A Study of the Ambivalent Image of Satan in John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*

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Abstract: John Milton, a prominent poet, political commentator, and advocate for democracy during the late English Renaissance, holds a significant place in history due to his renowned works. In his long epic *Paradise Lost*, Satan emerges as a profoundly ambivalent character. This portrayal is intricately linked to the social, political, and religious context of that time, embodying strong ambivalence and pluralism. In many literature works, Satan is often depicted as a rebel or a symbol of sin and evil. However, in *Paradise Lost*, Satan is given the right to speak, which transforms the previous simplistic portrayal into a more diverse and tangible image. As the narrative unfolds, Satan’s depiction transitions from hero to devil. Undoubtedly, the multi-dimensional transformation of this ambivalent image necessitates interpretation. This paper, guided by the principle of New Historicism, is divided into three sections, aiming to interpret the ambivalence and pluralism within Satan’s portrayal in *Paradise Lost*.

Keywords: John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, New Historicism, Satan.

1. Introduction

John Milton’s entire life mirrors a grand epic. Driven by a relentless pursuit of freedom and human rights, he possessed unwavering faith in standing alongside his nation, leading him to actively participate in the English Revolution. This significant historical event not only left an indelible impact on Milton himself but also played a profound role in shaping the narrative of *Paradise Lost*. As John Milton said, it was shameful to stay leisurely in a foreign country while his fellow citizens were struggling for freedom. He would not name or highly praise a hero or an ancient capital unless he had the experience and practice of all things worthy of praise. As is expounded by William Hayley in his biography in 1796, Milton is viewed as the “greatest English author”. Assuredly, the superb poems written by Milton have a profound influence on the later English poets. Among all his literature masterpieces, the most ever-lasting reputation may lie in the great epic *Paradise Lost*. *Paradise Lost*, as Dryden praises highly "one of the greatest, most noble and sublime poems which wither this age of nation has produced", is a great epic poem in English language and literature world. Undeniably, *Paradise Lost* is an unprecedented work for Milton as well as the English literature world, which has allured many readers and scholars since it was published in 1667. With this epic possessing a significant position in English literature as well as literature criticism, for centuries, critics and scholars have paid a lot of critical attention to the great epic. Especially Satan, as the most ambivalent figure in the poem, has caught a mass of critical attention undoubtedly.

The dispute about John Milton’s Satan in *Paradise Lost* has been lasting for hundreds of years. Indeed, the ambivalence of Satan is closely linked to his nature, whether he is perceived as a courageous hero or a malevolent devil. In fact, this controversy has given rise to two opposing viewpoints: the pro-Satanists and the anti-Satanists. Pro-Satanists argue for Satan’s inherent bravery, considering him a fearless hero. On the other hand, anti-Satanists contend that Milton intentionally crafted Satan as a devil in *Paradise Lost*, despite being one of the most intricately depicted characters. It is worth noting that most critical assessments of Satan lack comprehensiveness, highlighting the need to analyze his image from multiple dimensions.

On the one hand, there exist a large number of famous pro-Satanists such as Percy Besshe Shelley, William Hazlitt, William Blake and so on and so forth, most of whom regard Satan as a valorous and veritable hero, emphasizing Satan’s pride, courage and rebellious spirit to a large extent. From Shelley’s point of view, “Satan is a devil, but quite different from the popular personification of evil”. He has made his viewpoint transparent in “On the Devil, and Devils that Milton’s Devil, as a moral being, is as far superior to his God, as one who perseveres in a purpose which he has conceived to be excellent, in spite of adversity and torture, is to one who in the cold security of undoubted triumph inflicts the most horrible revenge upon his enemy—not from any mistaken notion of bringing him to repent of a perseverance in enmity, but with the open and alleged design of exasperating him to deserve new torments.” In *A Defence of Poetry*, he has manifested that “Nothing can exceed the energy and magnificence of the character of Satan as expressed in *Paradise Lost*.” William Blake also sides with Satan. In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, he makes his famous comments that “The reason Milton wrote in fetters when he wrote of Angels & God, and at liberty when of Devils & Hell, is because he was a true Poet and of the Devils party without knowing it.” Another pro-Satanist, William Hazlitt holds the idea that “Satan is the most heroic subject that was chosen for


5 Ibid., p. 148.

6 Ibid., p. 194.

a poem. His ambition was the greatest, and his punishment was the greatest; but not so his despair, for his fortitude was as great as his sufferings. His strength of mind was matchless as his strength of body."

However, as is elucidated before, there is no denying that the pro-Satanists are opposed by many anti-Satanists such as Charles Williams, C. S. Lewis, who scorns Satan to a large degree and view him as a symbol of original “sin” and “crime”. Compared with those pro-Satanists, more attentions have been put by anti-Satanists on Satan’s selfishness, folly and absurdity, which stand as the heinous peculiarities of Satan. As is illustrated by C. S. Lewis, “throughout the poem, all his torments come, in a sense, at his own bidding.”7 As the best friend of C. S. Lewis, Charles William shares a similar view with him. In his introduction to the collection of Milton’s English poems— The English Poems of John Milton, he holds the idea that Milton thought pride, egotism, and a proper sense of one’s own rights the greatest of all temptations;... And he thought it led straight to inaccuracy and malice, and finally to idiocy and hell.”10 Then he leads to his neighboring critical remarks about Satan. Satan’s evilness is fully bared in the comment. It can’t be repudiated that both the pro-Satanists and the anti-Satanists have their own biased and unilateral attitudes towards the comments of the Satan created by Milton, which manifests that they have been too sublime to view this figure from multi-dimensions. Based on this, in order to probe into this comprehensive figure, several critics contrive to analyze the image of Satan from different angles. They mention the inconsistency in the character of Satan in their works, but hardly do they profoundly probe into it. From a particular dimension, John Carey demonstrates that Satan is an ambivalent and plural figure, which manifests that it can’t be studied from one angle only. He makes it clear that “A more reasonable reaction is to recognize that the poem is insolubly ambivalent, insofar as the reading of Satan’s ‘character’ is concerned, and that this ambivalence is a precondition of the poem’s success—a major factor in the attention it has roused.”11 He argues that the views trying to prove that Milton really means Satan to be essentially evil, or essentially heroic, would destroy much of the poem’s power and interest. Carey argues that Milton never try to portray Satan as an essentially evil or hero, which will ruin a lot of the epic’s interest and fascination. Therefore, to answer such question as “the relation of Satan to Milton’s intentions”, Carey has to say “such questions are all completely unanswerable because we have no access to Milton’s mind, let alone his subconscious, at the time of writing.”12

All in all, it is unreasonable to analyze the image of Satan from one single perspective only. As is expounded before, John Milton is not just a poet. He is a brave revolutionary and pious Christian as well, which manifests that the background of the times exerts a great influence on Milton’s thoughts. Hence, it is impossible to get the comprehensive image of Satan unless we combine it with other factors like social elements and historic backgrounds.

On the basis of the discussions above, the critical theory of New Historicism can be used in analyzing the image of Satan. New Historicism is a literary theory that emerged in the late 20th century, emphasizing the interconnectedness of literature and its historical context. It challenges traditional approaches to history and focuses on the complex relationship between power, politics, and culture. New Historicism views literary works as products of historical and cultural forces, rather than isolated artistic creations. By studying the historical and cultural background, it offers a comprehensive understanding of literature. One of the main advantages of New Historicism is its ability to go beyond orthodox historical narratives and give voice to marginalized groups and non-traditional perspectives. It highlights the significance of power structures, social classes, gender, race, and cultural differences in literary works. Furthermore, New Historicism provides a critical analysis framework, allowing for a deeper understanding of the meaning, values, and social commentaries within literary texts. Therefore, in this thesis, both the paradise lost and the image of Satan should not be taken out of the historical backgrounds.

The thesis is mainly divided into three chapters:

In Chapter One, this chapter focuses on the image of Satan viewed as a hero who shares the same gallant value with Milton. Milton spent a lifetime full of frustration. However, his indomitable and unbent revolutionary spirit inspired him to a large degree. When describing Satan, it is natural for Milton to pour out his own spirit into the image who, as himself, indomitably resists against injustice and might, yearning for his own freedom. Hence, Satan is a hero found in Milton’s life experience, who can be seen as hero shadowed in the English Revolution. Undoubtedly, the rebellious spirit of Satan originates from Milton’s life experience.

In Chapter two, as is elucidated before, Satan is not consciously created by John Milton as the true valorous hero, which manifests that some of Satan’s so-called qualities have turned into his shortcomings, making Satan become the devil as the plots progress. Moreover, it needs to be pointed out that Milton is a pious Christian poet. That is to say, Milton is unlikely to portray Satan with positive writing attitude. The failure of the English Revolution increased his discontentment to the leaders of the revolution. And then Satan becomes the focus of Milton’s attack since he is the leader of this army as well.

Chapter three mainly focuses on the ambivalent image of Satan, showing the readers how the controversial image of Satan is created. The first two chapters have discussed the respective images of Satan viewed as the valorous hero and the devil. The image of Satan created by John Milton has caused pervasive arguments around the world. As is elucidated before, there exist the pro-Satanists and the

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anti-Satanists, both of whom have their own evidences to prove their ideas. However, it can be seen from the discussions above that the pro-Satanists and the anti-Satanists both possess the shortcomings of being too unilateral and biased to some extent, which manifests that the image of Satan should be seen more as a whole. Hence, this chapter discusses some of the typical images related to Satan to better analyze the comprehensiveness of this figure.

The conclusion is a general summary of the thesis, including some reflections for the whole analysis and some viable suggestions for future work in the study of John Milton's *Paradise Lost*.

2. Satan Viewed as a Hero

2.1 Languages of Satan Symbolizing Bravery

In this great epic, the impassioned speech made by Satan is pervasively advocated by readers, which is regarded as an unparalleled emblem of *Paradise Lost*. The language here is extremely powerful, symbolizing the firm determination of Satan. The valorous, recalcitrant spirit and ambition implicated in it have stimulated numerous people to put their faith on the intrepid hero Satan. The speech, which he makes in the first time when he awakens after the fall from the Heaven, not only musters up the courage of himself, but also convince many readers and scholars to view him as a true hero, such as the Romantic Satanists Shelley, Byron, Blake. The most influential and significant lines are as follows:

… What though the field be loft?  
All is not lost; th’ unconquerable will,  
And study of revenge, immortal hate,  
And courage never to submit or yield:  
And what is else not to be overcome; (PL Book I 106-09)\(^{13}\)

There is no denying that these lines are filled with passion and inspiration, which touch deeply into the soul of the readers, inspiring the readers to a large extent. The severe defeat from the Heaven has made Satan and his angel followers fall deep into the hell and suffer endless agony in the hell fire. They are going through the anguished suffering. On such severe occasions, Satan can still hold the firm belief and make such motivating speech, which has proved the unique heroic characteristics of Satan at that moment.

The words and phrases as “unconquerable will” and “courage never to submit or yield” are so strong and positive that most of the readers and critics would be inspired and motivated. It can be seen from these words that the perilous situation can’t hinder Satan from mustering up his own courage to stand up again. Based on such words of heroic tone and staunch determination, it is no wonder that the pro-Satanists praise Satan highly and indicate that Satan is a true hero in their mind.

For Satan, the falling is not tantamount to the true defeat. Instead, the true defeat is rejecting to muster up our courage again. Satan doesn’t choose to evade from his own defeat in the war. What he chooses indeed is to stand up and be prepared to counterattack as soon as he awakes. As he utilizes the languages:

That glory never shall his wrath or might  
Extort from me. To bow and sue for grace  
With supplicant knee, and deify his power,  
Who, from the terror of this arm fo late  
Doubted his empire; that were low indeed,  
That were an ignominy and flame beneath  
This downfall; (PL Book I 110-16)

It is the powerful and convincing languages that help Satan unite the angel-followers. Both the establishment of the heroic image and the consolidation of his leadership lie in his languages, which have manifested how strong and valorous Santa is. There is no denying that Satan does well in making speeches. He can seize all the subtle discrepancies of languages, fully using the positive function of them. After Satan and his army make the plan to go to destroy Eden to take revenge on God, none of the followers are brave enough to be the first one to do the task. It can’t be repudiated that Satan is the only one plucking up the courage and said:

But should ill become this throne, O Peers,  
And this imperial fav’ reignty, adorn’d  
With splendor, arm’d with power, if aught propos’d  
And judg’d of public moment in the shape  
Of difficulty or danger, could deter  
Me from attempting. Wherefore do I affume  
Thefe royalties, and not refuse to reign,  
Refusing to accept as great a flare  
Of hazard as of honour, due alike  
To him who reigns, and so much to his due  
Of hazard more as he above the reft  
High honour’d fits? (PL Book II 445-56)

This is how a great political orator works. Without doubt, Satan is a talented statesman. He is good at speaking political words to unite his followers, calling for the followers to work for him. His languages are filled with inspiration and bravery, which make people easily know that Satan is a courageous hero.

2.2 A Heroic Image Shadowed in English Revolution

Milton is not only a remarkable and talented English poet, but also a vehement revolutionary who is willing to devote himself into the revolution. Based on his particular identity, the strong passion of Milton for the English Revolution is another factor that is worthy of analyzing to better get the comprehensively portrayed heroic image of Satan.

After his return to England in 1639, Milton began to find out the true paradise. In *Milton and the English Revolution*, Christopher Hill illustrates that: “the early sixteen-forties were a formative period for English radical thinking, and for Milton.”\(^{14}\)

Milton had been determined to devote himself to his educational theories with enlightenment ideas if history didn’t get in his way. In April of 1640, Charles I sent away the Short


Parliament and stimulated a second expedition against Scots, while still suffering torturous defeat as well. Under such a severe circumstance, Charles was compelled to gather the Long Parliament. The topic of revolutionary suddenly turned into the central one at that period of time. Undoubtedly, Milton soon stepped into the current of revolution, which had been his ever-lasting dream. He was febrish that “the vigor of the Parliament had begun to humble the pride of the bishops”. 15 Hence, it is natural to find that the council held in Paradise Lost may have implicated the Long Parliament already. What comes with the Long Parliament is the old regime: the Earl of Strafford, the minion of Charles, was tried and executed.

All of these events had stimulated Milton to a large extent, making him firmer than ever. Milton wrote a sequence of booklets to emphasize the significance of freedom, to guard episcopacy and to elucidate his standpoints of the way in which the reformation should move forward. Moreover, the publication of Areopagitica in 1644 enrolled Milton steadfastly with the more liberal revolution of his times. Being a revolutionary full of patriotism, he guarded freedom and guided a tremendous republic toward its destiny in this pamphlet. In 1645, the New Model Army made the decisive victory, which inspired Milton with the bright future of the revolution. Hence, based on his confidence of the revolution, in Paradise Lost, he couldn’t control his feelings to present his spectacular words to the army led by Satan:

Ten thousand banners rise into the air,
With orient colors waving. With them rose
A forest huge of spears, and thronging helms
Appeared, and sereid shields in thick array
Of depth immeasurable. (PL Book I 545-49)

However, the revolution did not continuously develop as John Milton expected.

The execution of Charles on January 30, 1649 was a turning point in Milton’s personal career and urged him to hope in Paradise Lost for the happier Paradise within. Before long, he was appointed Secretary of State for Foreign Tongues.

In May, the English Revolution reached its climax—England was proclaimed a common wealth. Confronted with the danger of losing his sight, Milton still chose to write a number of pamphlets defending the regicide against Salmusius hired by Charles II. In Paradise Lost, the unyielding determination of Satan to overthrow the dictatorship rule of God reveals Milton’s fervent expectation to carry a deed as solemn as the English Revolution.

However, it was unfortunate that the British revolution didn’t come to success as John Milton expected, which manifests that the revolution had ultimately come to nothing. John Milton was soon apprehended and put into prison. However, it was his blindness that made him flee from the penalty of death. It can’t be repudiated that the revolution had indeed failed. Nevertheless, the anguished feelings of failing would not thwart the firm will of Milton: what he did was to adhere to his atelic epic Paradise Lost and put all his sentiments gotten from the revolution into this epic. For instance, In Satan’s speeches pouring out grievance, Milton subliminally mixes his emotion into:

“Is this the region, this the soil, the clime,”
Said then the lost Archangel, this the seat
That we must change for Heav’n? — this mournful gloom
For that celestial light? (PL Book I 424-45)

No matter how harsh the condition is, Milton would never surrender to reality. His pen was the weapon used to get through those harsh moments and helped him hold his ground, just as Satan calling on his troops who seemed to lose their will:

“Awake, arise, or be forever fall’n!” (PL Book I 330) Long is the way/ And hard,” Satan encourages his followers “that out of hell leads up to light”. (PL Book II 432-33) However, there is a saying that “everything has its pros and cons”. All of the marvelous qualities put forward are, from another thinking dimension, the hidden shortcomings of Satan.

Subsequently, the vehement speech given by Satan at the beginning of Book I had manifested the excessive self-glorification of Satan to a large extent. Hence, it can be seen from these that Milton had not consciously turned a devil into a truly fearless hero filled with leadership.

3. Satan Viewed as a Devil

3.1 The Rationally Negated Image of Satan

In light of the faith of John Milton, it has been expounded before that Milton would not portray the image of Satan as a positive one. Rationally speaking, it can be seen from some descriptions of this epic that the image of Satan is negated to some extent. For instance:

“O Father, what intends thy hand,” she cried.
Against thy only son? What fury, o son,
Possesses thee to bend that mortal dart
Against thy father’s head? (PL Book II.727-30)

It is a fragment taken from the Book II of Paradise Lost, which depicts the scene that on arriving the Hell-gate, Satan is scheduled to fight against the ferocious monster when a “snaky sorceress” (PL Book II 724) rushes between the two. Then there comes a more detailed description that: Satan having assembled his rebellious army, she sprang fully-grown from Satan’s head. The angels at first feared her, and named her Sin; but Satan, finding her attractive, mated with her. Based on these descriptions, it can be ensured that the image of Satan created by Milton in this part standing at the opposite direction of morality and abstinence.

At this time, Satan no more represents the image of hero who is strong and fearless enough to direct the whole army into victory.

On the contrary, in order to make the readers realize his dissatisfaction of Satan, Milton depicts those vicious, sordid, oppressive and disgusted images. There is no denying that Milton’s firm faith to the God and Protestantism make the rationally negated image of Satan.

In accordance with the New Historicism, the interpretation of literature works has a strong correlation with the cultural background hidden behind it. That is to say, the religious element of John Milton exerts the most significant and profound influence.

In fact, the process of comprehending Milton and the image of Satan lies in figuring out the Christian doctrine and Puritanism, which influence the life of Milton and his creative career to a large extent.

Paradise Lost is the product of the Revolution of 1641 plus the Restoration of 1660 as well. During this period of time, the mood of Milton had converted from being sanguine of the Civil War to desperation. Undoubtedly, all of those upheavals would affect Milton to a large degree, which indicated that as the Revolution progressed, the ambivalent attitude of Milton toward those revolutionary leaders were incessant. In the 1640s, he contrived to fight against the Presbyterians, conveying his hidden dissatisfaction with the Independents led by Cromwell. On the basis of the classical historical background put forward, the discontentment with the revolutionary leaders gave Milton no chance to stand at the side of Satan.

The same idea has been put forward by C.S. Lewis in A Preface to Paradise Lost: “From hero to general, from general to politician, from politician to secret service agent, and thence to a thing that peers in at bedroom or bathroom windows, and thence to a toad, and finally to a snake—such is the progress of Satan.”16 The descriptions of Satan related to those filthy and greedy help us make more rational and comprehensive comments on the image of Satan.

3.2 The Devil Image of Satan related to the Religious Belief of Milton

The duties of the religious mainly lie in continuously being assiduous, abstinent and industrious. There is a ubiquitously spread saying that “God helps those who helped themselves.” As a member of the middle-class Puritan, the identity of God appeared to be a better spiritual sustenance for Milton at any stages of his life. Conveying his faith to God had far exceeded any other social obligations, which manifested the pious spiritual world of Milton. As E. M. Tiflyard puts it: a churchman half his life.”17 Milton is basically a Christian poet.

In Paradise Lost, as hard as Satan contrives to win this battle, he still completely failed. It is no exaggeration to say that the end of Satan has been consciously made by Milton. And the reason is that the great epic is written on the basis of the Bible, thus making the whole epic created with its value system centering on that of the Bible. There exists a plot that when sin and death move earthwards and Satan goes back to hell to announce his good news, he finds Hell a strange sight, with the gate wide and unguarded, the outskirts deserted. In this plot, Milton has consciously implicated that the triumph of Satan is totally hallucinatory, which continues the following plots that Satan suddenly found out that all his followers change into serpents. Milton makes a contrast at this place:

So oft they fell
Into the same illusion, not as man
Whom they triumphed once lapsed. (PL Book X 570-72)

At any time, the religious belief is the first element emphasized by Milton when he is creating the image of Satan, which is tantamount to the most significant factor through the whole creating process. It is the faith of Milton that nothing can surmount good. And the distinction between right and wrong is completely transparent. The failure of the devil against God manifests his yielding to good.

The most significant reason for Satan rising in rebellion lies in his previous pursue for “liberty”. However, this pure motivation has transformed into the endless lust fighting for the so-called “Honor, dominion, glory, and renown” (PL Book VI 422). He no longer represents the hope for victory.

As he talks with his companion:

“To do aught good never will be our task,
But ever to do ill our sole delight,
As being the contrary to His high will
Whom we resist.” (PL Book 1 159-62)

Approaching Eden, he utters:

“So farewell hope and, with hope, farewell fear,
Farewell remorse! All good to me is lost.
Evil, be thou my good:” (PL Book IV 108-10)

It can be seen from these statements that Satan has completely abnegated those good qualities. In fact, the blasphemy of Satan against God has been seriously contrary to the puritan identity of Milton. Hence, reasonably, Milton could no longer advocate the image of Satan. The image of Satan as is created into a greedy, selfish, and evil one.

All in all, the firm religious belief of Milton as a Puritan exerts a great influence on his establishment of the image of Satan. However, Milton holds the idea that even those reasonable behaviors are malicious if it is not in accordance with the will of God.

In spite of all the good qualities shown by Satan, he is regarded as the symbol of devil since he doesn’t follow the will of God, which is unbearable from the perspective of religion. It is Milton’s contention that the real freedom would be obtained only by following the will and order of God.

4. Satan Viewed as an Ambivalent Image

4.1 Other Images Related to the Ambivalence of Satan

In Paradise Lost, there exist some other typical images which have strong correlations with the image of Satan. Hence, the analysis of the ambivalent image of Satan lie in the analysis of other images related to it as well.


4.1.1 The Image of God

First of all, at the beginning of the Book III, when we first try to understand the speech given by God charily, it seems that we are faced with a tyrant. His tone sounds like a cranky and grumpy dictator whose mind is only filled with self-defensiveness:

.... They themselves decreed
Their own revolt, not I
They trespass, authors to themselves in all
Both what they judge and what they choose. (PL Book III 115-23)

Man shall not quite be lost, but saved who will,
Yet not of will in him, but grace in me
Freely vouchsafed.

Some I have chosen of peculiar grace,
Elect above the rest; so is my will.
The rest shall hear me call, and oft be warned
Their sinful state… (PL Book III 173-86)

The brutal behavior of the God toward Satan appears to be unreasonable. Indeed, it really troubles us to a large extent when we are contemplating the question that why God chooses to go to such sadistic torture just to show his mercy to us human beings. The lack of courage and love of the angels serves originally as a foil to the superiority of the Son, but the original weakness of the angle reminds us of the courage and resolution of Satan and the rebel angels. As for God’s speeches, the interpretations differ from each other. While some people take them as an egoist’s self-defensiveness, some others esteem it as the ways of God treating the men and the rebel angels. So it is reasonable that the controversies of the image of God shaped by Milton help him to strengthen the ambivalence of Satan. In fact, the image of God and the image of Satan complement with each other, which manifests that the two major characters successfully add the uncertainty and ambivalence into interpretation, increasing the artistry of the Paradise Lost. Indeed, the classic images of Adam and Eve reinforce the ambivalence of Satan as well. For instance, at the early pages in Book IV, when Satan takes a look at Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden for the first time, it is obvious that he is deeply attracted by them, while possessing the emotional tendency of falling in love with them. They are creature:

.... whom my thoughts pursue
With wonder, and could love, so lively shines
In them divine resemblance, and such grace
The hand that formed them on their shape hath poured. (PL Book IV 362-65)

Based on this episode, John Carey has made an incisive and detailed analysis of it:

Whereas pro-Satanists (Raleigh, Stoll, Hamilton) take his response to ‘divine resemblance’ to be sincere, anti-Satanists (Lewis, Musgrave) interpret his words as brutal irony. Since he is soliloquizing, irony is perhaps unlikely—but not completely impossible.

As usual, we can’t take the simple step of declaring one reading correct. But we can see that Satan gains fictional depth from the dubiety.18

4.1.2 The Image of Eve

There exists another analogical episode when Satan encounters Eve in Eden in Book IX. When Satan sees her, he is immediately attracted by such an extremely gorgeous person, which has made him become good at that moment. Her loveliness and the glorious radiance shining in her:

...overawed
His malice, and with rapine sweet bereaved
His fierines of the fierce intent it brought.
That space the Evil One abstracted stood
From his own evil, and for the time remained
Stupidly good, of emnity disarmed,
Of guile, of hate, of envy, of revenge. (PL Book IX 460-66)

It can be seen from this episode that the image of Eve has helped to prove the ambivalence of Satan again. That is to say, based on this episode, both the pro-Satanists and anti-Satanists can fetch the factors that are in line with their ideas. The original nature of Satan seems to incline to pursuing beauty and freedom just like Adam and Eve, which manifests that what the pro-Satanists said are reasonable to some extent. However, the violation of his true nature can be seen as the evidence of being greedy and immoral as well. Evidently, the analysis of the images of Adam and Eve has given more detailed proofs to better comprehend the comprehensive and ambivalent image of Satan. Moreover, both the image of God and the image of Eve manifest the idea that the image of Stan is not unilateral and it should be analyzed related with other images.

4.2 Complexity of Satan

As is elucidated by E. M. Tifflard in Studies in Milton, “it is surely the quality of Milton’s Satan that, like Macbeth, he inspires contrary feelings: the desire to approach and gaze because of his greatness, the desire to shrink and avoid because of his cruelty; the desire to approach and support because of his courage, the desire to flee because of the madness on which it is based.”19

In fact, if Milton hadn’t created such an ambivalent characteristic arousing so many conflicts, the Paradise Lost would not have become the classic anymore. With the constant development of the English Revolution, the conflict mainly comes from the continuously changing emotion of John Milton, thus making the comprehensive and complex image of Satan.

In Paradise Lost, the heroic Satan and the evil Satan stand as two different sides of one coin, which indicate that though the two disparate characters represent totally diverse images of Satan, both of them compose the ambivalent image of Satan and make it more comprehensive. That is to say, the most rational way of judging Satan is to comment this figure from

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different dimensions.

On the one hand, taking the revolutionary background into consideration, pro-Satanists have the capacity of combining the historical background in the New Historicism with the mood of Milton. However, they have neglected the religious background of the poem, which is significant to the analyzing process as well. Meanwhile, it is also unilateral of the anti-Satanists for only taking the religious factor into consideration, while totally overlooking the inner mood of Milton. Then there comes the question: who is the real hero in *Paradise Lost*? The real symbol of hero in Milton’s idea has gradually transformed with his life. During the Restoration, Milton suffered the fluctuating process of his political career. At that time, he was arrested and released with loss of his previous treasury reputation, which even put him into blind. The originally sublimated hope in his heart had been completely substituted by seeking out the true hero who might “embody the better fortitude” of patience and heroic martyrdom (PL Book IX 31-32). In *Paradise Lost*, the Son of God represents the image of a true hero, who is the aggregation of all good qualities and willing to contribute himself to the humankind. That is to say, the respect and praise of Milton have been put on the only true hero of this epic.

5. Conclusion

Drawing upon the theory of New Historicism, the three chapters thoroughly explore the ambivalent image of Satan from various perspectives, revealing the gradual transformation, or rather regression, of Satan’s character from Book I through Book X. Milton’s lifelong dedication to infusing his political ideas into *Paradise Lost* becomes evident, showcasing his unwavering pursuit of freedom in defiance of oppressive authorities.

Undeniably, John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* has masterfully crafted an ambivalent and multifaceted image of Satan, captivating readers and scholars alike, evoking a multitude of interpretations worldwide. Some perceive Satan as a courageous hero, while others condemn him as a covetous devil. However, it has been recognized that both perspectives possess the flaw of excessive one-sidedness, prompting an alternative interpretation that advocates for viewing all facets of Satan’s character as an integrated whole.

On the basis of the aforementioned interpretive approaches, this thesis probes into the portrayal of Satan in *Paradise Lost* from various perspectives. The integration of historical contexts and literary works presents a more dialectical and comprehensive approach to literary criticism. This not only enriches the historical foundations of the analysis but also significantly enhances the overall thesis’s credibility.

Indeed, although this thesis has been designed to enhance the accuracy and persuasiveness of the analysis, there are still several aspects that have not been addressed, such as Milton’s ambivalent attitude towards the degeneration of Adam and Eve and his characterization of the true Christian hero—the Son. It cannot be denied that further discussions on these topics will assist scholars in better analyzing the comprehensive image of Satan and the theme of *Paradise Lost*.

Works Cited


