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SUMMARIZED ARGUMENTS TO THE ACTUAL  
STORIES IN PARADISE LOST**

*By*

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# THE GENERAL RELATION BETWEEN THE SUMMARIZED ARGUMENTS TO THE ACTUAL STORIES IN PARADISE LOST

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## Abstract

The paper attempts to investigate the general relation between the summarized arguments to the actual stories in *Paradise Lost*. Unfortunately, the arguments of *Paradise Lost* have been taken for granted as offering a coherent guide to both the narrative of the epic and its overall structures. Therefore, they have not received enough attention by Milton's scholars. However, this study argues that the use of the arguments or headnotes in *Paradise Lost* exceeds the limit of summarizing the content to highlight social issues such as the need for educational reformation, to criticize the political authority, to ask for freedom of speech, and finally to describe the poem's own narrative.

## ملخص البحث:

تنشغل هذه الورقة بدراسة العلاقة العامة بين محتوى الكتب والخلاصات المختصرة التي تسبق تلك الكتب في الملحمة الشهيرة "الفردوس المفقود" للشاعر الإنجليزي جون ميلتون. وحيث ان هذه الخلاصات لم تظهر في الطبعة الاولى للملحة، لذلك فهي لم تجذب اهتمام كثير من الباحثين. وظل الباحثون يقرأونها على أنها خلاصة مختصرة لمحتوى الكتاب. ولكن هذه الدراسة حاولت البحث في ماهية العلاقة بين الخلاصة ومحتوى القصة في الكتاب. وأكدت الورقة بأن الخلاصة بالإضافة الى دورها في تلخيص محتوى الكتاب، ناقشت قضايا اجتماعية كثيرة منها على سبيل المثال: نقد السلطة السياسية واصلاح التعليم وأهمية حرية التعبير كما انها قدمت وصف عام للسرد الملحمي.

When the epic of *Paradise Lost* was first published in 1667, the arguments or headnotes were not included as an essential part of the epic. Simmons, the printer of the first edition of *Paradise Lost*, according to Allen Gilbert, says "There was no argument at first intended to the book, but for the satisfaction of many that have desired it, I have procured it" (27). In the second edition of 1668, the arguments appeared as an aspect of the epic poem, yet they were not distributed through the several books. It was only in the version of 1674 where each of the twelve books of the epic poem was preceded by an argument or a headnote. Unfortunately, the arguments of *Paradise Lost* have been taken for granted as offering a coherent guide to both the narrative of the epic and its overall structure. Consequently, they have not received enough attention by scholar of Milton. However, the inclusion of the arguments to the epic is not an arbitrary task; otherwise they would not be included and distributed to the twelve books of *Paradise Lost*. The present paper attempts to investigate the general relation between the summarized arguments to the actual stories in *Paradise Lost*. Largely because of the limitation of space and time, this study is selective by its nature. Therefore, only a selection of books and arguments will be considered. In this paper, I will mainly

concentrate on the first four arguments and books of *Paradise Lost*. I argue that the use of arguments or headnotes in *Paradise Lost* exceeds the limit of summarizing the content to highlight social issues such as (the need for educational reformation), to criticize the political authority, to ask for freedom of speech, and finally to describe the poem's own narrative.

A brief look at the history of epic as a genre manifests a great change in its form partly as a result of the invention of the printing press in the late fifteenth century, in addition to other economic and social elements such as the concept of religion and its role in society and how it can shape people's perception towards their daily lives. The classical epic was represented as an oral act. Catherine Bates, in her article "*The Faerie Queene: Brittain's National Monument*", states that "Epic has been represented as a visual or a verbal phenomenon because, in either form, it was immediately accessible to a group, the epic story could be apprehended by any number of people, so long as they had eyes to see or ears to hear" (136). At a more general level, the difference between, for example *Beowulf* and *Paradise Lost*, is attributed to the concept of oral and written epic. In terms of epic textual and generic dimensions, C.M.

