

John Milton: A Study on Selected Poems

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ABSTRACT:

The study aims at analyzing the poetry of John Milton who is an important poet of sixteenth-century English literature. It explains the period in which the poet appeared, namely the age of the Renaissance in English literature. It also sheds light on his life and his writing which its importance can be found within. It focuses on his epic "Paradise Lost" as an example of his literary ability and creativity.

The study aims at shedding light on Milton's life and his great works and failures as a trial to what is going on in the mind of

...the mind of one of the most influential poets of the era. The study will explore how Milton's personal beliefs and the socio-political climate of the Renaissance influenced his writing, particularly in his portrayal of divine and human nature. By examining both his masterpieces and lesser-known works, the study will offer insights into the complexities of Milton's thoughts and the enduring impact of his poetry on English literature.

Keywords: The age of Milton. Paradise lost. Renaissance. Poetry. Drama.

I. INTRODUCTION :

The focus of this study is on two major poems by John Milton: Paradise Lost and The Passion. The aim of the study is to examine each poem and understand its significance in Milton's works. Milton's writing period, from 1620 to 1674, was a significant turning point in English history. The conflicts that had been brewing for decades in the economy and other areas, often beyond the conscious intentions of their protagonists, came to a head in the Revolution of 1640. Although much of what was radical in that war was lost in the hesitations of the interregnum and the reaction of the Revolution, the transformation that had taken place proved to be irrevocable. Changes were confirmed and substantiated in 1688, and as a result, the world of the late seventeenth century was in many ways recognizably modern (Terry, Eaglet, 1988:10).

1. The Renaissance in English (1500-1600):

During the 14th century, there was an intellectual movement that came to be known as the Renaissance. This movement focused on classical learning and philosophy. The Renaissance in English history can be divided into three main sections: the rising of the Renaissance under the early monarchs (1500-1600), the rise of the Renaissance under Elizabeth I (1558-1603), and the refusal of the Renaissance under the Stuart monarchs (1603-1649). John Milton, one of the most prominent English poets and the greatest of the Puritan poets, lived during the last period of the Renaissance. In 1649, he was appointed as the Latin secretary to the newly created Commission of Foreign Affairs.

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3. John Milton's Life (1608- 1674) :

John Milton was born and raised in London. His father was a well-to-do scrivener who was also involved in real estate. Despite being sent to school to learn a trade, Milton displayed an exceptional skill for learning and by 1625 he had already mastered Greek, Latin, and several modern European languages. He went on to receive his B.A and M.A from Christ College, Cambridge. After completing his studies, Milton refused to join the church and instead spent the next five years reading extensively and traveling through Europe. By 1640, he was already known for his poetry, particularly for his masque, *Comus*, and elegy, *Lycidas*. However, Milton dedicated himself to the "pamphlet wars" and set up residence in London where he focused on his writing and tutoring his two nephews and several other boys. During this time, Milton seriously considered writing an epic poem but struggled to find a suitable subject. In 1642, he married Mary Powell who died in childbirth in 1652, leaving him with three daughters. Despite being warned that he would lose his sight if he continued with his close work, Milton continued writing and eventually became completely blind in 1651. In 1656, Milton married his second wife, Katherine Woodcock, who died in childbirth in 1658. No longer involved in politics, Milton was finally free to write the epic poem he had been considering for so long - *Paradise Lost*.

4. On His Blindness :

“When I consider how my light
Ere half my days in this dark world and wide
And that one talent which is death to hide
Lodged with me useless.through my soul mere do it
To serve there with my Maker, and present
My true account, last he returning chide”.
“Doth God exact day-labor, light denied?”
“I fondly ask. But patience, to prevent
That murmur”, soon replies “God doth not need
Either man's work or his own gifts.who best
Bear his mild yoke, they serve his best. His state

Is Kingly: thousands at his bidding speed.
And post Over land ocean without rest
They also serve who only stand wait''.

5. Milton's Paradise Lost:

It is fascinating how Paradise Lost by Milton is an epic poem that narrates events on a grand scale, with its setting spanning across the entire universe. The major figures in the poem are God, his son Adam and Eve, and Satan. The fall of man, as told in the biblical story of Adam and Eve's temptation and their expulsion from paradise, is the central theme of the poem. Milton started writing the poem in 1660 and completed it in 1663, and due to his blindness, he dictated it to his three daughters, who served as secretaries. The poem was first published in 1667, and a shorter sequel called Paradise Regained was published in 1671. According to Buckler, Paradise Lost is Milton's supreme creation that attempts to justify the ways of God to men. It is a large-scale expression of Western civilization, just like Homer's Iliad, the biblical psalms, Vergil's Aeneid, and Dante's Divine Comedy.

"Of manes first disobedience, and fruit
Of that forbidden tree whose natural taste
Brought death into the world, and all our woe,
With loss if Eden, till one greater man
Restore us, and regain the blissful seat,
Sing, Heaved muse, that no the secret top".

disobedience, and loss thereupon of paradise (Frye,1951:5). Hierarchy is evenmore pronounced in Paradise. Adam and Eve are not even equal to one another, while, in relation to the other created things, they are like the lords of all. The reason of their one restraint, the arbitrarily forbidden tree, is to show that they agree their place in a hierarchic order dominated by God. The divine prohibition is

In John Frye's book, "The Anatomy of Criticism," he discusses how hierarchy plays a crucial role in the story of Adam and Eve's disobedience and subsequent loss of paradise. The hierarchy is particularly evident in the way that Adam and Eve are not even equal to each other, yet they are considered like lords in relation to the other created beings. The reason for their one restraint, the forbidden tree, is to demonstrate that they recognize their place in a hierarchy that is dominated by God. The divine prohibition serves as

“The only sign of our obedience left
Among so many signs of power and rule
Conferred upon us, and dominion given
Over all other creatures that possess
Earth, air, and sea” (Eaglet:39-40).

6. The Passion:

Twentieth-century Milton criticism is almost entirely focused on Milton's unfinished poem, "The Passion". In a note added to the poem's release in 1645, Milton himself stated that he was not satisfied with what he had begun and left it unfinished. Critics have since debated the reasons for the poem's failure. Some believe that Milton did not fully realize the conditions necessary for his poetic faculty to excel, while others argue that the poem fails due to a lack of a controlling idea. Despite the criticisms, some argue that "The Passion" may be a well-crafted artifact. The poem's meter and rhyme

scheme are similar to those of the introduction to the Nativity Ode, suggesting that the stanzas of "The Passion" may be a preamble to a larger work. While the failure to embody Christ's story may be a flaw in the poem's purpose, it may still serve as a successful prologue or invocation to the Ode. Ultimately, "The Passion" may be Milton's way of exploring the conditions necessary for inspiration to occur in poetry. The poem's persona may be an alter-ego for Milton, attempting and failing to enter a holy temper condition necessary for writing a successful poem.

7. Milton's Work :

It is fascinating to learn about the various branches of literature that John Milton excelled in. His contributions to both poetry and drama are particularly noteworthy, and I look forward to reading more about them in this chapter.

8. Milton as a Poet:

Milton was a poet who believed that his work, 'Paradise Lost', was directly inspired by the same spirit that inspired Moses. Moses was considered the archetypal poet and shepherd of the Israelites in the wilderness. In heaven, they sing the song of Moses, which celebrates the triumph of the Israelites over the Egyptians who were swallowed up by the Red Sea. Moses was also the author of the Pentateuch, which is the source of the creation epic, 'In the Beginning'. This phrase opens the book of Genesis, which tells the story of God creating the heavens and the earth. The same phrase also opens the Gospel, which prepares for the transcription by the New Testament of the relations between God and humanity.

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9. Milton as a Playwriter :

Drama is a form of literature intended to be performed by actors on stage, radio, or television. It is also commonly referred to as a play. Although Milton wrote a drama during the reign of Charles II, he never intended it to be performed. During his time, the theatre was not active, as noted in Burgess's work (op.cit:132).

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II. Conclusion:

Milton is a renowned poet known for his work on *Paradise Lost*, which is considered to be the greatest epic poem in the English language. His other works, *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonists*, also demonstrate his immense poetic talent, solidifying his position as one of the greatest English poets of all time. Milton was a firm advocate for the revocation of the Church of England and the execution of King Charles I. He held these beliefs from the start of the English Civil Wars in 1642 right up until the restoration of King Charles II in 1660. His political philosophy was grounded in the rejection of oppression and state-sanctioned religion, which is evident in all of his works. John Milton was the last great poet of the English Renaissance, and his work laid the foundation for the emerging aesthetic of the post-Renaissance era. He was also well-versed in Latin and modern Italian literature and was ambitious to write a poem in English that could be compared to Virgil's *Aeneid*. Although widely considered a failure by many scholars and critics, Milton's *Passion* poem has been criticized.

This study holds great value for those studying English literature because it provides a thorough critical analysis of three of John Milton's poems. Additionally, this study enriches the readers' knowledge by providing a wealth of information about the three poems being analyzed.

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