

JOHN MILTON'S GRAND STYLE IN PARADISE LOST



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John Milton is a great poet who had his deep-rooted philosophical and moral views, but he considered man responsible for his fall. His poetry is characterized by sublimity. Other poets have given us beauty, philosophy and romance, but none has given us such sublime things as Milton. In Paradise Lost Milton chose the Biblical theme of the creation, fall and redemption of man. All the events are ranged around the plucking of the apple. The scene of the action is universal space and the time is eternity.

Milton's Paradise Lost is a great epic. In this poem he has mostly followed the great epic poets Homer and Virgil. The epic theme is generally sought from the legendary history of the epic poet's nation. Milton's theme belongs to a time before the nations were unborn. He does not deal with the legendary history of his nation: he deals with the legendary history of mankind with the cradle of the human race. Though he believed that religion touched everything and everyday, he was not interested in any abstract religion. The main point of his religion is man in his earthly and worldly affairs. As quoted by Hardin Craig:

.... it is a modern poem with religious content. Its chronology is the life of every man, of every day, Adam and Eve are man and woman, as they live in the world. This fact is elemental, and it

means that in Paradise Lost we have to do with one of the broadest studies of religion and ethics ever undertaken. Its story is symbolic and one of immediate daily application, or it is nothing.¹

There is a lot of controversy as to who is the hero of Paradise Lost. Some critics like Shelley and Hazlitt regard Satan the hero of Paradise Lost. But many critics of 20th century do not agree with this opinion. This problem has been made complex for nothing. The theme of this epic is 'Fall of Man' and not the fall of a villain or wicked angel. It is true that Satan possesses superhuman qualities in his character. He had been the leader of fallen angels. It is true that he had lived in Heaven with all divine glory. It is also true that Adam does not play any role in first book. Satan fell into hell along with his followers. He inspired all the fallen angels to take revenge from God and throw 'Him' out of Heaven. Satan came to the garden of Eden and disguised himself as serpent. He disobeyed God because he possessed wonderful pride in his character. Satan flattered Eve. He inspired her to pluck the fruit from the tree of knowledge. Eve tasted the fruit of knowledge.

Milton has described the grand personality of Satan through many similes. Satan believed in grand mental powers and said that the mind is in its own place and in itself can make a heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven. He further told the fallen angels it is better to reign in Hell than to serve in Heaven. But Satan can not be regarded the hero of this epic because emotion, envy, revenge etc. are not noble qualities. Aristotle said that a villain can not be the hero of a tragedy. In this epic Milton has shown the downfall of courage but he is after all a devil. Milton loved Adam and Christ. It is true that Satan revolted against God as Milton revolted against Charles 1st.

Adam can be safely regarded as the hero of this epic. Adam is the first man in the garden of Eden and he is different from the heroes of other epics. He is the symbol of virtue and goodness. He felt lonely in the garden of Eden and that is why Eve was created. He is the father of mankind. But he does not have any human experience. Different angels told him different things at different times. He was given a warning against Satan. He was told that reason is the best virtue. He was told if he tasted the fruit of knowledge he would die.

Adam and Eve led a happy life in the garden of Eden. Adam had passionate love for Eve and that is why he disobeyed God. Adam had given a warning to Eve against Satan. He has told everything to Eve about the tree of knowledge. But Adam preferred his love of Eve to his love of God. Eve gave the forbidden fruit to Adam. Now Adam had to decide- whether he should choose Eve or punishment of God ? Adam decided to eat the fruit for the sake of Eve. He tells her-

“How can I live without thee?”

Adam felt that he could not live all alone in the woods without her. God might not create another Eve. Eve had become flesh of his flesh. So he decided never to part from her. If he does not fall with Eve, he would have to lead a lonely life in Paradise. Death for her was life for him. Now Eve had become a part of his life, If he loses her, he will lose everything. So Adam decided to disobey God. He ate the fruit of knowledge and Eve became very happy. Adam forgot his reason and knowledge. This is how Milton describes the Fall of Man.

