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A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF MILTON'S POETIC STYLE AS REVEALED IN HIS EPIC POEM *PARADISE LOST*: BOOKS I AND II

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims at exploring John Milton's poetic style in his epic poem *Paradise Lost*, and the internal and external influences that shaped it. The ingredients of the grand style generally are: the greatness of the conception which inspires the poem; the exercise of a rich imagination; the employment of dignified words arranged in an impressive and harmonious order; and the use of certain technical devices which add to the interest and the dignity of the language employed. The grand style produces an impression of bigness, or enormity, or vastness, or loftiness in the reader's mind. And all these characteristics can be applied to Milton's style in the writing of *Paradise Lost*. The researcher adopts the analytical approach by examining the first two books of the poem: Books I and II. The researcher finds out that Milton's style in *Paradise Lost*, whether attaining grandeur or overwhelming us with its weight and sublimity, or not, has never been, and never will be a "popular" style. It is a scholarly style, and only scholars will admire or appreciate it. The average reader of poetry finds this style too heavy, cumbersome, and often bewildering because of its obscurities. It is impossible to understand *Paradise Lost*, including Books I & II, without copious annotations, though there certainly are many passages written in a lucid style that charms us (such as the brief portraits of Moloch, Belial, and Beelzebub in Book II, and the celebrated speech of Satan on surveying the infernal regions in Book I).

Keywords: Allusiveness, Figures of speech, Grandeur, Latinism, Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Simile, Style, Sublimity.

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1. INTRODUCTION

John Milton's style in *Paradise Lost* (1667) has justly been described as the grand style. The word "sublimity" best describes the mature style of Milton. It was a quality he attained only after years of stern experience. The merits of *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* do not depend upon the reader's taste in theology, but upon the stark grandeur of

many descriptive passages, and the passionate love of Nature which glows throughout the poet's work. Broadbent holds the view that "Milton is among the few English writers whose style can be called scholarly, his images unique and his words elevated" (6).

The ingredients of the grand style generally are: the greatness of the conception which inspires

the poem; the exercise of a rich imagination; the employment of dignified words arranged in an impressive and harmonious order; and the use of certain technical devices which add to the interest and the dignity of the language employed. The grand style produces an impression of "bigness, or enormity, or vastness, or loftiness in the reader's mind" (Nicolson 12). And this is the impression produced upon our minds while reading Milton's *Paradise Lost*.

Lewis attributes the grandeur of Milton's style in *Paradise Lost* to the following three ingredients: First, the use of slightly unfamiliar words and constructions, including archaisms. Second, the use of proper names chiefly for their sound, but also because they are the names of splendid, remote, terrible, voluptuous, or celebrated things. These proper names encourage a sweep of the reader's eye over the richness and variety of the world; and finally, allusions to most of the sources of interest in our sense-experience (light, darkness, storm, flowers, jewels, sexual love, etc.) (11), but all over-topped and managed with an air of magnanimous austerity. There is no doubt that these three ingredients do enter largely into the making of Milton's grand style. But these are not the only ingredients, as will be seen later on in the discussion throughout this paper. The focus of the research will be on the first two books of *Paradise Lost*. Prince (15) argues that Books I and II are replete with examples that best illustrate Milton's unique poetic style in the composition of his great epic poem.

According to Hale, "Milton's Language is a polyglot's study of a Renaissance polyglot" (1), and in order to understand the text of *Paradise Lost*, one must focus on Milton as a linguist and how his many languages can be helpful in clarifying the meaning of the poem. Milton is a poet, who knew many languages such as Greek, Latin and French, and all these languages influenced his poetic style in the composing of *Paradise Lost*, added Hale. In Banisalamah's point of view, Milton "manages to hide his agitation with the monarchy under allegorical language. Then, he reveals his opposition to the crown via these crafts" (32). That's why, in order to avoid punishment by the authorities for

being anti-monarchical, Milton retorted to figures of speech and the use of Latin and foreign words.

2. DISCUSSION

2.1 The Sublimity of Style in the Portrayal of Satan

In Book I of *Paradise Lost*, we do not anywhere meet a more sublime description than the one in which Milton gives us a portrait of Satan with a dignity suiting the subject. Milton portrays Satan in the following quotation as:

he above the rest
In shape and gesture proudly eminent
Stood like a tower; his form had yet not lost
All her original brightness, nor appeared
Less than archangel ruined, and the excess
Of glory obscured: As when the sun new
risen Looks through the horizontal misty air
Shorn of his beams, or from behind the
moon In dim eclipse disastrous twilight
sheds On half the nations, and with fear of
change. Perplexes monarchs. (I: 589-599).

