

The Devil's First Advocate

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Abstract- *In this work, I analyze John Milton's Paradise Lost through Milton's use of allegory, allusion, and religious archetypes alike and hypothesize the implications of said techniques of writing as a more synchronistic view held by Milton in this particular work, as Milton never abides by one singular religious context or reference to coinciding cultures of the time, but appears to borrow all at will indiscriminately, as if to hint at a greater connection between each.*

Keywords- *Paradise Lost; John Milton; Religion*

It's often found that through the varied perspectives of reality, interpretations of stories, truths, events, and even lives of others become scrutinized, praised, yet occasionally redefined. When humans do things, there is little actual thought of the weight of their actions, despite what is claimed. The true omnipotence that lay not only testimony of works' endurance, but witness to their folly, and the persecution thereof is time. Time and its passage dictate ideas and the residual effects refined in their wake far past prime. Though the moment illuminates a room, what's left of the home is a function of its aging. Much like architecture, manmade creations must be well-built for influences to truly last.

It's no easy feat to produce something that supersedes temporal lapse. This could infer as to why those that do create the culture of modern man. Many methods exist in the molding of what was into what now is. A very clever, if genius, method is that of the paradigm shift, and John Milton carried that tactic out on one of the hardest possible pieces to offer up a differing, perhaps untold, view on: the story of creation and the fall of all mankind. The book of Genesis, suitably, birthed an entire belief system. Milton, however, was first to cast a light unto a dark underbelly of this immaculate construction and descent by introducing a Luciferian view to underscore its contents.

Paradise Lost is a true mark of what a simple change of scope can do to an entire religion. His illusory use of both cultural and biblical reference was the first time much thought had been given to the ever-endangerer of good and corruptor of conscience. His abstract ideations and ties from pagan allusions to create somewhat of an understanding of the inner workings of darkness and chaos were groundbreaking. Even such a chaotic description of hell displayed Satan's pining for reason through irrationality:

Nine times the space that measures day and night
To mortal men, he with his horrid crew
Lay vanquished in the fiery gulf...
A dungeon horrible, on all sides round,
As one great furnace, flam'd: yet from those flames
No light, but rather darkness visible,
Serv'd only to discover sights of woe,
Regions of sorrow, doleful shades, where peace
And rest never dwell; hope never comes
That comes to all: but torture without end (PL I, 47-67)

Not only was this context descriptive in its visuality of pandemonium, but it lends itself to the celestial characteristics of the setting as well describing the sheer unfathomability to its nature by depictions of emotional expressions as being concrete physically: "No light, but rather darkness visible, Serv'd only to discover sights of woe, Regions of sorrow, doleful shades, where peace And rest never dwell" (PL I, 62-67). Never before had hell been so described as an abstract ideation granted physicality versus the succession of sufferings and layers in terms of degree so separated by Dante's Inferno.

That seemed to be how Milton described Satan: irrationally rational, chaotic, yet orderly, unreasonable within his own format of reason, and (what may be most importantly) self-aware. His fall and reconciliation with the terms of no return to his celestial home seems to beget this direct contrarianism that Satan so adopted upon its recognition:

"All good to me is lost;
Evil thou be my good" (PL IV, 109-110)

This immediate inflection eloquently sets up the process of reason through Satan's actions to follow, though there were inklings of this philosophy in his motives earlier on. These ideas suggest alluding to western enlightenment that was occurring at the time of Milton's composition of the piece: "Here we see the implications of habits of mind that come into existence with western modernity. For those taught in these habits, the human first becomes truly "human" by emancipating itself from the demand for original obedience" ("Creation, Paradise Lost, and Modernity", 45)

