

Things to Look for in *Paradise Lost*

Courtesy of Prof. Vicki Silver, UC Irvine

01. ambiguous pronoun reference: its implications for the speaker and his subject.
02. syntactical inversions: their implications, especially for the speaker's condition.
03. breaks/disruptions of line or stanza form: caesuras too forcible (full stops), or enjambments that deny the stanza's structure.
04. weak rhymes that do not ring quite true: problems of poetic closure; watch Milton's use of rhyme occasionally in PL.
05. invocations.
06. verb tense changes.
07. uses of "as if," "perhaps," "as," and the subjunctive mood to signify the hypothetical.
08. apostrophes/addressing persons or objects.
09. narrative interpolations, parentheses, asides, interruptions.
10. metaphors, similes, analogies that take on a life of their own, usually indicated by their incongruity or their length.
11. a pileup of allusions to classical or other literature/mythology.
12. super-sensuous language (pay attention to hair, music, and anything "wanton" or "ripe").
13. abstractions, either personified ("Truth") or rational ("the fixed mind").
14. animate objects or things, especially if resistant: pay special attention to air.
15. images of light/sight: their implications for poetic/divine understanding, understanding, truth, purity.
16. music and singing: their implications for poetry, inspiration, seduction, ecstasy of soul, moments of redemption.
17. muse: its implications for poetic/narrative authority and efficacy.
18. acts of invocation, prayer, request, or demand in narrative/lyric structure.
19. images or references to sages, poets, prophets, seers, bards, saints.
20. *any* mention of poetry *per se*.
21. any reference to the physical senses, especially eyes, ears, and tongues.
22. grades or *spectra* of color or light.
23. magic.
24. any physical paralysis or constraint.
25. any reference to the mind or its faculties ("fancy" or "will").
26. the word "wander": its implications for the speaker's, character's, or reader's errors of interpretation/description, etc.
27. words that describe speech ("murmur"), soliloquies, different idioms, different or changing speakers (see item 1).
28. attempted acts of persuasion (note the word "rhetoric").
29. descriptions of persons or landscapes; "observer similes."
30. attempts to locate someone or some place in the landscape.
31. negative constructions: "neither were you . . . nor were you," etc.
32. piling up of relative or coordinate clauses.
33. Miltonic humor, cartoon-like "bad guys."
34. difficulty in dramatizing the speeches of "God" and "Christ."
35. moments of self-interrogation on the narrator's part.