This description contains a very noble picture which consists in images of tower, an archangel, the sun rising through mists or in an eclipse, the ruin of monarchs, and the revolutions of kingdoms.

As we read this description the mind is hurried out of itself between a crowd of great and confused images which are impressive because they are crowded and confused. If they were separated, much of the greatness would be lost. The following words best suggest the situation of Satan and his fallen comrades:

he with his horrid crew
Lay vanquished, rolling in the fiery gulf
Confounded though immortal:
But his doom
Reserved him to more wrath; for now the
thought
Both of lost happiness and lasting pain
Torments him; round he throws his baleful
eyes
That witnessed huge affliction and dismay
Mixed with obdurate pride and steadfast
hate. (I: 51-58)

In this passage, indeed, we have a combination of various sources of the sublime: the principal object (that is, Satan) eminently great; a high superior

nature, a 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. Thus we see that there is a multiplicity and complexity of factors combining to produce the grand style.

As seen in the above words, Satan is described heroically, and the words used to introduce him serve only one function, which is to glorify the devil in order to make him more pitiful. Slotkin has rightly pointed out that "Paradise Lost is centrally concerned with explaining the presence of evil in a universe ruled by an omnipotent and benevolent God" (100). But as readers, we do not have to sympathize with the devil whose sole aim is to corrupt the minds of his followers, and to lead them to more destruction and despair. Pride, which is Satan's sin, made him think that he can equal his Creator. Milton's use of glorious words to describe Satan is only to show him as a leader, thinking of lost happiness and defeat, and as a leader, he had to appear a hero so as to attract those being led by him. Forsyth believes that the whole of *Paradise Lost* revolves around the central character Satan, and therefore, it is natural for Milton to develop this character heroically.

Other examples of the elevated, grand style in Book I are Satan's various speeches. Satan speaks always in a rhetorical, magniloquent manner which greatly impresses us and evokes our admiration. The following memorable lines illustrate this point:

What though the field be lost?
All is not lost; the unconquerable will,
And study of revenge, immortal hate,
And courage never to submit or yield. (I:
105-108)

The above quote suggests his strong intelligence, his inflexible resolve, his exceptional will-power, and his dauntless courage. These qualities too stamp him as a hero and lend him a certain nobility. Here he tells Beelzebub that he is not at all repentant of what he

did and that his defeat has brought about no change in him.

As stated by Nafi', "Milton permitted Satan to develop into a character far more appealing than Milton's theology could have allowed" (1). But that doesn't mean that Milton had intended to glorify the character of Satan at the cost of God. One may admire Satan's words, but not his abominable character. Satan's physical dimensions and size are described as huge, and this may mark him as a hero, Added Nafi'.

In Book II of *Paradise Lost* the sublimity of style is maintained by the very manner in which Milton portrays the characters of the various fallen angels including Satan. The impression which we get from Book I about Satan's character is maintained. In the first place, Satan in Book II speaks in a very impressive and self-confident manner, just as he had spoken in Book I. In his first speech in Book II, he courageously says:

My sentence is for open war. Of wiles,
More unexpert, I boast not: them let those
Contrive who need, or when they need; not
now.
For, while they sit contriving, shall the rest,
Millions that stand in arms, and longing
wait
The signal to ascend, sit lingering here,
Heaven's fugitives, and for their dwelling-
place
Accept this dark opprobrious den of shame,
The prison of his tyranny who reigns
By our delay? No! let us rather choose,
Armed with Hell-flames and fury, all at once
O'er Heaven's high towers to force
resistless way,
Turning our tortures into horrid arms
Against the Torturer. (II: 51-64).

As the above words indicate and suggest, Satan asserts that the fallen angels, though defeated and oppressed, continue to possess an immortal vigor, which Hell would not be able to hold. He declares that he has not given up Heaven as lost forever. He asserts that the fallen angels would rise to Heaven again and would appear even more glorious and more awe-inspiring than if they had not fallen from there. Furthermore, they would feel so self-

confident while rising to Heaven that they would never again fear any disaster. Not only does Satan here try to inspire his comrades with hope about the future, but he speaks about himself in such a way as to strengthen his own leadership. He says that he has been established as the leader through his "just right," through "the fixed laws of Heaven," (ll. 18) through his services to his comrades, and through their "free choice" (ll. 19). Thus he speaks in a dignified and hopeful manner despite the defeat which he and his comrades have already suffered.