Adam’s real fall begins when he becomes a slave of his passion for Eve. This is the reason that Milton hated woman. He was not in favour of giving education to women. He said- “One tongue is enough for women.” On one hand he holds Eve responsible for the fall of Adam. But at the same time Adam is responsible for his own fall. Eve offered the forbidden fruit to Adam and he tasted it. He tasted the fruit “against his better knowledge.” He became the victim of female charm. There is no doubt that Adam had faith in mercy of God. He was ready to share the offence of Eve and suffer punishment for her. Due to his love for Eve, Adam did not obey the instruction of God. He became a victim of his passionate love. Adam repents for this folly soon. He regarded himself a ‘degraded fellow.’ He had lost his wisdom due to his passion. He forgot the authority of God. He had lost greatness of mind and nobleness. It shows his fondness for Eve. At this stage Eve is everything for Adam. Eve is important to him. All this happened, though many angels had given warning to him. Critics are of the opinion that Adam left his manhood for Eve. Adam even justified the deed of Eve.

Adam is the hero of this epic and not Christ or Satan. Adam realizes that there is some meaning in Eve. He feels that weakness. Raphael said that there is no true love that Adam could rise to Heaven. Raphael tells him that the best path in life is through reason.

The question before Adam is – To stand or fall? Actually there is a conflict in his mind between his loyalty to God and love for Eve. Adam had prepared a garland to welcome Eve. When he sees Eve with the forbidden fruit, the garland drops down. He realizes that Eve is defeated. He is ready to die with her. God's words were still ringing in his ears. But his love for Eve was unlimited. Paradise becomes meaningless for him now. This is how Adam meets his fall. Even while getting punishment from God he feels that inactive life is useless. But Adam repents for what he had done. This is how he gets Paradise again. Adam is the hero of Paradise Lost. Milton can not be called the hero of this epic because he is not a character here. It is true that poem is full of references to Milton's personal life. Actually Milton expressed his political ideas through Satan and religious ideas through Adam. Some critics say that Satan is the hero of the book 1st of Paradise Lost. But it is a very important question and the decision can be taken in the light of all the twelve books.

There is autobiographical element in Milton's poetry. In Paradise Lost, he expresses himself in three ways. In the first place, there are certain direct observations of the poet regarding his personal life. In the second place some of Milton's prominent traits are reflected through the character of Satan. And some of the opinions of the poet are brought forth by Adam. Thus Milton's own personal speeches as well as the indirect utterances of Satan and Adam reveal Milton's personality, character and conviction. Legious remarks: Milton is in truth the only living being who exists in his own works.² In Paradise Lost Milton expresses his own feelings, thoughts and aspirations through his characters. Kenneth Muir is of the opinion that Milton's dominant intention in writing Paradise Lost was personal. He says:

Milton, as has often been remarked, was in Paradise Lost not only justifying God's ways to men; he was justifying his ways to Englishmen between 1640 and 1660. He was telling them why they

had welcomed back the monarchy. They had failed through their own weakness, their own lack of faith, their own passions and creed, their own sin. God was not to blame.³

It has been recognized by almost all critics that the personality of Milton is reflected most in his portrayal of Satan. Milton who was a defeated rebel, unconsciously identified himself with Satan who has the pride and egotism of his creator and Milton's pride had known defeat like Satan. In Satan we see the courage and defiance which Milton himself felt when he saw the Restoration coming. Milton's egoism, his love of liberty, his unyielding power and strong will, his leader-like qualities, his rebellious spirit, his anguish and rage etc. are shown through the portrayal of Satan. Milton's experience of private life and his relationship with women's experience of private life and his relationship with women's are expressed in *Paradise Lost* through the relationship of Adam and Eve. Milton's first marriage with Mary ended in unhappiness. When Adam moralizes on the unhappiness of marriage and puts the whole blame of his fall on women, it seems that the poet is pouring out the bitter cry from his heart. Again, the change in Adam's attitude towards beauty of Eve's character, is a change brought about in Milton's own life after his marriage. However, Satan is the most dominating personality in *Paradise Lost*. The simple fact is that *Paradise Lost* exists for Satan, just as *Iliad* exists for Achilles, and *Odyssey* for Odysseus. It is in the figure of Satan that the imperishable significance of *Paradise Lost* is centered, his vast unyielding symbolizes the profound antimony of modern consciousness.

