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# Milton's Tempter: A Genesis of a Subportrait in *Paradise Lost*

By FRANK S. KASTOR

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. . . for now  
Satan, now first inflam'd with rage, came down,  
The Tempter. . . . (PL IV.8-10)<sup>1</sup>

SATAN'S CHANGE in character, real or apparent, following the Mt. Niphates speech and the above lines has produced epic critical controversies; these are too well known and complex to become embroiled in here, especially since I am not offering yet another interpretation of Milton's Satan.<sup>2</sup> My own view is similar to Waldock's ("he is not a changed Satan—he is a new Satan"<sup>3</sup>) and that of Rajan and Gilbert, who argued that the speech separates two different concepts of Satan: the great leader of unconquerable armies and the cunning, subtle Tempter.<sup>4</sup> I believe Milton's announcement of a change in roles ("now / *Satan* . . . came down / The Tempter") relates directly to an actual transformation in character which follows. The role of the Tempter and its characterization, which appear only in Books IV and IX, amount to a subportrait: an almost separable part of the satanic portrait and one which differs markedly from the rest, yet is absolutely self-consistent.<sup>5</sup> My purpose is simply to present a genesis and explanation of that subportrait.

That Milton's Tempter may be the product of his own genius working directly "from divine revelation alone" (Gen. iii and Rev. xii.9, especially) or from the scattered details of Scripture as developed fantastically

<sup>1</sup>All Milton quotations are from *The Works of John Milton*, ed. Frank Allen Patterson et al. (New York, 1931-38).

<sup>2</sup>Review of many of these controversies can be found in A. J. A. Waldock, *Paradise Lost and Its Critics* (Cambridge, Eng., 1947); Douglas Bush, "*Paradise Lost*" in *Our Time: Some Comments* (New York, 1945); R. J. Zwi Werblowsky, *Lucifer and Prometheus: A Study of Milton's Satan* (London, 1952); Mina Urgan, "Satan and His Critics," *Engl. Dept. Studies, Istanbul U.*, II (1951); F. L. McAlister, "A Survey of Twentieth Century Milton Scholarship with Particular Attention to Controversies," *DA*, XIX (1958); Calvin Huckabay, "The Satanist Controversy of the 19th Century," *Studies in Engl. Ren. Lit.*, Humanities Ser., No. 12 (Baton Rouge, 1962).

<sup>3</sup>*Paradise Lost*, p. 83 (n. 2).

<sup>4</sup>B. Rajan, *Paradise Lost and the Seventeenth Century Reader* (London, 1947), p. 97; Allan H. Gilbert, *On the Composition of "Paradise Lost"* (Chapel Hill, 1947), p. 57.

<sup>5</sup>The one exception, which Johnson and some modern critics have found amusingly baffling, underlines Milton's sense of the role and self-consciousness in handling it. When the Tempter is discovered "Squat like a Toad" at Eve's ear (IV.800ff), he explodes almost literally—in fact, into a different role and character with "its own likeness" (l. 813): in Gabriel's words, "the Prince of Hell."

through general Christian tradition is possible, of course. The problem with the first possibility is the paucity of scriptural details (although the Tempter is one of the best documented of Satan's many roles<sup>6</sup>) and with the second, the opposite. Sixteen centuries of theological speculation, of biblical exegesis, and of homiletic, literary, and popular imagination presented Milton (and modern explicators of *his* Satan) with an incredibly voluminous mass of inconsistent and contradictory information about Satan's character, appearance, roles, and attributes. As a general historical entity, Satan, even as Tempter, was and still is an immense and multifarious accretion of many ages and imaginations.<sup>7</sup>

A more specific and, I believe, convincing genesis of Milton's Tempter appears, however, in the tradition from which *Paradise Lost* directly emanates—a tradition, incidentally, which involves the two possibilities mentioned above. From the tradition of literary and quasi-literary renditions of the storied or fabled version of Christian divine history, a pattern of satanic characterization emerges in which the Tempter is a separate part of the portrait.<sup>8</sup> Despite individual variations in characterization from account to account, the Tempter is regularly differentiated from the rest of the portrait in one way or another. Often the separation is absolute: the Tempter is an entirely separate and distinct character. At other times the differentiation amounts to a subportrait of a single satanic figure, as in *Adamus Exul*, *Cursor Mundi*, or *Paradise Lost*.