Bowra, in his book *From Vigil to Milton*, argues that “An epic poem is the by common consent to a narrative of some length and deals with events which have a certain grandeur and importance and come from a life of action, especially of violent action such as war” (1). Additionally, Bowra identifies the major features that differentiate between “literary” epic and “authentic” epic. The two types differ, according to Bowra, at two levels; the technique is different between the two, and “each owes its character to special methods of composition” (2). Consequently, the difference in the circumstances of composing establishes a difference in the character of the poetry. Henceforth, Bowra differentiates between the methods of composition of an oral epic and a literary epic in terms that the former reveals what is commonly known and called a heroic and derives directly from societies and matches with the heroic standards. The latter manifests a different perception of heroism and of human greatness within societies where it is not necessary to be called heroic. Bowra enhances his notion as he states, “The truly heroic ideal and standards of conduct did not exist for the writers of literary epic” (10). Accordingly and obviously, Milton’s *Paradise Lost* explicates the characteristics of the literary epic especially through the reading of Satan. Though the notion of Satan and his wicked deeds, in religious societies in particular, are associated with evilness and villainy, nonetheless some readers find nobility in his acts and see him as a revolutionary figure. Another feature of the literary epic, in addition to its concentration on truth, is its attitude to sensual pleasure. Thus, epics like Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene* or Milton’s *Paradise Lost* serve partly to entertain the members of society.

Milton’s plan for composing his epic encounters a major challenge, whether to follow the rules of Aristotle for an epic or to follow nature. In his book entitled *A Preface to Paradise Lost*, C.S. Lewis affirms that

“In Milton’s mind there is apparently some other kind of epic contrasted with that which Aristotle recommended” (5). *Paradise Lost* manifests that Milton takes an equal balance between the two.

During the Renaissance era, the epic was regarded as the highest form of literature. Sir Philip Sidney in his *Defense of Poetry* wrote in 1595 that the epic is “the best and most accomplished kind of poetry”. Furthermore, for Sidney the epic’s mission is limited to draw into public the celebrated achievements of warrior-princes and the leaders of nations. Milton, on the other hand, moves beyond the limitations of the basic traditional role of the epic. David Loewenstein in his essay entitled “The Seventeenth-Century Protestant English Epic”, states that “Milton is acutely self-conscious about writing in this ambitious, comprehensive literary form and yet attempting to do something remarkably fresh with it” (148). Therefore, Milton’s epic draws upon partly the existed traditional characteristics of the art of the epic, yet his writing is different in kind from the work of Homer and Virgil. Gregory Machacek, in his book *Milton and Homer*, argues that books five and six of Milton’s epic were the most explicit contributions of Homer’s writing to *Paradise Lost*. However, for Machacek, “the Homeric epics exerted a different kind of influence on the war in heaven episode, beyond what they contribute to enriching the meaning of particular passages” (55). Moreover, Milton is not highly in favor of the romantic or chivalrous epics of Boiardo, Ariosto, and Spenser partly because the epic poet must deal with a single action. Hence, Milton’s concern is to compose a unique epic contrasted with Aristotle’s recommendation. “Milton”, according to Bowra, “has grafted his epic manner onto a subject which lies outside the main epic tradition” (196). Thus, Milton uses the characteristics of the classical epic into his poem, yet critically revises and challenges many of the themes and conventions of the epic including its

concentration on the heroic and martial pursuit of glory. Lowenstein points out how Milton incorporates the elements of both the classical and Renaissance epics, especially when Milton introduces the cataclysmic war in Heaven narrated in Book 6 of the epic. Bowra puts it more plainly as he writes, "Milton claims that his subject is more heroic than that of any other epic and explicitly singles out Homer and Virgil for invidious comparison" (197). Milton writes:

Death's harbinger: sad task, yet argument  
 Not less but more Heroic than the wrath  
 Of stern Achilles on his foe pursued  
 Thrice fugitive about Troy wall; or rage  
 Of Turnus for Lavinia disespoused  
 Or Neptune's ire or Juno's, that so long  
 Perplexed the Greek and Cytherea's son;

(IX, 13-19)

Milton rejects Homer and Virgil's treatment of the war as a truly heroic subject. For Bowra "Milton introduces the war on a noble scale into *Paradise Lost*, but his war is of a very special kind, unlike human war and far more important in its issues and its results" (197). Milton's treatment of the war reveals his rational vision of society. The main source of his subject is the Bible which participated actively on the life of humankind in the time of Milton.

