

What are the epic qualities in “Paradise Lost, Book I?”

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What qualities of an epic do you find in Book I of Milton's “Paradise Lost”?

John Milton's (1608-1674) “Paradise Lost, Book I” (1667) is seen as one of the greatest epics in English literature. An epic is a long, serious poem that tells the story of a hero or a big struggle between good and evil. It usually includes a grand setting, strong characters, epic battles, long speeches, and supernatural elements. In Book I, Milton uses many of these features to make the poem great and powerful.

A Serious and Grand Theme: An epic always talks about a serious and grand subject. “Paradise Lost, Book I” is about the fall of man; and how Satan and the other angels were thrown out of Heaven after they rebelled against God. The poem begins with this serious line:

*“Of man's first disobedience,...
Brought death into the world, and all our woe.”*

This shows that the poem will tell a grand story of sin, punishment, and human history. The theme is religious, moral, and universal. It is about all mankind.

A Great Hero (Epic Character): Every epic has a central figure. In Book I, Satan is shown as the main character. Even though he is evil, he is brave, proud, and full of energy. Even after being thrown into Hell, he does not give up. He tells the fallen angels that they will still have courage and strength. He says that it is better to be free in Hell than to serve in Heaven:

“Better to reign in Hell, than serve in Heav'n.”

Satan has many heroic qualities like leadership, strength of mind, and strong speech. He is evil but he still plays the role of an epic hero in Book I of the poem.

A Vast Setting: In epics, the story happens in many places, not just one small area. In “Paradise Lost,” the action takes place in Heaven, Hell, and later Earth. In Book I, Milton gives

us a picture of Hell. Hell is full of fire, darkness, and pain. In hell, there is—

“No light, but rather darkness visible.”

This huge setting makes the story feel big and powerful, fit for an epic.

Long and Speeches: Epic characters often speak in long and serious speeches. These speeches show their plans, emotions, and ideas. In Book I, Satan gives many strong speeches. For example:

“Awake, arise, or be for ever fall'n.”

He speaks to give hope to the fallen angels and calls them to act. These speeches make the poem more dramatic and grand.

Supernatural Elements: Epic poems include gods, angels, devils, and magical places. In *“Paradise Lost,”* we see God, Satan, angels, and the creation of Pandemonium (the capital of Hell). All the characters are supernatural beings, not normal humans. The war in Heaven is also between divine forces, not earthly armies. This gives the poem a myth-like feeling, which is common in epic stories.

Epic Similes: We see epic similes in epics. These are long comparisons that make something clear and powerful. In this poem, Milton compares Satan to a giant sea monster, ***“Leviathan.”***

“Leviathan...

...hugest that swim th' Ocean stream:

This helps the reader imagine how big and strong Satan looks in the burning lake of Hell. These similes are often rich, beautiful, and long, which is a special feature of epic poetry.

Formal and Elevated Language: Milton writes in a formal and elevated style, even without using rhyme. His sentences are full of powerful words, and the tone is grand. This makes the poem sound noble and important, just like other great epics like *The Iliad* or *The Aeneid*.

In fine, Book I of *“Paradise Lost”* has all the major epic qualities: a grand theme, a heroic central figure, a wide setting, supernatural beings, formal speeches, epic similes, and elevated language. Milton used these tools to create a powerful religious epic.