

Paradise Lost



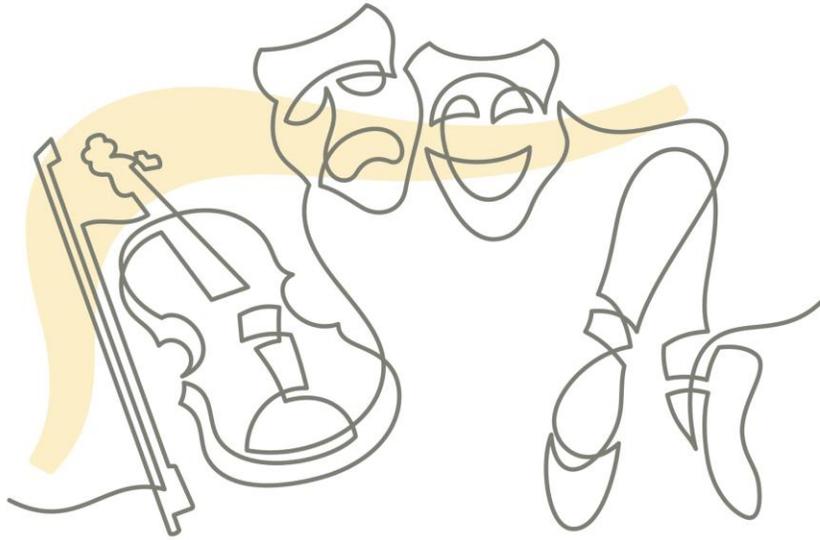
Paradise Lost
By Erin Shields

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Centaur Theatre Study Guide

Study Guide prepared by:
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ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT

Erin Shields is a Montreal based playwright and actor. She trained as an actor at Rose Bruford College of Speech and Drama in London, England, and then studied English Literature at the University of Toronto. She won the 2011 Governor General's Award for Drama for her play *If We Were Birds*, which premiered at Tarragon Theatre. Her most recent play, *Paradise Lost*, was commissioned by the Stratford Theatre Festival in Stratford, Ontario under Artistic Director Antoni Cimolino and Executive Director Anita Gaffney. It was first produced by the Stratford Festival at their Studio Theatre from August 1 through October 21, 2018.

CREATIVE TEAM

Playwright: Erin Shields
Director: Jackie Maxwell
Designer: Judith Bowden
Lighting Designer: Bonnie Beecher
Sound Designer & Composer: Thomas Ryder Payne
Associate Sound Designer: Deanna Haewon Choi
Dramaturge: Bob White
Fight Director: John Stead
Movement Director: Valerie Moore
Original Casting Director: Beth Russell
Assistant Director: Mahalia Golnosh Tahiriha

CHARACTERS

Satan (F, 35-40): formerly Archangel Lucifer; a rebellious angel, tempter of humanity, clever, wounded, free

God the Father (m, 60's): creator of everything, weary innovator, loving patriarch

God the Son (m, 33): son of God, redeemer of humanity, full of love

Adam (m, 20): the first man, in love with Eve

Eve (f, 20): the first woman, in love with Adam

The Chorus of the Damned:

Beelzebub (f, 40): Satan's confidant and second in command

Moloch (m, 40s): Satan's general, a fierce warrior

Belial (m, 70s): a wise warrior and philosopher

Mammon (f, 25): lesser angel, an early adapter fused to Astoreth

Astoreth (f, 30s): lesser angel, moon goddess, fused to Mammon

Sin (f, 50s): daughter/lover of Satan; half angel, half-serpent

Death (m, 20): son/grandson of Satan; angry and hungry

The Chorus of the Chosen:

Gabriel (f, 40): archangel/seraph, general in God's army

Michael (m, 40): archangel/seraph, general in God's army

Raphael (m, 70s): archangel, gentle mentor, amateur theatre director

Uriel (f, 25): archangel, regent of the sun

Urania (f, 30's): angel, muse of astrology

Zephon (f, 50s): angel, guardian of the garden

Ithuriel (m, 20): newly formed angel, guardian of the garden

SYNOPSIS:

Paradise Lost is a modern retelling of John Milton's 17th century epic poem of the same name. The action takes place in Hell, Heaven and on Earth, preceding Satan (or Lucifer)'s fall from grace and banishment to Hell. God the Father has created Adam and Eve as a soothing balm to nurse the pain of Satan's insubordination. Adam and Eve live peacefully, happily, and cluelessly in the Garden of Eden, where the mantra of "ignorance is bliss" reigns supreme. Having lost the war in Heaven, Satan and her Chorus of the Damned are seeking ways to gain revenge on God for banishing them from Heaven. Seeing the tempting force of corruption as the best course to ruin, Satan sets her target on Adam and Eve, and forever disrupts the peace in Eden...

VOCABULARY WORDS:

Manichean: to follow the philosophy of Manichaeism, which is an old religion that breaks everything down into good or evil. It also means "duality".

Prelapsarian: characteristic of or belonging to the time or state before the fall of humankind

Epic: lengthy narrative poem, which typically involves a setting beyond living memory in which extraordinary characters, usually heroes or gods, do extraordinary things. They also provide an origin story for nations or people.

In medias res: Latin for "into the middle of things"

Iambic pentameter: metric line used in English poetry; an "iamb" is an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable. One iamb is a foot, and "pentameter" indicates a line of 5 "feet", so overall there are 10 syllables in one line of poetry.

THEMES AND TOPICS:

Power: Abuse and Misuse

Satan

*"In heaven, one voice reigned supreme.
One being determined all,
And that being made the rest of us servants
To Him and His chosen Son.
But no such hierarchy exists down here.
In Hell we all have a say.
Any Virtue, Power, or Cherub may take its place
And voice an opinion
On what to do about our dismal situation"*

In the play, Satan presents Hell as an alternative to Heaven, where a democracy of opinion is possible. She refers to God as a dictator. God's paternalism presents heaven as a constrictive police state. How does this view challenge or subvert conventionally held notions of "heaven" as an ideal special place of harmony and acceptance? We usually refer to things we like as "heavenly"; what happens when heaven resembles a dictatorship? Pay close attention to the different hierarchies and power structures in Heaven, Hell and in the Garden of Eden.

Good and Evil

God the Father is good, and Satan is bad, or so we are led to believe. The play challenges this binary by depicting God as a nepotistic dictator who favours his own son over his longest serving angel, Satan. How does the play subvert our conventional ideas of good and evil? Are these characteristics mutually exclusive? Can one exist without the other? Can someone be both good and evil? How are good and evil portrayed in Heaven, Hell and in the Garden of Eden? What are their similarities and what are their differences?

Revenge

Beelzebub

*“This place was intended to be a dungeon, not a safe retreat.
Make no mistake, we are still within Heaven’s jurisdiction
And we will be made to live in strictest bondage,
So why are we sitting here dreaming of war or peace?
War is what got us here,
And peace is impossible for slaves.
The only peace we will find is in plotting revenge.”*

Revenge is a central theme of the play. What emotions motivate a need for revenge? Try to identify the different types of revenge that are portrayed in the play. What makes revenge noble? Can revenge ever really be noble?

Authority

Satan rebels because he is unwilling to be subjugated by God and his Son. Satan denies God’s authority and declares it is “Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven.” This is probably one of the most often quoted lines from Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. Does Satan’s questioning of God’s authority humanize her in the play? Have you ever identified with Satan’s emotions and motivations?

Innocence vs Knowledge

Adam and Eve are happy because they are innocent; they are innocent because they have not tasted the fruit from the tree of knowledge. “Ignorance is bliss” is a common proverb that means if you do not know something, you do not worry about it. Before eating the fruit, Adam and Eve had no concept of shame and no concept of disobedience; their time in the Garden of Eden was characterized by an absence of worry. Is innocence ignorance? Is knowledge always a good thing? In the play, Satan declares:

*“I liberated you from the banality of bliss.
I released you from the beigeness of contentment.
I freed you from blind obedience”*

Consider these words: “banality”, “bliss”, “beigeness”, “contentment”, “blind”, and “obedience.” Why group these words together? How do we separate “good” and “bad” knowledge?

God

“Freewill!

I could have made you all obedient.

Made every human, every angel do precisely what I commanded.

No one could have rebelled because everyone would have been

Compelled to follow my every instruction.

But where is the joy in that?

What is the pleasure of love if it isn't given freely?

