Paraphrasing Paradise Lost

by
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A THESIS

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AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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This thesis is the transformation of Book IV of Milton’s epic poem Paradise Lost into graphic novel format. Transforming Milton’s epic Paradise Lost into a graphic novel offers the advantages of making the material more accessible for students, and easier to understand. The aim is to make the poem more interesting to them so that students might explore the original work further on their own. There is value in reinterpreting the work this way. Paradise Lost is a difficult read, and Milton is very hard on his readers. The genre of the graphic novel is a union of the highly abstract and invisible world provided by words, and the visible world of art. This combination of received with perceived information would help chip away at the difficulties in understanding that arise for students reading Paradise Lost, like the old saying: “a picture is worth a thousand words.”

Key Words: Graphic novel, Paradise Lost, Milton

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I understand that my project will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University, University Honors College. My signature below authorizes release of my project to any reader upon request.

Sarah Lund, Author
Thesis mission statement

For my thesis, I am going to transform Book IV of Milton’s *Paradise Lost* into graphic novel format. Transforming Milton’s epic *Paradise Lost* into a graphic novel offers the advantages of making the material more accessible for students, and easier to understand. The aim is to make the poem more interesting to them so that students might explore the original work further on their own.

There is value in reinterpreting the work this way. *Paradise Lost* is a difficult read, and Milton is very hard on his readers. The genre of the graphic novel is a union of the highly abstract and invisible world provided by words, and the visible world of art. Scott McCloud writes in his book *Understanding Comics* that, “Pictures are received information. We need no formalized education to ‘get the message.’ The message is instantaneous. Writing is perceived information. It takes time and specialized knowledge to decode the abstract symbols of language.” (pg. 49) This combination of received with perceived information would help chip away at the difficulties in understanding that arise for students reading *Paradise Lost*, like the old adage: “a picture is worth a thousand words.” Unfortunately, because of this combination of picture and words in storytelling that comics and graphic novels are often considered a base form of art and hastily dismissed.

However, I would argue that comics and graphic novels can be effectively used to portray serious topics and that they offer great advantages as a medium. The first and foremost advantage is their accessibility. As mentioned earlier, pictures as received information are less taxing for an audience to understand than words. Emotions can be more clearly expressed in this
medium as well. Looking over a page of a graphic novel, a reader can quickly understand the setting and relate to the emotional state of the character within it, before turning their mind to the words and dialogue for context. The combination of pictures and words that graphic novels provide can pull a little closer what otherwise might have been out of reach for people. As a result, the work itself could be brought to a wider audience.

In a lot of ways, it would be distinctively difficult to translate Paradise Lost into any visual medium. This has to do with the style in which Milton writes. When he describes a given scene or a given action, he accepts that what he is trying to tell his readers is largely indescribable. He can share that fact with his readers by constructing and then deconstructing that scene with his words. In this way, he conducts the nebulous image a reader has in their mind’s eye by making it appear, for example, both large and small using the abstract medium of words. A tangible picture drawn on paper loses that nebulous quality, and while it consequently makes the point clearer, a drawing cannot retain the deliberate, indescribable impression that Milton’s words can.

Ultimately, none of the integrity of the poem would be lost by being transformed into a graphic novel. It is true that some of the subtleties and intricacies of Milton’s language would be difficult to convey in the graphic novel medium. However the consequent advantage would be that his work could be better exposed to more people, and the graphic novel format would make it easier for students to grasp.
References


Well well, Sun.

Look at you up there, so bright you make all the other stars look like nothing.
Sigh.

You remind me of where I stood, how I looked, before I fell...

And I hate you for it.

I was just as high, higher even,

before I declared war on the unsurpassed King of heaven.

Tch.

And for what?
He didn’t deserve that from me. He created the being that I was, and all he required from me was gratitude.

An easy repayment in thanks.

...Not that all His goodness did me any good...

Being forever indebted became wearying, a burden.
why not take one step higher to set *myself* highest?

High as I was,

And in an instant, absolve that burdensome debt, once and for all.
Sigh,
why didn't He just
make me some
lesser angel?

Then I would've been
content where I was,
without the tantalizing
hope of attaining
something greater dangling
in my face.

Slench

No, no...
Someone else would have been in my position, and fallen prey to ambition, just as I did.

Who's to say I wouldn't have followed them, and wound up in the same state.

Yet...

There were some angels that didn't fall, and still stand.

Armed against temptation, inside and out.
Were you granted that same free will and power to stand? *Yes.* So what is to blame but

*Heaven’s love*

that I wound up in this sorry state?

Well...
Then may His love be-

Cursed

Love or hate alike,

Both have dealt me nothing but misery.
Which way should I go to escape this suffering?

I am Hell.

Hell is within me.

There is no escape.
Is there no way for me to be pardoned?

I could submit.
Ugh, no.
Not after making the claim that I could overthrow the Almighty.

If only they know the price I pay for that claim...

The higher they raise me in Hell...

...The further I fall.

The king of misery,
The price I pay for failed ambition.
But supposing I did repent, surrender.

Even if I was forgiven, even if I regained my station.

How soon would I take it all back?

Without threat of pain, how long would it take for me to rebel again, only to fall twice as far and land twice as hard.

heh heh heh, No.
And He knows it.

He is as far from offering me forgiveness as I am from begging for peace.

Very well then.
I'll abandon hope, and with it, fear and remorse.

All good to me is lost. Evil is my good.

At least with that I will split this world with Heaven's King.

Who knows...

Perhaps I will reign over more than He by the time this is done.
Well.

That's not right.
I should report this to...

Excuse us, Archangel Uriel!

We were wondering...

Hm?

Which is the center of this new creation? The Sun, or the Earth?

The Sun is here...

And the Earth is there...

And both are moving with respect to each other.
But I'm afraid you'll have to excuse me for now.

He didn't really answer the question, did he?

Maybe he doesn't know.
Heh.

You'd think they'd have built a better wall.