There seem to be several reasons for this separation. For one thing, in the earliest extant and embryonic versions of the story, the pre-Christian pseudepigrapha and apocrypha of the Old Testament, the names, roles, and actions of the apostate leaders vary considerably. For example, in the *Book of Enoch* there are two main leaders of the fallen apostates, "Semjâzâ" and "Azâzêl."<sup>9</sup> Semjâzâ was the chief leader to whom God gave "authority to bear rule over his associates" (p. 193); but it was Azâzêl who originated sin on earth: "And the whole earth has been corrupted

<sup>6</sup>The serpent of Gen. iii is directly related to Satan by Rev. xii.9, "that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world." Additional references: Job; I Chron. xii.1; Matt. iv.1-11; Luke iv.2-13, xxii.3, 31; John viii.44, xiii.2, 27; Acts v.7; I Cor. vii.5; II Cor. ii.11, xi.3; Eph. ii.2, vi.11; I Thess. iii.5; II Tim. ii.26; I Pet. v.8; Rev. xx.3, 8.

<sup>7</sup>He appears most nearly whole when shaped by the intellectual structure of a lengthy study or history, of which there have been many good modern ones: e.g., Edward Langton, *Satan: A Portrait* (London, 1945); Joseph Turmel, *The Life of the Devil*, trans. S. H. Guest (London, 1929); E. H. Jewett, *Diabolology: The Person and Kingdom of Satan* (New York, 1890); G. Papini, *The Devil*, trans. A. Foulke (New York, 1954); Maximilian Rudwin, *The Devil in Legend and Literature* (Chicago and London, 1931).

<sup>8</sup>The tradition, of which *PL* is one of the last and greatest examples, is well described and documented by Watson Kirkconnell, *The Celestial Cycle* (Toronto, 1952).

<sup>9</sup>*The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, R. H. Charles et al. (Oxford, 1913), II. See also *The Book of Jubilees*, *Vita Adae et Evae*, and *Apocalypsis Mosis*. The regular connection of Satan and the Serpent appears mostly after A.D. 100.

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through the works that were taught by Azâzêl: to him ascribe all sin" (p. 194). In *II Enoch* the fallen apostate is called "The Devil," and it was he who "seduced Eve." He differs from the archangel in name, state, and role; however, the distinctions here are little more than embryonic. In fact, the evidence from these early accounts suggests only the possibility that the seeds of the story may have carried the genes of a separate Tempter.

A second factor, which appears overtly in some of the versions, is the concept of Satan's enchainment in Hell: the belief that Satan had been bound in Hell by God and could leave only with his permission. Consequently, as for example in the Caedmon or Marini versions, another apostate is the Tempter in the Garden.<sup>10</sup>

A third and probably more decisive factor is the nature of the story itself as it developed. Despite considerable variety in the length, genre, number of episodes, degree of characterization, purpose, period, and language of the versions, still the story is composed basically of a relatively consistent historical framework and what amounts, through repeated practice, to a series or core of standard events: the Creation, the Apostasy, the Fall to Hell, the demonic council, the Temptation and Fall of man, episodes from Christ's redemptive mission, and the Last Judgment. Satan's characteristic actions are determined largely by the nature of each episode. By far the most popular single episode in the story, as reflected both by extended treatment and by the large numbers of separate treatments, was the Temptation in the Garden. The role and character of the Tempter in the story were affected correspondingly.

The settings of the story profoundly affect characterization too. The extreme differences in the worlds of Heaven, Hell, and the Garden on earth influence inestimably the corresponding roles and characterizations. This can be conveyed, however, only by quoting large segments of many works, a practice which space precludes.

However, the separation and distinctness of the Tempter, who is always and only found on earth, and usually in the Garden, are manifest in other ways also: in descriptions of him which differ markedly in details of size, shape, or appearance from those of Satan in other roles; changes in motivation; marked differences in characteristic actions; different

<sup>10</sup>Some of the background of this idea is discussed by C. A. Patrides, "Milton and His Contemporaries on the Chain of Satan," *MLN*, LXXIII (1958), 257-260. "Genesis B," *Caedmon's Metrical Paraphrase*, ed. Benjamin Thorpe (London, 1832), pp. 28ff; Giambattista Marini, *La strage degli innocenti*, trans. Richard Crashaw, *The Complete Works of Richard Crashaw*, ed. Alexander B. Grosart (private printing, 1872), p. 97ff. Other factors extraneous to the story itself are the role of the Tempter historically (especially the anthropomorphic devil of the Middle Ages) and the doctrine of demonic disfiguration (see John M. Steadman, "Archangel to Devil: The Background of Satan's Metamorphosis," *MLQ*, XXI [1960], 321-335).

appellations; and differences in the author's attitude toward that role.<sup>11</sup>

