

Paradise lost – john milton's complicated masterpiece

[Literature](#), [Poem](#)



Paradise lost is a great literary work of Milton. It is an epic. It is written in grand style. Milton had been planning to write it for years. During the years of political change he had been looking for a suitable subject and for a little while he even considered the idea of writing on an Authoritarian legend. But eventually, he choosed a wide subject to write on the fall of Adam and Eve and fall of human race through them. Paradise lost is a rich mixture of knowledge. The Bible, The Talmud and church fathers contributed to the story of Paradise Lost. The structure and tragic tone of poem resembles Homer and Virgil. But Milton’s individuality is reflected in this poetry. The poet uses his knowledge and produces a masterpiece. He creates a universe which is past, present and future at the same time. He creates a world that is timeless and place less.

The poem opens with an invocation to heavenly Muse (without the use of classical Greek mythology). The poet seeks the help of heavenly Muse and describes the subject of poem: man’s first disobedience to God in eating the forbidden fruit and consequently the fall of man. He seeks the support of Muse from the mount of Sinai. He calls upon Muse and says that he is going to write a poem on a very noble subject as compared to ancient poets. He prays for illumination of his vision. His purpose is to justify the ways of God to men. Milton’s story begins with asking the reason why Adam and Eve our parents first fell from heaven and who reduced them to their revolt. They lived happily in heaven with only one restriction on them. Join our fb group: Library of English Literature and Linguistics by Arshad Mehmood. The infernal serpent was cause of their fall. In his envy and revenge he beguiled the mother of mankind Eve. Because of his pride and ambition to rise above

God, Satan waged an impious war in heaven. In result God expelled him from heaven. Others rebel angels also fell down into the deepest pits of hell where they were to suffer everlasting punishment. Although he was immortal, Satan suffered. He was confused and stunned from the fall from heaven. He now lay outstretched upon a fiery lake. Milton gives us the picture of hell partly through our own eyes and partly through Satan’s eyes. The place has utter hopelessness. It is full of visions of sorrow and despair. The fallen angels are facing torment. In this condition lie the fallen angels, three times as far from the light of heavens as the earth is from the utmost poles of universe. Satan speaks to his closest associate Beelzebub. He tells him that he feels high disdain against the maker of heaven. He will never seek forgiveness and will fight against God. Milton reminds us that his speech is only a noisy boost to arouse the fallen angels but actually he is in the depths of despair. Beelzebub replies Satan in apprehensive manner. He says to be weak is to be miserable. He says that glory of fallen angels is diminishing and their happiness consumed. They are in total destruction. Join our fb group: Library of English Literature and Linguistics by Arshad Mehmood. Satan replies promptly to vanish Beelzebub’s fear. He says that to do anything good is now out of question for them. To do evil should only be delight and this will nullify God’s will. Satan then draws attention of Beelzebub to that cosmic hail has stopped. They must not miss the opportunity and discuss how to come out of this dire calamity. Milton then describes the huge dimensions of Satan. He compares Satan with Titans like Briareos and to giants like Typhon. Satan is also compared to sea beast Leviathan. God leaves Satan to follow his “ dark designs”. So that he might

bring damnation upon him and he might see that evil always lead to infinite disgrace. The dry land is described as imagery of earthquake and volcanic eruption. But in moving from lake to land Satan only exchanges liquid fire for solid fire. Beelzebub also follows Satan in coming out. Then, Satan makes his famous first speech. He is in shock but accepts the conditions of hell. Finding himself in total misery, he says that “ mind is its own place, in itself can make a heaven of hell and hell of heaven”. This is a powerful statement. This speech of Satan is most important part of epic. Satan motivates the fallen angel by his encouraging speech. He says “ Better to reign in hell than to serve in heaven “. Beelzebub support Satan and rebel angels resume their power. In next lines Satan’s shield and spear are described, also the large multitude of fallen angels. Satan’s shield is compared to moon size large when viewed by telescope. And the fallen angels are like fallen autumn leaves on the bank of river. Then Satan addresses the fallen angels for the second time. He calls them princes, warriors, potentate, the flowers of heaven and boost them. He gives them ultimatum to rise or be fallen forever. The followers leap up like men who have been caught asleep on duty. They are awake and they are in hovering multitude. They rise like locusts. The leaders of various regiments now step forward. They are powerful angels who were once having princely dignities in heaven.

Then Milton gives us a catalogue of fallen angels. They include the false gods against whom Jehovah of old testament protects his chosen people. First is Moloch, the destructive sun God. Then Chemos, Baalim, Ashtarohah, Thammuz, Dagon etc. These false gods and their destructive effect on

mankind is elucidated in detail. After that dejected state of fallen angels is described. They are in bad condition. Their looks are downcast and damp. But they have a hint of joy in them. A new plan of action is devised and Satan is somehow successful in raising their spirit. Then Satan and fallen angels assemble as an army. The flags rise and they show their shields. The music is played and there is an impressive array of forces. They gather together and arrange themselves. Then Satan again addresses the angel. He tries to address the angels. His first three tries are stopped by tears of frustration and despair but at last he gathers courage and gives his speech. This third speech is also filled with zeal and enthusiasm. He determines to continue the war Against God and His creatures. The fallen angels reply with waving swords, crashing shields and shouts of anger against God. Then a band of angels rush on command of Mammon to nearby hill and dig gold. They construct a magnificent building and name it “ Pandemonium”. Then in next lines more details about Mammon are given. At the end, all the fallen angels except the chiefs reduce their size to flies.

