

SATAN AND EVIL

A Study of Milton's Satans
in Relation to the Problem of Evil
in Paradise Lost and Paradise Regain'd

A Thesis

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KEY TO ABBREVIATIONS

of works frequently cited

- Grierson:- Grierson, Sir Herbert J.C., Milton and Wordsworth,
Cambridge, 1937.
- Hanford:- Hanford, J.H., A Milton Handbook, New York, 1933.
- Lewis:- Lewis, C.S., A Preface to Paradise Lost, London, 1946.
- Niebuhr:- Niebuhr, R., The Nature and Destiny of Man, New York, 1946.
- P.L.:- Paradise Lost
- P.R.:- Paradise Regain'd
- Ross:- Ross, M.M., Milton's Royalism, Ithaca, 1943.
- S.M.:- The Student's Milton, ed. Patterson, Frank Allen, New York,
1930.
- Tillyard:- Tillyard, E.M.W., Milton, London, 1946.
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INTRODUCTION

In this thesis I will attempt, in terms of Milton's presentation of Satan, to contrast the role of evil in Paradise Lost with the role of evil in Paradise Regain'd. Evil, as presented by Milton, may be defined as a rebellion against the hierarchy of God's creation. This hierarchy consists of an ordered system of life stretching from the mineral realm to God, and is governed by a divine decree to the effect that whatever is closer to God in the great chain of being must govern, by natural right, whatever is more distant from God. A failure to obey one's natural superior in this hierarchical conception constitutes rebellion against the Omnipotent. As a result of rebellion the divine harmony of the universe is replaced by a state of chaos. The order of rule is upset. Internally man is governed by passion rather than reason, and externally society and history are governed by tyranny, war and lust.

Although evil, measured in terms of its impact, upsets temporarily God's perfect government of the world, it does not thereby defeat His divine purpose. Since God is, by definition, Omnipotent, nothing can resist His will. In His foreknowledge exist all the events of eternity. The activity of every atom in the universe is the result of His decree. Evil, therefore, acts and governs with His permission.

That permission is, in Paradise Lost and Paradise Regain'd, the expression of divine justice. Since evil is self-originated, a result of the misuse of free will, it is, therefore, blamable. Blame involves guilt, guilt involves punishment, and punishment is the measure of justice. Thus God declares:

Man disobeying,
Disloyal breaks his fealtie, and sinns
Against the high Supremacie of Heav'n,
Affecting God-head, and so losing all,

To expiate his Treason, hath naught left,
But to destruction sacred and devote,
He and his whole posteritie must die,
Die he or justice must...¹

Satanic thralldom becomes the justice of God. To punish man God permits evil to rule the world. Evil, therefore, is the servant of justice.

God's goodness, however, is expressed not alone in His justice.

Mercy in the end prevails:

Man therefore shall find grace,
The other none: in mercy and justice both,
Through Heav'n and Earth, so shall my glorie excell
But mercy first and last shall brightest shine...

Since justice, however, is the pre-requisite of mercy, evil is, in the final analysis, the means to greater good. That greater good is the fulfillment of the divine plan in the establishment of the Kingdom of God.

Whoever embraces evil must, of necessity, embrace an illusion. Since evil is a revolt against God and yet serves God in the fulfillment of His plan, it follows that to act on the basis of revolt is to act on the basis of an illusion. This fact will be of fundamental importance to an understanding of Milton's presentation of Satan.

In Paradise Lost, Milton is primarily concerned with the justice of God. Evil, therefore, as the servant of justice, performs a dynamic and leading role in the epic. As the instrument of justice it uproots the whole order of the universe and plunges humanity into a living Hell.

In Paradise Regain'd, Milton is concerned with the mercy of God as manifest in the Son. The dynamic function of evil, as the instrument of justice, is replaced by an ineffective evil used as a background against which to present the perfections of the Son.

Viewing evil as defined above in its relation to God, and presenting it as a potent force in Paradise Lost, and as an impotent force in

Paradise Regain'd, Milton has created two Satans to conform to the role of evil in each poem. In the following chapters an analysis will be made of Milton's presentation of Satan as it reflects the function of evil in the two works.

Since the role of evil in Paradise Lost is of central importance and carries, as the instrument of justice, the dynamic movement of the epic, Milton's initial task is to create a figure equal to the superhuman function which it is to perform. Satan, in Paradise Lost, is God's arsenal of ammunition. He is the embodiment of the explosive force of evil which is, at the same time, the explosive force of divine wrath that reverses the whole order of the universe and renders man passion-ridden and society tyranny-ridden until the end of the world.

