

# Satan as the hero of Paradise Lost

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Satan as the hero of *Paradise Lost*  
Književno-kulturološki smjer

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## 1. Introduction: John Milton and *Paradise Lost*

A masterpiece of English literature, *Paradise Lost*, which caused many debates in literary circles because of the controversial questions it raises, was written by a highly prominent English poet, John Milton. Milton was an exemplary figure in the 17<sup>th</sup> century political and secular circles of the English society. Despite belonging to the higher class by birth, his worldviews were shaped by political struggles pressing the country of his time. He was a fervent republican who gained influence during English civil war. Milton's education and excellence in multitude of languages brought him the reputation as an erudite throughout the medieval Europe, while on the home front, he was considered a committed supporter of England's Lord Protector, Oliver Cromwell and a fervent advocate of the Commonwealth. However, Milton soon started experiencing deterioration of his sight and by 1654, just a couple of years before he started writing his widely recognized epic poem, *Paradise Lost*, he was completely blind. Nonetheless, this setback, nor the fact that he was overwhelmed by mourning both of his second wife and their infant child in private life, and the death of Oliver Cromwell which marked the beginning of the gradual downfall of the republic, did not hinder his imagination nor prevent him from creating the epic which can nowadays be seen as one of the pillars of English language literature.

In his private life, Milton was a devoted Puritan who believed in the authority of God and the Bible and was therefore against the institutionalized Church of England and its undeniable connection with the monarchy. But like Satan, his character in the *Paradise Lost* books Milton was also avid supporter of freedom of speech and freedom of press, an issue which was considered widely controversial in 17<sup>th</sup> century England. He also wrote about other radical topics such as divorce, for which he advocated in the series of publications *The Divorce Tracts*. But even though this thought may seem to unreal to be true, Milton had some extremely convincing similarities to his *Paradise Lost* character of Satan who bravely stood

up to the unfair distribution of power. Milton, like the character he was writing about, was being persecuted and judged for his different beliefs. Namely, Milton disagreed with the idea of a monarchy ruled by king Charles I, who was imposing Anglican beliefs onto and persecuting Puritans like himself. Milton, therefore, like Satan chose to fight the regime he saw as corrupt and unfair, his stance even causing the imprisonment after the fall of Commonwealth.

Continuing with his controversial topics, Milton wrote *Paradise Lost* to, as he says it, “justify the ways of God to men”, but this epic abounds as well with his personal beliefs connected to church and the higher importance of individual conscience and faith in God over the institutionalized religion propagated by the Catholic and Anglican churches (“Satan As An Epic Hero In Paradise Lost”). Although his first intention was not writing an epic with religious overtones, but one which would feature a British historical figure, a mythical king, like Arthur, or even Oliver Cromwell, as its main protagonist, Milton’s religiousness and Puritan nature prevailed and he returned to his old, but original idea of writing a story of the Fall of Man and disobedience (“Satan As An Epic Hero In Paradise Lost”). As the UK Essay “Satan As An Epic Hero In Paradise Lost” suggests that

Milton had a purpose of writing an epic poem upon a noble subject decades before he started writing *Paradise Lost* in 1658. In his famous work *At a vacation Exercise in the College* (1628), he already mentioned that he would like to devote himself to “singing in the manner of Homer” and at the same time, he envisioned writing a poem concerning “wars and heaven under Jupiter”. Notes and drafts from around 1640 include four drafts of projections of the fall of man, one of them called *Paradise Lost* and another *Adam unparadiz’d*. It took Milton almost twenty years writing controversial prose and political pamphlets while he was a strong supporter of liberty

of conscience, free will and human choice. (“Satan As An Epic Hero In Paradise Lost”)

Although *Paradise Lost* is an epic poem written in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, controversial questions such as “Is the Paradise Lost really of religious thematic?” or “Does it encourage blasphemy?” are still current. But the main question which puzzles critics and writers worldwide even today concerns the hero of this poem and raises the controversial question of Satan having that part in *Paradise Lost* instead of Adam.

### 1.1 Paradise Lost in short

It can be said that this epic is essentially a dramatic version of the well-known story from Genesis; a story of Adam and Eve and their fall from grace brought on by Satan in the shape of a serpent. However, Milton’s version dives deeper into the character of Satan, a charismatic and brave protagonist who is led on by revenge and anger towards God and his new creation, the man. Connecting Milton’s *Paradise Lost* to his own biography, one can easily see the similarities between the poet fighting the “evil king” who persecuted and killed many of his friends and colleagues, the only way he knew, through the power of the pen, and the fallen angel, who fell only because he was brave enough to stand up to the tyranny of imposed power. *Paradise Lost* can therefore be read even as a deconstruction of the Genesis myth in which the roles of the hero and villain are reversed. The story opens in hell, where Satan and other fallen angels are recovering from the defeat they experienced in the battle against God. In the palace that they built, Pandemonium, they hold a council and decide that instead of returning to battle, they are going to explore the new world where God’s new creations reside, and plan their revenge. Satan goes alone and travels across Chaos and the universe until he reaches the new world and tricks Uriel into allowing him to see the Man. God sees all of this and foretells the fall of man which prompts his Son to offer to sacrifice himself for man’s salvation. When Satan enters the gate of Paradise, he sees Adam and Eve talking about God’s

commandment not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge. He becomes jealous of them and plans his revenge. Uriel warns Gabriel and other angels that Satan has entered Paradise, so they find him and banish him from Eden. Raphael is sent by God to warn Adam and Eve about Satan and he tells them a story of a once favored angel's jealousy of the Son of God which led him to wage the war against God and his angels, prompting Messiah, Son of God, to banish him and his followers to Hell. However, Satan returns to Paradise, disguises himself as a serpent and finding Eve alone, he persuades her into eating the forbidden fruit. Returning to the point made previously, one is here again able to see the similarity between Milton and Satan and even ask if Satan is really just after the revenge, or is he trying to undermine the power and prove the importance of freedom of choice and free will. Looking at it from this perspective, it can be said that Milton and Satan are essentially doing the same thing, which is disestablishing the prevalent order. Eve relates her story to Adam, and he, not wanting to leave her alone in her fate, eats as well. Losing their innocence, they become aware of their despair and nakedness and start blaming each other for their fate. The Son of God descends to mercifully judge the sinners while Sin and Death, Satan's offspring, build a bridge to Earth which will become their new home. Satan and his followers are turned into serpents as a punishment for causing Man's downfall. Michael is sent to lead now reconciled Adam and Eve out of Paradise. Before they go, he shows Adam the troublesome future of mankind which resulted from their sin. He is saddened by this sight, but remains hopeful for the arrival of Messiah, future savior of mankind. With that, Adam and Eve are led out of the gate of Paradise.

