



Satan characteristics in Milton's Paradise Lost: A diagnosis

Dr. G. Kiran Kumar Reddy¹, Dr. P. Kousar Basha², Dr. A K. Gopi Krishna³

^{1,2,3} Assistant Professor in English, Rajeev Gandhi Memorial College of Engineering and
Technology, Nandyal, AP, India.

Email: kiran.mokshita@gmail.com¹; kousarrgm@gmail.com²; gopirgm@gmail.com³

Corresponding Author: kiran.mokshita@gmail.com

ORCID ID: 0000-0002-1161-5698

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Dr. G. Kiran Kumar Reddy

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Abstract

This paper analyses satan character, examines who is the real hero of the poem. Some critics claimed that by glancing at design, satan is the protagonist of the poem. He revolts against God and rejects god's orders. His valor is portrayed through oratory skills and awakens the fallen angels. As a Renaissance leader, he becomes a towering personality in Paradise Lost. His role is pivotal, influences others with his traits. His flaws, ambition, qualities of epic are highlighted.

Keywords: Milton, Paradise Lost, Satan, heroism.

Milton's Satan, at least as presented in Book I and II of the epic, is a magnificent poetical achievement. He has exercised a strange fascination on readers of the epic ever since it was written. Dryden regarded him as Milton's hero. Blake asserted that, Milton was of the Devil's party, knowing it. Shelley admired him and thought that as a moral being, he was superior to God. Who out of feelings of revenge subjects him to eternal damnation and torture. Coleridge and Hazlitt admired him as a great rebel, a great freedom fighter like Prometheus. Abereromble is of the view that the central significance of the epic is centered on the

character of satan , such as that of Iliad and Odyssey in their respective heroes.

Various reasons may be given for the strange fascination that satan has exercised over successive generations of readers. First, it should be remembered that Milton had been brooding over the possible theme for his epic for years. In this way, in the past several years, much creative energy has been generated. When he began writing, all the stores of energy expressed itself in the character of Satan, with which the epic opens. Second, as far as the account of Hell and its possessor is concerned, Milton was free to follow his own bent and give free play to his imagination. He did not enjoy

this freedom in his account of God and Heaven, for these had to follow the scriptures closely. He was denied freedom of invention, which is why Book I and II are superior to the other books. Therefore, Satan is more magnificently drawn and is a more fascinating character than the other figures in the succeeding books.

Third, a satan's character has been exalted and glorified for artistic reasons. His purpose was to depict the story of the conflict between Heaven and Hell, God and Evil. To bring out the might and greatness of the Almighty, he must make his adversary one of heroic stature, a magnificent and glorious being. Therefore, he has magnified satan to heroic proportions. The glorification of satan was essential for his epic purpose. Satan has the qualities of leadership, which a born leader of men should have. He could win over one third of his angels to his side and wage a terrible war against the omnipresent, so that, for some time, his very throne was shaken. In Hell, he can inspire his followers to wage eternal war against the determined. Rightly or wrongly, he suffers from a sense of injured merit and wage war for his just rights. A poetic glow and admiration as well as that of his followers. To enlist out sympathy further for satan, the poet has shown the Almighty as rather unjust and tyrannical, who punishes satan not to reform but to have his revenge upon them.

Benjamin Ramm refers to Christopher Ricks' remark on Paradise Lost that Paradise Lost is "a fierce argument about God's justice and that Milton's God has been deemed inflexible and cruel."¹

In Paradise Lost, Book I, there are five speeches of satan, and each of which shows that he has qualities essential for a true leader and commander. As Waldock aptly points out, the speeches reveal that satan has, "fortitude in adversity, enormous endurance, a certain splendid recklessness, remarkable powers of rising to an occasion, extraordinary qualities of chief man ship and remarkable quick thinking

in meeting difficulties that are new and appear overcoming one.

His first speech, was made soon after he awakened from his stupor in Hell. Satan addresses Beelzebub, his trusted lieutenant and comrade in the war against Heaven, and now his fellow sufferer. The speech strikes at once the key note of his disposition, viz., his indomitable will, his fixed resolve never to be subdued and his attitude of irreconcilable antagonism towards God,. The main points of the speech are that Satan first laments their evil fortune. "How glorious we were and how we have fallen," which is the burden of his lamentation.

However, although we have lost so much, we do not repent nor change our fixed mind and firm resolve. The field may have been lost, but our indomitable mind has not been subdued, and we will never sue for God's grace with suppliant knees. Rather, he fights with God with a better chance of success, because we now know that fate has made us immortal and that we have gained some experience from our late encounter with him. We now know of his secret weapon of thunder. The speech reveals that he is a liar, cowardly, mean and vicious. Obviously, we cannot sympathize with such a character, nor can it be said that Milton's sympathies are with satan.

