

Milton's Presentation of Satan in Paradise Lost *Tala't A. Qadawi* (*)

Abstract

This paper aims at focusing on the manner by which Milton presents Satan in *Paradise Lost*, especially the speeches Satan addresses to his fallen angels which reflect his great desire for power, immortal hate, envy, ambition of equality to god, challenge and revenge. Also Milton depicts Satan's physical and moral degradation due to his disobedience to God. Discussion *Paradise Lost*(1667) has attracted the attention of scholars and critics, and it has succeeded to provoke debate. Some believe that this poem exists for only one reason and that is Satan about whom the action revolves. It is he who immortalizes the significance of *Paradise Lost*. They also believe that Milton sympathized with Satan and was unconsciously influenced by him. William Blake, the first – generation romantic poet, said that Milton was of the devil's party, whether he knew or not; Satan is the hero of *Paradise Lost*. The romantic poets accepted Milton's treatment of Satan as a hero and a rebel. Satan for the romantics is presented as a symbol of heroic energy; his strength can be seen through his conflict and endurance. In other words, Milton so powerfully expresses his own heroic energy through the character of Satan that they deeply admire. The reason behind this admiration lies for the romantic poets in Satan's ceaseless struggle. Satan's noble, virtuous heroic energy is clearly shown in rousing himself from the lake of fire. and inspiring his followers with his desire for action. E.M.W. Tillyard points out that the character of Satan " expresses something in which Milton believed very strongly : heroic energy ---- the very essence of Milton's nature."(*) However, Satan's heroic energy is invested

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in a bad cause because it springs from envious hatred and destructiveness.

Others disagree on this point. M.H. Nicolson, for instance, claims that Milton states the theme or subject of his poem, whose materials are chiefly taken from a classical epic, as " man's first disobedience." Hence the focus on man, not on Satan, because the latter is not mentioned or referred to in the prologue until line thirty –four.^(*) T. Crehan claims that Milton 's main purpose in **Paradise Lost** is concerned with Man and God, and "Adam, not Satan, is the central figure of the whole poem."^(†) The greatness of the character of Satan, Nicolson adds, lies not only in the heroic character of Satan but also in "slow and steady degeneration of an angle who once stood next to God Himself in heaven."^(‡) what prevents us from admiring Satan, he adds, too, is the the skilful manner Milton uses to describe how "Satan diminishes from grandeur and magnificence to baseness and final degradation."^(§) This degradation is both physical and moral.

Physically, Milton presents Satan as huge as a Titan, holding a shield which is the largest object ever seen. Also he holds a spear which is so gigantic that the tallest pine tree seems only a stick if compared with the spear. He is like a proud tower, the sun seen through morning mist, or moon in eclipse because he has lost some of the brightness and glow of an angel in heaven, as these lines show:

----- *He, above the rest
In shape and gesture proudly eminent,
Stood like a tower. His form had yet not lost
All her original brightness, nor appeared
Less than archangel ruined, and th' excess*

*Of glory obscured: as when the sun new-risen
Looks through the horizontal misty air
Shorn of his beams, or from behind the moon,
In dim eclipse, disastrous twilight sheds
On half the nations, and with fear of change
Perplexes monarches.....^(*) (I. 589 – 599)*

According to B. Rajan, likening Satan to a tower of pride meant to be ' contrasted with the traditional image of Christ as a tower of safety and salvation. "^(†) In Book IV, our sympathies towards Satan Gradually change. Sometimes Milton portrays him comically. Satan becomes no longer grand when he leaps into Paradise like a city thief or a " prowling wolf, " leaping over the fence where the sheep are kept(IV-183). Entering Eden, Satan sat " like a cormorant "(IV. 196) on the Tree of Life. David Daiches notes that after comparing Satan with a sheep –stealing wolf and a city thief " we find the deliberately denigrating line ' so clomb this first grand thief into God's fold "'(IV.192).^(‡) Then the angels find Satan "squat like a toad, close at the ear of [he sleeping] Eve" when tempting Eve and inspiring her with evil and corrupting dreams. Moreover, Milton even allows Satan to take the form of a snake, "So talked the spirited sly snake; and Eve/ yet more amazed, unwary thus replied"(IX-613-614). In so doing Satan, T.Hislop says, changes or degenerates from a great, proud fallen angel or rebel to a liar, tempter and envious seducer. He declines, " until he becomes the lowly serpent."^(§) One may say that cormorant and vulture are grand but at the same time they are dangerous birds living on the carrion of prey. Arnold Stein argues that Satan's wound caused by Michael's sword is not only physically ridiculous but it is also psychologically and

mentally humiliating because Satan is so proud of himself that such a wound hurts his dignity and pride.^(*)

