

John Milton and The Devil's Party

Abstract

Milton seems to have put the most striking features of his own personality in the figure of Satan. His love of liberty, his indomitable individuality and energy, his pride, his sense of justice are the glorious representations that are reflected in Satan's character. But Paradise Lost hardly confirms it because Milton was proud in a good cause and wanted to justify the eternal providence whereas Satan was the arch-enemy of God through evil. Milton is quite conscious of what he intends to do with Satan and neither consciously nor unconsciously he is of devils party.

Keywords: Indomitable, Glorious, Eternal Providence Consciously, Devil's Party.

Introduction

Milton's poetry is the echo of a great soul, indeed Emerson says rightly:

...throughout his poems, one may see, under a thin veil the opinions, the feelings even incident of the poet's life still reappearing, ... It was plainly needful that his poetry should be a version of his own life, in order to give weight and solemnity to his thoughts, by which they might penetrate and possess the imagination and the will of mankind." (Emerson, The Complete Works 1904)

Milton's strong moral character, his love of liberty and virtue, his patriotism which made him sacrifice his eyesight for the good of his people, his devotion to God are obvious in his poetry. Satan is the greatest creation of Milton in "Paradise Lost" which is based on the theme of fall of man by disobedience towards God. Satan's character is so very powerful and so very strong that it seems to be the hero of "Paradise Lost." Satan possesses tremendous courage, so much of fortitude towards adversity, all the heroic energy and such an invincible mind which can be able to change even the hell into heaven. Such a magnificent delineation of Satan has attracted the admiration and sympathy for him from many readers of Paradise Lost.

"It is surely the simple fact" says Abercrombie, "that if Paradise Lost exists for any one figure that is Satan, just as Iliad exists for Achilles and the Odyssey for Odysseus". The reason why Milton wrote in fetters when he wrote of angels and God, and at liberty when of devils and hell" says Blake, "is because he was a true poet and of the devils party without knowing it." (Abercrombie 2010)

Milton seems to have put the most striking features of his own personality in the figure of Satan namely his indomitable individuality and energy and his passionate love of liberty. This is certainly not a deliberate design the epic narrative precludes the possibility of poet's subjectivism in the poem. According to ancient critic Longinus "the greatness of a poem its transporting power, emanated from the poet's nobility of thought and vehemence of passion and emotion. It is in this manner the poet's personality enters into the poem and gives a distinct shape to its content, technique and style. When for example Satan declares that.

"Better to reign in hell, than serve in heav'n". (Paradise Lost 2008)

We perhaps seem to hear the voice of Milton who defied his powerful opponents, and remained unbending in his will. When the Puritans were defeated, they naturally suffer great punishment, great problems but Milton does not feel desperate and depressed. The first speech of Satan expresses the awakened, strong spirit of Milton.

"What though the field be lost

All is not lost, the unconquerable will". (Paradise Lost 2008)

Milton also puts his love of freedom, his pride, his heroic energy and his sense of justice and right in Satan and naturally in him he created the most glorious representation of his own qualities.



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Milton like Satan was a great rebel against a tyrant Satan against God and Milton against the Stuart Monarch. In spite of himself says Legouis of Milton:

... He was in deep sympathy with Satan, the great rebel of heaven and the enemy of God. The pride and indomitable courage of the revolting angel rekindled the emotion of the interest hours of his life, and do what he would, he saw God as the king of England, surrounded by submissive angles, as by courtiers, who spent their lives feasting, singing and fighting in glorious wars. Devoutly, but mechanically, he paid lip service to the duty of obedience, but in his heart he was chanting a hymn of freedom and rebellion. (Prof. Naeem 2010)

Milton's moral greatness, his dauntless courage and his wonderful skill in arguments is clearly revealed in Satan's oratory- "To be weak is miserable." Again he speaks to his next mate-

"The mind is its own place, and in itself

Can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven." (Book I- 254-55)

It is into Satan that he has put most of himself, his pride and his temperament. Adous Huxley in "Vulgarity in literature" speaks of Satan as "indomitable devil, whose self esteem was founded like Milton's own on just and right" But Paradise Lost hardly confirms the views of Legouis and Huxley. Milton no doubt was proud, but he was proud in a good cause, in the service of God and against wicked men, Satan on the contrary, was the arch-enemy of God of divine order, of virtue.

Satan is most dominating figure in Paradise Lost Book I as well as Book II. He is the first who wakes up from his sleep on the fiery lake in hell, raises his head above the flood and casts his "baleful eyes" that threaten the doom of man. His body is gigantic with a shield as large as moon. He stands pre-eminent like a tower above all the rebel angles. With this physical magnificence and vigour Satan is far superior to the rebel angels by virtue of the extraordinary power of his mind which are exhibited in his great speeches in hell. It is his resourceful brain that first conceives the idea of seeking revenge upon his Almighty victor God, indirectly through man.