The change in the role of evil in Paradise Regain'd necessitates a change in the presentation of Satan. The aggressive superman of the first book of Paradise Lost is replaced by a Satan whose ammunition is spent and whose force is exhausted. In the first chapter an analysis will be made of the contrasting presentations of Satan in terms of the specific problems with which Milton is faced in relation to his concept of evil, the means by which he presents him in terms of literary influence, and the way in which he brings him to life in relation to the situation with which he is faced.

Having created a powerful figure in the person of Satan, Milton must identify that power with God by placing it at the service of the divine plan, for this is the function of evil. At the same time, he must demonstrate the deteriorating influence of evil upon the individual who embraces it, for this is the effect of evil. Because of this function and this effect the Satanic illusion glorifies God, on the one hand, and renders Satan morally depraved on the other.

In Paradise Regain'd, Milton is no longer concerned with identifying a dynamic evil with God's plan because justice has been fulfilled. Evil, as a dynamic force, has served its function. Milton therefore accentuates the moral depravity of Satan in order to place mercy in its proper focus as that which shines brightest in the ways of God to men. In the second chapter the way in which Milton subordinates evil to the will of God by making it glorify Him, on the one hand, and by exposing the moral depravity of Satan, on the other, will be analyzed in terms of Milton's presentation of the Omnipotent.

The first two chapters will complete the analysis of Milton's technique of translating into artistic terms the role of evil in the two poems. The third chapter will show evil in action by analyzing Satan in relation to the two temptations. Bearing in mind the role of evil in each poem, I will attempt to measure the consequences of Satan's victory over Adam and Eve and the consequences of Satan's defeat before the Son of God as it sums up Milton's whole concept of, and attitude to evil. In the final chapter this concept and this attitude will be related to the larger social and political background from which both concept and attitude emerge.

NOTES.

1. P.L. Bk. III, 11.203-210.
2. P.L. Bk. III, 11.131-134.

CHAPTER I

THE INITIAL PRESENTATION OF SATAN IN PARADISE LOST AND PARADISE REGAIN'D

Milton, in Paradise Lost, presents evil in the service of divine justice.¹ Within the epic, evil causes the overthrow of the earthly Paradise, and plunges disobedient man into an earthly Hell which endures until the second coming of Christ. This overwhelming upheaval within the divinely ordered universe bathed in heavenly Light does not, for Milton, who writes as the spokesman of God,² represent a real attack upon the supremacy of the Omnipotent. God, in His foreknowledge, anticipates the fall of man and proclaims in the loss of Eden, not His defeat, but His justice. Thus He declares to His assembled angels:

Assembl'd Angels, and ye Powers return'd
From unsuccessful charge, be not dismay'd,
Nor troubl'd at these tidings from the Earth,
Which your sincerest care could not prevent,
Foretold so lately what would come to pass,
When first this Tempter cross'd the Gulf from Hell.
I told ye then that he should prevail and speed
On his bad Errand, Man should be seduc't
And flatter'd out of all, believing lies
Against his Maker; no Decree of mine
Concurring to necessitate his Fall,
Or touch with lightest moment of impulse
His free Will, to her own inclining left
In even scale. But fall'n now he is, and now
What rests, but that the mortal Sentence pass
On his transgression ...³

In Paradise Lost evil serves the pre-ordained scheme of God as the instrument of divine justice. To punish man for his transgression, God subjects him to the rule of evil as embodied in Satan and the fallen angels. When the Omnipotent Judge observes Satan and his crew approaching the world, He declares:

... I to them have quitted all,
At random yielded up to their misrule;

And know not that I call'd and drew them thither
 My Hell-hounds, to lick up the draff and filth
 Which mans polluting Sin with taint hath shed
 On what was pure ...⁴

Evil is God's hell-hound serving Him in the fulfillment of Justice.

In Paradise Regain'd, Milton, having presented the role of evil in relation to divine justice, turns to the role of evil in relation to mercy as it is manifest in the Son of God.⁵ The Son, while not restoring in His incarnation the earthly Paradise, symbolizes for the virtuous man an inner Paradise which is protected by "light from above"⁶ against the onslaught of evil. This Paradise within is an exclusive advance showing of the new world that is destined to appear with the second coming of Christ.⁷ The impact of evil, therefore, in the temptation of the Son of God is negligible. Its dynamic function, as the instrument of justice, is replaced by a non-dynamic function in which it is used as a background that enhances the perfections of the Son.

The initial problem that Milton faces in the presentation of Satan is the creation of two contrasting figures to fit these two contrasting roles. In Paradise Lost, he must create a giant figure that is equal to the superhuman task which it performs in the epic. This involves, however, certain difficulties of which Milton is fully aware, and which, as a highly conscious artist, he undertakes to solve.