So, instead, I endowed you all

With the power to make your own choices.”

Do we have control over our future? Are we able to decide for ourselves whether to act or behave in a certain way? Or is everything we do or say predetermined by forces outside of our control? Think of the various ways in which the concepts of free will and determinism are portrayed in the play.

PRE-SHOW DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Instructions: The following questions can be used as pre-viewing oral discussion prompts or written reflection questions to prepare students for the setting, topics and themes of the play.

1. What is epic poetry? What conventions define the genre? In teams, research some famous epic poems, such as *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, Homer's *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, Virgil's *Aeneid*, and *Beowulf*. Read and collect a synopsis of these poems and try to identify the main markers of each poem.
2. What defines the hero of a story? Think of the epic poems you researched, and think too of contemporary action movies. What characteristics define a hero. What makes an anti-hero? What qualities make us identify with a hero or anti-hero of a story?
3. What is blank verse? Most poetry in the English language is written in blank verse. Why do you think that is? Research and find the main characteristics of blank verse and try to identify some famous poems that use blank verse. As a group activity, look up a news article, and try to narrate the events in blank verse.
4. Poetry is primarily an oral tradition. Epic poems like *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, were byproducts of a preliterate society, stories that were meant to be memorized and passed down through generations as sources of entertainment. Nowadays, we mainly consume poetry by reading it. Discuss the different mediums of poetry and theatre. What makes them different? What makes them similar? Is one more effective than the other in conveying a story?
5. Erin Shields' *Paradise Lost* is a modern retelling of a classic poem from the 17th century. The character of Satan is played by a woman and Shields incorporates many elements of 21st century political angst. Discuss Shields' strategy of repurposing an established work of the English literary canon for a modern audience. Are there any concerns from the 17th century *Paradise Lost* that can translate to this play in 2019?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS/ ESSAY TOPICS

1. Discuss the role of the two choruses in the play. In ancient Greek tragedy, the Chorus comments collectively on the dramatic action. Compare the Chorus of the damned with the Chorus of the Chosen. Why do you think the playwright decided to have the same actors play both choruses?
2. Some of the most famous lines from plays come from soliloquies, speeches delivered by a character who is speaking to themselves or thinking out loud so that the audience understands what is going on internally. Think of famous soliloquies from Shakespeare's plays; notably, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Macbeth*. What do these soliloquies reveal about the characters? In what way does Satan's character borrow from or readapt from the conventions of the soliloquy?
3. Analyze Adam and Eve's pre- and-postlapsarian state. How does their access to knowledge impact their feelings for each other? Pay close attention to their speech, and discuss the significance of their switch from third-person narration to first-person narration. Why is this significant?
4. Is revenge ever justifiable under certain circumstances? Explain your answer, and try to find examples from films or books you've read.
5. Discuss the meaning behind "Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven." Do you agree or disagree with this sentiment?
6. Shields' *Paradise Lost* makes many references to current events such as climate change and an ever-changing political landscape. Why do you think she chose to include them in her play? What do Satan's statements say about our current political climate?
7. Discuss the portrayal of Satan as a woman. What narrative point is Shields trying to make here?
8. The play within the play is used as a warning to Adam and Eve. It is meant to be entertaining and educational and to forewarn Adam and Eve the dangers of envy. Do you think the play was effective? What was the point of including this play within the play itself? Shakespeare used this narrative device in several of his plays, such as *Hamlet* and *A Midsummer's Night's Dream*. Familiarize yourselves with these two plays and how the "play within a play" narrative device complimented the themes and motifs of the plays.
9. After Adam and Eve's "fall", the Son of God tells God the Father, "I don't have to see it to know I already forgive them. But if you do not understand your own capacity for love then I am to have to show you." Discuss the importance of forgiveness in the play. Who gets to forgive? Who gets to receive forgiveness? Who rejects forgiveness, and why? Why is it hard to forgive those who have hurt, or betrayed us?
10. When dealing out their punishment, the Son of God tells Eve:

*"You will be excluded from making decisions,
and engaging in meaningful work.*

*Your ideas will be mistrusted;
Your fears will be discounted;
Your instinct ridiculed.
Whatever you do, you will have to prove your worth,
Your ability, and your intelligence.”*

Discuss the importance of this statement. Discuss current events that have brought feminist issues to the forefront of the news. Why do you think Shields decided to include this in the play? In what ways does the play force us to rethink old narratives as they relate to gender and gender roles?

11. Why does Satan address the audience? If you could respond to Satan, what would you say?
12. What role does humour have in the play? Discuss and compare the scenes you thought were particularly humorous. How does the humour of the play compliment the serious aspects of the narrative?
13. In the play, Eve tells Adam, “is it me, or did my punishment seem disproportionate to yours?” Discuss the importance of Eve’s statement. Why are punishments disproportionate? What is the importance of questioning the authority of the person dealing judgment?
14. Discuss Satan’s final monologue. Satan says,

*“And while they struggle to recreate the garden,
the world of their youth,
they will transfer an image of that garden
to their children and their children and their children,
but every image of that bliss will be slightly fractured,
slightly off”*

We cannot return to the past. Why do you think we find comfort in idealizing a past that was free from worry? Why does Shields choose to end her play with Satan telling her audience we cannot go back, no matter how hard we try to recreate something we held dear?

15. Does the play end on a hopeful note? If we keep trying to recreate the past with the same result, does that constitute insanity? Or does it mean that the human spirit is resilient and ready to try again and again?

RESEARCH TOPICS/QUESTIONS:

1. Research ecocriticism. How can we apply it to this play? Analyze the following passage of the play:

*“I saw an awe-inspiring mountain range
covered with ancient wood
and all I could think about was cutting it down
and running a pipeline through it.
I saw a stupendous glacier stretching*

*As far as the eye could see
And all I wanted to do was melt it.
I saw a breathtaking crest of falling water
That almost stopped my heart with its thunderous sound,
Glorious beauty, and sublime spray,
But you know, all I could think about
Was where to put the casino.*

*Come on, you know what I mean.
Don't sit there looking indignant.
I know you're burning it, chopping it, draining it,
Building it up, tearing it down, selling it to the highest bidder;
Don't feel guilty about it.
Don't feel like you have to deny it,
Or pretend that you aren't part of it.
Or justify the makeup of your investment portfolio.
You've had no other choice but to play by the rules of the game."*

2. Art and literature have been closely interrelated for centuries. Think of some of the most famous classical paintings that depict the creation of Adam and Eve, the depiction of Heaven and Hell and religious iconography in general. Look up the following paintings/illustrations:

- William Blake's illustrations of *Paradise Lost*
- *The Garden of Earthly Delights* by Hieronymus Bosch (1490-1510)
- *Adam and Eve* by Albrecht Dürer (1507)
- Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel, specifically, *The Creation of Adam* and *The Creation of Eve*
- *The Fall of Man* by Titian (1550) and *The Fall of Man* by Rubens (1628-1629)

How have these paintings and their themes influenced our perception of the "fall of humankind"? What have they taught us about this Biblical origin story?

3. The story of Adam and Eve and the concept of "original sin" has been a source of contention in theology, art, literature and philosophy for centuries. Why do you think this is? Read the book of Genesis, Chapters 1 through 4. How does the Bible's origin story compare to Shields' play?

CREATIVE ACTIVITIES:

Instructions: These activities can be done individually or in groups of 2 or 4 people.

1. What if Satan apologized to God? Imagine what that interaction would be like. Write a letter to God, or imagine a dialogue between God and Satan.
2. Let's play Devil's advocate. Put God on trial. Satan is the prosecutor, and God the Son is the defense attorney. How would this trial go? Would you find God guilty or innocent?

3. Based on the paintings mentioned in the research topics, how would you recreate the Fall of Humankind today? Discuss art movements, themes, colours and textures that you would use and explain their relevance to the themes of the play.
4. Recreate the play as a “choose your own adventure” type of narrative. Identify the main events of the play and list four options that lead to the next scene. Which narrative elements of the play would you keep? Which would you omit, or alter?