The use of disguise is of course one of the principal characteristics of the Tempter generally. In the story his major, although not exclusive, disguise is the serpent—his major scene the Garden. In fact, in dramatic versions of the story "The Serpent" is regularly a separate character, a distinct role which is included as such in the *Dramatis Personae*. For example, in Hans Sachs' *Tragedia von Schöpfung, Fal und Ausstreibung Ade aus dem Paradeys* (ca. 1530), Jacob Ruff's *Adam und Heva* (1550), and Giambattista Andreini's *L'Adamo* (1613), the *Dramatis Personae* include among the fallen angels Lucifer, Satan, and the Serpent as separate characters. The latter is the Tempter and appears alone with Eve on stage. The stage directions of Sachs's play reflect concisely the separation: "Die schlang steht auff ihr füß. Die drey teuffel [Lucifer, Satan, and another] gehen ab. Eva kumpt. Die schlang spricht."<sup>12</sup> In both the Ruff and Andreini plays, Satan says he will use the serpent ("die schlang wil ich reitzen an"), but as almost always in such plays only "die schlang," or the "Worm" as he is called in the York mystery cycle, does the tempting.<sup>13</sup> The appearance of the Tempter as an actual serpent on stage dramatically reflects a major aspect of the separation of that role. Regardless of genre, it is always and only the Tempter who is associated with the serpent. That very old and repeated association clearly accounts for the notable snakelike qualities of his character.

Another factor which often distinguishes the Tempter is appellation. Although the satanic names and epithets vary among the versions, the appellation most often used for the Tempter alone is "the Devil." For example, *The Fall of Lucifer* from the Chester mystery plays presents "Lucifer" as an archangel characterized chiefly by pride in his own beauty and loftiness. After his fall he is disfigured; his title becomes "Devil Lucifer" and his characteristic feature is enmity to God and man. In the temptation scene with Eve, however, his title is "the Devil" and he is a serpent throughout the scene.<sup>14</sup> When used specially for the

<sup>11</sup>The prominence of these factors depends upon the length of the version, its fullness and number of episodes, and the degree of attention to characterization, rather than upon period or nationality. Since there is no significant development in the pattern historically, I have arranged the examples to best illustrate the major aspects of the pattern of separation of the role. Some of the works are, of course, major analogues of *PL*.

<sup>12</sup>[Complete Works of] *Hans Sachs*, ed. Adelbert Von Keller (Tübingen, 1870), I, pp. 34, 37.

<sup>13</sup>Jacob Ruff, *Adam und Heva*, ed. Herman M. Kottlinger (Leipzig, 1848), p. 35; *The York Cycle of Mystery Plays*, ed. J. S. Purvis (London, 1957), Pageant No. 5, p. 18. See also, e.g., Arnoldus Immensen, *Der Sündenfall* (ca. 1475), ed. Otto Schönemann (Hanover, 1855); Troilo Lancetta, *La scena tragica d'Adamo ed Eva* (Venice, 1644); Serafino della Salandra, *Adamo caduto* (Cosenza, 1647).

<sup>14</sup>*The Chester Mystery Plays*, ed. Maurice Hussey (London, 1957), pp. 1 ("Characters"), 8, 16, 20. Another variation appears in the *Ludus Coventriae*. Three of the characters listed are "Lucifere," an angel who debates in Heaven with God; "Serpens," who tempts Eve; and

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Tempter, "the Devil" is more than a name; almost always it has the force of a dyslogistic term, an opprobrious epithet, and reveals a special attitude toward that role alone.

Thomas Peyton devotes less than half of his epic poem, *The Glass of Time, in the Two First Ages* (1620), to the story, and concentrates upon the scene in Paradise. Although other satanic roles are manifest, the Tempter's is dominant. And although other satanic names appear once or twice each, the name "the Devil" appears over fourteen times, and applies only to the Tempter. It occurs always in connection with the serpent, temptation, disguise, or fraud: "that dismal day / . . . the woman did the Devil obey," "by the envy of a *viperous* tongue / Hatched by the Devil."<sup>15</sup> The fact that Peyton occasionally calls the Devil "a Devil" does not alter the essential point. The name is associated with a type of behavior or action. It is a derogatory term as well as a proper name for the role of Tempter. Its use indicates an emotional response and an attitude of contempt and loathing for that role:

In these and such like shapes thou liest in waight,  
To gull the world as with a poisoned baight,  
That being tane man's vitall life straight baines,  
Infects his blood, and runs through all his vaines,  
And as thou art, dost cozen, lie and lurch,  
Transformed sometimes into a man in th' church,  
Under that holy habit, maske and guise,  
Thou setst abroad thy cancred venom'd lies.  
And thus thou camst unto our Grandam Eve,  
And as a Devill into her thoughts doth dive,  
Seeming a serpent crawling on thy breast,  
Much like a simple foul mishapen beast. . . . (st. 71, p. 63)