In his first speech to Belzebub, satan tells him that although they have lost the battle, they have not completely vanquished. They are still in possession of many qualities that help them win the war. He speaks as if they have lost only the first round of the battle and that success is bound to be theirs.

They have a strong will, an eager desire for revenge, an undying hatred for God and courage never to submit or yield. These qualities, which still remain with them, are clear proof that they are not defeated. As long as they have these qualities undiminished, they can be sure of final victory.

The second speech of satan, also addressed by Beelzebub, who had advised caution, is equally self-revelatory. He tells Beelzebub: We must not be weak, for to be weak is always to be miserable. We must overcome our weakness. We never let ourselves act as mere tools in the hands of God. Even if he wishes to utilize our services, he thwarts the purpose of God. In the meantime, the tortures with which we are being plagued have ceased at least for the time, and let us hasten to profit by this temporary end of war and hostility.

The third speech of satan further reveals his unconquerable spirit. In the conventional epic manner, Satan greets their new abode, and laments the contrast between it and Heaven, which they have lost. He says, "It is better to reign in Hell, than serve in Heaven." The speech brings out his determination to make the most of his circumstances.

The fourth speech of satan is addressed to his followers and is cleverly calculated to move them to action. He addresses them as princes, potentiates, powers and thus appeals to their sense of pride and reminds them of their former glory.

The last speech and the longest speech of satan in Book I are made to his followers after they have all assembled in battle array on the open but desolate plain. First, like a great military surveyor, his magnificent and numerous troops. He first appeals less and reminds them of the glorious war they waged in heaven. They have suffered a fall, a dire change. They have come from heaven to hell. Satan further appeals to their pride as celestial beings, and suggests that they should wage eternal war. Otherwise, they would remain forever in that infernal pit. Of action, but cleverly says that it would be decided in full counsel, after due consultation with all of them. He then ends with the call of battle.

"War, then, war

Open, or understood, must be resolved.

In Books I and II of Paradise Lost Satan is the protagonist. He predominates in the first two books and motivates his companions. He is the first to awaken from their stupor. He has an enormous bulk, like a leviathan, and it covers many a rood. His shield has a circumference as broad as that of the moon, as seen through the telescope, and his spear is compared with the tallest pines that are used for the mast of an admiralship. He is the highest rank man, though defeated, and his fame has been dimmed only slightly. He is intended to suffer, but never surrender. He has no doubt been defeated, but it was only because God cunningly concealed from him the secret weapon of thunder.

Monami argues that "No doubt in the first books of the poem Satan is pictured as a magnificent, heroic figure".² His qualities are magnificent. No one matches with Satan, he shoulders great leadership in Paradise Lost.

Satan dominates Book I of Paradise Lost. He also dominated during the debate in Book II. The suggestion that they should have their revenge on God by seducing and corrupting the newly created race of man is his but, like a true leader, allows Beelzebub to obtain credit for it. Like a born leader, he takes upon himself the hazardous task of journeying through chaos, exploring the new world and corrupting the newly created man and woman, Adam and Eve. His heroism in offering to undertake this dangerous enterprise is greeted by his followers with thunderous applause. To heighten the heroism of Satan, Milton introduced a similar scene in heaven. The Almighty asks his angels to suffer and atone for the sin of man, but none comes forward for the task. Thus, the satan is shown to be the bravest and the most heroic of Eden, he shows great tact, intelligence and resourcefulness. His powers of eloquence and his capacity for reasoning succeed in overcoming the scruples of Eve.

For these reasons, Satan is the hero of Books I and II, but he cannot be regarded as the hero of the epic as a whole. Even in the very

opening of Book I, we are told that the epic is not about Satan; it is about man and his fall. The poet intends to sing the story of the fall of man and the original sin, and how man was redeemed and his sin was atoned by the supreme self-sacrifice of the son of God. Thus, the story is not at all about Satan. He is certainly the testament of the fall of man, and he achieves this end not through heroic means, but through villainy and crooked practices.

Satan may, therefore, be called the villain of the piece with greater may, therefore, be called the villain of the piece with greater justification than its hero. A hero never stoops to guile: he is open and straightforward in his actions. In addition, Satan uses his passion, but by the passion of revenge. His motives are ignoble, and the means that he uses are equally mean and low. Indeed, as C.S. Lewis noted, there is a gradual degradation of his character. First, he loses his lustre and glory; second, he stoops to the use of guile, third, he assumes the form of a toad; fourth, he takes on the role of spy; fifth, he turns into a serpent; sixth, he cunningly seduces an innocent but rather than a vain and frivolous woman. Finally, he and his companions are transformed into hissing serpents.