Satan, as the embodiment of evil, must act on the assumption that by his actions he is perverting the will of God, for evil is, by definition, a rebellion against God. In reality, (i.e. from God's point of view), however, Satan acts as a puppet of God, fulfilling His justice as a part of the divine plan. Satan, therefore, acts under an illusion. And it is upon this illusion that Milton is able to create the appearance of struggle between Satan and God out of which emerges the dynamic figure that supplies the whole basis for the epic form

(which is built around the struggle of a primitive superman with his environment) and carries the movement of the epic toward its climax. By acting as if he were perverting the will of God, Satan creates the illusion of Titanic strength which validates, in the dramatic sense, his victory in the Garden of Eden, and gives expression, in the final analysis, to the wrath of God.

Milton's problem is to pit the illusion against the reality without, at the same time, destroying the necessary dramatic vitality of that illusion. While the reality must remain dominant, since Milton is writing to justify God and not to justify Satan, the illusion must remain operative. If the veneer of struggle is destroyed, the epic, as an art form, collapses.

In his initial presentation of Satan in Paradise Lost, Milton is primarily concerned with demonstrating the apparent power of the Satanic illusion. In Paradise Regain'd Milton is not concerned with Satanic force. Since justice has been fulfilled, Satan has completed his positive function in carrying forward the divine plan. In relation to mercy, he must fade into the background while the Son comes to the centre of the stage to perform His role in that same plan. It is to illumine the grace of God by showing the triumph of mercy over justice for which Satan is resurrected from the rejected world of humanity upon which judgment has already been passed. In the context of mercy the dynamic of evil is destroyed.

The analysis of Milton's initial presentation of Satan in the two poems will be based upon the method employed by Milton to contrast the two creations. This analysis will limit itself, (with one or two exceptions) to a study of the Satan of the first book of Paradise Lost and the Satan of the first one hundred and thirty lines of Paradise

Regain'd (i.e. from the beginning of Paradise Regain'd until Satan goes off for the first time to tempt the Son of God).

In order to create the illusion necessary to the role that Satan plays in Paradise Lost Milton models him after the epic hero of Homer and places him in an environment that serves as the basis of physical and psychological struggle which call forth the heroic attributes, and make him, in relation to the fallen angels, a great warrior-leader worthy to be a god. In Paradise Regain'd, Milton models Satan, not upon the epic hero of Homer, but upon the Satan of the Book of Job and the Satan of the Gospel of Saint Luke. In addition he removes the whole environment that provides a stimulant to heroic deeds. Satan, as a result, is stripped of heroic attributes. Glory and honor no longer surround him.

The epic hero of Homer is the complete individualist. His personal destiny, as distinct from any social destiny, is of supreme importance to him.⁸ In fulfilling this personal destiny, which is the manifestation of his ego-drive, he surpasses all others in strength and courage and overcomes all the obstacles that are implanted against him (usually by the gods) along his path to fame and honor. In pursuing his destiny he is completely ruthless and will destroy anyone or anything that stands in his way. This superman faces no moral issues because his destiny is measured in secular and temporary terms and is concerned with problems that involve either physical prowess or mental cunning. When and if he is successful in overcoming every difficulty, honor, glory and fame are bestowed upon him and he is ranked among the gods.⁹

Making use of this heroic model, Milton must show it to be the garment of the "infernial serpent", without at the same time destroying the dramatic and poetic values of the Homeric concept, for it is these

values that provide the poetic justification of the Satanic conquest and perpetuate the life of the epic. Milton's task is to subject the Greek heroic myth to the Hebrew-Christian one by placing it in apparent opposition to that myth when, in reality, it is at its service. To create the necessary dynamic, the Greek epic hero, while playing the role of an animated puppet of the Hebrew-Christian God, must appear to rebel against him.

Milton's precaution to preserve the real and proper relationship between the Greek and Hebrew-Christian world is evident throughout the first book.¹⁰ In the opening invocation he draws a careful distinction between the Greek and Hebrew world by deliberately by-passing the "Aonian Mount" and continuing beyond that "middle flight"¹¹ to Mount Sinai for his inspiration in the composition of the epic. In the actual text the will of God is stamped upon the activity of Satan. When, for example, Satan raises his body from the burning lake, Milton points out:

... nor ever thence
 Had ris'n or heav'd his head, but that the will
 And high permission of all-ruling Heaven
 Left him at large to his own dark designs,
 That with reiterated crimes he might
 Heap on himself damnation, while he sought
 Evil to others, and enrag'd might see
 How all his malice serv'd but to bring forth
 Infinite goodness, grace and mercy shewn
 On Man by him seduc't, but on himself
 Treble confusion, wrath and vengeance pour'd.¹²

In addition to exposing the Satanic illusion by showing its relation to God's plan of salvation, Milton also exposes its inherent evil by making use of a patristic theological speculation to the effect that Satan and his fallen angels become, in incarnation, the gods and idols of the heathen world.¹³ Thus when Milton describes the great march and muster-roll in Hell he expands it to include the great march and muster-roll of the pagan world: