

The Garden of Eden

Characters:

Adam— innocent, naïve, ashamed
Eve—seductive, tempting, disobedient
Satan—cunning, manipulative, evil
God— betrayed, unforgiving, punishing

Symbols:

Apple
Serpent
Garden
Tree of knowledge
Tree of life
Nakedness
Fig leaf

Significant Concepts:

Temptation
Knowledge
Loss of innocence
Free will
Disobedience
Original sin
Fall from grace
Exile
Origin of suffering

Summary:

According to this origin myth/story, God created Adam, the first person in both the Judeo-Christian and Muslim traditions, from the dust of the earth. Placed in the Garden of Eden (the name meaning delight, the earthly paradise, Adam dwelled in a state of being of complete innocence and contentment. God, then, created a companion for Adam by extracting one of his ribs while he slept. Adam and Eve, whose name in Hebrew means life or life-giving, are allowed to enjoy and reign over all life in Eden but are forbidden by God, upon pain of death, to eat from either the tree of knowledge (of good and evil)—believed to confer wisdom—or the tree of life—considered to bestow immortality.

Satan, a rebellious fallen angel, was jealous of Adam and Eve's favor with God and their place in Eden, and determined to ruin the first humans. Cunningly disguised as a serpent, Satan approached Eve and tempted her to eat of the tree of knowledge, convincing her that she would not die but instead would possess all knowledge and would become like a god herself. Eve ate the fruit, often considered to be an apple, and then persuaded Adam to eat the fruit as well.

After eating the fruit, Adam and Eve became aware that they were naked and constructed clothing from fig leaves. Ashamed, they did not want to face God when he sought them, so they hid. When God accused Adam of eating the forbidden fruit, Adam blamed Eve for his own disobedience. In order to punish Adam and Eve (and to prevent them from eating of the tree of life and thus becoming immortal), God banished them from the Garden to someplace east of Eden, condemning them to suffer—Eve through childbirth and Adam through toiling for his food. Thus, the implication is that knowledge comes at a severe price, the loss of innocence. (In addition, as an element of this origin myth, the serpent was damned to eternally crawl on its belly.)

Literary Examples:

"We are Adam and Eve, unfallen, in Paradise." (George Eliot, *The Mill and the Floss*, 1860)

"So there we were, naked as Adam and Eve." (Philip Roth, *Epstein*, 1959)

"I was firm as a man could be till I saw those eyes and that mouth again—surely there never was such a maddening mouth since Eve's! (Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, 1891)

"Things whirled too fast around me. My mind went alternately bright and blank in slow rolling waves. We, he him—my mind and I—were no longer getting around in the same circles. Nor my body either. Across the aisle a young platinum blonde nibbled at a red Delicious apple as station lights rippled past behind her. The train plunged. I dropped through the roar, giddy and vacuum-minded, sucked under and out into late afternoon Harlem." (Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 1947)

"You are welcome to all my confidence that is worth having, Jane: but for God's sake, don't desire a useless burden! Don't long for poison—don't turn out a downright Eve on my hands!" (Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 1847)

"By his original constitution aided by the co-operating influences of his lot, Billy in many respects was little more than a sort of outright barbarian, much such perhaps as Adam presumably might have been ere the urbane Serpent wriggled himself into his company." (Herman Melville, *Billy Budd*, 1924)

Eden is that old-fashioned House Emily Dickinson

Eden is that old-fashioned House
We dwell in every day
Without suspecting our abode
Until we drive away.

How fair on looking back, the Day
We sauntered from the Door--
Unconscious our returning,
But discover it no more.

Daedalus and Icarus

Characters:

Daedalus—inventive, creative, crafty

Icarus—ambitious, reckless

King Minos—controlling, vindictive

Symbols:

Labyrinth

Minotaur

Wings

Sun

Fall

Significant Concepts:

Invention

Imprisonment

Flying

Independence

Disobedience

Failure

Summary:

Daedalus, a craftsman from Athens, fled to Crete after murdering his pupil Talos in jealousy and fear of Talos's skills. In Crete, he began working for King Minos, the son of Zeus and Europa, who prayed to Poseidon for a magnificent sacrificial animal but was unable, because of its handsomeness, to sacrifice the bull that Poseidon sent. When Minos's wife fell in love with the beast, she persuaded Daedalus to help her to seduce the bull. Hiding in a cow frame (which Daedalus constructed for her) that the bull mounted, the queen became pregnant and gave birth to the Minotaur, a monster with the body of a man and the head of a bull. In order to hide this shameful offspring, Minos instructed Daedalus to build a place from which escape was impossible, where the Minotaur would be shut away from view; Daedalus created the Labyrinth. When Minos defeated Athens in battle, he demanded sacrifices to feed the Minotaur. His own daughter Ariadne fell in love at first sight with Theseus, the young Athenian prince, and persuaded Daedalus to reveal to Theseus a way out of the Labyrinth. Daedalus told his fellow Athenian to take a string into the Labyrinth with him that he could follow out after killing the Minotaur, which Theseus did, thus ending Athens's required tribute to Minos.

Enraged at Daedalus's betrayal, Minos imprisoned the inventor, along with his son Icarus, in the Labyrinth. Unable to escape from the maze without aid, Daedalus turned to the sky. He fashioned two pairs of wings from feathers and wax; before they took flight, Daedalus warned his son to use moderation, to fly neither too high nor too low because of the possible effects of the sun and sea. Young, adventurous, and exhilarated by the power of flight—Icarus did not heed his father's advice. After flying too close to the sun, the wax binding his wings melted, and Icarus fell, plunging into the Aegean Sea where he drowned. Daedalus flew safely on to Sicily, where the king hospitably received him and where the inventor helped bring about the eventual death of his captor Minos.

Literary Examples:

"He was Icarus now, and on the very verge of challenging gravity, or God, depending how one looked at it." (Jenny Diski, *Happily Ever After*, 1991)

"It was a dirty reeking room into which we entered, with men and women idling upon stools and cushions—I know not if Daedalus would have made a labyrinth for such monsters." (Peter Ackroyd, *The House of Dr. Dee*, 1993)

Musée des Beaux Arts

W. H. Auden

About suffering they were never wrong,
The Old Masters: how well they understood
Its human position; how it takes place
While someone else is eating or opening a window or just walking dully along;
How, when the aged are reverently, passionately waiting
For the miraculous birth, there always must be

Children who did not specially want it to happen, skating
On a pond at the edge of the wood:
They never forgot
That even the dreadful martyrdom must run its course
Anyhow in a corner, some untidy spot
Where the dogs go on with their doggy life and the torturer's horse
Scratches its innocent behind on a tree.

In Brueghel's *Icarus*, for instance: how everything turns away
Quite leisurely from the disaster; the plowman may
Have heard the splash, the forsaken cry,
But for him it was not an important failure; the sun shone
As it had to on the white legs disappearing into the green
Water; and the expensive delicate ship that must have seen
Something amazing, a boy falling out of the sky,
Had somewhere to get to and sailed calmly on.

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