



A Paradox in Milton's Epic: "*Paradise Lost*"

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ABSTRACT

John Milton through his most renowned controversial Epic titled "*Paradise Lost*", written in 1667 addresses the idea of free will and questions the existing hierarchy of absolute power and authority. Written during a time when people blindly followed the Church and the rules of the King and in fear paid heed to all the norms that existed in society which ultimately leads to nothing more than a peaceful death. The relevance of such historical revolutionary acts In today's post-modern world will be further discovered in this paper. The idea of having a choice and how it came into existence with several such revolutions coming into play will also be extensively talked about in this paper. The character of Lucifer and how he is not a pessimistic being, like how our ancestors told us after reading the scriptures will be analyzed thoroughly and the way Milton glorifies Satan to give us a new angle of interpretation will also be dwelt upon and further examined in this paper.

Moreover, the futuristic thinking of Milton and how his Epic still holds a firm stand in today's contemporary world will further dwell in this paper. The necessity of such revolutionists in our lives will be given importance in this research.

KEYWORDS: *Free Will, Absolute Power, Choice, Revolutionists, Fear of Authority.*

MAIN CONTENT

1.1 INTRODUCTION

"Paradise Lost" (1667) by John Milton is a strong expression of Individuality and the right to seek one's freedom. He wrote as an opposition to the hegemony of kings and rulers of that time who were given the sole authority to govern the whole nation. This absolute power was questioned intensively by Milton in his Epic.

Milton was a faithful disciple of Cromwell, who led the movement of 'the Republics' and his ideology opposed the existing morals of society which fascinated Milton and influenced him to write such a controversial Epic of that time.

"Milton's goal in writing "Paradise Lost" was to write an epic that would capture the spirit and environment of his society and religion, much as Homer's epics spoke for Greek civilization." (Bourne Pp 4-5)

His sole reason for writing the whole epic in 'blank verse' is to bring forth the metaphorical idea that writing in rhyme schemes is similar to being in 'bondage', the same way how the people of Britain were tied under their King during that age.

1.2 Milton's Criticism of Church and State

He aimed to let his readers know that the strength of power when attributed to the wrong hands can cause a lot of atrocities which, out of fear and lack of knowledge the citizens continue to face and suffer because of their blind faith towards those who are in power and exercise their uncontrolled authority.

In his renowned work, the controversy began when Milton challenged the Church by bringing in biblical concepts to make a direct comparison between the hierarchy of religion with the hegemony of monarchy. However, one has to look closely to point out the fact that his ideology of blind faith toward the Church was also ultimately true. With the advancement in Science men gradually understood that reality and spirituality are hard to go hand in hand.

This thought was strengthened way before by Milton when he tried to glorify Lucifer, the fallen angel, who had

to suffer and rule Hell only because God claimed and intended it that way.

1.3 Absolute Power; Is it Justified?

Lucifer's agony was solely based on pure revenge from God and his plans and plottings were attributed to let the world know how powerful God is and how he can control and show his authority on whoever he wishes and for those who stand in his way to question him will surely suffer the severest consequences like Satan. With this Milton attempts to ask his readers - Is it just to have such absolute power and authority?

The character of Lucifer or Satan is pessimistic because God wants it to be that way. His existence is what makes the Almighty look good, just, and rightful. However, it's important to know that even this thought is created by God in his favor.

Being the archangel, the angel of light, all Lucifer asked for was his share of powers since he was given the sole chance to sit at the right hand of God due to his remarkable capabilities which even God noticed and that's the reason he was offered to be seated at the right hand of his so-called father. Unfortunately, this trait of questioning his authority was not in the likeness of God and hence, he was given the most difficult task of punishing evil after being condemned to Hell by the orders of the Supreme.

The act of punishing evil is not an easy one since one has to be always harsh, rude, and adamant otherwise men won't understand their mistakes and it's an absolute fear that has to be inculcated to succeed in the assigned task.

Furthermore, one has to clearly understand that Lucifer was given the job of punishing those who are not following the orders of absolute power and committing sin by being evil but, in most cases Lucifer is considered to be evil which is a wrong assumption that he too wants to clarify. Just because he is the king of Pandemonium in Hell and turned out to be hideous and monstrous after his wings were cut and was made to fall, doesn't mean he is the actual evil. The role assigned to him by God made him like this otherwise humans won't be fearful and he became the reason they think twice before committing a sin and going against the words of God.

1.4 Good Needs Evil

God needed Satan to be the demon and an everlasting one, as we all are made aware that the Almighty foresees everything hence, knowing that Lucifer is leading a civil war towards him God didn't stop him earlier because he wanted everyone to know how supreme even he is. This was done with the purpose that even if men don't fear Lucifer's act at least they will fear God because of the undefined power he possessed.

God's ideology was very simple: he needed a fall guy as our forefathers (Adam and Eve) had already disobeyed him and brought sin into existence. Nevertheless, God got the perfect candidate to take the fall, and his aim of indirectly let everyone know that whoever disobeys him will be shunned and acted away, and further, they will lead a torturous life ahead with a lot of suffering and laments and will never be allowed to enter into paradise.