On the topic of reason, one could question the logical processes of Milton's God amidst this. Why would an omnipotent, supremely righteous deity that oversees the universe allow this to happen? The answer lies in the philosophical phenomenon of double-effect reasoning. "Double effect reasoning (DER) implies the coexistence of good and evil in certain affairs; for a good outcome to appear, the possible evil side effects in its company or deviating from it are foreseen-but-not-intended" ("Double-effect Reasoning in Paradise Lost" Abstract). It underscores that while Satan may have chosen to be completely evil, that it was of divine consciousness and an ultimately good outcome that it had taken place. This is a philosophical context to which many Christian religions

operate under to explain the will of God. It operates within the axioms that “1. God is omnipotent and all powerful. 2. God is totally good. 3. Evil exists in the world.” (“Double-effect reasoning in *Paradise Lost*” 75). These suppositions allow Satan’s direct contradictions to the divine trinity to occur without answer until the book of revelations, where he casts himself into the lake of fire for shame of defeat in the face of righteousness.

Milton’s clever use of the double-effect reasoning strategy doesn’t end there. It’s also employed when the celestial dialogue is taking place in heaven between the angels, God (the father), and Jesus (the son). In this council, God reveals that he is aware and has constructive influence over the fall of man following Satan’s betrayal:

Such I created all th’ethereal powers,
And spirits, both them who stood and them who fell...
Their will, dispos’d by absolute decree,
Or high foreknowledge. They themselves decreed
Their own revolt, not I: if I foreknew,
Foreknowledge had no influence on their fault...
They trespass; authors to themselves in all...
Their nature, and revoke the high decree
Unchangeable, eternal, which ordain’d
Their freedom; they themselves ordain’d their fall. (PL III, 100-128)

This passage illustrates that God was in control of the situation despite letting go the control of his creation’s collective will. He describes that the deviation of will makes negative consequence inescapable, and the almighty, infallible to it.

This dialogue between the father and son is encasing yet another allusion. This time, pagan. Milton’s styles in this scenario depict something reminiscent of an exchange between celestials atop Mount Olympus:

Thus while God spake, ambrosial fragrance filled
All heaven, and in the blessed spirits elect
Sense of new joy ineffable diffused (PL III, 131-137).

The term “ambrosial fragrance” is an allusion to the true divinity of God by referencing a parallel validation through that of the Olympians: “Milton’s ‘ambrosial fragrance’ also recalls a scene of divine revelation in *Aeneid* 1, where Venus appears to Aeneas in the guise of a huntress, a scene that reveals as a ‘true goddess’ as ‘from her head her ambrosial tresses breathed celestial fragrance’” (“Milton’s Olympian Dialogue”, 212).

This synchronicity of religious takes and cultural allusions combined into the reference of Christianity had not been used before, especially in epic poem format. It begs the question as to whether Milton, himself was a synchronist that believed there is a commonality between the natures of all influential deities. From allusions to pagan gods

portraying demons as false idols to lead men astray to the Olympian dialogue that refers to God in the format of Zeus among other gods, and additionally Satan’s enlightenment of diverging from direct obedience and question of authority, it can be asserted that these connections are not accidental. It’s interesting to note that Milton never belongs wholly to one paradigm throughout the twelve books, be it religious or worldly. Rather, he appropriately borrows all tools at his disposal. Through the brilliant contextual references, Milton creates such an illustrious reinvention of a story theoretically as old as time. Amazingly, his interpretations have withstood many generations succeeding him and will continue to do so through the curiosity expanding in proportion to removal from Milton’s own era. The further from this timeframe, the more his words will be left to individual interpretation apart from historical context, but regarding what Milton actually had mentioned about the natures of life’s meanings. In part, he outlines the ultimate will of God being the predestination of life and the universe as we know it. But, he also appears to note that our idea of divinity, god, Satan, and the duality of good and evil may not be as we imagine, or unlike anything we can ever be capable of imagining in its entirety. Regardless the implications of his work, there is one certainty that arises from the ashes of age: it has lasted the trials of time’s hearings, and it has changed the way we view good and evil by its descriptions alone.

Works Cited

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