had his doubts about his divine inspiration. What if 'Paradise Lost' was not a poem divinely inspired and instead was Milton aspiring above his place? Milton's aim is no small task. "To justify the ways of God to men." is an aim with weight and heavy consequences. What if Milton is wrong? And even if Milton is divinely inspired and his story is not incorrect, Milton also has his doubts about whether he can convey those divinely inspired ideas to his reader.

"If answerable style I can obtain
Of my celestial patroness, who deigns
Her nightly visitation unimplored,
And dictates to me slumb'ring, or inspires
Easy my unpremeditated verse:"³²

If Milton is divinely inspired and not deluding himself, and then only if Milton can translate the ideas he has received from the Muse into "answerable style", then he will have accomplished his task. If Milton is deluding himself or fails in his obtaining an answerable style, then Milton runs the risk of being like Satan: an exile from God leading others astray.

One of the doubts Milton faces is whether he can translate the visions and ideas given to him by the Muse and put them into words. This is the same problem that Raphael has when telling Adam about Heaven. How can someone convey in human language what may not be explainable to humans? If Milton's visions are divine inspiration, and are about Heaven and Hell and Earth before the fall, how can he explain that to a world after the fall? Human language is not capable of conveying an idea with perfect accuracy, without different interpretations. Human language was not always like this, and Milton offers glimpses of what it may have been like before the fall.

³² 'Paradise Lost' 9.20-24

In Book 8 Adam recounts his own remembrances of his creation to Raphael. After God had created man he brought all the animals to him “to receive/ From thee their names.”³³ Adam names them and this demonstrates what Edenic language is for Adam.

“I named them, as they passed, and understood
Their nature, with such knowledge God endued
My sudden apprehension...”³⁴

In naming the animals Adam becomes aware of their nature. He gains insight through the act of naming, of speaking. God creates through speech, and Adam learns through a similar action. While Adam did not call these animals into existence, naming them delivers the knowledge of them, perfect understanding of them, into his mind.

Naming has created knowledge, or awareness of what is. However, this is only in the human mind, where God does it in existence. This is not Adam’s first mention of naming, one of his first acts after God created him is to speak:

“... to speak I tried, and forthwith spake,
My tongue obeyed and readily could name
Whate’er I saw,”³⁵

What objects are, and the words used to name them, have a natural correspondence for Adam and Eve. Ambiguity does not exist, and not only that, a gift of knowledge and understanding of the object comes with such naming. Everything has a definite meaning and purpose in their names, clarity provided through perfect understanding of the objects that language is depicting. This might be why Raphael faces a difficulty in explaining Heaven to Adam, since human language in Eden is tied directly to seeing and naming, and

³³ ‘Paradise Lost’ 8.343-344

³⁴ ‘Paradise Lost’ 8.352-354

³⁵ ‘Paradise Lost’ 8.271-273

Adam has not been to Heaven and cannot see it. Adam and Eve's use of language will change and become clouded once they transgress God's commandment.

After they have eaten from the tree and this does not turn out how they had envisioned, Adam begins to blame Eve for all their troubles and condemns her:

“Out of my sight, thou serpent, that name best
Befits thee with him leagued, thyself as false
And hateful; nothing wants, but that thy shape,
Like his, and color serpentine may show
Thy inward fraud, to warn all creatures from thee
Henceforth; lest that Heav'nly form, pretended
To Hellish falsehood, snare them.”³⁶

This speech is a far cry removed from what Adam said of Eve before he chose to eat the fruit: “if death/ Consort with thee, death is to me as life.”³⁷ Eve has transformed, for Adam, from someone he would die so as to be with her again into the creature he blames for his choice of eating the fruit: a serpent. Adam names Eve ‘serpent’ as it suits how she is on the inside according to the now angry and bitter Adam. But Eve is not a serpent, nor was she intending this outcome.

After eating the fruit Adam has lost the ability to understand through names. He has falsely named his beloved Eve because he thinks he understands her nature. He has given her a new name. This is the inverse of how language worked before. In naming the animals Adam understood their nature. Now Adam is naming Eve based on what he believes her nature to be. The usage of naming has become perverted and with it language and any clarity therein. This change in language is foreshadowed by Satan and his fallen angels' use of double-tongued language.