It is this attitude toward the Tempter as serpent and loathsome devil which distinguishes the Devil from Satan for many writers and which so

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"Diabolus," who operates with "Serpens" in the Temptation scene and claims responsibility for the act) "I dede hem att pis velony"); ed. K. S. Block (London, 1922), p. 26. For further evidence of this distinction, see, e.g., *Norwich Play* (14th cent.) in *The Non-Cycle Mystery Plays*, ed. Osborn Waterhouse, EETS, Ser. 2, No. 104 (London, 1909), p. 12; *Le mystère d'Adam*, Tours MS., new trans. by Henri Chamard (Paris, 1925), Act II; Charles Perrault, *Adam, ou la création de l'homme, sa chute, et sa réparation* (Paris, 1697), Bk. II; Sir William Alexander, *Doomes-Day*, in *The Poetical Works of Sir William Alexander* (Glasgow, 1872), III, "First Hour," pp. 10-27.

<sup>15</sup>Reprint (New York, 1886), p. 86, sts. 131, 132; also pp. 62, 82, et passim.

often makes the Tempter in the garden different from, say, the Leader of the Infernal Council.<sup>16</sup>

As the quotation from Peyton reflects also, the Tempter through the course of history has appeared habitually as a man among men. In versions of the story too, a regular feature of the subportrait is its man-sized and manlike qualities. Furthermore, the implications of this feature far exceed the simple matter of disguise. A widespread practice is exemplified by Joseph Fletcher's *The Perfect-Cursed-Blessed Man* (1629). The brief version of the story, and particularly of the Temptation and Fall, serves primarily as material for a sermon or treatise on "Man's Miserie by His Degeneration."<sup>17</sup> Fletcher graphically depicts at length the physical, moral, and spiritual decay which man has undergone as a result of original sin. The Tempter is the Devil and becomes the major example, and even metaphor, of degenerate man. The cause of man's fall was that he was "Proud, Lucifer-like, greedy to arise." But, as a result of man's fall, "he shook hands with the devill" and engaged in "ev'ry kinde of evill."

For all man's powers and pers'nall faculties  
Were pois'ned all; chang'd their abilities.  
In doing well; he once did well resemble  
The Glorious God: but now— . . .  
He rightly represents the devill in  
Pravitie of perverse disposition.

The conclusion of Fletcher's exemplum-sermon continues the analogy: "Such is this monster-cripple, devill-man." For Fletcher and many another writer, the Devil-Tempter and man bear a close, profound, and ugly family resemblance.

In fact, in those works in which the Tempter is characterized other than as simply a serpent or devil, it is his very human qualities which mark the role. These qualities do vary, of course; several stereotypes, however, are also readily apparent in the tradition. A major one is the comic Tempter.

In D'Arnould Greban's *Le mystère de la Passion* (1452), the comic

<sup>16</sup>The difference in attitude toward this role is manifest in one way or another in almost every version I have examined; only the degree and type vary. Also, it seems that the separation of roles in the story accounts for the fact that the distinction in names appears more markedly in versions of the story than in general practice. Sometimes the shift from "Satan" to "the Devil" seems to occur almost unconsciously in connection with temptation, disguise, or the serpent; see, e.g., Du Bartas' *Semaine* in *Du Bartas: His Poems* (London, 1621); "The Imposture," Pt. 2, day i, week 2, pp. 186-200, and particularly Sylvester's marginal notes (pp. 14, 15, 191).

<sup>17</sup>The title of Ch. ii, in which the story occurs; see *The Poems of Joseph Fletcher*, ed. Rev. A. B. Grosart (private printing, 1869), pp. 65ff.

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Tempter is absolutely separate from all other satanic roles. The leader of the fallen angels is "Lucifer"; the Tempter is "Sathan," one of the fallen crew: "*Icy s'en va Sathan a quatre piez comme un serpent entortiller autour de l'arbre.*"<sup>18</sup> Following the fall of Adam and Eve, he says, "J'ay bien joué mon parsonnage." Indeed, he has played his role well. As Greban develops it, Sathan is a comic buffoon, an idiotic and lighthearted punster, or "roy de la feve," the king of laughter, as Lucifer calls him. The sharp contrast between the two characters and their different roles emerges clearly in the following dialogue:

- SATHAN: Fronsssez de vostre orde narine,  
 Lucifer, dragon ferieux,  
 gettez souppirs sulphurieux,  
 brandonnez de flamme terrible,  
 cornez prise a voix tres horrible;  
 nous avons eu cruelz vacarmes.
- LUCIFER: Comment va nostre herault d'armes?  
 Es tu venu, roy de la feve?
- SATHAN: J'ay admené Adam et Eve,  
 qui sont ja du siecle transsis;  
 ilz sont la en ce limbe assis,  
 si tres piteus qu'il n'y fault rien.
- LUCIFER: Laissez les moy la, ilz sont bien;  
 ilz y ont, je croy, beau poser.  
 Deables, ne vueillez repposer,  
 randissez moy, grans et petis,  
 courez moy tous nos appatis,  
 tout le monde est a moy donné.
- SATHAN: Grand mercy a moy, *Domine*:  
 j'en ay este l'embassadeur. (p. 24, ll. 1698-1717)

Lucifer is an angry, taciturn figure, a "dragon furieux . . . [to whom] tout le monde est . . . donné." The Tempter is a "roy de la feve," "l'embassadeur," a clown ("Grand mercy a moy, *Domine*"), the Prince of Hell's comic subordinate, for whom "les piez et le corps serpentin" were a fitting garb.

In Gil Vicente's *Breve sumário da história de Deos* (1526), "Lucifer, o maior do inferno," (prince, captain or leader of hell) and "Satanas, fidalgo de seu conselho," (nobleman of his council), who becomes the "tentador" (Tempter), are also separate characters.<sup>19</sup> The comedy of the work resides largely in the Tempter. He is a boorish country nobleman

<sup>18</sup>Paris, 1878, p. 692f, a stage direction.

<sup>19</sup>Ed. Joao de Almeida Lucas (Lisbon, 1943), pp. 42, 44.



with ambitions at the court of Lucifer; mainly a comic rustic with an uncomic love of deceit, whom a suave and calculating Lucifer manipulates to accomplish the fall of man. Lucifer tells Satanas, "Faze-te cobra, por dissimular" (p. 44), but the Temptation occurs offstage and the Tempter never appears as a serpent. The character is developed along strictly human and comic lines.<sup>20</sup>

The Tempter of Andreini's *L'Adamo* exemplifies a different stereotype as well as a subportrait of a single satanic figure. Andreini's Lucifer is a consistent character through four of the five acts. Like the figure in Books I and II of Milton's epic, he is the proud, unrelenting adversary of God and man. Dynamism characterizes his words and deeds, whether as the "hot, reckless rebel" or the warrior-general torn from heroic mold and rousing his troops to action. In Act III as the Tempter, he is transformed. Not only his shape (now half-woman, half-serpent), but his whole character is utterly changed by the new role, which is developed at some length. He is first of all beautiful and seductive; as Eve says,

For arms and hands it has, a human bosom,  
And all the rest appears but trailing serpent.  
How the sun, gilding with his rays those scales,  
Flashing with fair hues, dazzles both my eyes!  
I wish to draw more near . . .

The nearer I approach, the greater charm  
He shows to view, sapphire and emerald  
And ruby now and amethyst and now  
All jasper, pearl and jacinth is each fold.<sup>21</sup>

In contrast to the rest of the portrait, the Tempter is a poetic character, sensitive to beauty, "courteous" and "wise," as Eve says (p. 245), and honey-tongued—a courtier with feminine traits who makes a fine art of flattery:

You vanquisher of eyes, charmer of souls,  
Darling of hearts, fair maiden, pray approach me!  
Lo, I disclose myself. Behold me here,  
Yea, all of me, and sate your eyes with gazing:  
You the chief ornament of all the world,  
You Nature's show-piece, micro-paradise,  
To whom all things on earth bow down in praise.

<sup>20</sup>Mystery plays are particularly rich in comic Tempters: e.g., in *Le mystère d'Adam* (Paris 1925), Act II, "La Seduction"; *Le mystère du Viel Testament*, publ. by baron James de Rothschild (Paris, 1878). In both, the Tempter is also a separate character.

<sup>21</sup>See trans. Watson Kirkconnell in *The Celestial Cycle*, pp. 244-245, for this and the following quotations.