Paradise lost is written in grand style. It is written in blank verse. It has overall non rhyming structure. The poem is composed of iambic pentameters. Each line has five long syllables. Milton uses epic similes. Also the use of alliterations produces musical effect. His similies go far beyond the limits of comparison and are expanded to draw complete pictures. Many simple and Homeric similies are used. The nature of Milton’s blank verse in “ paradise lost” is the unrhymed meter of five accents and ten syllables. He stiffened and strengthened the texture of blank verse. He introduced a a

variety in blank verse so that it is never monotonous. The epic contains verse like paragraphs which have overflow of ideas. Milton has gained perfect mastery over blank verse without diminishing dignity and grandeur.

MAIN THEMES

Sin and punishment

The main background theme in the epic is the sin and its punishment. The fallen angels along with Satan are burning in the miseries of hell because of their sin. They have shown proud to God. They disobeyed their creator and in result they got punishment to be in fiery hell forever. They are stunned and immersed in depths of despair. They are in pain because of their own pain and following the cursed Satan. So sin and its results in the form of divine wrath and punishment is shown in paradise lost one.

Power and Majesty

The second theme of paradise lost is power and Majesty. There is display of power throughout the poem. We see that power of Muse is called in the beginning of the poem. Then there is power of Almighty God and we see its effects on the rebel angels. After that power and will power of Satan greater than other angels. After that different rebel angels and their descriptions along with their evil power and destruction caused by them in world is shown. So all these parts of poem give an overall theme of power and superiority to the poem.

Fall of mankind

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Overall theme of the epic is fall of mankind. How mankind is misled by the evil spirits and how they are entangled in sin through the dark motives of Satan. The poem has theme how mankind stray from the path of their creator God and come in the net spread by Satan and its companions. The mission of fallen angels is to drag humankind in hell with them. They are envious of man’s rise and they want to take revenge from them that’s why they use every possible ways to dwindle them from the path devised by God.

SPEAKER SETTING AND SYMBOLISM

The speaker is poet himself. In opening he invokes the heavenly Muse and seeks help. He tells that he is rising voice on a very important subject. Then the setting is hell and poet describes the fallen angels in hell after they were abandoned by God and thrown in the miseries of hell. This is the setting in rest of the poem. The imagery is used to give us a picture of conditions in the hell. All the fallen angels are scattered on different sides and they are aroused by Satan’s speech. Satan gives three speeches and starts revolt in hell. He forms an army against God. This army is then organized and we get a full picture of hell. Vast imagery, similes and metaphors are used to give a clear image of hell.

CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Literary position and scholarship

Shakespeare and Milton are two poets of England who are above the rest of poets of their age. Shakespeare was dramatic and poet of universal

humanity. And Milton was epic poet and poet of Puritan England. So this epic is unique and gives us an epitome of Milton’s Nobel style. As we progress through it we are highly impressed by Milton’s scholarship and the paradise lost is a masterpiece. He was acquainted with the learning of ancient Greece and Rome. He combines this knowledge with his learning of Bible. This gives us a beautiful classical epic.

Milton’s imagination and love of beauty

Milton’s poetry revealed his quality of imagination and it ranges equally apt on heaven and hell. His imagination can create invisible and concrete the visible ideas. He possessed the keen sense of beauty. He was very sensitive to external beauties. The poem has freshness and charm. It testifies his love of nature. We find both classicism and modernism in his poems. He was a great hater of tyranny but had all ornamental qualities of a royalist. His poetry is rich with simplicity and romantic richness of modern art. As we observe the characters Adam, Eve and Satan we find that there characters are simple and majestic but they have splendor, complexity and subtlety in dress, style and illustrations.

Milton’s grand style

Milton’s style is called grand style because it has always an unmistakable stamp of Majesty in it. It has not the voice of sea as Wordsworth say but it has an elevating effect on the reader. The subject is always lofty even if Milton speaks of common things. He uses the best words in best order. He is admirable as Virgil or Dante. His style is unique and it has perfection and

flawlessness. Milton wrote majestic blank verse. The style is in conformity with theme. The poet’s imagination, suggestiveness, compact words, use of epic similes and allusiveness are all in a grand style. This epic has all essentials of Miltonic style and it is an example of artistic perfection.

EFFECT OF ERA ON THE POEM

Milton lived in transitional age. Political, religious and social ideas were undergoing change at that time. Milton’s imagination and intelligence was also influenced by these conflicting principals. The two phenomena which had greatest effect on Milton’s work are Renaissance and the spirit of Reformation. Renaissance brought with it an increased interest in Greek and Latin Literature. People were interested in form of arts and beauty and the bright and joyous in life. But at the same time logical and rational matters of church and institutions were also fluctuating. The Puritans stood for the purest form of Protestantism. The believers of Puritanism were austere and high principled men who recognized the supremacy of Christ alone without any temporal or mortal intermediates. Milton too was a Puritan. That’s why he was also prosecuted in Elizabethan period. This Puritanism is also reflected in his Paradise Lost. Satan’s revolt is the revolt of Puritan against the established authority. Had there not been controversies, Milton may have written more books like this but some critics said that these conflicts of his time enriched his poetic genius. Milton’s poems bear traces of his time. He gave his opinion in his poems. Perhaps the epic should have gained more appeal if Milton had paid more attention to aesthetics and depicting colours of heaven instead of emphasizing the moral intention of story. Milton is more

a politician and Puritan in paradise lost than an artist due to influence of his era.