According to Fenton, "In book 1, Satan's first speech to the fallen angels after alighting on dry land fuses moral or psychological meaning with the language of land proprietorship: "plant," "eruption," and "bondage" have concurrent moral and legal denotations and convey how hope for individual authority is predicated on a bid for land" (2). These words suggest how heroic and determined Satan is, and how much hope he has in the future, hope to regain what has been lost, and this constitutes irony, for he never thought that he would never defeat the Almighty.

His second speech again shows his self-confidence when he says that, as he enjoys the privileges of royalty, he should be prepared to face greater dangers than those which his comrades would dare to face. Here he speaks in a tone of self-aggrandizement, but his tone creates the desired impression upon his listeners and upon the readers too. The impression of Satan's majesty and grandeur is reinforced by Milton when he describes Satan's splendor at the end of the assembly of the fallen angels. Here Milton tells us that Satan seemed to be the sole Antagonist of Heaven, and that he seemed to be Hell's dread emperor with "pomp supreme," (ll. 510) that he at this time showed "God-like imitated State;" (ll. 511) that round him were at this time a group of fiery seraphim with bright blazonry and horrendous weapons.

2.2 The Sublimity of Style in The Presentation of the Other Devils

Milton's grand style appears also in the manner in which Milton describes the other devils or fallen angels, and in the manner in which he makes these fallen angels express their views to the assembly. Rudrum asserts that, Moloch, for

instance, is described as the strongest and the fiercest Spirit who had fought in Heaven. Moloch had aspired to be regarded as God's equal in strength. Moloch would have liked rather not to continue to exist than be regarded as inferior to God in strength. Moloch's manner of speaking also shows his defiance of God despite the defeat which has already been inflicted on the rebellious angels. He is in favor of an open war against God. The description of Moloch's physical appearance combined with his pride produces a powerful impression on us; and then, of course, there is the effect of the impressive words which he employs in the following speech from Book II:

My sentence is for open war. Of wiles,
More unexpert, I boast not: them let
those
Contrive who need, or when they
need; not now.
For, while they sit contriving, shall the
rest,
Millions that stand in arms, and longing
wait
The signal to ascend, sit lingering here,
Heaven's fugitives, and for their
dwelling-place
Accept this dark opprobrious den of
shame,
The prison of his tyranny who reigns
By our delay? No! let us rather choose,
Armed with Hell-flames and fury, all at
once
O'er Heaven's high towers to force
resistless way,
Turning our tortures into horrid arms
Against the Torturer; when, to meet
the noise
Of his almighty engine, he shall hear
Infernal thunder, and, for lightning, see
Black fire and horror shot with equal
rage
Among his Angels, and his throne itself
Mixed with Tartarean sulfur and
strange fire,
His own invented torments. (51-70).

The above words suggest the grudge that the speaker has for the Almighty, his main enemy.

Instead of submitting to God and admitting his defeat, Moloch is trying to instigate the other fallen angels and enrage them against God by reminding them of their great loss of heaven. The above quotation may create an image of a hero in the readers' mind, but in reality they reflect the situation of a defeated leader, trying to justify his defeat and to rise up again. This pointed of view is emphasized by Anderson, who stresses the fact that the fallen angels are doomed to suffer because of their immorality in waging a war against their creator.

Similarly, Belial too is impressively described as very graceful and humane. "A fairer person lost no Heaven" (I. 110). He seemed to have been made for dignity and high exploit. His tongue dropped manna; and he could make the worse appear the better reason. Of course, Belial is not defiant while speaking about God; he suggests an attitude of submission to God; but even he shows a capacity for rhetoric and impressive oratory. Mammon's suggestion also is that the conditions prevailing in Hell should be accepted by them all; but even he is not prepared to spend his whole life in an attitude of servility to God and to make humble offerings of flowers and scents to God endlessly so that even Mammon's speech creates a powerful impression upon us. Beelzebub is, of course, scornful to God; and he urges continued hostility towards God, suggesting also a very clever strategy. His appearance too is described in an impressive manner. He rises to speak with a grave countenance, looking like a pillar of State, his face shining with wisdom, and his "Atlantean shoulders fit to bear the weight of the mightiest monarchies" (II: 306-307). He too shows himself to be a powerful orator. To quote Milton's words describing this character speaking would be worthy:

Thrones and Imperial Powers, offspring of Heaven,
Ethereal Virtues! or these titles now
Must we renounce, and, changing style, be called
Princes of Hell? for so the popular vote
Inclines, here to continue, and build up here

A growing empire; doubtless! while we dream,
And know not that the King of Heaven hath doomed
This place our dungeon, not our safe retreat
Beyond his potent arm, to live exempt
From Heaven's high jurisdiction, in new league
Banded against his throne, but to remain
In strictest bondage, though thus far removed,
Under the inevitable curb, reserved
His captive multitude. (II: 310-323).