## 2. Heroic Devil

When reading Milton's *Paradise Lost*, the reader is likely to perceive Satan as a character too charismatic not to be sympathized with. He abounds with characteristics usually given to protagonists and heroes such as determination, bravery and, if one was to compare him to

ancient tragic heroes of Greek literature, such as Oedipus, he also has hamartia, a fatal flaw which ultimately causes hero's downfall. All of this causes controversy when analyzing characters of *Paradise Lost*. Even though Satan is quick witted, brave and an excellent leader, the question arises whether the devil can be an epic hero. It is explained in the UK Essay "Satan As An Epic Hero In Paradise Lost" that

Paradise Lost starts, not with the expected potential heroes of the Genesis stories, God or man, but it begins instead with Satan, therefore paying great attention to him, his actions and characteristics. Milton, introduce Satan by condemning him as the reason leader to the fall of man, "Who first seduced them to that foul revolt? /the' infernal Serpent..." (1.33-34). in this sentence it implied that Satan had begun to be set up as the final rebel, not just of the epic, but of humanity. Milton easily represented Satan's pride that led to his ultimate failure. He tried to overthrow God; while unluckily he was cast into the Hell, but Milton also told us, "...for now the thought/both of lost happiness and lasting pain/Torments him..."(1.55-56). At once, the author tried to make Satan to be a pitied, more human and less evil role. He also described Satan's physical character to be "in bulk as huge/as whom the fables name of monstrous size, /Titanian..."(1.196-198). Satan's size growing extreme larger comparing with the others supports Satan as the hero. Satan is so physically impressive that Milton can't find anyone who can match him. Hence he is distinctive from the other angels and men. ("Satan As An Epic Hero In Paradise Lost")

As one can see here, Satan abounds with characteristics which could be seen as positive and therefore attributed to the protagonist. However, it could also be said that Satan is a character born out of the zeitgeist of Milton's England. As it is said earlier, Milton lived in the times of change, both the rise and fall of monarchy and of the Commonwealth, therefore, it can be said that "Satan's resistance to God mirrors the revolutionary and heroic spirit of the



bourgeoisie. While he finally loses the joyful heaven and Adam and Eve lose the Eden. All these consequences are the hints of the capitalist class's failure and the feudalistic class's restoration."("Satan As An Epic Hero In Paradise Lost") All of this can be corroborated by the fact that Milton himself was banished from his own "heaven" in which he could freely and openly talk about controversial ideas as well as practice his own religion without fear, to the "hell" of exile by king Charles II, nearly escaping death. Paradise Lost can therefore be seen as Milton's last attempt to discretely say that not all God sent power is necessarily good.

Moreover, like other epic heroes in epic poetry, Satan as well faced obstacles which he needed to overcome on his road to success. He is fearless, determined and stubborn which makes him overcome everything in his way to achieve his goal which can remind the reader of epic heroes such as Odysseus whose perilous journey home is not unlike Satan's own journey to Eden:

The core of Satan's heroism in this poem is that though that he would fight against all the odds, he was still in favor of his own beliefs and fought till the end to preserve his beliefs. He says "We shall be free; the Almighty hath not built Here for his envy, will not drive us hence: Here we may reign secure; and, in my choice, to reign is worth ambition, though in Hell: Better to reign in the Hell than serve in Heaven" (1.259-263). ("Satan As An Epic Hero In Paradise Lost")

It is also important to note the contrast between Milton's God and Satan. The latter one invokes pity and sympathy for his fate, and may even feel that the revenge he seeks might be justified by the inflexibility and nepotism of a very cruel God. Benjamin Ramm refers to Christopher Ricks' remark on Paradise Lost that

Paradise Lost is "a fierce argument about God's justice" and that Milton's God has been deemed inflexible and cruel. By contrast, Satan has a dark charisma ("he pleased

the ear”) and a revolutionary demand for self-determination. His speech is peppered with the language of democratic governance (“free choice”, “full consent”, “the popular vote”) – and he famously declares, “Better to reign in Hell, than serve in Heaven”. Satan rejects God’s “splendid vassalage”, seeking to live. (Ramm 9)

William Blake masterfully explains Milton for deciding to write such an appealing devil and says that “The reason Milton wrote in fetters when he wrote of Angels and God, and of liberty when of Devils and Hell is because he was a true poet and of the Devil’s party without knowing it” (qtd. in Ramm 10).

The versatility in Milton’s characters of *Paradise Lost* and the unusual appeal which Satan brings are just some of the reasons to explore the possibility of seeing this complex character as a hero of this outstanding epic. This essay will therefore explore multiple authors and their take on the topic of Satan as a hero of *Paradise Lost* while comparing the same character, his flaws and virtues to the ones of other characters in the epic. It will also try to find the answer to the question of how is Satan similar to Milton and connect it to the reason why this makes him the hero, as well as give an answer to the question of how does the resolution of the plot contribute to Satan’s hero/villain dichotomy. In the end of this journey, it should be clear why Satan, even though he is a devil banished from Heaven, could still be an epic hero in this timeless epic poem.

## 2.1 Types of heroes

Every story needs a hero, no matter if he or she is good or bad. *Paradise Lost* is no different than any other story in that aspect, except that here, the lines between a hero and a villain are more than blurred. But before we continue with analysis of the character of Satan, we need to establish the major types of heroes that exist and generally appear in both modern novels and ancient epics. The NY book editors article offers 6 main types of heroes that are

used in stories: the willing hero, the unwilling hero, the tragic hero, the classical hero, the epic hero, and the antihero. The willing hero is, as the name suggests, always willing to take on the obstacles he faces with the sheer optimism that borders recklessness.

The reader will find this type of a hero running in the face of the danger when everyone else is running away from it. The willing hero is motivated by the obstacles that he faces. He's always ready for challenges, and is bored of a life that doesn't provide some threat to overcome. The willing hero is also noted for his bravery.

Unlike some other heroes on this list, the willing one is fearless and daring, almost to a fault. He's optimistic and overly self-confident in his abilities. ("6 Types of Heroes You Need in Your Story")

The unwilling hero is exactly the opposite of the willing one. But even though he does not tackle on the obstacles, and although he does not laugh in the face of the danger, he takes on the responsibility the mission thrust upon him for the sense of duty. However, this does not mean that he is comfortable with his heroic role. Usually this type of a hero is an ordinary person who faces extraordinary challenges and almost impossible tasks.

Unlike the willing hero, the unwilling hero is faces challenges with doubt and trepidation. He is unsure of which path to take. Doubt is the unwilling hero's constant companion. The unwilling hero (also known as the reluctant hero) is never comfortable with his title. He wishes that anyone else could take the task; however, he innately understands that he alone has been chosen to do it. One of the most common inner struggles for the unwilling hero is his desire to return to normal, but alas, it can never happen. Eventually, the unwilling hero will prove his bravery by rising to the task. ("6 Types of Heroes You Need in Your Story")

The tragic hero is the one with which Satan could partially be identified. His inner flaw, or hamartia, is the reason for his downfall.

In Aristotle's definition of the tragic hero, the hero loses everything through a reversal of fortune (also known as peripeteia). His downfall doesn't come from immorality or corruption, but rather from an error in judgment or the sudden whim of fate. ("6 Types of Heroes You Need in Your Story")

The classical hero is very similar to the willing one. But not only is he willing to take on any dangerous tasks offered to him, he also seems to be perfect in every other way.

Like the willing hero, the classical hero is courageous and eager to do what's right. He often has a built-in code of ethics that leads him down the virtuous path, even if he has some inner conflict. Most classical heroes benefit from divine heritage or supernatural powers. He stands apart from the crowd because he's superior in some way. ("6 Types of Heroes You Need in Your Story")

The epic hero is a legendary type of a hero which bears the most resemblance to Milton's Satan. He is notable for his bravery, determination and good leadership skills. Epic heroes are usually followed on their journey where they meet perilous obstacles and evolve both physically and spiritually.

The epic hero starts out as an ordinary person, contemporary with his time. However, as the story unfolds, the epic hero becomes more apparent. He's noted for quick-thinking, selflessness and/ or endurance. While the epic hero is usually on a physical journey, his inner journey is just as interesting to explore. When this hero comes face to face with evil, he must first fight the inner battle. ("6 Types of Heroes You Need in Your Story")

The last hero is the antihero, so even though he plays the part of a protagonist in many stories, we cannot easily compare him to the other heroes from this list. This character too has some traits of Milton's Satan. His choices seem questionable in the least and the way he achieves his goals are somewhat atypical, but he is not a villain either and he tries to follow the path he believes to be right.

He often lacks the courage to do the right thing and is only loyal to himself. He's definitely not squeaky clean. However, he's no villain either. Your reader can see that he's truly a hero in disguise and eventually will do what's right. ("6 Types of Heroes You Need in Your Story")

However, even though one is presented with the array of hero types and categories in which one could place Satan, this job seems to be far more problematic than it looks. As John Steadman argues in his essay *The idea of Satan as the hero of Paradise Lost*, if one was to classify Satan as a character and a hero, the first question one should ask is what the hero actually is. Because heroes come in all shapes and sizes and depending on who is reading the story, hero might not even seem as one. Exactly for this reason, Satan's actions have been defended by many ever since this epic poem came to light. Steadman argues that

Only by distinguishing and isolating the different senses of heroism and heroic virtue, and by examining the various ways in which Milton deliberately played these different meanings against one another can we moderns approach a solution to the basic issues underlying the so-called "Satanist" controversy: the precise senses in which the Adversary of Milton's God is truly and not just superficially heroic; and (more significantly) the degree to which the entire portrait is a consciously fabricated illusion-an image of an eidolon, a pseudo-hero. (Steadman 254)

### 3. Prometheus and Satan

According to Christian, and the religious readers in general who would try to analyze *Paradise Lost*, Satan would most likely be a villain, like Achilles, Alexander the Great or Caesar who were glorified as the heroes of the antics, but seen as villains by Milton's very contemporaries. Therefore, it can be said with certainty that even though Satan possesses the qualities of the epic hero, he can still be judged and condemned as a villain by the religious readership. Steadman continues,

Many of the apparently heroic qualities that the devil displays-contempt of danger, fortitude of mind and body, prudence as adventurer and as leader-are, in fact, morally neutral; they can be, and often have been, exercised for both good and evil ends. In another context, they could have been associated with genuine heroic virtue; the example of the faithful angels is a case in point. (255)

Moreover, Milton's body of poetic works attracted and had a great influence on many famous poets after his own time like Percy Bysshe Shelley, Mary Shelley, Lord Byron, John Keats, William Blake, and others. With regards to this, it is important to allude to the similarity between Prometheus, the hero of the Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* drama, and Satan, who, like the former, displayed a true spirit of rebellion. This similarity is quite important while analyzing the qualities that make the hero hero. In both works, *Paradise Lost* and *Prometheus Unbound*, the reader is presented with two very similar characters – unearthly strong, quick witted, good leaders, brave and formidable, however, one of them is considered a villain, while the other is glorified as the romantic hero. While both of them exhibit the spirit of rebellion, Satan lacks the unselfishness of Prometheus's deeds and the affinity for revenge. Prometheus endures his punishment proudly and stoically, while Satan, firm in his beliefs, decides to fight what he sees as unjust. Both of these characters believed in the righteousness of their doing, so does that mean that we can view Satan as a romantic hero

as well? Percy Bysshe Shelley comments on this resemblance himself in his preface to the *Prometheus Unbound*:

The only imaginary being resembling in any degree Prometheus is Satan; and Prometheus is, in my judgement, a more poetical character than Satan because, in addition to courage and majesty and firm and patient opposition to omnipotent force, he is susceptible of being described as exempt from the taints of ambition, envy, revenge, and a desire for personal aggrandisement, which in the Hero of Paradise Lost interfere with the interest. The character of Satan engenders in the mind a pernicious casuistry which leads us to weigh his faults with his wrongs and to excuse the former because the latter exceed all measure. In the minds of those who consider that magnificent fiction with a religious feeling, it engenders something worse. But Prometheus is, as it were, the type of the highest perfection of moral and intellectual nature, impelled by the purest and the truest motives to the best and noblest ends. (Shelley 98)

Prometheus and Satan seemingly share the same fate. They are both punished for rebellion against “tyrants”, both opened their stories bounded and tortured for their deeds but their spirit and personality remained unbroken and unbent like the great rebels they are. “Milton’s Satan, is or ought to be an object of admiration and sympathy, conscious or unconscious, on the part of the poet or his readers or both” (Lewis 94) , writes C.S. Lewis, and even though he somewhat disagrees with the notion of Satan's role as a hero in Paradise Lost, he, understandably, agrees with the admirableness of his character. However, Satan’s determinedness soon becomes inflexibility and stubbornness. As Mukherjee explains in his article *Shelley’s Prometheus and Milton’s Satan: Exploring the uneasy kinship*,

Even after his absolute defeat and fall and when the only prospect that looms before him is that of eternal punishment, that spirit of high disdain, which once led him to challenge the Almighty, revolts against the idea of submission:

... to bow and sue for grace

With suppliant knee and deify his power

Who from the terror of his Arm, so late

Doubted his Empire, that were low indeed,

That were in ignominy and shame beneath

This downfall... (Milton 111-116)

He plans to overthrow God. Milton's Satan is a megalomaniac. (Mukherjee 1176)

But all of these attributes still make Satan worthy of the title of an epic hero. Many of Milton's contemporaries the main goal of an epic poem was to show heroic virtues, and looking at Satan, who was once God's brightest angel, we can see that he doesn't lack in them. Steadman mentions:

The primary function of the heroic poet was to delineate heroic virtue-to depict the aristocracy of a pattern-hero and thereby move an audience (usually of martial and aristocratic background) to admiration and emulation. Since the traditional epic argument centered upon warfare-successful warfare -the conventional epic virtues normally involved martial prowess. The epic hero must demonstrate his heroism through his military 'strength and skill. Physical fortitude was thus a sine qua non, though it might be combined with other and more amiable qualities: strength of mind as well as body, prudence, magnanimity, temperance, and piety. (Steadman 256)



Be that as it may, Satan is certainly not a flat character. Even though many literary critics disagree on who is the actual hero of *Paradise Lost*, one thing they all agree with is the depth and change, or better to say degradation, of character which Satan undergoes makes him one of the most complex characters of all times. So, in order to follow his gradual change, it is the best to start from the beginning of the books. If one was to do that, he or she would notice that Satan was the main focus of the action in first three books is him alone. And even other characters are introduced or talked about, the main mover of the entire plot is still Satan himself. Here, however, one can ask the question of God's importance in everything that happens because of his omnipotence and the ability to foresee and put everything in motion. Therefore, if God already knew about Satan's betrayal and his revenge, did Satan in fact do everything by his own free will, and can he be seen as a rebel at all? Still, all of this does not change the fact that with all the other characters in *Paradise Lost*, Satan is the most active one and the most talked about. Monami quotes Thomas Arnold and remarks:

As Thomas Arnold has put it, "It has been often said and it seems true that the hero or the prominent character of *Paradise Lost* is Satan. Throughout the first three books the attention is fixed up on his proceedings. Even after Adam and Eve are introduced, which is not till the fourth book, the main interest centers upon him; for they are passive—he is active, they are the subject of plots—he is the framer of them. They living on without any definite aim, are represented as falling from their happy state through weakness and in a sort of helpless predestined manner; while he is fixed to one subject, fertile in expedients, courageous in danger and on the whole, successful in his enterprise. Clearly, Satan is the hero of *Paradise Lost*. (Monami 2)

Before his fall from grace, Satan is seen as the brightest of God's angels. He is brave, strong, clever, bright and second only to God. Looking at this, it does not seem that strange to attribute the title of a hero to a character like this, moreover because of the fact that it is also

Satan who loses his place in Paradise. As Satan's character deteriorates and becomes increasingly damned, his attributes do not change. He still retains all of these virtues which correspond to the heroic code. Monami argues that

No doubt in the first two books of the poem Satan is pictured as a magnificent, heroic figure. He is endowed with splendid qualities of head and heart which raise him about the level of other characters in the epic. He is noble, selfless, enterprising, taking upon himself the responsibilities of bold and perilous leadership. He is the uncompromising champion of liberty, defiant of God the tyrant. Moreover the traditional idea of the epic hero as a great warrior and leader lends support to Satan as the hero of the poem.

(5)

However, even though Satan truly possesses all the attributes of a traditional epic hero, the fact that he was corrupted, selfish, vengeful and damned remain unchanged. In the wake of today's heroes whose piousness, selflessness and kindness seem to be some of the most important characteristics, heroes like Satan, who although somewhat unconventional and wicked, seem to be somewhat disregarded. Wyatt and Low explain his character:

In the first two books Satan is naturally made a heroic figure; he is still an Archangel, though fallen, one of the chief Archangels and king over his fellows. His character, his power, his capacity for evil must be exalted in order to show the epic greatness of the coming conflict, in order to rouse the reader's fears for himself, human sympathy with his first parent and gratitude for his redemption. But we have not to wait for Paradise Regained to see the steady deterioration in Satan's character. Surely to take one instance alone, there is little of the heroic in Satan when he takes the form of a toad to whisper in Eve's ear and is stirred up by the spear of Ithuriel (Book X). At the close of the poem Satan's degradation is complete. (6)

Be that as such, the best way to understand Satan's character is by getting to know his creator, Milton himself.

#### 4. Milton as Satan, Satan as Milton

In the first poem he published "On the Morning of Christ's nativity", Milton announced himself as the poet and according to John Rogers, in his lectures on Yale, he stepped into the publishing world rather late. He had however, Rogers continues, the image of the poet long before "On the Morning of Christ's nativity" ever saw light, and it was most certainly not the first poem he had written. The ode has however, according to Thomas Corns, "generally been recognized as Milton's first manifestation of poetic genius and, qualitatively, a poem to be set alongside 'Lycidas' and A Masque presented at Ludlow Castle, 1634 as his most significant poetic works before Paradise Lost."(Corns 216)

Milton's early poems are written with heavy religious overtones, but they are also made to imitate classic writers such as Ovid. Paradise Lost as well resembles classics in Greek literature like Hesiod's *Theogony* and in the beginning of book one, the reader is presented with an invocation similar to those used in *Iliad* and *Odyssey*: "Sing heavenly muse, that on the secret top/Of Oreb, or of Sinai, didst inspire..." (Milton 6) In accordance to this, Collet argues that

Milton's early poems, especially those in Latin, are in the spirit of the exercises at St. Paul's School, designed to imitate Ovid, and the recitations and debates at Cambridge. They contain myth that is heavily classical and primarily decorative, although occasionally a mask for the young poet's yearnings and resolution. It is natural that as he became concerned with his great task of justifying God's ways to men (and the biblical themes that followed) the uses to which he put this pagan material would be carefully calculated and concentrated in accord with his subject and form. (Collet 88)

Moreover, Shawcross argues that the ode was composed during a time in Milton's life that he based his understanding of religion on Scripture, but he was still influenced by myth. (21)

Could Milton then, after his imprisonment by the King, had rejected the myth (as the pervading power structure offered no position for him) and revised it in hopes of further subverting the King?

One of the most radical essays written against the tyranny of the monarchy are the antimonarchical polemics *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* in which Milton urges the public to punish the tyrants of the monarchy accordingly, by citing both the Scripture and classical writers. Albert Labriola says:

The *Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* (1649)—probably written before and during the trial of King Charles I though not published until after his death on January 30, 1649—urges the abolition of tyrannical kingship and the execution of tyrants. The treatise cites a range of authorities from Classical antiquity, Scripture, the Fathers of the Church, political philosophers of the early modern era, and Reformation theologians, all of whom support such extreme—but just, according to Milton—measures to punish tyrants. (Labriola 6)

Along with the Bible and the myth of Genesis, another powerful structure was embedded deeply into the British consciousness of Milton's day and age which is the Great Chain of Being.

Sometimes called the *Scala Natura* (scale of nature), this view saw all of creation existing within a universal hierarchy that stretched from God (or immutable perfection) at its highest point to inanimate matter at its lowest. One can see something of this hierarchy in Plato's ranking of human souls in the *Phaedrus*, but also

in Aristotle's notion that the capacity to act upon reason rather than instinct distinguishes human beings from animals.

Indeed, each link in the Great Chain of Being represented a distinct category of living creature or form of matter. Those creatures or things higher on the Chain possessed greater intellect, movement, and ability than those placed below. Thus each being in the Chain possessed all of the attributes of what was below plus an additional, superior attribute:

God: existence + life + will + reason + immortality + omniscient, omnipotent

Angels: existence + life + will + reason + immortality

Humanity: existence + life + will + reason

Animals: existence + life + will

Plants: existence + life

Matter: existence

Nothingness

As a result of this hierarchy, creatures and things on a higher level were believed to possess more authority over lower ones. (Snyder 1)

Having been written before the Enlightenment, *Paradise Lost* is conformed by the Chain, which was a legitimation used by the monarchs to exercise control and rule over their dominions. Hasan Al-Atrooshi presents this in his *Chaotic Effectuation of the Great Chain Of Being* in John Milton's *Paradise Lost* by explaining how Milton corresponds to such hierarchical structure through the pyramid that Al- Atrooshi gives (see fig. 1):

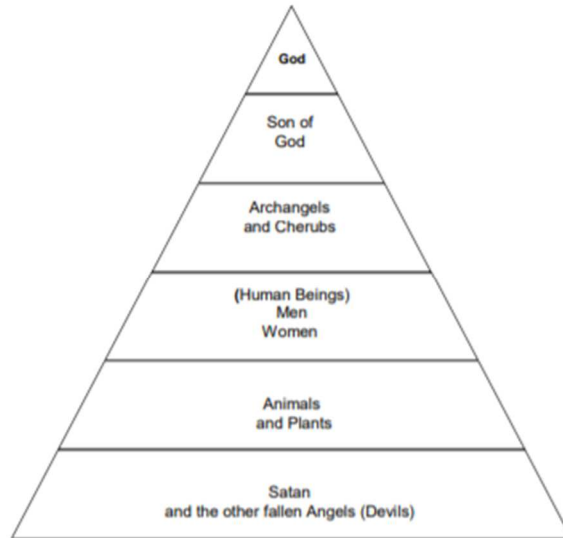


Fig.1. Pyramid of hierarchy based on proximity to God as seen in Al-Atrooshi, Chiya Abdulsalam Hasan. Chaotic Effectuation of the Great Chain Of Being in John Milton's Paradise Lost. Iasj.net, 2010, [www.iasj.net/iasj?func=fulltext&aId=17626](http://www.iasj.net/iasj?func=fulltext&aId=17626).