Milton's attitudes towards the traditional epic is attributed to three main reasons; the first one relates to Milton's major ultimate goal of writing an eternal epic which deals with universal theme, the second one is attributed to Milton's view of education, and thirdly to the social and political circumstances of the restoration era. According to Dennis H. Burden "Milton is insisting on the rationality of his subject" (1). Hence, the classical epic, with its characteristics, does not serve his mission. Milton's rich journey of education allows him to select wisely the right features of the epic. In other words, Milton is an expert in the field of humanity, therefore, he anticipates the need for a change. He does

not simply follow the rules of the art of the epic, but instead leaves his valuable critical traces on the genre of epic. This is evidenced, according to Burden, at the opening of Book 9 where Milton picks a quarrel with classical epic:

I now must change  
 These Notes to Tragic; foul distrust,  
 and breach  
 Disloyal on the part of Man, revolt,  
 And disobedience: On the part of  
 Heaven  
 Now alienate, distance and distaste,  
 Anger and just rebuke, and judgement  
 given,  
 That brought into this World a world  
 of woe,  
 Sinne and her shadow Death, and  
 Miserie  
 Deaths Harbinger: Sad task, yet  
 argument  
 Not less but more Heroic than the  
 wrath  
 of stern Achilles on his Foe pursu'd,

(IX. 5-10)

This passage, according to many critics, manifests Milton's view of the classical epic. Furthermore, Burden argues that:

Milton significantly names neither Odysseus nor Aeneas, calling them simply the Greek' and 'Gytherea's Son' since what mattered was not who as individuals they were or what they were like, but simply that one was a Greek and the other the son of Venus, these two things being a sufficient cause for their being the objects of divine wrath" (12).

For some critics, Milton's case against the classical epic is similar to a typical writing of literary criticism that leads its concern to the moral and logical implications of any particular episode. For example, Milton in Book 1 writes:

With loss of Eden, till one greater  
 man  
 Restore us, and regain the blissful  
 seat.

(I. 4-5)

The two lines demonstrate multiple layers socially (politically) and theologically depending on readers' response and appreciation. Milton depicts controversial issues exceeding the limits of portraying the noble deeds of the traditional epic character. The potential readers may read the lines as a mimicry of the political atmosphere in England during the seventeenth century. Here, Milton's long narrative poem works at three levels; social, political, and theological.

Indeed, Milton's task is to create work of art which takes the shape of both universality and locality. *Paradise Lost* reveals universal qualities as it touches upon a core universal event in the life of humanity in accordance with Heavenly religions. Simultaneously, it implicitly touches upon social issues like religious diversity, education, freedom of speech, and the political life in England in the seventeenth century. In his book *John Milton a Short Introduction*, Roy Flannagan argues, "By the 1640s Milton was thinking of tragedy in terms of instructive history or Bible stories that might also teach an English person valuable lessons about life" (72). Milton's epic is not mainly reporting the event, but rather the long narrative provides dramatic features to the event to the point where it invites readers' critical contributions and evaluations of the events. How do they view the event and consequently how do they respond to it knowing that religion occupied a significant role during Renaissance period? The long narrative poem concentrates on universal subject matter and much greater interior emphasis. Likewise, Milton's *Paradise Lost* resembles, in a sense, the Bible itself since it spans from the Creation to the end of time itself. "Theology and theological debate", according to Loewenstein, "are central to Milton's poem in a way that they are not in any other Renaissance epic" (150). In fact, many critics analyze the epic based on the religious facets found throughout the narrative poem.