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His job in Paradise, as he tells Eve, is gardening. How appropriate to his character,

To wreathe the lilies or weave rose with rose;  
Here giving contour to a fragrant hedge,  
Or causing there a crystal rill to flow  
In flowers' bosoms and by tiny herbs,

for he is a half-womanish embroiderer of words and flowers into "sweet displays." The difference between the Tempter and the rest of the satanic portrait is nearly absolute: aside from the sharp contrasts of appearance, shape, action, and temperament, the whole tone of the Tempter's scenes is strikingly dissimilar to the rest.<sup>22</sup>

Another major type, the last to be discussed here, is the machiavellian Tempter, the very human villain. This type is well exemplified in Vondel's *Adam in ballingschap* (1664), which together with its companion play, *Lucifer* (1654), forms a long, important, and contemporaneous analogue of *Paradise Lost*. Lucifer is the Prince of Hell. The Tempter, Belial, is a separate character, and one entirely different as well.<sup>23</sup> "Sly Belial" is a distant subordinate of the Prince in the hierarchy of Hell: he is the "Squire" of Asmodeus, who, in turn, is an underling of the Prince. Furthermore, he is unscrupulous and loathsome in his cunning and guile. He takes, for example, a villainous delight in the prospect of his act:

BEL. The hearing must come first, so that my talk  
May take away their scruples. Gradually  
Nearer the tree they'll venture, foot by foot;  
Then with the hand shall they approach the apple,  
That charms the eye and lures the mouth to taste.  
Thus Death is kissed unwittingly, before  
The fires of lust for dainties are extinguished. (p. 454)

The contrast in character between the Prince and Tempter is everywhere apparent; it extends down even to minor details. For example, the Prince prefers to overcome Adam by using either "the eagle, prince among birds" or "an elephant . . . to toss Adam upon his tusks / Impale him" (p. 451)—that is to say, by more violent and "valorous" means. The

<sup>22</sup>Another good example of this type of Tempter is in Della Salandra, *Adamo caduto*.

<sup>23</sup>A clue as to why Belial may have been selected to be the Tempter is supplied by a fn. in the standard Dutch text of the play, *De werken van Vondel*, ed. R. N. Roland Holst (Amsterdam, 1931), V, 616: "*Belial*: Hebreuwsche naam met de beteekenissen: nietsnutter, perverse, verworpen, onderwereld. . . ." My trans.: "*Belial*: from the Hebrew name, meaning "good-for-nothing," "perverse," "rejected," "of the lower world." These are apt epithets of the traditional Tempter and may explain the choice of Belial for the role. The following page references are to the trans. by Watson Kirkconnell, *The Celestial Cycle*.

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Tempter, on the other hand, prefers the "subtle serpent" and a "sly attack." The Prince thinks "the man should first be tried" (p. 454), but the Tempter thinks it should be the woman:

BEL. Nay, for man sees too keenly. Through the mask  
He'd mark the lie. But womankind is weak  
And simple as a dove. With ease we'll work  
And get at Adam through the woman-creature. (p. 454)

Finally, the temptation scene itself separates the two most dramatically. "Belial in serpent form" (p. 462) does the tempting. And, as in so many plays, the Tempter as serpent coils loathsomely before the audience's eyes.<sup>24</sup>

Despite variations, the Tempter emerges from over a thousand years and innumerable versions of the story as a clearly discernible character. Most often called "the Tempter," "the Serpent," or "the Devil," he is found always on earth and usually crawling through the Garden or wrapped around the tree. In part he is a snake, literally and figuratively; and even his devilish and human qualities have a serpentine flavor: he is a sneaky, cunning, guileful, fraudulent, lying character who operates slantwise and speaks with a forked tongue. He is also a man-size, human, and shoddy villain who works alone, using disguise to accomplish his lowly ends. A character devoid of scruples and dignity, he is viewed with loathing and contempt, or else, when presented as a comic buffoon, with derision. He stands apart and in contrast to the glorious archangel, the awful leader of apostate armies, or the frightening and monstrous ruler of Hell.

Approached from this background, Milton's Tempter appears to be a classic case of tradition and the individual talent. Commensurate with the epic proportions of *Paradise Lost*, Milton's development and particular uses of the role are impressive indeed and will be discussed later. The foundations upon which he built that role and character, however, are largely traditional.<sup>25</sup> He had, to begin with, as much precedent for separating the roles by subportrait as by a distinct character. Empirically it is clear that he chose to embody the force of evil in one large satanic figure, for whatever artistic, theological, or other reasons. The dominant name for that figure throughout the epic is, of course, "Satan" (used over ninety-

<sup>24</sup>For other villainous Tempters, see, e.g., *Cursor mundi*, ed. Rev. Richard Morris, EETS, No. 57 (London, 1874-93), pp. 30ff et passim; Caedmon's "Christ and Satan" and "Genesis B" in Thorpe (n. 10) or in *The Junius Manuscript*, ed. George P. Kropp (New York, 1931); John Bunyan, *The Holy War*, ed. M. Peacock (Oxford, 1892), pp. 14-17.