³⁶ 'Paradise Lost' 10.867-873

³⁷ 'Paradise Lost' 9.953

Satan is the first to fall among God's creations, before the other fallen angels and before Adam and Eve. As such he is also the first to experience this change in language and its move away from pure understanding. The ambiguity and blurred meanings of language becomes a tool for Satan. Double-meaning in language is demonstrated best in a speech from Satan during Raphael's recounting of the war in Heaven.

On the second day of fighting in Heaven Satan presents a truce to God's angels while concealing that he and his cohorts have invented cannons³⁸ and will soon open fire:

“Vanguard, to right and left the front unfold;
That all may see who hate us, how we seek
Peace and composure, and with open breast
Stand ready to receive them, if they like
Our overture, and turn not back perverse;
But that I doubt, however witness Heaven,
Heav'n witness thou anon, while we discharge
Freely our part; ye who appointed stand
Do as you have in charge, and briefly touch
What we propound, and loud that all may hear.”³⁹

Satan is punning on cannon fire while appearing to offer terms of peace. Raphael comments that Satan was “scoffing in ambiguous words.”⁴⁰ Later, Belial also gets in on the fun, although he has a far blunter and less eloquent style than his leader:

“Leader, the terms we sent were terms of weight,
Of hard contents, and full of force urged home,
Such as we might perceive amused them all,”⁴¹

What is notable here is it is only the rebelling angels who are speaking in these ‘ambiguous words.’ The double meanings are seemingly lost upon the opposing side as they

³⁸ The usage of cannons in the narration of the war in Heaven presents an intermixing of the problem of analogy that both Raphael and Milton face in their narrations. Raphael must use analogy to explain events during the war to Adam, and one of these is presumably whatever is meant by cannons. But Milton himself is using the analogy of cannons for his markedly more modern audience. Milton deftly does not have Raphael use the name cannon, since Adam would have no idea what that means, but the lines still translate the spiritual into the physical for both the ancient and the modern.

³⁹ ‘Paradise Lost’ 6.558-567

⁴⁰ ‘Paradise Lost’ 6.568

⁴¹ ‘Paradise Lost’ 6.621-623

are caught unawares by the cannonade. Raphael's description of Satan "scoffing in ambiguous words" might display a microcosm of the difficulty Milton faces when composing this poem. Raphael, as an angel, may not have the capability of properly understanding ambiguous words but he still says Satan was using them anyways. But this is Milton speaking through Raphael, the ultimate source of the words is a post-fall Milton. In order for Satan's speech to work in the poem it must use ambiguous words, but Raphael the narrator may not have recognized them as such in his accounting to Adam.

Puns work due to words having similarities, either in sound or in meaning. Words have multiple definitions while remaining indistinguishable without context or definition. This comes down to appearance: whether in form or sound a word appears like another word. While one meaning is always intended, the other definitions are present and color what is being said with alternate meanings or more nuanced meanings. Milton uses the word wanton several times throughout the poem, a word which highlights the power of multiple meanings in a word.⁴²

Deception also relies on using similar appearances. Milton demonstrates this early on in the poem when Satan convinces Uriel to point out where God's newest creation, the two humans, reside. Before speaking to Uriel, Satan shifts his appearance:

"But first he casts to change his proper shape,
Which else might work him danger or delay:
And now a stripling Cherub he appears,
Not of the prime, yet such as in his face
Youth smiled celestial, and to every limb
Suitable grace diffused, so well he feigned;"⁴³

⁴² Milton uses the word wanton eleven times throughout 'Paradise Lost'. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, wanton has six definitions, with various meanings. Milton uses this word to signal all these meanings, however, it is clear that whenever Milton uses this word he intends only one definition. It could be called something like an anti-pun, all the other meanings are not possible in those situations, but they still influence how it is interpreted. Even when Milton is trying to be absolutely clear, human language will not allow him to be.

⁴³ 'Paradise Lost' 3.634-639

Satan pretends to be a Cherub who wishes to see the wonders of God's newest creation. This speech⁴⁴ to Uriel is a masterclass in rhetoric, Satan playing upon everything Uriel expects and wants to hear from a Cherub to gain exactly what he wants. Milton describes this deceptive speech from Satan as such:

“So spake the false dissembler unperceived;
For neither man nor angel can discern
Hypocrisy, the only evil that walks
Invisible, except to God alone,
By his permissive will, through Heav'n and Earth:
And oft though wisdom wake, suspicion sleeps
At wisdom's gate, and to simplicity
Resigns her charge, while goodness thinks no ill
Where no ill seems: which now for once beguiled
Uriel, though Regent of the Sun, and held
The sharpest sighted spirit of all in Heav'n;”⁴⁵