In the above pyramid, Milton presents such a system as a hierarchy based on proximity to God and His grace, leading to a hierarchy of angels, humans, animals, plants and devils. The Son is closest to God, with archangels and cherubs behind him. Adam precedes Eve and then animals and plants come next with Satan and the other fallen angels following last. (Al- Atrooshi, 3)

King James I himself also wrote, "The state of monarchy is the most supreme thing upon earth: for kings are not only God's Lieutenants upon earth, and sit upon God's throne, but even by God himself they are called Gods." (Snyder, 7)

If God represents a monarch in heaven, this proves to be another point which makes Satan the hero of *Paradise Lost* for he did exactly the same thing Milton urged the public to do in his antimonarchical polemics – to punish cruel tyrants. Satan's rebellion, his active character and bravery to stand up to the source of injustice should serve as a stimulus for the people to act in face of tyranny as opposed to being passive. Al -Atrooshi continues:

He declared war against the Creator and many angels joined him, shaking God's throne in a cosmic battle. Here, Milton shows how the destructive battle over the Chain of Being begins. Being banished from his proximity to God, Satan decides to wage a war against God and His son in order to create anarchy in the chain. (Al- Atrooshi 5)

Coetzee, in his work *The Dusklands* has his character Eugene Dawn, a mythographer employed by the US government in the psychological warfare against Vietnam, write a report to his commanding officer (also named Coetzee) on ways in which the psychological warfare should be conducted. Dawn writes:

A myth is true—that is to say, operationally true—insofar as it has predictive force. The more deeply rooted and universal a myth, the more difficult it is to combat. The myths of a tribe are the fictions it coins to maintain its powers. The answer to a myth of force is not necessarily counterforce, for if the myth predicts counterforce, counterforce reinforces the myth. The science of mythography teaches us that a subtler counter is to subvert and revise the myth. The highest propaganda is the propagation of a new mythology. (Coetzee 4)

Satan is a vehicle of the revision of the pervading myths of Genesis and the Chain, and the epic could in that sense be read as a discourse or a series of arguments relating to the nature of power, with the end game being the questioning of the pervading norms and discourses.

Like Satan, Milton is taking on the grand adversary – Biblical God, whose power stems and translates to the ideologies mentioned before, which, in turn, legitimize them. Therefore, the only thing one can do is to assume that Milton, as Blake puts it, is in fact of devil's party without being aware of it. He shares great similarity with the rebel of his epic

poem, because Milton himself was a rebel of his own time who was as well punished for standing firm in his beliefs.

Satan goes after God's creations in hopes of subverting the creations against their Father, which achieves several things. First, it subverts the idea of God's omnipotence, as the reader will deduce malevolence rather than benevolence stemming from God's decision to allow free will despite his ability to see the final outcome, and second, structurally speaking it diminishes God's power (or his perception of power) by striking directly at his creations. . Dawn continues his report by writing:

What is the lesson of CT? CT teaches that when the cohesiveness of the group is weakened the threshold of breakdown in each of its members drops. Conversely, it teaches that to attack the group as a group without fragmenting it does not reduce the psychic capacity of its members to resist. Many of our Vietnam programs, including perhaps strategic bombing, show poor results from neglect of this principle. There is only one rule in Vietnam: fragment, individualize. Our mistake was to allow the Vietnamese to conceive themselves as an entire people huddled under the bombs of a foreign oppressor. Thereby we created for ourselves the task of breaking the resistance of a whole people—a dangerous, expensive, and unnecessary task. If we had rather compelled the village, the guerrilla band, the individual subject to conceive himself the village, the band, the subject elected for especial punishment, for reasons never to be known, then while his first gesture might have been to strike back in anger, the worm of guilt would inevitably, as punishment continued, have sprouted in his bowels and drawn from him the cry, “I am punished therefore I am guilty”. He who utters these words is vanquished. (Coetzee 3)

Milton, like Satan, is influencing God's creations individually, and it is through the act of writing *Paradise Lost* that Milton asks his reader whether or not he or she is feeling guilty,



and whether or not he or she accepts the original sin. If the answer is no, then one must rebel against the established order, like both Milton and Satan did.

##### 5. Satan as the hero of *Paradise Lost*

If one was to explain the hero, he or she would say that hero is a person of action and not of thought. They possess extraordinary skills and talents and often surpass their peers in intelligence, strength, wittiness and bravery. They usually deal with wars or other dangerous ventures, and are therefore ruled by the code of honor which makes them just, but their pride makes them deadly to their enemies. These characteristics, overconfidence and the need for the thrill of adventure often cause them many troubles.

If we look at these characteristics of the hero, then it is very easy to assume that Satan indeed is the hero of *Paradise Lost*. However, we can also ask whether the work of literature needs the hero in the first place. And how can we determine who is the real hero of *Paradise Lost* when Satan, God, and Adam seem to play equally important roles in the story's plot.

“What is a Hero in Literature? Definition, Examples of Literary Heroes” explains that

Including a hero in a literary work allows for the reader to follow the journey of a character as he or she attempts to overcome the conflict in the story. The action of a story revolves around this character's conflict; therefore, it is important to include a main character in order to create an interesting piece of literature. (“What is a Hero in Literature? Definition, Examples of Literary Heroes”)

But the function of a hero is also to make the reader sympathize and identify with the character he or she follows through their journey. This exactly might be the reason why Satan is more approachable character than either God, Archangels or Adam. Satan is brilliant, strong, quick witted and extraordinary in such a way that he can almost reach the level of God. But still, he is not perfect, he is flawed with almost human characteristics. He is proud,

arrogant and vengeful. He is rebellious and he is not afraid to take action against what he finds to be unjust. Juxtaposed to God and the Son who are the epitomes of goodness, but yet able to enact supreme and merciful justice, Satan seems to be a villain. However, if one was to look at his characteristics more closely, his anger seems perfectly justified and his actions resemble those of human beings.

*Paradise Lost* is one of the literary works where juxtaposition is prevalent throughout the entire poem. The reader can at first encounter the juxtaposition and the difference between heaven and hell when Milton describes the place where Satan and his rebel angels have been banished, as a place so different from bright heavenly spheres:

As far removed from God and light of Heaven

As from the center thrice to the utmost pole.

Oh how unlike the place from whence they fell!

There the companions of his fall, overwhelmed

With floods and whirlwinds of tempestuous fire (Milton 73-77)

The reader is presented with two different environments and two different types of characters. The ones bound to hell are a group of wild, rebellious and vengeful demons who want to wreak havoc to avenge their fall from heaven, and the ones in heaven are glorious, just, and surrounded by the goodness and grace of God. And, most importantly, there is a juxtaposition between God who is omnipotent and just, but merciful, and vengeful and proud Satan. By contrasting these two characters, the reader is bound to justify Satan's punishment and see him as an absolute form of evil, however his sin is not the strife for evil, but pride, love of power and hatred towards suffering. Nafi quotes and explains:

All is not lost; the unconquerable will,

And study of revenge, immortal hate,

And courage never to submit or yield,

And what else is not to be overcome. (106-109).

The above words indicate that the sense of Satan's punishment seems lost in the magnitude of it; the loss of infinite happiness to himself is compensated in thought, by the power of inflicting infinite misery on others. Yet Satan is not the principle of malignity, or of the abstract love of evil, but of the abstract love of power, or pride, of self-will personified. (Nafi 5)

Satan is a megalomaniac, and his obsession with power brought him to his final fall and his degradation in the form of his final transformation into serpent.