<sup>25</sup>The support for this and my preceding remarks on Milton will appear in the following discussion. I would add only that I have found no convincing "single source" for Milton's Tempter, yet a wealth of applicable analogues.

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four times, excluding Arguments). The meaning of the word and the basis of the character are simply "the adversary." As the Tempter, the adversary's character is molded, and consciously, by traditional practice. For example, Milton's nine uses of the appellation "the Tempter" clearly circumscribe, delineate, and distinguish that role. The title is first used when the satanic figure arrives in Paradise and announces the change in roles: "*Satan*, now . . . came down / The Tempter" (IV.9-10). The next five uses occur in Book IX during the Temptation scene; the last three occur in Books X and XI and further emphasize the role.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, Milton's use of the appellations "the Devil" and "the Serpent" are equally traditional and revealing. Milton uses "the Devil" five times, and only for the Tempter.<sup>27</sup> Of the thirty-nine references to serpents or the Serpent (excluding Arguments), thirty-one are either epithets of the Tempter or references to the Tempter-Serpent in Book IX.<sup>28</sup>

Like many of his predecessors, Milton also makes the Tempter far smaller in stature than the other roles. The transformation, however, is made gradually as well as self-consciously. Milton diminishes Satan's stature during the course of Book III—"When first this Tempter cross'd the Gulf from Hell" (X.39)—as the role changes from Prince of Hell to Tempter.<sup>29</sup> Facing Death, Satan is described as a "Comet"; leaving the throne of Chaos, he "Springs upward like a Pyramid of fire." During Book III, he becomes like a "vulture" who feeds upon "the flesh of Lambs or yeanling Kids" (ll. 431-434), like a "scout," and finally becomes "the Devil" (l. 613), "the fraudulent Impostor foule" (l. 636) to pass by Uriel. The reduction in size begun in Book III is completed in Book IV and maintained throughout Books IV and IX.<sup>30</sup> The Tempter is compared in Book IV to a "prowling Wolfe" (l. 183), "a Thief" (l. 188), "a cormorant" (l. 196), "a Toad" (l. 800); in IX, to "a black mist low creeping" (l. 180);

<sup>26</sup>IX.549, 567, 655, 678; X.39, 552 (referring to the fruit of the tree: ". . . the bait of *Eve* / Us'd by the Tempter . . ."); XI.382 ("that hill . . . / Where upon for different cause the Tempter set / Our second Adam . . .").

<sup>27</sup>In connection with the transition to Tempter, discussed in the next paragraph, "the Devil" is disguised as a "stripling cherub" (III.613). In IV.394 "the Devil" in disguise is ugly and loathsome with envy and prepares for the temptation; also, "the Devil" (l. 846) is discovered at the ear of Eve. In IX.188 "the Devil" enters the serpent. And in X.878 Adam calls the Tempter "the Devil." There are no other occurrences of the name.

<sup>28</sup>Of these about 16 occur in Bk. IX; Milton's use of the epithet in the Argument of IX is indicative.

<sup>29</sup>This change in size has been well noted in this century and its significance much disputed. The most regular interpretation of the last two decades seems to be that it is part of Satan's progressive "decline," "degeneration," or "degradation." Cf. C.S. Lewis, *A Preface to Paradise Lost* (London, 1942), p. 97; Merritt Y. Hughes, *John Milton, Complete Poems and Major Prose* (New York, 1957), p. 177; J. M. Steadman, "Satan's Metamorphoses and the Heroic Convention of the Ignoble Disguise," *MLR*, LII (1957), 84; and Rajan, p. 105 (n. 2). My findings point rather to role.

<sup>30</sup>Except for the incident involving another change in roles (IV.797ff) discussed in n. 4.

and it is in IX, of course, that he becomes a serpent. His size is small: generally smaller even than man's, and far, far smaller than that of the rest of the satanic portrait.<sup>31</sup>

The similes also reflect Milton's attitude clearly. To Milton, the Tempter is loathsome, contemptible, bestial, and despicable. Passages like the following are spotted through the two books:

Thus while he spake, each passion dimm'd his face  
Thrice chang'd with pale ire, envie and despair,  
Which marr'd his borrow'd visage, and betraid  
Him counterfet, if any eye beheld.  
For heav'nly mindes from such distempers foule  
Are ever clear. Whereof hee soon aware,  
Each perturbation smooth'd with outward calme,  
Artificer of fraud; and was the first  
That practis'd falshood under saintly shew,  
Deep malice to conceale, couch't with revenge. (IV.114-124)

Throughout the two books, words like fraud, lies, wiles, and false guile accentuate like drumtaps the intensity of Milton's disgust and contempt.

