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Milton's Muse and Satan: A Deviant Discourse

Dr. Debi Prasad Misra

Associate Professor & HoD, Department of English, Panchmura Mahavidyalaya, Bankura, West Bengal, India

Email: debiprasadmisra1@gmail.com

Abstract:

"Paradise Lost" intricately weaves biblical narratives, portraying Adam and Eve's expulsion from Eden after succumbing to Satan's deceit. Milton's poetic brilliance brings to life the cosmic battle between good and evil, emphasizing the consequences of disobedience while contemplating the concept of predestination.

Milton's invocation to the Muse is a deliberate attempt to deviate from the tradition. Whereas the Pagan epic poets invokes the aid of the Muse, the Greek goddess of poetry, Milton invokes the Holy Spirit. Milton is a Christian poet and his invocation is justified. And it's a deviation from the epic tradition.

Keywords: Satan's deceit, Invocation to the Muse, Adam and Eve, Holy Spirit.

Great poets of all ages have always believed that absolute knowledge remains unattainable except by revelation and inspiration. The poets are "divinely inspired" says Plato and the epic poets of *The Ramayana*, *The Mahabharata*, *The Iliad*, *The Odyssey* and *The Aeneid* have all bowed down to the goddess of poetry with a passionate appeal for guidance. Virgil seeks the aid of the deity of inspiration in *The Aeneid* – "Musa mihi causas memora" – O muse relate to me the reasons of Juno's resentment against Aeneas". Greek and Latin epics frequently open with an invocation to the Muse as found in the opening lines of the *Odyssey* "speak Memory of the long tried royal." In *Paradise Lost*, Milton also invokes the "Heavenly Muse" in conformity with the epic tradition after he has stated his subject mankind's first act of disobedience and the fruit of that forbidden tree.

Milton pleads with the Muse, the goddess of inspiration, one who inspired ancient poets to write grand verse. Hesiod, the ancient Greek poet says that the Muses are the nine daughters of Zeus and Memory. The nine daughters "dance on soft feet about the deep blue spring on the mount of Helicon". The haunts of the classical Muses are near the Castilian Spring and they bestow upon the promising poet, "the gift of the sweet song". Even through Milton uses the classical word 'Muse' Milton's Muse is not, however, one of the nine pagan Muses. He refers to a different Muse, certainly Christian by specifying that his Muse inspired Moses to receive the Ten Commandments and write *Genesis*. Milton's Muse does not reside on Mount Helicon. Rather it dwells on the "secret top of Oreb or of Sinai."

Milton's Muse is the Holy spirit'- the part of God that pervades the whole universe and which inspired Moses to reveal the future to the chosen seeds the Israelites Milton's *Paradise Lost* deals with "things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme" and unlike the classical epics, it doesn't deal with national events and heroes. *Paradise Lost* is concerned with the whole human history. The story of Adam and eve is the most original one and to recreate that story in his epic poem, Milton requires God's support other than anything else. He does not intend to soar merely the middle region .He wishes to fly above the Aonian Mount- far into the Garden of Eden. Just as Dante calls on the Holy Spirit to recreate poetically the dark regions of the Inferno in *Divine Comedy*, Milton summons the Christian God which will instruct him and help him capture in his imagination the Paradise, the Earth the Hell -the whole of the universe.

Milton's Holy Spirit is the only guiding authority who is omnipresent and omnipotent. It assumed the shape of Dove and injected life and harmony in the vast universe. It is the same spirit that "mad'st it pregnant". It will illuminate the poet with prophetic vision-"What in me in dark, illumine". There is a faint reference here to Milton's blindness---a subject he will return to more directly in Book II. Milton turns his blindness into God's opportunity to choose him as a mortal vessel fit to reveal cosmic past and future.