1.5 Concept of 'Utopia'

Furthermore, one should also know that the idea of 'Utopia' like the garden of Eden in the chapter of Genesis created by God is the same tactic that in the modern world, the state established to blackmail its citizens. They molded the rules according to their liking which profited them, solely for their well-being, and then made punishments along with rewards in the form of amenities attributed to only those who have their names in their books of favor.

Milton wanted to put forth the fact that it's the emotion of "fear" that tends to control man from taking the next step forward. It is indeed this factor of fear that helps the rulers to govern and control the people by exercising their demands to gain maximum profits and excel in their way of living.

1.6 Character of Lucifer Justified for his Role

Lucifer wanted man to fall not to derive pleasure out of it but to make them understand the truth about God, which he also realized after his ultimate fall to Hell. Like his followers Beelzebub and other demons who realized the same and joined his army, his attempts were in favor of humans to comprehend the real side of God that was revealed to them.

Lucifer's actions were to an extent justified since he just demanded what he felt he deserved just like how in the contemporary world we follow the law of equity, but when he was denied and punished for it, that too in the most humiliating way possible as God made him stoop so low beneath the earth where fire boils and fury thrives. However, here too the Almighty kept his face in front of others by proclaiming the idea that since sin has been introduced in this world, he too has assigned a King to rule Hell and punish those who disobey his command. This again brings forth the egoistic characteristic of God being superior to all.

1.7 Human Beings as 'Pawns'

Moreover, how Satan used humans as pawns in his game of revenge similarly the actual fight always happens between the haves who continue to assert their dominance over the other to depict their superiority and exercise their rule. Ultimately, it is the have-nots who have to suffer the loss like in the case of Adam and Eve who lost entry to their land of paradise and were banished from Paradise because of their sin of disobedience caused due to the mischievous hands of Satan who used them as means to achieve his aim by trying to find a way to climb up and cause harm to his Arch enemy.

Some even say that the creation of humans by God was true because somewhere he felt threatened by the other angels who have some sort of power to control, whereas these humans will be completely unaware of their existence and will be grateful towards the creator who shaped them into existence. Moreover, God needed an audience to pay heed to his commands, to whom he can rule without any fear of being questioned or harmed as already by creating them he had achieved his goal of being superior to them. Therefore, we could also say that even God was using humans as pawns for his gain to be accepted as the 'supreme power of all'.

1.8 Milton's Point of View

We understood the fact that Milton was way ahead of his time as the Church was pretty dominant during his time of existence and even the Kings were dependent on religion and somewhere were using spirituality and blind faith as their means to govern and rule over the citizens. Nevertheless, Milton attacked directly by depicting biblical references in his Epic work and questioning the sole authority of the Church. His ideology was simple as he wanted his readers to know that even the Holy scriptures are written by men and further interpreted by humans who try to preach what they feel is the just and right way to act in society. In the same

way, even we humans being part of society can interpret any text in our way, which seems suitable to our state of living. Hence, writing on such a controversial theme was Milton's way of bringing forth an ulterior dimension of the same biblical concepts by providing a different angle going against the existing justifications of the Church.

The writer wanted his readers to see all the sides before coming to an informed decision and to make them aware that the idea of 'free will' always exists and once you make a choice then only one would understand the value of that choice. Instead of being fearful, timid, and frightened as to what lies ahead of them, they should choose the path less traveled. Even Robert Frost later through his poetry wanted to bring forth this similar idea that it's always better to go for the road which not many have taken then only one would have a chance to leave their mark of existence in this ever-changing world of possibilities.

Milton didn't profess a strong ending to his Epic because he wants the readers to have the choice of choosing what they seem is right and just. Throughout our life we humans have been told what to do and how to do rightly based on the pre-existing norms that we continue to follow blindly but, even though we know that society is dynamic, it keeps on changing hence, sticking to the old rules and regulations is not what we should do.

Therefore, we should have similar brave and courageous characters like Milton and Lucifer to question those in power and finally open the eyes of our mob to make a sound decision and also know the fact that they always have a 'choice' rather than blindly putting their faith on something which their ancestors told to be the right way to act without causing harm and disrupting the will of God.

1.9 Conclusion

Such revolutionaries like Milton and Lucifer are essential in our society to bring a change and history has taught us thoroughly with the solid examples of revolutions like the French Revolution, Enlightenment Age, Age of Reason and Realism, Democracy, and so on, that blindly obeying the predetermined practices and norms without realizing it's ultimate aim is not how society functions efficiently. One needs to question the relevance of such rules and regulations based on that particular period of their existence and we need such revolutionaries to come forth and mark their purpose of life in history to help others understand and make an informed

decision after adhering to both the pros and the cons side of the issue we are dealing with.

To conclude, one can say that like Milton and many such revolutionists, through their works of art have attempted their best to make the people aware and bring a necessary change in society. Such iconic examples should motivate us further to stand for what we as individuals feel is right and express our desires without any fear.

Others do notice when one stands apart and sometimes they are criticized for that as well but only time will tell Milton who decided to take a strong stand and was stern to not sway away even after all the tables turned towards him but, he was not someone to give in easily. Milton continued to fight for what he believed in because of which today he is admired by all and his Epic "*Paradise Lost*" is considered one of the major works of art and a true classic of English Literature that has made its mark beyond the literary field as the text continues to be quoted in the fields of Law, Politics as well as Sociology.

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