Satan is the dominating figure in the first two books and his personality has a dramatic dynamic interest. It was Dryden who first of all said that Satan is the hero of *Paradise Lost*. John Demnis agreed that "the Devil is properly his hero, because he gets the better." According to Shelley:

Milton's Devil as a moral being is as far superior to his God, one who perseveres in some purpose which he has conceived to be excellent in spite of adversity and torture, to God who in the cold security of undoubted triumph inflicts the most horrible revenge upon his enemy, not from any mistaken motion of inducing him to repent of a perseverance in enmity, but with the alleged design of exasperating him to new torments.⁴

Milton's style is classical. It was Mathew Arnold who first of all made use of the term, "grand style" and in his lecture On Translating Homer, he set out to describe it in these words, "The grand style arises in poetry when a noble nature, poetically, gifted, treats with simplicity or severity a serious subject."⁵

There is a solid influence of Tasso, Homer and Virgil on the style of Milton. The opening books of Paradise Lost are remarkable for sublime style. But Keats remarked that Paradise Lost is fine in itself. But Keats blamed Milton for corruption of our language and perhaps Keats was harsh towards Milton. But Rickett called Milton 'an accomplished scholar.' Tennyson described Milton as 'God-gifted organ voice of England.' Wordsworth took inspiration from the matter and manner of Milton. Critics like Hazlitt admired the musical quality of Milton's blank verse. It is true that sound and sense are inseparable in Milton's poetry.

Milton's language has been admired for restraint and definiteness. Though he was a great scholar of Latin and English yet he was never in a hurry to express his thoughts. He knew what to write and how to write it. It is a well-known fact that he studied Homer, Virgil and Dante before writing Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained. He learnt the basic principles of writing epic from these ancients. He imitated them but never copied their style. However, it is also true that his poems are full of classical allusions. His language is at times very simple and clear. For example, his sonnet On His Blindness is clear and musical. It is remarkable for correctness and proper choice of words. Arnold admired Miltonic style and quoted many lines from Paradise Lost to confirm his statement. Regarding his style Compton Rickett remarks:

In his great epic, Milton is extraordinarily fertile in the methods he adopts to avoid monotony. He strengthens blank verse without cramping it. He is like a great organist who, while never losing sight out of the original melody, adorns it with every conceivable variation which serves to exhibit, in place of obscuring, the freshness and sweetness of the simple theme.⁶

The language of Paradise Lost is really grand. A reader can understand the whole Paradise Lost

only when he has a good knowledge of Latin, French and English languages. Milton's blank verse is faultless. He could create musical effects at so many places. His language is dignified. John Wain says that Milton's style is one of grand simplicity. Arnold puts him in the category of Virgil and Dante. Many lines of this poem can be admired for rhythm. His language is natural. His blank verse proves that he was a great scholar. Lunder admired Paradise Lost for harmony, music and eloquence.

David Daiches admired Paradise Lost for simple beginning, use of conjunctions, prepositions and relative pronouns. It is surprising that the first main verb does not come until the sixth line. When the first verb comes, it is important. Milton could use complex Latin forms whenever he wanted. There are many references to the events of history and the Bible in Paradise Lost. A reader must know them to enjoy Paradise Lost. It is a sublime poem because Milton tried to deal with reality, not fiction. Everything appears truth and not fiction Milton had great command on grammar and his syntax is admirable. His language was personal. There may be a difficulty for some readers due to some influence of Tasso.

The epic similes also make Paradise Lost a sublime poem. For example, Satan has been compared with sea-beast Leviathan. He was the hugest creature and the pilot regarded him some island. Then Satan is compared to Titan. The fallen angels were as thick as autumnal leaves. The fallen angels begin to wake up now and they have been compared with sentinels asleep on duty. These fallen angels have been further compared to the plague of locusts. Satan's shield has been compared with the moon. His lance is compared with the tallest pine tree. So his similes are unique.

Some critics are of the opinion that Milton is an obscure poet. As a matter of fact, one must have a sound knowledge of History and Geography to understand his poetry. Milton consulted maps while writing Paradise Lost, Paradise Retained, Samson Agonistes etc. He asked others to explain geographic facts to him even when he had become blind.

Milton's style can be admired for simplicity as well as plainness. The mind is in its own place and itself can make Heaven of Hell and hell of Heaven. Moreover, his style is never artificial and monotonous. Tillyard admired the heightened style of Paradise Lost. His style is not lacking in variety, So grand style is the only term which aptly describes the matured style of Paradise Lost.

C.M. Bowra remarks:

Of all styles it is the grandest, and that not merely in its sustained sonority and its distance from the speech of everyday. It has more than Latin solidity; in comparison with the language of Cameos or of Tasso it is cold and even inhuman. No conclusions are made to human weaknesses; all topics are raised to the same sublime level.⁷

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