Milton points out that not even angels are capable of spotting deception arrayed against them, even the most sharp-sighted angels in Heaven. Everyone is susceptible to this deception. Milton also emphasizes that sight is a key element to deception. Uriel watches the disguised Satan leave and go toward Earth, and soon realizes he was deceived. When warning Gabriel against the evil that has entered the Garden, Uriel relays that after following Satan that “in the mount that from Eden north,/ where he first lighted, soon discerned his looks/ Alien from Heav'n, with passions foul obscured.”⁴⁶ It is not until he visually saw Satan change that Uriel realized that he had been duped. Appearances reveal how things are, but only if you can understand what you are seeing, as an angel might, and only if that appearance is not meant to deceive you.

⁴⁴ 'Paradise Lost' 3.654-680

⁴⁵ 'Paradise Lost' 6.681-691

⁴⁶ 'Paradise Lost' 4.569-571

While appearances are important, it is only one element of how Satan deceives Uriel and later, Eve. The other more powerful and more dangerous element is language itself. Satan is the first to use language in new and unexpected ways, and he is the master of it.

Language is a means of communicating an idea between two users of that language. It is a medium of translation for an idea to travel from one mind to another. What language is meant to convey is not always as simple as a name, abstract ideas exist within the mind that cannot be given a clear and distinct meaning. Speakers must use metaphors and analogies to convey these ideas. Raphael does exactly this when translating the events in Heaven to Adam, saying that “what surmounts the reach/ Of human sense, I shall delineate so,/ By lik'ning spiritual to corporal forms,/ As may express them best.”⁴⁷ The only way Raphael can explain Heaven to Adam is via analogy, translating the spiritual to the human.

As some ideas cannot be explained due to the lack of succinct expression in language, analogy is the only means of communicating complicated concepts and notions between minds. The more complicated an idea is, the more nuances it brings along with it. Because the pure understanding that Adam and Eve possessed with Edenic language fell with them, analogy and indefinite language are the only means left to translate an idea.

Despite the flaws of indefinite language, it is the only means humans have to communicate thoughts and ideas between one another, and it is effective in doing so. While it is not perfect, the general outline and shape of ideas can be received on the other end of this medium. When an idea is being translated through language it relies upon the other minds interpretation of what is being conveyed. Different notions of the meaning behind

⁴⁷ 'Paradise Lost' 5.563-576

words present within the mind, and predispositions and ideas already there, always combine with those incoming to shape the interpretation. And this can be exploited.

Satan's plan to corrupt humans does not come to fruition until Satan first spies on Adam and Eve in the Garden. Overhearing their conversation about the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, and witnessing how they interact, a plan begins to formulate in Satan's mind. He will convince Adam and Eve to transgress the one commandment given to them by God, and in doing so, drive them from their position as God's favored creation. And the key to this plan is the deception of Eve.

Eve describes her memories of her own creation to Adam, when she first awoke:

"I thither went
With unexperienced thought, and laid me down
On the green bank, to look into the clear
Smooth lake, that to me seemed another sky.
As I bent down to look, just opposite,
A shape within the wat'ry gleam appeared
Bending to look on me, I started back,
It started back, but pleased I soon returned,
Pleased it returned as soon with answering looks
Of sympathy and love; there I had fixed
Mine eyes till now, and pined with vain desire."⁴⁸

This speech is overheard by Satan while eavesdropping on the couple in the Garden and reveals to Satan the key to executing his plan. This speech, soon followed by her comment upon first seeing Adam that she thought him "less fair,/ Less winning soft, less amiably mild,/ Than that smooth wat'ry image;"⁴⁹ shows fundamental parts of Eve's character. She seeks to know who she is, but also has a flair of vanity.