Milton's invocation to the Muse in an example of his unique combination of the two epic traditions- the classical and the Christian. The eloquent language of Invocation possesses sublimity, intensity and "a breathless leap", in the words of T.S Eliot. The fact that Milton is blind reinforces his urgent need for inspiration. At different points throughout the poem, Milton calls on the Muse to generate his creativity. In the Book II, he says "Shine inward... Irradiate, plant eyes ... That I may see and tell/ of things invisible to mortal sight".

Milton' Satan, "the most exalted and depraved character", in Addison's words, has always remained a complex and controversial figure who never ceases to elicit our varied response- praise and sympathy, among others. Stanley Fish, in his work *Surprised by Sin: The Reader in Paradise Lost*, has rightly pointed out that "the poem's centre of reference is it's reader who is also its subjects." Milton used a number of literary techniques intentionally to lead the reader into a false sense of security whereupon he would effect a turn from the reader's expectations in order to surprise the reader with his own prideful self-sufficiency. Milton's intention was to force the reader to see his own sinfulness in a new light and be forced back to God's grace.

Milton's Satan is projected so heroically in the first two books of *Paradise Lost* that the reader is tempted to take Satan to be the hero of this epic. The Romantic poets, in particular, were all praise for Satan and Robert Burns, for instance, went to the extent of saying, "Give me a spirit like my favourite hero, Milton's Satan" However, the progression, or, more precisely, regression, of Satan's character from Book I through Book X gives a much different and much clearer picture of Milton's attitude toward Satan.

Most of these writers based their ideas on the picture of Satan in the first two books of *Paradise Lost*. Satan rises off the lake of fire and delivers his heroic speeches which are full

of fire and eloquence. Satan appears heroic because the first two books focus on Hell and the fallen angels. The reader's introduction to the poem is through Satan's point of view. The question of whether Satan is the hero of *Paradise Lost* should, however, be put to rest if we understand his progressive degradation. Satan is a vain and ambitious angel, who through his deceptive but impressive power of oratory misled a host of angels to revolt against God. After his fall, his mission is to thwart the aims of God and "out of good still to find means of evil". That one line – "Study of revenge, immortal hate" which is a part of his first speech – "All is not lost – the unconquerable will", clearly suggests the evil intention of this great personality, who has the qualities of a hero, but who abuses and misuses them all for evil ends.

Milton's Satan is far more complex than the flat character of Devil of the Bible and popular imagination. Satan is the best drawn of Milton's characters. He is a magnificent poetic achievement which engages the attention and excites the admiration of the reader. He possesses many heroic traits – courage, leadership, indomitable will and intellectual power. Around his character, according to Coleridge, the poet "has thrown a singularity of daring, a grandeur of sufferance and a ruined splendour, which constitute the very height of poetic sublimity."

Satan blazes like a meteor in his attractive speeches, but his rhetoric is mere bombast and deceptive. His oft-quoted speech – "To reign is worth ambition, though in Hell/Better to reign in hell, than serve Heaven" is a crowning example of his love for freedom. But is Satan not hiding the truth behind his grandiloquence the fact that there is no scope for reigning in this bottomless pit of agony and darkness? In him, the spirit of pride, of egotism is the poison that permeates his whole being and spoils all that is good in him. His admission – "Farewell remorse; all good to me is lost; /Evil be thou my good" sums up his despair and damnation. According to B.Rajan, Satan is not short of appreciable qualities, but his "virtues are perverted by their end". He thinks of submission to God, but his king-size ego rejects it. The breach between him and God is so vast, that he has lost the power to atone.

The reason why Satan is appealing to us is because evil, not good, always appears convincing and attractive. According to Tillyard, "The Satan in Milton enables him to draw the character of Satan well just as the Satan in us enables us to receive him". Undeniably, in the first two books, Milton gives certain praiseworthy qualities to Satan, but Milton also traces the moral degradation of Satan's character throughout the poem. As C.S Lewis has rightly pointed out, "From hero to general, from general to politician, from politician to secret service agent and thence to a thing that peers on at bedroom or on bathroom windows and thence to a toad and finally a snake – such is the progress of Satan"

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