In short, the manner of the presentation of these speakers to us and their impressive and rhetorical manner of addressing their audience are such as to produce an impression of grandeur in spite of the humiliating conditions in which they have been forced to dwell.

2.3 Not Colloquial Style, the Use of the Long Sentence, The Suspended Sentence:

It has been pointed out here that the grand style is far from a style based on the conversation of common people. We are not here dealing with a style incorporating the natural, everyday speech of ordinary people, as subsequently was demanded of Wordsworth. It is not a colloquial style as was used by John Donne, or the kind of style recommended by twentieth century critics like T.S. Eliot. The grand style is completely divorced from the common speech of common people. It is a style which largely employs unfamiliar words and expressions. It is therefore necessarily a highly artificial style, though the word "artificial" here does not carry any hint of disapproval or condemnation or censure. One of the most striking ingredients of this style is, according to Fuller, for instance, "the long, complex, involved sentence" (13). In fact, the reader sometimes gets lost in the labyrinth of such a sentence though, when understood, this sentence produces in him an effect of wonder, amazement, and admiration. The very opening of Book I provides an illustration:

Of man's first disobedience, and the fruit
Of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste
Brought death into the world, and all our woe,

With loss of Eden... (1-4).

We have in the first six lines of the poem the power and sublimity of what T.S. Eliot called "a breathless leap" (Huttar 2). Milton here achieves a loftiness effect, both by the word-order, which is especially firmly fixed in imperative sentences, by beginning with the genitive object "Of Man's first disobedience, and the fruit of that forbidden Tree." And inserting between it and the predicate a relative clause "whose mortal taste brought death into the world," with various dependent elements "and all of our woe, with loss of Eden." This opening sentence of Book I is an example of what is known as "suspension," which might lead to confusion on the part of the reader. The reason for this is to capture the attention of the reader. As Arnold has pointed out, "Milton did not let this sentence escape him till he had crowded into it all he could, so that the verb comes at the end of thirty eight words" (20). By thus withholding the verb so long, Milton is able to state in a heroic way the magnitude of the poem's subject and so the magnitude of his task. As has been pointed out by Tsur, "the first six lines of Paradise Lost a divergent, fluid structure, in which suspense is drawn out from the preposition *Of* at the onset to the anticipated verb *Sing* in line 6. l" (167).

The word-order quite literally encompasses the huge theme. There are as many as twenty three elaborate suspensions of one kind or another in Book I. Of courses they do not occur in succession, but alternate with unsuspected passages. The suspensions mark moments of emphatic meaning in the steady flow of the epic narrative as, for example, the opening of Satan's address to Beelzebub: "If thou beest he; but O how fall'n! how chang'd... In equal ruin" (I: 48-91).

Another example of such a sentence is to be found in the description of the frozen Continent which forms part of Hell. In this connection Milton says:

Beyond this flood a frozen continent
Lies dark and wild, beat with perpetual
storms
Of whirlwind and dire hail, which on
firm land
Thaws not, but gathers heap, and ruin
seems

Of ancient pile; all else deep snow and
ice,

A gulf profound as that Serbonian bog
Betwixt Damiata and Mount Casius old,
Where armies whole have sunk: the
parching air

Burns froze, and cold performs the
effect of fire. (II: 587-595).

Here we have the example of a long and involved sentence which occupies as many as nine lines. The frozen Continent, we are told, lies dark and wild. It is beaten by perpetual storms of whirlwind and by dire hail. The hailstones here do not melt but keep piling, till the pile looks like the ruin of an ancient building. Then there is a gulf as deep as the Serbonian bog which had swallowed whole armies. And there are a couple of more details too in the same sentence. We have another long and involved sentence when Milton describes the reaction of the fallen angels to the new and dreadful sights which they see in Hell. These angels are feeling confused and forlorn; they proceed "with shuddering horror pale" and with "eyes aghast" (I: 616). They pass through many dark and dreary valleys through many dolorous regions, traversing rocks, caves, lakes, fens, bogs, dens, etc. here again detail is heaped upon detail in the same sentence to produce a tremendous effect. Yet another example of this kind of long sentence in Book II, where both the subject and the verb come at the end of fifty three words. This sentence occurs when Milton is describing the region which was revealed to Satan's eyes after his daughter Sin had unlocked and opened the gates of Hell at his request. Satan finds wild abyss yawning before him. He stands and looks with amazement at this wild abyss. The sentence begins with the words "Into this wild abyss" (II: 910), and then Milton proceeds to describe the abyss. He describes the abyss in about seven lines and then says: "Into this wild abyss the wary Fiend looked for a while" (II: 917). Now, this kind of sentence certainly baffles and bewilders the reader. But when, after a certain amount of mental labor, the reader does understand the connections between the various parts of the sentence and makes out its meaning, he is simply overwhelmed by wonderment and admiration. The point held by Murray is still valid; he thinks that "the very choice

of words, apart from the length of the sentence, contributes to the effect of grandeur" (6). Indeed, the vocabulary employed is most impressive, as are the word-contributions of the syntax. This structural aspect is an authentic feature of Milton's mode of expression and one which contributes more than any other single element to the elevation of his poetic style.

2.4 Allusiveness and the Use of Proper Names

Another essential quality of Milton's style is its allusiveness. This quality, which also contributes to the elevation of style, consists of a rich suggestion of matters of observation in the realm of Nature and of human experience. Milton explores all the treasures of literature and various other branches of learning for his allusions. Myth and legend are freely made use of, as are historical, literary, and scientific facts. Classical and biblical allusions are to be found in abundance. Erudition is thus an integral part of Milton's style. And then there is also another feature of Milton's style, namely a collection of exotic proper names, names of persons and places. The harmony, the concord, and the spell of such proper names have generally been recognized. So far as allusions are concerned, in Book I Milton's comprehensive scholarship finds full play in the passage which compares the host of the fallen angels to various military assemblages of heroic legend. That passage is a miniature survey, chronologically arranged, of the great conflicts which find mention in stories of heroism. Milton here mentions the wars of the gods and the Giants, the sieges of Troy and Thebes, the battles of King Arthur, the Crusades, and the wars of Charlemagne.

In Book I, the entire catalogue of the devils is replete with such proper nouns-Moloch, Chemos, Baalim and Ashtaroth, Thammuz, Osiris, Isis, Belial, being only some of the names of pagan deities mentioned by Milton. The names of places and the names of rivers include Rabba, Argob, Arnon, Hinnom, Damascus, Abbana, and Pharpar.

Book II takes us back to the stories connected with the Gorgons (like Medusa), the Hydras, the Furies, the river Lethe, the ship Argo, the voyage of Ulysses, the horrors of Scylla and Charybdis, Hercules and his exploits, Tantalus, Gryphon and several more. As for proper names, we

have one place a mention of Oechalia, Thessaly, Oeta, and the Euboic Sea. At another point we come across the Serbonian Bog, lying between Damiatra and Mt. Casius. Later we come across Acquinoctial winds, Bengala, the isles of Ternate and Tiabre, and the white Ethiopian. The range of allusions and the proper names is so wide that an impression of comprehensiveness, immensity, and all-inclusiveness is inevitably produced which go beyond the requirements of mere illustration. Nevertheless, an impression of grandeur and majesty is effectively created.

This is undoubtedly one of the several sources of the sublime in Milton's verse.

2.5 The Epic or the Homeric Simile: Other Figures of Speech

Then there are the similes. Milton's epic similes go beyond the strict requirements of showing the similarity or the resemblance which initially prompts them. In Milton's hands the similes develop into elaborate pictures with the result that, in addition to the resemblance which is the central point of the simile, we are irresistibly driven to imagine a number of other things, some of which are very remote from our actual experience. As Addison has pointed out, "digressions of this kind are justified, firstly because they enhance the poetry by glorious images and sentiments, and secondly because they supply variety and relief by introducing scenes outside the proper scope of the story" (19). Many of Milton's similes show his habit of pursuing a comparison beyond the mere limits of illustrative likeness, for the sake of a rich accumulation of circumstances beautiful in itself. Barker is of the view that these digressions (in the form of long, elaborate similes) were for Milton a "welcome means of pouring forth the treasures of his mind" (n. p.).

The passage, describing Satan after the fall, in Book I, contains three impressive similes, one of them going considerably beyond the illustrative requirements; in order to convey to us the undiminished glory of Satan after his defeat; Milton compares the Archangel to the newly-risen sun looking:

"through the horizontal misty air shorn of his beams or from behind the moon, in dim

eclipse shedding disastrous twilight on half of the nations and perplexing monarchs with fear of change." (595-599)

The significance of the association of Satan with an "eclipse" of the sun is obvious, eclipses having always been regarded as evil omens. But, besides conveying to us Satan's diminished luster, this simile calls up numerous other images because of the reference to frightened nations and perplexed monarchs

Then there is the Leviathan simile, which not only bring before us the vastness of Satan's dimensions but also suggests a falseness of appearances, the trickery to which Satan resorted, and the lack of caution on the part of Eve when communicating with the arch-fiend.

In the following lines, Milton compares the fallen angels to autumnal leaves, which lost all its glory:

His Legions, angel forms, who lay entranced
Thick as autumnal leaves that strew the
brooks
In Vallombrosa, where the Etrurian shades
High overarched embower; or scattered
sedge
Afloat, when with fierce winds Orion armed
Hath vexed the Red Sea coast, whose
waves overthrew
Busiris and his Memphian chivalry. (I: 301-307)

The comparisons of Satan's legions with autumnal leaves, with the sea-weed floating on the waves, with the wrecked Egyptian army, with the swarm of locusts, and with northern barbarians not only convey the vast numbers of Satan's army, but also the confusion in which they lie, their diminished glory, and certain sinister implications.

The abundance of such striking and effective epic or Homeric similes in Book I is astonishing. Even when Milton borrows a simile from his epic predecessors (the simile of the bees, for instance), he adapts it to his own peculiar use. The following quotation from Book I is an apt illustration of this point:

. . . As bees
In spring time, when the sun with Taurus
rides,

Pour forth their populous youth about the
hive

In clusters; they among fresh dews and
flowers Fly to and fro, or on the smoothed
plank, The suburb of their straw-built
citadel, New rubbed with baum, expatiate
and confer Their state affairs. (I: 768-775)

The above quote suggests the insignificance of the devils by having Milton compare them to the size of bees; and the simile also suggests confusion and disturbance on the part. Milton then compares them to human dwarfs and pygmies living beyond the Indian mount (namely, the Himalayas)

These epic similes, or long-tailed similes as they are also called, inevitably contribute to the effect of the sublimity of style. Regarding Book II, there are as many ten similes of this kind. The murmur of approval, which comes from the fallen angels after Mammon has spoken, is compared to the sound which is heard from the hollow rocks after the blustering winds have subsided. This is one of the most striking comparisons in the poem; and the comparison does not just end here, but develop into an elaborate picture of the winds blowing all night and rousing the sea, with sailors keeping a watch to save their ship from getting wrecked. This is best illustrated by the following words:

Borne even or high; for this day will pour
down, If I conjecture aught, no drizzling
shower, But rattling storm of arrows
barbed with fire.

So warned he them, aware themselves, and
soon In order, quit of all impediment;
Instant without disturb they took alarm,
And onward moved embattled. (VI: 544-550)

As has seen from the above quotation, the picture of the storm is followed by a picture of the ship anchored in a craggy bay. Thus the attendant imagery in this simile has its own appeal and interest. And the imagery, as also the vocabulary, employed is such as to create a tremendous impression upon us. This is only one of the ten examples of the Homeric simile to be found in Book II. At the same time, these similes answer the demands of the narrative; they are images used to portray the scenes and characters and events that

compose the poem. They are what we have called above transposed descriptions, and in order to be effective, they have to be detailed. Once these similes are used as images, they become significant parts of the story and thus become elements in the growing forces of the narrative.

Besides the epic similes, other similes are also freely used by Milton. Other figures of speech such as metaphor and oxymoron, and such devices as alliteration and onomatopoeia also abound in *Paradise Lost*.

2.6 Latinism, Archaisms, Repetition, Inversion of Adjectives, etc.

Certain other copious features of Milton's style may also now be pointed out:

(1) Latinisms (Latinized construction), such as "insatiate to pursue" (ll. 8); "for never, since created man / Met such embodied force" (l. 573-574). The inversion of the adjective; for example: "hazard huge" (ll. 473); "Spirits damned" (ll. 482); "creatures rational" (ll. 498); "air sublime." Then we have the word "conjured" (ll. 693), used to mean "conspiring." As for Latinisms, there are, the words used in their original Latin, instead of their English, sense. Most of these words, as told by scholars, were current in the educated speech of the Elizabethan and Stuart periods, when all literate people were versed in Latin. They are foreign to the modern reader only because their meanings have been submerged. It is rarely that Milton can be suspected of being idiosyncratic in these usages. The difficulty for the modern reader is that many of these words have remained common words, but have lost their Latin meanings. Any strangeness or remoteness in Milton's language is due for the most part, as will all older authors, to such alterations in the meanings of the words. Many of Milton's Latinistic words do double service by reinforcing the English sense by the original meaning. This has expressive value whether the word be foreign or native in origin, and it serves Milton's aim of approximating to the Latin density of style. The fallen angels are "abject" (cast down) and "afflicted" (struck down) both literally and figuratively. "Reluctant is used thrice in the poem, each time with the literal Latin sense (struggling or struggling against) along with the modern English sense:

"down he fell / A monstrous Serpent on his belly prone / Reluctant" (X: 513-515).

An objection is often been raised that "Milton's syntax and word-order are Latinistic and foreign" (Shawcross 4). The syntax of *Paradise Lost* is certainly highly organized, and to some extent on the pattern of Latin poetry. But the number of Latin and other foreign constructions has been exaggerated. What Milton aims at is the economy and density of Latin expression. It is in the long sentences, so frequent in the poem, that we clearly see Milton's use of Latin syntax. The prime necessity in a long sentence is logical development, and this is the chief characteristic of Milton's epic style.

(2) Archaisms: "force" (for "frozen"), (ll. 853); "sentence" (for "advice"), (ll. 51); "strook" (for "struck"), (ll. 165); "fact of farms" (for "feat of arms").

(3) Repetition of words, to heighten and accentuate the meaning: "With ruin upon ruin, rout upon rout, / Confusion worse confounded" (ll: 966-997).

(4) A balanced arrangement of adjectives before and after the noun which qualify:
The scourge / Inexorable, and the torturing hour...(ll. 90-91).

(5) An effect of climax achieved by the successive use of similar words: "Unrespited, unpitied, unreprieved" (ll. 185).

(6) Parenthesis and Apposition: "Of Abbana and Phrapphar, lucid streams" (l. 469); "Their song was partial, but harmony / (What could it less when Spirits immortal sing?) / Suspended Hell..." (ll: 552-554).

(7) Omission of words: for example, there is the omission of the article: "to pass Rhene" (l. 352-353); of the verb: "cruel his eyes" (l. 604); of the pronoun: "as whom the fable name" (l. 197); and of the preposition: "fallen such a pernicious high" (l. 282).

(8) Inversion of adjectives: "dungeon horrible" (l. 61); "shapes immense" (l. 790).

(9) The use of one part of speech for another. Use of the verb form as noun: "beyond compare" (ll. 138); "the great consult" (l. 798); the adjective form

as noun: "for those rebellious" (l. 71); the noun for adjective: "their dread commander" (l. 589).

(10) Unusual compound epithets similar to those in Homer: "night-founded skiff" (l. 204); "bullion-dross" (l. 704).

Word-compression is yet another feature of Milton's style. The felicity of word and phrase too is a feature which no reader can miss. The vocabulary is always tough and this, combined with the involved sentences and the occasional omission of necessary words, sometimes leads to obscurity; and yet Milton's command of the resources of the language is such as almost to stagger us.

2.7 Description and Imagery

Milton's descriptive gift is simply marvelous. Book II contains several passages of graphic description. Noteworthy in this connection are the description of the frozen Continent, which has been stated above, the endless war of the elements, and the realm of Chaos. The manner in which the various devils have been drawn also show Milton's concrete imagination. The elaborate and vivid picture of Sin is another example of Milton's unrivalled command of language and his capacity to concretize an abstraction. Here is how Milton describes Satan's daughter:

At first, and called me Sin, and for a sign
Portentous held me; but, familiar grown,
I pleased, and with attractive graces won
The most averse, thee chiefly, who,
Full oft Thyself in me thy perfect image
viewing, Becam'st enamored; and such joy
thou took'st With me in secret that my
womb conceived A growing burden. (ll:
760-767)

2.8 Blank Verse

Milton's mastery of blank verse is another important feature of his poetic style in *Paradise Lost*. The use of blank verse too has its share in creating the sublime effect in this epic poem. Having chosen it, he proceeded to build out of it a type of verse before unknown, admirably suited to the grandeur of his subject. The chief peculiarity of this Miltonic verse is the length and involution of period. The sense is held suspended through many lines, while clause after clause comes in to enrich the meaning or to magnify the descriptive effect; then

the period closes and this suspended meaning falls upon the mind "like the combing mass of breaker on the shore" (King 5). A second and scarcely less important device is the extreme variety of pause; the sense comes to an end, and the suspended thought falls, at constantly varying places in the line, a device by which blank verse, monotonous when otherwise treated, becomes the most diversified of rhythms. In these and other ways, Milton made for himself a noble-verse instrument to match the grandeur of his imagery and theme. A theme that is universal and concerns all human beings.

Milton effected several improvements in the use of blank verse. He equals Shakespeare in his command of this meter. In his great epic *Paradise Lost*, he strengthens blank verse without cramping it; he gives it grace without making it vapid, and rounds off with finished care and single line without ever sacrificing the organic unity of the entire poem. He is like a great organist who, while never losing sight of the original melody, adorns it with every conceivable variation which serves to exhibit instead of obscuring the freshness and sweetness of the simple theme.

Rhythm, vocabulary, sentence structure, and imagery, all mingle and unite to form the majestic garment of Milton's thought and feeling. It is because the sense is suspended through line after line, and because Milton takes pains to avoid coincidence of the rhetorical pauses with the line-ends that we have the continuity of rhythm which is so characteristic a feature of his blank verse.

Any ten or fifteen lines taken at random from Book II would show the success with which Milton has employed it.

2.9 Twentieth Century Attackers and Apologists

It is worth mentioning that several 20th. Century critics led by Eliot have attacked Milton's style in *Paradise Lost*. Eliot for example thinks that:

His style is not a classic style, in the sense that it is not the elevation of a common style. It is from the foundation and in every particular, a personal style, not based upon common speech, or common prose, or direct communication of meaning. In Milton there is always the maximal, never the minimal, alteration of ordinary language.

(62). But the conclusion, paradoxical as it may seem, which Eliot reaches is: "The remoteness of Milton's verse from ordinary speech, his invention of his own poetic language, seems to me one of the marks of his greatness," (91), added Eliot.

But Milton's style has found its apologists and admirers too in this century. For instance, the Latinisms (the Latin idioms, syntax, and word-order) have been defended as devices for attaining in English something of the effect of the loaded line of Latin verse, which is a legitimate aim in a poem that deliberately emulates Virgil. It has also been said that many of Milton's Latinized words do double service by reinforcing the English sense by the original meaning.

According to Leonard, "The best critics of Milton's prosody have explored the ways in which sound and sense interact with each other in *Paradise Lost*" (n. p.) [my italic]. "This has always been the prime issue in the debate about Milton's style and it is here that the disagreements between Miltonists and anti-Miltonists become most interesting" (n. p.), added Leonard.

3. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, it must be pointed out that *Paradise Lost* is not written in an unvaryingly elevated and exotic style. The style changes constantly in answer to the moods of the narrative, to its subject-matter and moods. Milton knew how to use simple language on occasion; and this too may be regarded as only another facet of his conscious art. The supreme test of the writer, however, is the ability to write naturally, without mannerism or artifice, using the best words, whether simple or not, in the best order. That Milton commands such a style could be illustrated from every part of the poem. There is the same skill in the versification, as in the language, of poem. The verse adapts itself to heroic or domestic action, to description, oratory and talk, and to lyricism with a flexibility that has not equaled in English heroic poetry.

It also must be admitted that Milton's style in *Paradise Lost*, whether attaining grandeur or overwhelming us with its weight and sublimity, or not, has never been, and never will be a "popular" style. It is a "scholarly style, and only scholars will

admire or appreciate it" (Daiches 7). The average reader of poetry finds this style too heavy, cumbersome, and often bewildering because of its obscurities. It is impossible to understand *Paradise Lost*, including Books I & II, without copious annotations though there certainly are many passages written in a lucid style that charms us (such as the brief portraits of Moloch, Belial, and Beelzebub in Book II, and the celebrated speech of Satan on surveying the infernal regions in Book I).

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