



The Image of *Āz* in Persian Manichean Literature and Milton's *Paradise Lost*

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1.Introduction

John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667) is built upon a set of dualities. Both in form and content, the epic depicts a contrary state of human experience of which the conflict between good and evil is central. While Milton takes upon himself the grand task of justifying "the ways of God to men" (2007: 1.26), it is arguable that the book leads to serious theological doubts than confirm orthodox beliefs. On the surface, the hero of *Paradise Lost* is Adam, who is ultimately saved by the grace of God's Son. However, some assume that the character of Satan is the most prominent presence in the narrative, especially because the first two books have Satan as their protagonist. There is also the view that neither Adam nor Satan are the heroes; rather it is in fact Milton the poet who places himself on a similar par with previous epic poets and thus becomes the narrator-hero of the book.

While previous studies have mentioned the influence of Persian Manichean literature on John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667), little has been done on the image of Manichean demon *Āz* in comparison to Milton's representation of Satan. This is especially significant because Manichean dualism undermines the assumed monism of Milton's epic. Accordingly, this essay shows traces of Manichean dualism in the epic by discussing Satan's language and fractured passions. In the second part of the essay, we focus on the sympathetic representation of Satan as to bring to the fore the emotional readerly engagement of the book. Ultimately, the objective of this comparative reading of *Paradise Lost* is to explain the incongruity between the author's (Milton) intentions and the narrative effects.

2.Literature Review

Peter F. Fisher notes that in theory Milton was "always unequivocally at one with himself and unequivocally a monist," while in practice, that is, "in his ethical experience, he was always in conflict – a conflict born of the struggle between a

moral dualism which he experienced and a metaphysical monism which he believed (1956: 28). In a sense, Christ in *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* represents Milton's metaphysical beliefs, while Satan stands for the ethical conflicts. Put differently, the conflict is between Christ's monism and Satan's dualism. Harold Bloom writes that "the great dualist in *Paradise Lost* is Satan, who remains the marvelous scandal of the poem" (2009: 98). How can we explain that "marvelous scandal"? A clue here is Satan's division of spirit and matter, which is reflected in the kind of language he uses.

A theological solution to Satan's dualism (spirit vs. matter) is to note that Milton shows Satan's dualism only to prove him wrong. That is, through authorial negation, monism ultimately defeats dualism. Yet, this does not explain Satan's eloquent language and pathos. In his *Satanic Epic* (2002), the astute Milton scholar Neil Forsyth traces the origins of Satan as he is imagined in world culture and writes that in the early church Satan was indeed seen as the source of heresies, challenging orthodoxy. Leaders like Irenaeus and Augustine linked these heresies to the original rebellion in heaven, and Heretics were viewed as followers of the Devil.

Such heretical influence aligns Milton with Gnostic thought, particularly in *Paradise Lost*'s portrayal of forbidden knowledge. Gnosticism esteems hidden or forbidden knowledge as a path to enlightenment, and Milton's sympathetic portrayal of figures seeking knowledge (such as Satan and Eve) resonates with this tradition (Nuttal, 1998: 85). Galileo, a figure Milton admired, challenged cosmological orthodoxy with his discoveries, which incited conflict with the Church. By invoking Galileo's observations in *Paradise Lost* (2007: 1.286-91) as Satan contemplates the cosmos, Milton emphasizes the perilous yet noble pursuit of knowledge.

Milton's Satan further embodies traits of the Gnostic figure Allogenes (or "other-born"), a seeker of truths beyond the established order (Nuttal, 1998: 92-93). Allogenes symbolizes the outsider who disrupts accepted norms, which parallels Satan's challenge to divine authority. Through this lens, Milton's characterization of Satan reveals a fascination with Gnostic themes, as the quest for knowledge drives figures who question or even defy divine authority.

3.Methodology

This essay is a close-reading of Milton's *Paradise Lost* in comparison to the Manichean notion of $\bar{A}z$.

4.Discussion

Milton's agonism in *Paradise Lost* reveals Satan's $\bar{A}z$ for the Son's divine qualities. According to Revard, "Satan does not see the Son's radiance as love, but as a splendid and enviable quality; he does not connect the radiance, moreover, with his person, but with his office" (1973: 195). In other words, Satan wishes he were the Son, and in this sense, his intentions are "virtuous", though

his means be evil. That "enviable quality", however, is undermined by Milton's representation of the exaltation scene where the Son is elected. Read closely, God seems an autocrat (Forsyth, 2002: 54):

Hear all ye Angels, Progenie of Light,
Thrones, Dominations, Princedoms, Vertues, Powers,
Hear my Decree, which unrevok't shall stand.
This day I have begot whom I declare
My onely Son, and on this holy Hill
Him have anointed, whom ye now behold
At my right hand; your Head I him appoint;
And by my Self have sworn to him shall bow
All knees in Heav'n, and shall confess him Lord:
Under his great Vice-gerent Reign abide
United as one individual Soule
For ever happie: him who disobeyes
Mee disobeyes, breaks union, and that day
Cast out from God and blessed vision, falls
Into utter darkness, deep ingulft, his place
Ordaind without redemption, without end. (2007: 5.600-15)

Paradoxically, God's command, which was meant to promote unity, leads to division (and the emergence of evil). This raises a serious question about the nature and consequence of authority. Satan feels that his merit is injured as Iago in Shakespeare's *Othello* feels that he has been unjustly ignored. Satan's reaction to the divine decree is captured when he "thought himself impaired" (2007: 5.665). Impaired means "made worse" and plays on the word "pair", implying that Satan felt himself no longer equal to the Son, and perhaps once considered himself to be of equal stature. Thus, similar to historical pairs like Cain and Abel, Satan and the Son are framed as rivals or adversaries (Forsyth, 2002: 173). At this critical moment, Āz, Satan's internal passion or desire, which draws him toward the Son, becomes the driving force behind his disobedience. Milton links Satan's resentment directly to his ambition for occupying the Son's position.

5. Conclusion

This essay has argued that *Paradise Lost* continually stages a conflict between a professed metaphysical monism and an experienced moral dualism, and that the most incisive way to see this conflict is through the Manichaeic figure of Āz as it is refracted through Milton's Satan. Milton's prose theology insists that the "whole man" is one substance of body, spirit, and soul; yet the poem's most powerful scenes expose passions that divide, double, and pull toward contrary poles. The result is a hybrid representation: Satan is made legible both as a doctrinally negated adversary and as a dramatically intensified agent whose restless desire at once seeks the Light and rages against it.

This Manichaean lens neither claims Milton for heresy nor reduces the poem to doctrinal allegory. Rather, it clarifies how Persian Manichaean concepts, transmitted as they were through late antique and medieval channels, sharpen the poem's representation of desire, injury, and rebellion, and why the epic oscillates between repudiation and tragic admiration. Reading Satan as an Āz-like hybrid illuminates the otherwise "marvelous scandal" of his presence: his passions dramatize the poem's constitutive rift between experiential dualism and metaphysical unity, and thereby expose the difficulty of any theodicy that must pass through human feeling.

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