⁴⁸ 'Paradise Lost' 4.449-466

⁴⁹ 'Paradise Lost' 4.478-480

The first step in Satan's plan is to get inside Eve's mind, and he does this by speaking into her ear as she sleeps, influencing her dreams. She relays this dream to Adam when she wakes, recounting that what she dreams was unlike any other dream she'd had. The vision Satan plants in Eve's mind is a premonition of events that will unfold later, but even then, it is what is said to Eve by the figure in her dream that is most important:

"O fruit divine,
Sweet of thyself, but much more sweet thus cropped,
Forbidden here, it seems, as only fit
For gods, yet able to make gods of men:
And why not gods of men, since good, the more
Communicated, more abundant grows,
The author not impaired, but honored more?
Here, happy creature, fair angelic Eve,
Partake thou also; happy though thou art,
Happier thou may'st be, worthier canst not be:
Taste this, and be henceforth among the gods
Thy self a goddess, not to Earth confined,
But sometimes in the air, as we, sometimes
Ascend to Heav'n, by merit thine, and see
What life the gods live there, and such live thou."⁵⁰

This speech, spoken to Eve through her dream by Satan, sets the idea in her mind of what the fruit of the tree can do. Whether or not anything said in this speech is true is unimportant to Satan's goal. He is planting the idea of ascending above herself in the mind of Eve, that knowledge is not forbidden but is instead revealing and makes gods of men. Eve tells Adam of this dream, but Adam has his own ideas about dreams and what goes on in the mind and informs Eve as such:

"But know that in the soul
Are many lesser faculties that serve
Reason as chief; among these fancy next
Her office holds; of all external things,
Which the five watchful senses represent,
She forms imaginations, airy shapes,

⁵⁰ 'Paradise Lost' 5.67-81

Which reason joining or disjoining, frames
All what we affirm or what deny, and call
Our knowledge or opinion; then retires
Into her private cell when nature rests.
Oft in her absence mimic Fancy wakes
To imitate her; but misjoining shapes,
Wild work produces oft, and most in dreams,
Ill matching words and deeds long past or late.
Some such resemblances methinks I find
Of our last evenings talk, in this thy dream,
But with addition strange; yet be not sad.
Evil into the mind of god or man
May come and go, so unapproved, and leave
No spot or blame behind.”⁵¹

Adam seems aware of the dangers of imagination and wonder, describing how Fancy often distorts the shape of reality in dreams to create things that are not real. However, his claim that “Evil into the mind of god or man/ may come and go, so unapproved, and leave/ No spot or blame behind.” is wrong. Deception is the invisible evil and language can enter the mind and change the landscape as it will.

Much later in the poem Satan will speak to Eve again, disguised as the serpent, having lured Eve to the tree by planting the curiosity behind it in her mind. Having brought her to the Tree, the temptation of Eve takes place in one magnificent speech.⁵² Some of the vital elements of the speech are outright fabrications, such as that the serpent has eaten from the tree and still lives. Eve does not know what death is, as she has never experienced it. How could she know what it means that the eating of the Tree will bring death?

Satan also preys on Eve’s nature. Eve is curious, and thinks much of herself, and Satan designs this speech around those elements. The fruit, according to Satan, will give her

⁵¹ ‘Paradise Lost’ 5.100-115

⁵² ‘Paradise Lost’ 9.679-732

everything she wants. Satan's speech clouds her mind so much that she forgets the single commandment from God and chooses to pursue what she wants instead.

This speech only works because what Satan is saying, some of which is abundantly untrue, is melding with the ideas already in Eve's mind. Some of those ideas were planted by Satan through his dream whispering, but Eve's own predilections also allowed Satan's words to do their work inside her mind, such that Eve makes a drastic mistake. Adam follows her based upon his own nature as well, placing love of Eve over his loyalty to God. Adam forgot Raphael's example in Abdiel, the lone angel who resisted Satan's speech and remained loyal. Satan could not force Adam and Eve to make the choice they made, but he preyed upon their own thoughts and ideas and manipulated them into making that choice. The manipulation happened exclusively in the mind of Eve, conveyed there by language.

Another reason Eve was vulnerable to Satan's rhetoric is the nature of their discussion. It was a one on one conversation between the two of them, no one else was present to change how the interaction occurred. Had Adam been present at any time during this exchange, or even after Satan's speech but before Eve ate the fruit, things may have happened differently. There was no one else to discuss what was said before Eve acted upon it. Eve's instinctual reaction, that the serpent was right, was incorrect and there was no one else there to discuss the argument with her. Eve was alone with a voice trying to persuade her against what she knew was correct, and that voice succeeded.