The change in Satan's physical appearances is accompanied by a moral decay. This is subtly done by Milton through the changes in figures of light and darkness. Satan was clothed in light before he fell to hell. But he began to lose some of his brightness. when deliberately choosing evil rather than good, his brightness starts diminishing and fading away more and more. For Milton, Nicolson says, Satan's greatest sin is " obdurate pride " and " steadfast hate "(I.58), i.e. the pride understood by Milton and his classical predecessors, not as we think of it today as a good quality. According to Nicolson, Satan broke with the ladder of nature and order of creation. Satan was not content with his position; he was ambitious for a higher place. He aimed at overthrowing God. He, therefore, led himself to fall to a lower rank. In later Books of Paradise Lost, we find that Satan is no longer an impressive character. He is doubtful, passionate, afraid, envious and helpless. He becomes a new Satan. He admits his pride and ambition as well as repents and feels remorse. He realizes that the service of God was not hard at all. He knows that he himself is Hell and his case is helpless and needs no lecturing or discussing. Obviously, he is sad and regretful. His increasing stubbornness, his continuous refusal to choose right, and his deliberate choice of evil accompanied his physical and moral degeneration, Nicolson concludes.^(†)

Whether Milton, knowing or not, felt sympathy with Satan, it does not mean, as A. J. A. Waldock says, that he was on Satan's side. It only means that Milton was able, in a certain degree, to think of Satan in terms of himself. In other words, Milton's nature responded to the values and he was liable to temptations. Satan's refusal to give in is the thing which Milton admired and with which he sympathized. Bernard Shaw shares

this with Milton and says that " courage in a gangster is still courage and therefore good."^(*)

John T. Shawcross gives a different reading of *Paradise Lost*. He argues whether or not Satan is the central character in the poem"^(†). he believes that neither Satan nor Man is a protagonist. Looking for a hero " seems to me to be pointless: to me there is no hero in the poem " in the usual sense. Milton's main goal in the poem, Shawcross continues, is to emphasize the concepts distrust, disloyalty, revolt, and disobedience as contrasted to trust, loyalty, acceptance, and obedience.^(‡)

What has been mentioned so far is some of the critics' opinions about whether or not Milton was on Satan's part and whether or not he has the chief emphasis in *Paradise Lost*. This short paper aims at focusing on the manner Milton follows to present the character of satan whose speeches captures the reader's attention and shed light on his character. Obviously these speeches reflect his lust for power, hatred, envy, ambition, heroic energy, defiance, revenge. They show as an arresting figure and impressive character who degenerates because he challenges God and determines to revenge himself upon him. He says, exaggeratedly of course, the rebels shook the throne of God in the battle in Heaven and made Him doubt His empire. Satan and his followers thought they.

*----- endangered Heaven's perpetual king,
And put to proof his high supremacy
Whether upheld by strength, or chance, or fate!*(I. 131-133)

Milton succeeded in making us imagine Satan as a worthy antagonist of heaven, yet he wants us to be our guard that his

will and mind are evil and perverted. since satan's aims are immoral, i.e. They are devoted to the overthrow of God, he basically, T. Crehan comments, cannot be heroic.^(*) Likewise, David daiches argues that the "essential nastiness of his [Satan's] proposal " is evident in these lines :

*" Fallen Cherub, to be weak is miserable,
Doing or suffering: but of this be sure ----
To do aught good never will be our task
But ever to do ill our sole delight,
As being contrary to his high will
Whom we resist. If then his providence
Out of our evil seek to bring forth good,
Our labour must be to pervert that end,
And out of good still to find means of evil "*^(†)(I. 157-165)

Weakness for Satan is something miserable. Misery for him does not result from punishment but from weakness. Goodness is something he is not interested in, nor will he ever do > His task and objective are to do evil. He tries to do anything that opposes. His happiness and delight lie in choosing to do evil simply because God chooses good. He loses hope of reconciling with God or getting His grace. He does not want to beg peace:

*So farewell hope, and , with hope , farewell fear,
Farewell remorse! All good to me is lost;
Evil, by thou my good; be thee at least
Divided empire with Heaven's King I hold
(IV. 108 -111)*

Satan is the chief instrument of the Fall of Adam and Eve. This is due to his envy of them and revenge upon God for dismissing him out of heaven down to hell. Satan's cleverness and weakness are motivated by envy and revenge to deceive

mankind. His ambition is that he wants to be equal to God and the leader for all angles. Milton presents him as a leader and diplomat who succeeds in giving his followers hopes and motives and rouses them to action and promises them his leadership in the future battles His ambition, Milton suggests, was the cause of his ruin Ambition of this kind is not approved by Milton because his ambition was for literary fame, whereas Satan's was for equality to God. Because of this defect in Satan's character he suffers from eternal punishment. But despite his defeat and fall, Satan, T. Crehan notes, says defiantly that he is still unrepentant and unchanged.^(*) He scorns pessimism and never despairs of fighting God. He believes that he is as superior as God because God, like the angles, is created by fate. He does not think of God as divine; so he need not surrender to Him.