When talking about contrast, in his essay on *The Balanced Structure of Paradise Lost*, Shawcross mentions all the other instances where the reader can notice juxtaposition between both the characters and the environments:

The device of contrast, imitating the destruction of unity, is frequently encountered: Hell contrasts with Heaven and both with Eden; Satan with the Son; the relationships among Satan and Sin and Death with Adam and Eve and with the Father and the Son; Satan's offer to the Infernal Council to destroy man with the Son's offer in the Heavenly assembly to save man; Hell's fires and ice with Heaven's radiance; eternal damnation with eternal bliss; the causeway to Hell with the stairs to Heaven; the glittering vaults of Hell with the golden pavements of Heaven; mankind and nature before the fall with mankind and nature after the fall; bliss with woe; light with dark; and ascent with descent. (Shawcross 42)

Even though there is a myriad of ways to explain how Milton uses the character of Satan as a hero, the question still arises as to why would such a religious man whose poems and literature works closely followed the Scripture create such an appealing character to represent the epitome of all evil. As it is already mentioned, Satan at the beginning of *Paradise Lost* presents everything we would find in all great heroes of today. He is heroic, brave, handsome, strong and an incredible leader using his gifts of rhetoric to persuade others in his own cause. Simply put, he is Odysseus and Achilles, a type of a classical hero every reader would be surprised to find that he has fallen from grace. God even seems as an unfair, tyrannical and strict ruler who asks his most brilliant angel to bow down to his son. In all aspects, Satan's rage and the desire for revenge seems perfectly justified that one can almost forget that the character in question is the devil himself. So, the question of why Milton decided to make his devil so attractive does not seem so strange. Werkmeister mentions all the heroic deeds that Satan does in the beginning of *Paradise Lost*:

He wakens from a stunning defeat, rallies his followers, builds a great city (this poem was written around the time when London is being rebuilt after the Great Fire—a lot of those buildings we flock to London to see were being raised then), he hatches a plan. He makes lemonade out of lemons. He's a man of action, he's going to fake it till he makes it, he's not going throw away his shot... (Werkmeister 2)

Except for being, as Blake puts it, "of devil's party without knowing it" (Blake 1433), and wanting to show people of his time that it is possible to stand up to the unjust government, Milton might also want to show his religious readers how easy it is to be swayed by Satan's positive attributes. As it was previously claimed, Satan himself, apart from his incredible strength and supernatural abilities, seems incredibly human. He is flawed, makes mistakes and is driven by his intense desire for power. This desire and his overconfidence are

his inner flaws that take him to his tragic end. This type of character is therefore very easy to sympathize and identify with. Nafi also admits this and argues:

As has been stated by Daiches (1976), most of the villains in the Elizabethan and Jacobean drama have enough human characteristics to save them from becoming mere monsters. Milton too humanizes his Satan. Satan's character has depth. It shows changes of mood: the fluctuations of revengefulness, pride, and despair. It is realistic and near-heroic, whereas earlier devils were merely monsters. Satan is proud, of course. But beneath this pride lies a tormenting sense of despair. This despair overwhelms him until at last only the desire for revenge reigns supreme in his nature. (Nafi 15)

Because if Satan seems very human, then it is only natural that people have something Satanic in them and that the devil's ways are much more appealing and attractive than the arduous ones of God's. Werkmeister continues:

Milton, I think, is making the point that human nature is, in and of itself, Satanic. Milton wants to shock us into the realization that we're naturally attracted to Satan, that God is boring and his way is hard. If Milton's Satan had been cartoonish (pointy tail, pitchfork, etc.) or disgusting (rotted flesh, gutter speech), we would have easily dismissed him, which from Milton's point of view is something Satan wants...Milton wants us to be ever-vigilant not only against outside forces that might tempt us from presence of God, but also (and more importantly) against our own selves. (Werkmeister 3)

Satan is full of energy and passion, and the description of hell which, even though it is a terrible sight of darkness and fire, is still much more thrilling to read about comparing to the conventional and borderline boring heaven. Perhaps that is one of the reasons why Milton

created such a convincing character out of Satan. For a reader, it is always much more interesting to read about passionate and energetic characters, albeit they have questionable morals and norms, than about rule abiding, passive ones who offer no thrill or excitement. Milton's God seems exactly like the latter one with his strict and difficult to follow rules. He shows his readers how insanely attractive and appealing evil can be, as it was to the first people. Be that as it may, Satan's motives do not change the fact that his energy and the fact that he is goal oriented, ambitious and a fearless leader make him into a unique hero. Still, Nafi argues against it:

In Books I and II of *Paradise Lost*, Satan is depicted as heroic, but his is false heroism as it is based on false beliefs and unworthy aims and aspirations. It was Shawcross (1972) who considered Satan's heroism as "false heroism that has its dramatic side and a certain interest" (34). Satan may be perverse, but his desire for revenge gives him energy, and his energy makes him exciting and interesting. He has all the attributes of an epic hero and all the attraction. At the beginning of the poem he is placed in a dramatic situation. His reactions to this situation have a thrilling effect on us. His speeches are full of stirring, highly emotive words such as "liberty," "oppression," and "freedom." It was partly their deep love of liberty that caused the Romantics like Blake and Shelley to respond so warmly to the character of Satan. Satan is markedly like a romantic hero (such as the characters in Byron's Oriental tales). But Milton was not a romantic poet, and his treatment of Satan shows the weaknesses of the romantic position. Milton relentlessly exposes the willful, self-centered revengefulness of Satan, though on the surface this attitude of Satan looks like heroism. (Nafi 14)

The transformation Satan undergoes through his persistence in revenge reminds the reader of Oscar Wilde's *Dorian Gray*, and the degradation of his picture through his constant indulgence in sinful acts. Both Satan and Dorian start begin their stories as glorified heroes,

beautiful, angelic and innocent, but through their persistent degradation in character presented through Dorian's indulgence in forbidden acts of pleasure, and Satan's pursuit of revenge and his ultimate accomplishment of his goal their outside appearance also slowly deteriorates. In the end Satan returns to hell in his serpent-like form, and Dorian, stabbing his picture becomes the evil self the picture absorbed throughout time. In the introduction to Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Drew quotes the excerpt which describes the similarity between the two: "When the artist eventually views what has become of his portrait, he simply exclaims, 'Christ!...It has the eyes of a devil', prompting Dorian to reply, echoing the proud desperation of Milton's Satan, 'Each of us has Heaven and Hell in him' (Milton 125)" (Wilde, 15) These words echo Satan's:

The mind is its own place, and in itself

Can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven. (Milton 254-255)

Nafi continues to say that:

Satan embodies the powerful idea that Marlowe's devil Mephistopheles expresses

when he speaks to Faustus in the latter's study: "Myself am Hell, nor am I out of it."

Tillyard (1938) commented on this by saying that Satan's words regarding the change of place, which will never change his mind, suggest his heroic stature and a mind that will not relent, but will follow the plan of revenge till the end, no matter what the results are. (Nafi 17)

Milton's Satan deteriorated throughout *Paradise Lost* and he became one with the inferno he was cast into, but he still kept the persistence and strength of a character even though it was now used solely for his revenge.

He is not a chaotic villain who is evil only for the sake of mayhem, nor is he a simplistic hero who is bound and driven by moral codes. He is a supernatural being with almost human

characteristics. Driven by the intoxicating desire for power and belief that what he is doing and what his goals are, is only just, Satan uses his incredibly energy, motivation and rhetorical skills to lead an entire army against the most powerful being, God. The way Milton builds his characters and creates depth and the lack of it, makes readers easily swayed by the thrill that Satan brings with him. It is much easier to see him as a victim to a tyrannical ruler in a corrupt system of heaven where despite of his competence, strength and abilities, he is still made to bow down to God's son. The rage Milton's Satan experiences and the journey of vengeance it drives it seems not only justifiable, but also a natural course of the events. Satan thus turns from an epic hero, to a romantic or even a tragic one whose path can only lead him further into damnation. But he does not care, because he has already become one with hell. This constant courage that Satan displays causes the readers to continue viewing him as a fallen hero, rather than a villain of the story.