Milton's epic most probably was composed in a time when Milton gave up his career as a controversial pamphleteer and started living and writing as a religious Dissenter. Loewenstein asserts that "In *Paradise Lost* Milton combined epic form, sacred themes, and prophecy to create a daring and highly original poem retelling the most universal of biblical subjects: the Fall of humankind" (146). Similarly, Gilbert affirms that "Milton's epic differs from other epics in that it is still at heart a tragedy" (26). However, Milton's epic is open to multi-readings and not only bounded to theological reading. Bowra argues that "to give a proper scale to his subject, to show how important and universal it is, Milton goes back to the beginning of time and connects the Fall of the Angels and of Man with the difficulties which met him in his own days" (16). Viewed through this perspective, Milton's epic serves to unify between the past and the present. *Paradise Lost*, in this sense, can be read as a blow to the constructed religious institution since it was published during the restoration in which enormous political and religious hostility and uncertainty were taking place. In fact, Milton as a controversial writer opposes any kind of formal religious practices.

The distribution of the arguments to each book of Milton's epic is not an innovation of the seventeenth century, but traces back to ancient times. In fact, the arguments of *Paradise Lost* are compared to the Geneva Bible. Accordingly, Milton uses some of the characteristics of traditional epic in composing his long narrative. In his book *Milton's Paradise Lost*, John Diekhoff states, "*Paradise Lost* is an epic before it is an argument. Its essential structure is determined by epic principles and is less flexible than the structure of a political pamphlet" (17). Many critics and biographers of Milton agree that those arguments are written by Milton upon the request of the printer. Gilbert in his study asserts that the arguments are Milton's

writing. He attributes his claim to Milton's earlier plans for the drama of *Paradise Lost*. For Gilbert, "The outlines are written continuously and so for the most part are the arguments" (28). However, some other critics do not assign them to Milton and they argue that they are mainly written by the printer to increase the sales. In his article entitled "The 1668 Argument to *Paradise Lost*", John Hale argues that it is impossible to make a firm claim that the arguments were surely composed by Milton, but "external and internal evidence alike point to its being of Milton's own composition" (87). Another aspect which confirms Milton's composition of the arguments is related directly to Milton's personality. Milton is known to be very concerned about his fame as a poet and a scholar. Diekhoff states, "It was Milton's habit in his controversial prose to write frequently and at length about himself. This habit has been cited often enough as a proof of his arrogance, his pride, his self-concern" (13). Consequently, Milton would not let anyone spoil his epic by composing and adding irrelevant headnotes. Additionally, Hale ensures that if those arguments have not been written by Milton, then they must have been written by someone who is very close to him. Diekhoff argues that since Milton accepts persuasion as his end, he employs various devices of rhetoric to achieve it. The arguments, in this regard, serve as an avenue for persuasion. However, no matter who wrote them, they, since then, permanently exist as essential parts of any new copy of *Paradise Lost*. Thus, Miltonists need to deal with them as integrated elements of the epic. For Hale the arguments in *Paradise Lost* are very important because "they give evidence about Milton's developing interpretation of his own poem; raises some new questions; and helps us enter into the author's thinking about his poem" (87). Therefore, the examination of the relationship between the arguments of *Paradise Lost* and the actual

stories of the different books moves beyond the surface notion of acting just to summarize the contents of the different books to reveal how Milton composes and develops his epic and how he uses the argument as a rhetorical device to convince his audience.

The layout of the arguments in each book of *Paradise Lost* vary in terms of length and content. The longest one is found in Book 10, while the shortest one is in Book 8. I argue that the argument of book 1 is the most vital since it is the first piece potential readers would encounter and is the first step in the ladder in shaping the readers' expectations of the long narrative epic. Therefore, it has to be set in a very attractive manner. Additionally, Milton was aware of the valuable role of printing in society. Stephen B. Dobranski argues, in his book *Milton, Authorship, and The Book Trade*, that "Milton recognized the essential role that the printing press would come to play in promoting change and demonstrated the utility of this new technology for English people" (1). Thus, the inclusion of the arguments partly contributes to Milton's ultimate focal aim of writing an eternal epic. The eternal long narrative poem has to be completed at the level of content as well as the format. Hence the inclusion of the arguments partly fulfills the format requirements.