The moral stature of Satan appears to be very high and bombastic when his famous words about his dauntless courage and heroic energy are remembered and so memorable and thrilling is the way by which he extracts victory and consolation even from the worst defeat. Milton could not make Satan that ridiculous figure as he appeared in the writings of middle ages, with horns and hoofs and a tail. Satan had to be shown in magnificence so that he might be a fit adversary of the Almighty. God is Almighty, all powerful his enemy should be a very strong person because an eagle will not catch flies.

The speeches of Satan are the very obvious revelation of Satan's character. The speeches are praised highly as the expression of Satan's greatness of mind. They are no doubt the wonderful pieces of oratory, the rhetoric in them are a high watermark of persuasive eloquence. He speaks to Beelzebub of his fixed mind.

"And high disdain from sense of injured merit" that made him rebel against the mightiest. By "injured merit Satan means that his revolt against God in heaven was justified and his merit was neglected and the Son of God was exalted by him over him ignoring his just claims. On what grounds Satan justifies the superiority of his claims is difficult to understand. So far as, the Son is concerned he is physically and morally Satan's superior. In the war it is the Son ordered by God defeats Satan single handed and hurts him down into the bottomless pit. The Son also offers himself willingly to come down to earth to pay the penalty of Adam & Eve's sin by his own death.

Satan is mighty in doing evil, the Son is great in doing good. It comes to this Satan is a liar. He is a great master of oratory a master of sophistry" as David Daiches calls him, who can make the worse appear the better reason. The most glorious speech to Satan to his fallen host in books "awake, arise or to be ever fallen" has been considered as the most threatening call that was ever given by a commander to his defeated army but there is deep irony underlying it. The rebel angels arise at his call only physically, to fall ultimately to the lowest depth of moral degradation. They have some marvelously good qualities in him, but they were overpowered and destroyed by the evil and bad deeds. The remark of David Daiches is quite apt- "corruptio Optima Persima, the corruption of the best becomes the worst; and this is particularly clear in the case of Satan.

Satan is a Machiavellian character of the renaissance with a lust for limitless power and not bereft of admirable qualities, but his megalomania, his insanity of self-exaltation, overpowers and destroys all that is good in him. As Coleridge points out -Milton has carefully marked in his Satan the intense selfishness, the alcohol of egotism, which would rather reign in hell than serve in heaven. But around the character he has thrown a singularity of daring, a grand of sufferance, and a ruined splendor, which constitutes the very height of sublimity.

Satan has been often said to be the hero of Paradise Lost no doubt Satan's character is very powerful and very strong but every poetic description of Satan has some dark patch on it -"each chink of splendor is shuttered." The development of Satan beyond book I and II is quite new- and "he is a new Satan"- He is degraded. The germs of degeneration are in Satan from the very beginning but his demoralization now reaches its final end. He stoops down below his dignity and changed into a repulsive snake. As regards the glorification of Satan's character, Blake says that Milton was in deep sympathy with Satan and he consciously or unconsciously belongs to the devil's party. The argument of Blake that Milton was at liberty when he writes about Satan's character is hardly acceptable - so as to accept Satan as a hero of the great religious epic Paradise Lost. A poet writing in liberty may not necessarily write well about Satan. There is not a least doubt in it that Milton presents Satan as evil not without good and great qualities. Milton infuses his great and heroic qualities in Satan's character and

that is the reason that we might agree that he is on devils side. But Satan is certainly not the embodiment or symbolization of Milton- the great worshipper of god.

Milton very clearly indicates his aim in the invocation of heavenly muses that, my aim is to

“Assert the eternal providence
And justify the ways of god to men”

(Paradise Lost 2003)

So that the readers may not mistake his meaning and place him on the devils side.

Aim of the Study

Aim-Satan is the most controversial character in Milton’s Paradise Lost. It is said that Milton has Put in his own part in satan’s character .The aim of paper is to analyse whether Milton belongs to devil’s party or not.

Conclusion

To sum up, in the characterization of Satan, Milton’s art is at its best. Milton gives a fair deal to him by presenting in him the conflict of evil and good. He represents his admirable qualities of head and heart, and exalts him above all the fallen angels. But in Satan, evil gains strength and the good in him and all the great qualities he possess are destroyed by evil. By the time he completes the ruin of man all his luster is gone and he is changed into an ugly snake and sent to the bottomless pit of hell for everlasting punishment. Milton is quite conscious of what he intends to do with Satan and neither consciously nor unconsciously he is of devils party.

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