USING DRAMATIC IRONY TO CREATE TENSION/SUSPENSE:

<p>Situation #1: A bomb has secretly been placed in a public location, and characters in that location are unaware.</p> <p>Stakes/tension: Make your audience sweat by making us care about the potential victims. Make us understand all the reasons the audience really wants the characters to survive, but also make us feel like they might really be about to die. You may want to play with unimportant reasons to keep them in the location, just to make the audience squirm.</p>
<p>Situation #2: A character is going to ask someone out, but we know why they shouldn't.</p> <p>Stakes/tension: Make your audience sweat by making us care about this character's future broken heart and their anger towards the unfair decisions of the other character.</p>
<p>Situation #3: A film director pretends to be another actor getting ready to audition as a way to find out what the other actors really think about them.</p> <p>Stakes/tension: Make your audience sweat by making us care about the real actors by giving us powerful reasons why they want the part, and then make the audience squirm as they slowly embarrass themselves while talking to the director in disguise.</p>
<p>Situation #4: A character goes on and on about why they trust their loyal friend, but we know the secret reason they can't be trusted.</p> <p>Stakes/tension: Make your audience sweat by making us care about the main character by showing how much they care about their friend. Make the audience upset about the way they are secretly being treated by their friend.</p>
<p>Situation #5: A character is about to eat food that is poisoned at a dinner party.</p> <p>Stakes/tension: Make your audience sweat by making us care about the potential poison victim and by slowly getting them closer and closer to eating that deadly bite.</p>
<p>Situation #6: A boss goes on and on about why they trust their loyal worker, but we know the secret reason why the boss can't be trusted.</p> <p>Stakes/tension: Make your audience sweat by making us care about the worker by showing how much they are willing to do for their boss. Make the audience upset about</p>

the way the workers are secretly being treated by the boss by showing how the business is being secretly ruined.

Situation #7: A wealthy senior citizen is updating their will, since their health has not been good lately. They are considering leaving most of their estate to one person – but the audience knows why they shouldn't.

Stakes/tension: Make the audience sweat by making us care about the wealthy will writer by showing how kind and good they are. Make the audience cringe by revealing how secretly terrible the subject of their will really is.
person they want to leave money to really is.

Situation #8: A student takes the blame for something even though they are innocent.

Stakes/tension: Make the audience sweat by making us care about the main character. Increase the tension by just how much they have to suffer for something that they did not do.

DRAMATIC TENSION PRESENTATION ASSIGNMENT

/15 Marks

Topic/Story: _____

Group Members: _____

Performance Criteria	Excellent 5	Good Job 4	OK 3	Limited 0-2
Dramatic Tension -Dramatic Irony -Foreshadowing -Delay -Use of silence	-Audience tension is created effectively through deliberate use of 1 or more tension techniques	-Some level of audience tension is noticeably present -Clear use of 1 or more tension techniques	-Effort to create audience or story tension is clear, but may not be entirely successful	-An understanding of the techniques that create tension in the audience have not been demonstrated
Individual Performance	-Fully committed to role -Effective use of energy & volume -Always faces audience when necessary -Effective/original characterization	-Good commitment to role -Good use of energy & volume -Mostly faces audience when necessary -May try out an original character	-OK commitment to role -Energy, volume or body position may have needed some adjustment	-More effort and/or preparation required
Overall Effect	-Preparation, staging & creativity enhances performance	-Staging is clear and provides a good flow for the scene -Good prep -Noticeable effort to make creative choices	-Staging is generally clear and provides an OK flow for the scene -Good prep -Some creativity, but could do more	-More effort and/or preparation required

Comments:

MAKE THE AUDIENCE SWEAT: DRAMATIC TENSION PLANNER:

Group Writer: _____
Mark

Total: _____ **/5 – Group**

Group Members: _____

Evaluation Rubric:

Class: _____

0-2.5	3-3.5	4-4.5	5
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Incomplete▪ Does not demonstrate understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Mostly complete▪ Sometimes on-task	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Complete by deadline▪ Creative▪ Mostly on-task	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Complete/correct by deadline▪ Extra effort to be creative/original▪ Always on-task

Assignment: Using **dramatic irony** (when the audience knows something a character does not) and **stakes**, create a 1-2 minute long **tension-filled scene** that makes your audience “sweat”.

Answer the questions below to create the plan for your scene:

1. In a sentence - what is your story about?

2. Break down your scene:

Beginning: _____

Middle: _____

End: _____

3. How will you make your audience care about your main character in order to increase the tension?

-
-
-

Other Notes (optional):