Because of the interaction between language and the mind our first instincts and interpretations are not always correct. Our first understanding is not always true since our biases and notions regarding meanings color all our interactions with texts and our own thinking. Rarely is our first pass on an idea the best, as ideas are too complex to consider all

aspects on the first go around. When Adam asks Raphael about the differences between angels and humans, Raphael says that “whence the soul/ Reason receives, and reason is her being,/ Discursive, or intuitive; discourse/ Is ofttest yours, the latter most is ours,/ Differing but in degree, of kind the same.”⁵³ Angelic reason and human reason are the same but attained in different ways, with humans reasoning through discourse.

Satan’s deception of Uriel and Eve highlights why the intention behind the usage of language is important. Milton has a goal when writing ‘Paradise Lost’ to “justify the ways of God to men.” He is also afraid that he will not succeed and is terrified of leading people astray if his epic fails or is falsely inspired. Milton’s intention is good, and by displaying his doubts he is giving his readers insight into what he is trying to do. If Milton has not succeeded in his goal, perhaps he has at least warned his readers as such, and he will not have done irreparable harm in leading them astray with his false aspirations.

At St. John’s College we explore ideas like those given to us by Milton, whether they are what Milton intended or not. Here, we have the luxury of a community and a committee to determine what texts we read and discuss at this school. Decades of time in the Program and centuries of Western history aid in that selection. It is not the authors that we select, but rather the ideas in their texts. Our discussions teach us in many different ways: how to communicate, how to think critically, how to explore a problem, how to listen, how to consider other viewpoints. Each is beneficial in their own way, but these discussions ignore the authors of these texts. The Great Books, as treated by the Program, may as well be authorless texts passed down to us through history.

⁵³ ‘Paradise Lost’ 5.486-490

Authorial intent is not important to the discussion at St. John's College because of how the texts are selected. But after St. John's there will not always be a community to help you determine what to read and what not to read. Your community after St. John's is who you choose to be in community with, something you did not have a choice in at the seminar table. Nor will there be a committee to decide what ideas are worth exploring and where those ideas are coming from. Those are choices that are made alone. No one can make you read anything you do not choose to read.

Not every author is like Milton, riddled with fears that he will lead his reader astray. Some writers aim to do just that, and language is the perfect tool for it. Language can be used to convince people to do something for the speaker's personal gain, like buying their product. Even when you know what their goal is, language still allows the salesman to succeed in selling you on their product. Language is also key to political or ideological propaganda, spreading ideas and arguments for and against them. The 21st century and the Internet era has exploded the availability of thoughts and ideas from every corner of the globe. Anyone with a phone or computer can spread his or her message, for ill or for good.

Milton was explicit in his intention and signaled to his readers his own concerns if he was proven to be wrong. Looking at authorial intent can inform the reader of the nature of the idea they are being presented, but not every writer will signal their intention and will instead use the power of language to deceive their readers.

Ultimately what we choose to believe is up to us. Like Satan and Eve and Adam, we all have choices to make, and no one can make those choices for us. Our beliefs and morals are our own, but ideas can take root in our mind and sway our opinion. Ideas are pervasive, they never die, and they live in our texts, spreading through language. Abdiel withstood the

temptation to rebel against God, but Eve and Adam did not. Alone amongst one third of the angels in Heaven, Abdiel could recognize the deception for what it was. Abdiel is the most zealous of all the angels in Heaven, and that is the degree of loyalty to God it required to withstand the power of Satan's rhetoric when alone.

Discourse, as Raphael says, is the key to our understanding. Surrounding yourself with a diverse community filled with robust discussion and debate allows our reason to thrive. While what we choose to believe is our choice alone, the ideas that inform our choices should not be considered alone. Nor should ideas be unchallenged because of tradition. Diversity in this intellectual community is of paramount importance. If everyone in your community always agrees, that is not a good thing. Echo-chambers are not productive of robust thought, they can breed unchallenged ideas that should not be allowed to flourish. Defend your thoughts where appropriate, but do not shy away from being challenged in your community. If the ideas you choose to believe are strong, they will stand up to the debate. If they are not, then perhaps someone has helped you to identify a false conception of an idea, or a flawed argument, or a dangerous line of thinking.

When people write to deceive and sway our opinions, debate and discourse in a diverse community is crucial to finding our way and deciding for ourselves. The vital importance of different viewpoints other than our own cannot be understated. Each of us has our own interpretation of an idea and we have the means to communicate those understandings between one another. This communication is what allows us to determine which ideas are worth considering and which are not. Language can do us great harm when used to deceive, but it is also the tool that enables the recognition of that invisible evil.