The passage also reflects another standard aspect of the Tempter—his disguises. Although the disguise of Milton's Tempter may change, he always has one: cherub, lion, tiger (IV.402-403), black mist (IX.75), and serpent, into whose "Mouth / The Devil enterd" (IX.187-188).<sup>32</sup>

"The Serpent suttlest Beast of all the Field . . . fittest Imp of Fraud" is indeed the "Fit Vessel" for the "wiles" of the Tempter (IX.86-89). For the Tempter throughout is characterized by guile, fraud, falsehood, lies, and deceit—"basest things," in his own words (IX.171). In Book IX, however, the serpent becomes much more than the "Vessel" of the Tempter; it becomes synonymous with him. In the Argument and most of the text of Book IX, "the Serpent" and "the Tempter" replace "Satan" as the proper names of the character.<sup>33</sup>

When the Tempter, in entering the serpent, finds himself "con-

<sup>31</sup>Robert H. West, *Milton and the Angels* (Athens, Georgia, 1955), provides a theological background and justification for Satan's changes in size (p. 109, et passim). The relative size by role is a different matter from the expandable nature of angels, however.

<sup>32</sup>For something of the background of the particular disguises see Jackson I. Cope, "Satan's Disguises: PL and PR," *MLN*, LXXIII (1958), 9-11. There has been much scholarly interest recently in Satan's disguises and their significance: e.g., Raymond B. Waddington, "Appearance and Reality in Satan's Disguises," *TSLI*, IV (1962), 390-398; Thomas Kranidas, "Satan's First Disguise," *ELN*, II (1964), 13-15; Mother Mary Christopher Pecheux, "O Foul Descent: Satan and the Serpent Form," *SP*, LXII (1965), 188-197.

<sup>33</sup>He is called "Satan" only twice in Book IX; both instances occur at the outset before he reenters Paradise. Thereafter he is called "the Tempter" 5 times and "the Serpent" regularly. See nn. 26, 27, 28.

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strained / Into a Beast, and mixt with bestial slime" (IX.164-165), he is only reflecting what Milton has made him throughout, first by a series of animal similes and disguises, and then by his actions. The Tempter operates mostly by night, gliding obscurely, "creeping," and "then rising changes oft / His couching watch" as he "stalkes" his prey (IV.402-406; IX.159f); he squats "like a Toad"; "With tract oblique / . . . side-long he works his way" toward Eve (IX.510-512). He is also a flatterer; but his principal action is tempting, which he does first by dream in Book IV, then directly as serpent in Book IX.

However, the Tempter also has a notably human side; Douglas Bush is not alone in considering the satanic figure in Books IV and IX as "a very human villain." Not only is he generally man-sized and, like man, a spirit "incarnate" (IX.166), but his serpent rise, by acquired reason, to man-like state—"Internal Man" (IX.711)—figures importantly in the temptation, of course. In contrast to the public Satan in Hell and Heaven, the Tempter is developed internally.

The humanizing of the Tempter as "Internal Man" also adds a whole dimension to the traditional role. It results largely from the soliloquies. Only the Tempter, of all the satanic roles, has them. The Mt. Niphates soliloquy in Book IV and the four others which follow in Books IV and IX contain among other things an intensive and extensive searching of soul.<sup>34</sup> Introspection, self-evaluation, and conscience appear as well as self-chastisement, remorse, and a wide range of human feelings: grief, pity, disgust, hate, revenge, lust, envy, jealousy, pride, ambition, and more. Indeed, the Tempter has human impulses similar to those of post-lapsarian Adam and Eve, and the parallel is not accidental.

In contrast to Satan in Heaven and Hell, the Tempter suffers within and exemplifies, in detail, the inner ramifications and consequences of sin and evil, the inner hell:

Me miserable! which way shall I flie  
Infinite wrauth, and infinite despaire?  
Which way I flie is Hell; my self am Hell. (IV.73-75)

Milton's total portrait of Satan needs no additional encomiums. It is composed of numerous, admirable parts. One, his subportrait of the Tempter, I believe particularly enriches the whole, as he meant it to do. Illuminated by a long tradition of tempters, who are more often than not merely devilish serpents, comic buffoons, or two-dimensional, Machiavel-  
lian villains, Milton's Tempter reveals both its genesis and its rich individuality.

<sup>34</sup>IV.32ff, 358ff, 505ff; IX.99ff, 473ff.



See p. 376

VI. "SATAN ENTERS INTO THE SERPENT SLEEPING," BY M. BURGHERS AFTER B. DE MEDINA, FROM BOOK IV, *Paradise Lost* (1688)