Mind for Satan is the instrument of happiness. He is happy with his new home, Hell, and asserts that the mind has the power to overcome the environment in which it finds itself. He believes that he and his fallen angles in Hell are at least free from God's control. He believes that man is as happy as his mind is. Regardless of the place, the mind can be happy. Satan's mind is the master, and any external circumstances, i.e. God's punishment, do not affect him, as is apparent in these lines:

*A mind not to be changed by place or time.
The mind is its own place, and in itself
Can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven.
What matter where, if I be still the same,
And what I should be, all but less than he
Whom thunder hath made greater? Here at least
We shall be free; th' Almighty hath not built
Here for his envy reign secure; and, in my choice,
To reign is worth ambition, though in hell;
Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven(I.253-263)*

According to T. Crehan, it is only a fiction of Satan's own mind that he can be independent of God, and that Hell can be his own Kingdom.^(*) The last line above is a reflection of vanity and self-deception. It means for david Daiches that " so long as he [Satan] is boss he does not give a damn who he is boss of."^(†) his mind qualifies him to be a leader. Man can be happy even in miserable conditions and vice versa. Though defeated by God's thunder, Satan is still hopeful and thinks it possible to go back to heaven and prevent God from creating a new creation. it has been unanimously agreed upon that, through Satan, Milton tries to express his idea about monarchy. Also through Satan, Milton's own democratic beliefs can be noticed. Examples are" Thither, if but to pry, shall be perhaps/Our first eruption-or elsewhere"(I.655- 656) and "- But these thoughts / Full counsel must mature"(I. 659 – 660). RD Trivedi believes that Milton " found in satan, the arch rebel, an ideal mouth piece for his own revolutionary spirit,"^(‡) and he unconsciously looked upon God as the tyrannical king of England against whom he himself revolted. Satan is a democratic leader who does not want to impose his own ideas upon his followers. anyhow, what Satan could not achieve by war could be realized by his cunning action and trick, i.e. he plots for a secret, eternal war. this reflects Satan's evil mind. God defeated half of the angles in war:

---- our better part remains

To work in close design, by fraud or guile,

What force effected not; that he no less

At length from us may find, who overcomes

By force hath overcome but half his foe(I. 645- 649)

To surrender is something he does not like to practice. his will is unconquerable. His is so proud that he will never as

God's forgiveness, nor he will give God the opportunity to see him at his feet apologizing. No submission will be shown by Satan whatsoever. He makes his fallen angles feel that , though they have lost a battle, they have not lost the war, ".. What though the field be lost?"(I.111-112) is for Satan shameful and dishonorable, since they had made God fear the outcome. Although God can never be defeated, Satan determines to resist and never to stop fighting God until he is successful. He has a challenge spirit and heroic energy, but they undermined by his evil – mindedness and persuasive lies. David Daiches mentions that "the study of revenge" and "immortal hate" of line 107 take us to "a realm of barrenness and negativeness" which do not fit in with the Christian virtues which claim that "the courage to repent is more difficult and more admirable than stubbornness in hate"(*).

Satan revolt against God is defeated. What really happened was the opposite of what Satan had expected to happen. He had expected to defeat god and overthrow Him, but he, as Joseph h. summers has noted, finds out that he was even unable to gain victory against other angels, and suffers from wounds and physical and moral pain.^(†) Satan loses his pride and dignity.

To sum up, Milton presents Satan as a destructive force of evil who spares neither physical nor mental effort to fight the Almighty, taking no account of the unshakable powers of God and goodness. the determination,will power, endurance speedy action, deception, false persuasion, revolutionary spirit and intelligence are what Milton admires in Satan. Nevertheless, Satan invests this energy in the wrong direction: envy, hatred, revenge, chaos, ambition for absolute power and glory and transgression of one's own limits. Milton's powers of imagination and organization are obviously shown in *Paradise*

Lost, especially in the character of Satan, the most impressive of all characters in this poem.

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الملخص

شخصية إبليس في الفردوس المفقود لملتون

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يهدف هذا البحث إلى التركيز على أسلوب تقديم الشاعر الإنكليزي ملتون لشخصية إبليس في قصيدة "الفردوس المفقود" ولا سيما خطابه الموجهة لاتباعه من الملائكة المطرودين من الجنة التي تنثير اهتمام القاري وتلقي الضوء على رغبة إبليس الجامحة في السلطة، والكره، والحسد، والطموح، والتحدي، والانتقام، والمساوآمع الخالق. كما أن الشاعر يتناول بوضوح الانحدار المادي والمعنوي الذي وصل إليه إبليس بسبب عدم طاعته لخالقه.

^(*) قسم الترجمة - كلية الآداب / جامعة الموصل.