As mentioned earlier the arguments of *Paradise Lost* were inserted to highlight the need for educational reform during Milton's time. The arguments in the epic are not only a means for guiding reader or summarizing contents, but rather they act to attract more readers, invite critical analysis, and give hints and clues without revealing Milton's stance or judgement. In the argument of book 1, Milton's voice is absent, his role in the epic is not represented in the argument. However, in book 1, Milton writes;

That to the height of this great argument  
I may assert the eternal providence,

And justify the ways of God to men.  
(I.24-26)

In the above lines, Milton demonstrates his mission in the epic. For some critics Milton's task /to justify the ways of God to men/ occupies an important part not only in book one, but to the whole epic, yet the argument reveals no indication to the poet's role in the poem. The exclusion of the poet's voice in the headnote manifests a gap between the summarized argument and the content of book one. Nonetheless, this can be read as a way of giving readers full authority to appreciate the content of the story without depending directly on the role of Milton. The argument of *Paradise Lost* is used to clarify notions to readers. For example, the argument of book 1 reads as "Satan with his angels now fallen into hell, described here, not in the center (for heaven and earth may be supposed as yet not made, certainly not yet accursed) but in a place of utter" (56). Here the argument affirms clarification, rather than summarizing the content. The argument serves as a guide for the readers to avoid confusion. The outline points out the possibility of confusion and clearly leads the readers. Milton is highly aware of the complexity of his universal subject, hence the implantation of the argument works as a supplementary method to explain and add concepts that are not included in the actual poem.

Indeed, the argument of book 1 acts beyond summarizing the content of the story. According to Gilbert, the argument of the first story includes events that are not represent in book one, but they are reported in book six. Milton and the printer of the epic send hints to readers of the upcoming events of the long epic through the argument. This technique, I argue, is highly valuable as it encourages readers to move on with their reading. The argument of book one is not only an entrance to the first story of the epic, but rather a gate to the whole poem. E.M.W. Tillyard views the argument of the first book as a scope for Milton's plan. He writes, "It is natural that Milton,

believing in the high seriousness of his purpose should outline the scope of his plan" (245).

Perhaps, Milton hides his voice in the argument of book 1 deliberately as a way of demonstrating his view of traditional education. Milton's biography reveals his stance against traditional education. Neil Forsyth in his book *John Milton a Biography* writes, "Milton was disappointed by Cambridge University. He went there intending to become a minister of the church, but in his writings from those years he refers to himself only as a scholar or poet" (21). Even though Milton was known to be a successful and extraordinary student, he was rusticated because of a dispute with his teacher at Cambridge University. Later, in his prose "Of Education", Milton asks for the reformation of the educational system. He writes:

The end then of learning is to repair the ruins of our first parents by regaining to know God aright, and out of that knowledge to love him, to imitate him, to be like him, as we may the nearest by possessing our soul of true virtue, which being united to the heavenly grace of faith makes up the highest perfection (146).

Milton's long epic exemplifies his philosophy of education. *Paradise Lost* is not meant for entertainment only, but also aims for educating as the epic reveals aspects of his history and other current issues during the seventeenth century. The argument of book two, for example, provides a different depiction of Satan and his fellows from the general norm. Such description invites a multi-reading of the content of book two and encourages readers for both careful reading of the content and an in-depth critical thinking of the situation. Book two and its argument can be read as a representation of the political situation of England during Milton's period. This reading is permitted metaphorically through Satan's revolutionary reaction to God's

command. Nevertheless, Milton does not plainly shed light on the political atmosphere in England, yet he uses political discourses throughout the argument and the book. The argument is read as "The consultation begun, Satan debates whether another battle is to be hazarded for the recovery of heaven: some advise it, others dissuade" (109). This line reveals a political discussion in which different opinions are considered, yet the argument does not manifest the reasons for the revolutionary act, but only emphasizes indirectly the concept of equality: "another kind of creature equal or not much inferior to themselves" (109). These attitudes actively move readers a step beyond the limitation of the plot summary. The content of book two enhances these stances by providing positive delineations of the revolution:

Let us not then pursue  
 By force impossible, by leave  
 obtained  
 Unacceptable, though in heaven, our  
 state  
 Of splendid vassalage, but rather seek  
 Our own good from ourselves, and  
 from our own  
 Live to ourselves, though in this vast  
 recess,  
 Free, and to none accountable,  
 preferring  
 Hard liberty before the easy yoke  
 Of servile pomp. Our greatness will  
 appear  
 Then most conspicuous, when great  
 things of small,  
 Useful of hurtful, prosperous of  
 adverse  
 We can create, and in what place so  
 e'er  
 Thrive under evil, and work ease out  
 of pain  
 Through labor and endurance.

(II. 254-61).

The above lines demonstrate a revolutionary political discourse in a highly appealing way for readers. The argument seemingly sets a real political scene while the actual story

sheds light and elaborates on important human notions such as justice, freedom, and power. These concepts relate directly to the daily life of human beings, especially during Milton's time. Hence, there is a rooted connection between the two, as Milton uses the argument to overshadow some realistic features of his epic. Through this technique Milton encourages his readers to engage with the text critically to form their ultimate understanding. The idea of education here is not simply to supply information, but rather to support readers' participation. Milton depicts the scene in the argument of book two and provides his readers with full authority to participate, understand, and then make their judgment.

The headnotes of *Paradise Lost* are used to avoid censorship. Milton uses them as an additional space to emphasize certain social practices or to criticize the political government of his time. On June 14, 1643, the English Parliament passed a law called the Licensing Order, which required that all books be approved by an official censor before publication. In his famous prose "Areopagitica", Milton pleads for the repeal of the law. However, the government refuses his argument and official censorship of books in England lasted until the nineteenth century. Milton's prose "Areopagitica" has long been an inspiration for those demanding a free press. In "Areopagitica", Milton writes:

For this is not the liberty which we can hope, that no grievance ever should arise in the commonwealth, that let no man I this World expect; but when complaints are freely heard, deeply considered, and speedily reformed, then is the utmost bound of civil liberty attained, that wise men look for (276).

Milton composes his epic during the high peak of censorship, as a result Milton was aware of the new policy concerning printings and the impossibility of expressing his thoughts freely. Therefore, he uses both the content of the books and the arguments



to allude and hint at the political practices of the government. In the argument of book three, Milton sheds light on the concept of freedom and justice: "Clear his own justice and wisdom from all imputation, having created man free and able enough to have withstood his tempter" (164). Milton implicitly reminds his readers of the originality and importance of their freedom. He connects the notion of freedom to God directly to give it more credibility and value. The figure of God in the argument as well as in the following content, in parts, metaphorically represents the political authority. The argument also reveals another practice of the political authority: "But God again declares that grace cannot be extended toward man without the satisfaction of divine justice; man hath offended the majesty of God by aspiring to Godhead, and therefore with all his progeny devoted to death must die" (164). In book three, Milton writes;

Sole pledge of his obedience: so will fall,  
 He and his faithless progeny: whose fault?  
 Whose but his own? Ingrate, he had of me  
 All he could have; I made him just and right,  
 Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall.  
 Such I created all the ethereal powers  
 And spirits, both them who stood, and fell who fell.  
 Not free, what proof could they have given sincere  
 Of true allegiance, constant faith or love?  
 Where only what they needs must do, appeared,  
 Not what they would, what praise could they receive?  
 What pleasure I from such obedience paid,  
 When will and reason (reason also is choice?