Certainly, such one cannot be the hero of the epic. Who then is the hero? Neither God nor his son can be the hero, for they are perfect and flawless. According to Aristotle, the hero must have some flaw in his character. This leads to the fall of the hero. He must commit some error, but the omnipotent is incapable of any error. Satan has this tragic flaw—pride and inordinate ambition. God and his son have none. Therefore, none of them Satan for being a villain, and God and His son, for the reason just given, can be regarded as the hero of the epic.

Adam better claims to be regarded as the hero of the epic. The epic is about his disobedience and fall. It also holds out hopes of his redemption through the suffering and self-sacrifice of the son of God. It has been said that

Adam is too passive a character to be the hero of the epic. In this context, it should be remembered that the Paradise Lost is a classic epic with a difference. Its central theme is not the war, such as exploits of some great warriors, but the eternal war between good and evil for the soul of man. The virtues that are dear to Milton are not classical virtues, such as patience, endurance, and the capacity for resignation and self-sacrifice. These virtues Adam has in plenty. He knows the full consequences of the act of Eve, but knowingly, and, deliberately, he does not leave her, but, valiantly, determines to suffer with her the loss of paradise. He is patient and self-sacrificing, doing his duty irrespective of its consequences to him.

The picture of Adam and Eve leaving paradise throws into sharp relief the degradation of Satan and his followers into hissing serpents, suffering eternal damnation. Nor is Adam an entirely passive character. He has freedom of will, and he acts in making his choice. The action in his case is internal, and is expressed in his willing choice to suffer the loss of paradise along with Eve. He could have cowardly and basely chosen differently, but he chose what was noble and heroic.

Werkmeister mentions all the heroic deeds that Satan does in the beginning of Paradise Lost: he awakens from a stunning defeat, rallies his followers plot a conspiracy and proves himself as a man of action.³ When the Pandemonium had been built, the fallen angels thronged into the council hall. There, they had been summoned by their chief Satan

Of faery elves,
Whose midnight revels, by a forest side
Or fountain, some belated peasant sees.
Or dreams he sees, while over head the moon
Sits, arbitrating and nearer to the Earth
Wheels her pale course they on their mirth and dance

Intent, with jocund music charm his ear;
At once, with joy and fear, his heart
rebounds. (781-788)⁴

Milton describes the size to which the fallen angels contracted themselves when they entered the council hall in pandemonium in Hell. He attempts to convey an adequate idea of it instituting comparisons with well-known facts or legends of moral history.

A scholar Lewis mentioned that "Satan speaks of his fixed mind him rebellious when God appointed the son in the position, which satan trusted should have been entrusted to him."⁵

If we think in an optimist mode, Satan's role is very important in Paradise Lost.

"From their creator and transgress his will

With vain attempt. Him the Almighty power

Hurled head long flaming from the ethereal sky."⁶

He instills confidence in Belzebub and addresses him.

"If thou beest he- but oh how fallen!

Fallen cherub, to be weak is miserable."⁷

Satan's enormous physical form is depicted in bold. He lifts his head above the fiery wave, and his eyes shone with the fire of wrath.

In Book V Raphael, the spirit of the sociable is sent by God to warn Adam against his enemy satan.

At Adam's request, Raphael talks about Satan history.

What surmounts the reach of human sense, I shall delineate so, (V. 571--572)
"⁸

Most likely, the grave warning about fallen faith takes place in Book V, "When satan dares Abdiel about his supreme being rejects

Almighty's creation, and asserts his own power above God's :

Who saw

When this creation was? remembers thou

Thy making, while the maker gave thee being?

We know no time when we were not as now, (V.856--859)⁹

This passage denotes an arrogant homemade man in the contemporary world. This analysis of Satan's speeches indicates that his great intellect and leadership traits are combined with the immorality of values and inconsistent in thinking. We may admire his qualities of will, determination and clever oratory, but we cannot show sympathy towards him.

In the first two Paradise Lost Books, Milton portrays satan as a vigorous hero. Satan is presented as an inspiring leader with powerful and species-based arguments. In Paradise Lost II, Satan is presented chiefly as a subtle politician, and a skillful debater satan succeeds in his political game by using Beelzebub as a stooge. He succeeds in persuading the fallen Angels that they should opt for indirect war. Satan is chosen as the hero to undertake the perilous adventure through chaos to earth.

Conclusion

Satan is a negative character, towering personality in Paradise Lost. He is a rebel against God and God's creation. His character is debatable forever. Moreover, he is not a hero in view of Milton. Milton creates out of the conventional dark devil an active, Milton leader, an intriguing politician and an eloquent speaker, who, on occasion, expresses sentiments of universal validity.

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