



## CHARACTERIZATION OF SIN AND DEATH IN MILTON'S 'PARADISE LAST' BOOK II

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### Abstract

Milton's 'Paradise Lost' Book I ended with the construction of pandemonium, the huge hall in which the fallen angels intend to hold a meeting to mitigate their suffering and to escape from the Hell. In Book II, Satan addresses the fallen angels. There is the same note of defiance. He has not lost courage. Then, he invites suggestions from his followers where we are introduced to Moloch, Belial, Mammon and Beelzebub. They plan to take revenge by destroying the God's creation 'The New World'. Satan volunteers himself to go in search of the New World and reaches the gates of Hell. These gates are guarded by Sin and Death. This paper is concerned with the depiction and significance of Sin and Death in Book II.

**Keywords:** Pandemonium, Fallen Angels, Hell, Revenge

### Introduction

John Milton's 'Paradise Lost' is one of the immortal classics of the English Literature. His powerful rhetoric prose and eloquence of his poetry had an immense impact on 18<sup>th</sup> century poets. It is a classical epic, having all the features of the epics of Homer and Virgil. This epic deals with a biblical subject, namely, fall of man. Book I ends with the construction of Pandemonium. Book II begins with 'the great consult'. The conference is dominated by Satan, though various fallen angels express different perspective. The debate is between open war with God or war through craft and guile. A third proposal is preferred by Beelzebub to search another world created by God and exploit it:

"Seduce them to our party, that their God  
May prove their foe, and with repenting hand  
Abolish his own works. This would surpass  
Common revenge, and interrupt his joy"

Satan undertakes alone the voyage. Here Milton gives us a horrible description of Sin and Death. During his voyage, when Satan arrives at the gates of Hell, he sees two horrible shapes were guarding the gates. One shape is a woman from the head downwards to the waist, but her lower part has the form of a snake. All around her waist is a pack of hounds which keep barking endlessly. This shape is Sin:

"The one seemed woman to the waist, and fair,

But ended foul in many a scaly fold  
Voluminous and vast, a serpent armed  
With mortal sting."

The circumstances of her birth are as fantastic and horrible as her appearance is. Once, when Satan was still living in Heaven, he suddenly experienced severe pain in his head. His eyes became dim. In this condition, his head split open and from inside sprang an armed goddess. All the angels felt amazed on seeing this phenomenon. They named this goddess Sin. The poet writes:

"All on a sudden miserable pain  
Surprised thee; dim thine eyes, and dizzy swum  
...Then shining Heavenly fair, a goddess  
armed,  
Out of thy head I sprung."

Satan was more pleased with her. Having come out of his head, she was his own daughter; but he fell in love with her. Sin became pregnant as a result of their sexual relationship. Meantime, Satan and some other angels revolted against God. They suffered a heavy defeat in this war and were dispelled from Heaven. Sin was also one of the fallen angels. But she was given the custody of a powerful key which could unlock the doors of Hell:

"..at which time this powerful key  
Into my hands was given, with charge to keep  
These gates for ever shut, which none can pass  
Without my opening."

One day she felt an acute pain of labour. The child used violence to come out of her womb. Tearing through her entrails, a boy emerged. This child was the monster Death. Death carried a dart in his hands, and none could escape it. Death raped his own mother and the result was the birth of hell-dogs. Milton illustrates his shape as:

"if shape it might be called that shape had none

Distinguishable in member, joint, or limb;  
Or substance might be called that shadow  
seemed,

...Fierce as ten Furies, terrible as Hell,"

When Satan approached the gates of Hell, Death strode angrily towards him. Satan was amazed but he was not frightened. They were ready for a fierce fight but Sin interposed. Since Satan had not recognized her she gave an account of her birth out of his head. Sin also reminded Death he was not the king but in reality he was the slave of God. He should not fight against his own father. She says,

"O father, what intends thy hand, she cried,  
Against thy only son? What fury, O son,  
Possesses thee to bend that mortal dart  
Against thy father's head? And know'st for  
whom;"

At once Satan spoke more gently. He told them he was not their enemy but a true friend. He was taking that dangerous voyage just for their sake. There was a rumour that a new race was created by God called man. Clever Satan assures that he would conquer that new world for them. He says,

"I come no enemy, but to set free  
From out this dark and dismal house of pain"

Death was immensely pleased with his powerful speech. Sin told Satan that Satan is her father so she would obey her father and whatever he wants. She opened the doors of Hell. Later after 'the fall' Sin and Death construct a bridge to connect Earth and Hell.

John Milton Has painted both of them with lucid colours specially their origin. The characters of Sin and Death are not merely decorative pieces in the poem. They are one of the most important participants in the central action which is Man's first sin which brought Death into the world. In Book II, double incest can be seen, incest between father and daughter and incest between mother and son which is

morally most repulsive. Sin and Death are allegorical figures. These characters are Splendid portray of Milton's powerful poetic imagination.

#### **References**

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