Useless and vain, of freedom both despoiled,

(III. 95-109).

Significantly, the content of book three elaborates more on the notion of freedom. In the above lines, Milton remarkably highlights the concept of freedom and how it is useless to worship God without a freewill. The concentration on the concept of freedom is not an arbitrary task. Milton implicitly implements the notion of freedom to criticize the political situation in England during the seventeenth century. Because of the censorship policies over the printing press, Milton was unable to plainly address these political issues. Both the argument and the content of book three considerably focus on the concept of freedom. To avoid the political power, Milton hints at these issues, yet a close examination of the argument enhances the political representation of England in Milton's time. Both the content and the argument of book three reveal Milton's full grasp of his audience, and as a result, Milton uses religious discourse deliberately to deliver his political messages.

Finally, the arguments in *Paradise Lost* serves to depict the poem's own narrative technique. Diekhoff argues that "Milton in *Paradise Lost*, as a mean of persuasion, makes the strongest of all possible claims to authority and probity and makes it at point in the argument where its very "interruption" serves to call the reader's attention to the logical as to the narrative structure of the poem" (21). This idea is plainly clarified through the argument of book three and four. The argument of book three provides readers with hints to the upcoming events. Both arguments at certain points take a direct form of narration. The argument of book three, for example, reads as "God sitting on his throne sees Satan flying towards this world, then newly created; shows him to the Son who sat at his right hand; foretell the success of Satan in perverting mankind" (164). Readers would expect this type of narration, and actions as

well. Like the argument of book three, the argument of book four reads "Satan now in prospect of Eden, and nigh the place where he must now attempt the bold enterprise which he undertook alone against God and man, falls into many doubts with himself, and many passions, fear, envy, and despair; but at length confirms himself in evil" (214). Here the argument manifests the poem's narrative technique as it emphasizes the sequence of events in detail. The argument describes Satan's attitudes to the whole situation and sheds light on his moments of hesitation, doubts, and despair. Also, the same argument provides an intensive depiction of the setting. "Journeys on to Paradise, whose outward in the shape of a cormorant on the tree of life, as the highest in the garden to look about him" (214). The narration of book 4 starts with revealing clearly and directly Satan's stance about his fall and his plan for revenge. In book 4, Milton writes:

Satan, now first inflamed with rage  
came down,  
The tempter ere the accuser of  
mankind,  
To wreak on innocent frail man his  
loss  
Of that first battle, and his flight to  
hell:  
Yet not rejoicing in his speed, though  
bold  
Far off and fearless, nor with cause to  
boast,

(IV. 11-14 ff).

The above lines match well with the preceding argument, since it manifests a direct type of narration. Based on the close examination of the argument, readers would infer and draw their conclusion on the poem's narrative technique.

Tracing the history of the epic as a genre manifests the valuable contributions of Milton upon the art of the epic poetry. Milton incorporates between the existed elements of the classical epic with the invocation of his own. This particular technique is very affective as it assists

Milton in achieving his ultimate goal of composing an eternal epic. Bowra asserts that "Milton has mastered the epic poetry available to him and sought to convey in a new setting what was best in the tradition" (196). *Paradise Lost*, as an epic, contains all the familiar characteristics of the classical epic such as war, single combats, perilous journeys, beautiful gardens, marvelous buildings, and a vision of the world and of the future. However, Milton employs these elements of the classical epic to serve his subject.

Unfortunately, the arguments or headnotes of *Paradise Lost* received a scant attention by Milton's scholars. Moreover, scholars are still in doubt whether the arguments were composed by Milton or the printer. For many critics and readers as well the role of the arguments in Milton's epic is just to summarize and outline the basic events in the epic. However, a close reading of the arguments demonstrates their significant role within the milieu of the epic. They are used to add knowledge, make clarification, and invite critical reading of the text. In other words, the arguments were used to highlight social issues such as the reform of the educational system in England, the role of the political authority within the community, and the importance of freedom.

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