#### 6. The Sublime in *Paradise Lost*

When talking about Milton's *Paradise Lost* and Satan's heroism, it is also important to note the sublimity that prevails in this entire work of literature, but also in its characters as well. It is without question that Milton's epic poem excels in beauty and grace, but can we attribute such quality to the very character of Satan? In her essay *Allegory and the Sublime in Paradise Lost*, Victoria Khan quotes:

In his Philosophical Inquiry Burke gives Milton's description of 'the universe of Death' in Book 2 as an instance of the sublime and Hugh Blair, in Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres, describes the Satan of Book 1 as the sublime figure par excellence: Here concur a variety of sources of the Sublime: the principal object eminently great; a high superior nature, fallen indeed, but erecting itself against distress; the grandeur of the principal object heightened, by associating it with so noble an idea as that of the sun suffering an eclipse; this picture shaded with all those images of change and



trouble, of darkness and terror, which coincide so finely with the Sublime emotion; and the whole expressed in a style and versification, easy, natural, and simple, but magnificent.... (Khan 186)

Blair here corroborates all the previously mentioned instances of why Satan can be seen as a hero of *Paradise Lost* and adds that this, indeed, adds to the sublimity not just of his character, but of this entire literary work.

But the sublimity of Milton's *Paradise Lost* was not only reserved for literature, it also transcended into other spheres of art. Therefore, in William Hogarth's painting *Satan, Sin and Death*, the reader is able to visually perceive the characters of *Paradise Lost*, Satan and his offspring, in the sublime scene of the battle between Satan and Death while Sin separates them:

Before the gates there sat

On either side a formidable Shape.

The one seemed woman to the waist, and fair,

But ended foul in many a scaly fold,

Voluminous and vast – a serpent armed

With mortal sting (Milton 649-654)

Khan also comments on this scene which is the epitome of the sublime in the *Paradise Lost* saying that "Satan in the Sin and Death episode dramatizes the 'intriguing proximity of hypsos to bathos', of 'subjective "freedom" to a mad or comical inflation of the self'; and in so doing stages the extremes of total identification and total alienation which the reader of *Paradise Lost* must learn to avoid."(Khan 188)

What Khan is trying to say is that the scene of the combat between Satan and his offspring Sin and Death causes in the reader both the feeling of sublimity and the great disappointment. Up to the point of his fight with his children, the reader can see Satan as a victim and a tragic hero on his journey for revenge, but the grotesqueness of the entire scene causes the reader to notice the signs of degradation in once magnificent angel, Satan. His own children are presented as monsters who he has to win over to cross the gates. He is still a brave and decisive warrior, but his degradation is now visible because he, who stood up for the freedom of expression and thought has to fight his own grotesque offspring to exit the premises of hell. The Satan presented in this scene can cause the reader both to feel alienated from the once great epic hero, and pitiful of his downfall and irreversible destiny.

The author Lydia Hamlett in her essay *Sublime literature: William Hogarth's Satan, Sin and Death (A scene from Milton's Paradise Lost)* explains the sublimity of the painting seen in her essay (see fig.2):

From its first publication Milton's poem was acknowledged as being sublime. But it was not until after the appearance of Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757) that the poem was exploited by Romantic painters, as the physical qualities that Burke emphasised as being sublime could be found in abundance in Milton's descriptions. Hogarth's earlier, pre-Burkean painting could also, however, be said to be exploring a specifically sublime aesthetic since he was illustrating a sublime text. His interpretation, for the first time, attempts to capture visually Milton's own 'terrible' description. (Hamlett 2)



Fig.2. William Hogarth's Satan, Sin and Death as seen in Hamlett, Lydia. "Sublime Literature: William Hogarth's Satan, Sin and Death (A Scene from Milton's 'Paradise Lost')." *Tate*, Tate, 1 Jan. 2013, [www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/the-sublime/lydia-hamlett-sublime-literature-william-hogarth-satan-sin-and-death-a-scene-from-miltons-r1138666](http://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/the-sublime/lydia-hamlett-sublime-literature-william-hogarth-satan-sin-and-death-a-scene-from-miltons-r1138666).

Here we are able to see Satan, still full of strength and power, while the distance from God's light already started deforming him from his previously angelic looks and turning him into a diabolical creature on his path to become a hideous serpent. Hamlett continues:

Just as Sin combines the majestic and the monstrous, Satan unites elements of the heroic and the diabolic: the armored and energetic hero has the tail and mask-like face of the devil and his shield substitutes almost completely for one of his scaly wings. This conception of Satan was later picked up by the Romantics who saw the 'fallen angel' as the hero of the poem. (6)

The sublimity in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and in this scene in particular comes through the innovative ideas and imaginative storytelling. We can see that Sin is presented as a beautiful maiden, but only partially as her lower part of body is a grotesque mixture of mythological monsters and horrid beasts, while Satan himself is shown exactly as he is presented in the epic poem, like a fallen hero, tortured by his own damnation which can be

seen through the degradation of his outer looks. Nonetheless, some critics argue that the scene that could carry more sublimity than this one is a description of a combat between Gabriel and Satan. Hamlett quotes and explains:

In contrast, Addison says that the episode which describes the combat between Gabriel and Satan is sublime, as it:

abounds with Sentiments proper for the Occasion, and suitable to the Persons of the two Speakers. Satan's clothing himself with Terror when he prepares for the Combat is truly sublime, and at least equal to Homer's Description of Discord celebrated by Longinus, or to that of Fame in Virgil, who are both represented with their Feet standing upon the Earth, and their Heads reaching above the Clouds. (5)

Satan's heroic character contributes the overall sublimity of this literary work. Without his depth of character and the battles he leads against other characters, *Paradise Lost* would lose its uniqueness. Satan is not only an epic hero of *Paradise Lost* because of virtues like strength, speed, courage and energy, but also because he thinks, ponders, suffers, deals with his fears and strives for his goals, no matter what they are. He is a type of a hero that causes a reader to feel with him and that truly makes this epic poem sublime.

#### 7. Can the Devil be a hero?

The final stages of this thesis bring us to the question of whether the Devil can be a hero of *Paradise Lost*. To answer that, the reader has to pay attention to the Milton's background. He is a Puritan for whom the grandeur Satan carries with his character represents nothing but tackiness and arrogance, both of which do not have a place in a puritan religion. In his discussion, Nafi strongly argues that Satan cannot possibly be a hero of *Paradise Lost*, even though he admits that some of his characteristics may seem misleading to readers to sympathize with him and consider him a tragic hero. He goes on to say that Satan acted much

like the first man. He was also disobedient because of his immense pride, which is, in many ways, similar to Milton's own pride. This causes the reader to think that Milton is, unknowingly sympathetic to Satan's woes, and that he, in the same way, gives him the role of the hero. However, Nafi disagrees and sees this as a wrong approach. His main argument is that Satan's pride made him believe he was equal to God, which in turn made him appear evil and corrupt. If we accept Satan's evil as a fact, then his role as a hero, as well as a chance to repent becomes permanently impossible. "He is a lost soul to whom hope never comes that comes to all." This fact is summed up at the end of Satan's opening soliloquy in Book IV: "Evil be thou my good." (Nafi 27) According to Nafi, it is only in human nature to admire characters like Satan who are utterly devoted to a lost cause, but nonetheless brave persistent. This is why it is difficult for a reader to ignore this kind of chivalry and suppress their admiration. Nafi continues to argue this stance:

To simple-minded moderns, unversed in theological speculations, this admiration seems only right and proper. But Milton knew and repeatedly tells us that all Satan's words and deeds were perverse and vain. Many insist on regarding Satan as a Byronic hero, or give him all the credit for courage and endurance and leadership which they give to all worthy epic heroes. If we are to understand Milton's Satan, we must stop regarding him as a great unfortunate. This of course he is, like Macbeth, but like Macbeth he is wicked and unrepentant to the end. This makes him a great tragic figure but not an epic hero. (27)

Both Nafi and Monami agree that for someone that has not read beyond the Second book, Satan does indeed may seem like an epic hero with an incredible strength, power of will, persistence, persuasion and quick wittedness, but throughout the books, it is true that Satan threads the path of irreversible degradation, inwardly and outwardly. Monami adds that for the readers that do not read more than 2 first books, Satan will undeniably be the hero. But

if the same reader finishes the poem, they will only be able to conclude that Satan could not possibly be the hero of this epic. Monami goes on to say that it is a ‘nonsensical paradox’ to call Satan a hero since Milton’s idea of heroic was completely different. He claims:

To regard Satan as the hero of Milton's epic is to stultify the poet's whole intention; if he is the hero then *Paradise Lost* is a bad poem, since Milton will have failed to express its meaning through the hero. Moreover, Satan's heroic grandeur is not seen so much in action as it is seen in his speeches. One should always remember that Milton was a Puritan. For a Puritan, anything flashy and glamorous is necessarily evil. After all, evil has to be attractive if it aims to tempt people away from goodness. What is magnificent, glamorized and beautiful need not be good, desirable or heroic, especially if it is steeped in hypocrisy and deceit. (Monami 6)

Maybe Milton indeed did not intend Satan to be the hero of his epic poem, but giving him such attributes like the free will to fight against the oppressiveness and for freedom, he does seem to be of the devil’s party. It is no wonder romantics viewed Satan as a Byronic hero, or a tragic one. Furthermore, it can’t be said that Satan never doubted his own actions nor seemed to be repenting his disobedience. He was arrogant amongst his peer, boasting and bragging about his strength, but when alone, Satan also was at times doubtful and pensive. In his essay *Sympathy for the devil: An analysis of Satan in Paradise Lost*, Charles Reis argues that Satan, although arrogant in front of other fallen angels, admits that he is not omnipotent and that God is more powerful than him, which could even be interpreted as a showing of doubt in the outcome of his actions and even remorse. He goes on to explain:

Compare this attitude to Book IV: when alone in the Garden of Eden, Satan says to himself “O had his powerful destiny ordained” (4.58). In this line, Satan is beginning to question himself as a strong rebel. The one he is referring to is God himself, and he is acknowledging several things about God. One is that he is “powerful,” which means

of having great strength...Satan is acknowledging God's power to include the ability to control the life and path of individuals, which includes Satan himself. By Satan using the word "ordained," there is an implication of holy hierarchy, with God having the ability to ordain all. This one line, with the use of these particular words, indicates that Satan is conscious of the supremacy of God. (Reis 3)

Reis continues to go into detail analyzing Satan's words in which he shows torment, remorse, and desperation proving that Satan does in fact feel regretful of his actions, but is too stubborn and persistent to give up his revenge. Furthermore, Sarah Johnson, in her essay *Paradise Lost as a Christian Myth*, brings into question fairness of God's actions and the justifiability of Satan's desire for revenge. She goes on to say:

Milton also gives his God a human side in *Paradise Lost* when God creates humankind. Satan states;

More angels to create, if at least

Are his created, or to spite us more,

Determined to advance into our room

A creature formed of earth, and him endow (IX. ll. 146-149).

This clearly shows that Satan believes God is creating humankind for the sole purpose of spiting the fallen angels, by letting them know that they can be replaced. He also says that God is creating this new being so that they can take over and God can spread his kingdom. The God shown here is a vengeful God. He clearly is using humankind to get back at Satan. Homer and Milton cannot help but write the Gods in this manner because they are human themselves, and trying to write in an omniscient persona is an experience that is not known. (Johnson, 4)

After all that has been said, no matter how unbelievable and unconventional it is, Satan still seems as the most probable hero of the *Paradise Lost*. We have to think that the entire plot of this epic poem revolves around man's disobedience which was directly caused by no other character than Satan. Since the very beginning of this epic, we follow this unlikely hero on his journey from the magnificent angel in Heavenly kingdom to the fallen angel and the prince of Hell. He is the mover of the entire story, the one with which it starts and ends, the one who changes, fights, becomes his own person with choices, no matter what they are. He is never stagnant and forever changing. Other characters of *Paradise Lost* remain flat and unchangeable while Satan, like the true hero, moves and creates ripples of actions that echo throughout the entire story; it is his loss of Paradise which is the prime mover of the story. Therefore, aren't all of these the characteristics that any reader would look in a hero of a great epic? Satan, thus, become worthy of being compared to the great heroes of classics, like Achilles, whose bravery and excellence in battles caused people to tremble on the very mention of his name, or Odysseus, whose perilous journeys just so he could achieve the goal of reaching home before his death, brought him recognition all over the Greece and further. Indeed, Satan's own heroism, although slightly unconventional, and maybe even completely accidental, can still be compared to other great heroes in literature.

## 8. Conclusion

This paper has explored the idea of Satan's heroism, both structurally, post-structurally (in terms of the socio-historical context available through Milton's own life) and through the portrayal of his character and its juxtaposition to the more traditional and clear-cut heroes. The moral basis from which many of the critics cited approached the negation of Satan as the hero of *Paradise Lost* seems, much like Satan himself, two-folded and double edged, as the notions of both Good and Evil in their traditional terms are the very notions that are being deconstructed in Milton's epic. Satan, as the hero of *Paradise Lost* is in structural



terms a vehicle through which the exploration of envy, jealousy, pride, and disobedience take place in *Paradise Lost*. In post-structural terms they are Milton's attempt to subvert the grand-narrative of the Great Chain of Being and the King as God's representative on Earth. One undoubtedly mirrors the other and it is the exploration of the discourse of power that is at the core of this epic for which Milton's name to this day remains synonymous with power.

## Abstract

The thesis focuses on the analysis of the character of Satan in Milton's epic poem *Paradise Lost*, and attempts to define it and contextualize the character's heroism both in structural and post-structural terms while juxtaposing him with other, more traditional heroes. After giving the brief biography of John Milton, the author of the said epic poem, the essay touches upon the similarity between this unlikely hero, his stances and causes he fights for, and Milton, along with the details from his own life which prove the similarity that *Paradise Lost* has with the narrative of the Great Chain of being, was Milton's way of subverting the King's rule in 17th century England. The thesis also explores Satan's characteristics, his flaws and attributes, while comparing him to heroes and antiheroes of some of the other works, which in turn helps corroborate the claim that Satan is a hero of *Paradise Lost*. The thesis comes to the conclusion of why the incarnation of evil banished from heaven could be viewed as a main contributor to the action of the story and plot itself, and therefore a hero of this epic poem.

**Keywords:** Satan, *Paradise Lost*, John Milton, hero, antihero, epic poem Great Chain of Being, characteristics

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