

The Character of Satan ^{IV}

The grandeur of the epic, Paradise Lost, may be said to depend to a very large extent on the character and achievements of Satan. Several critics assume that he is the hero of Paradise Lost, while others argue that Milton has portrayed himself with his pride and solitary grandeur in the figure of Satan. Milton's conception of this character certainly does not err on the side of consistency. Satan, the lover of liberty gradually loses his splendour and 'fascination', and degenerates into the mere seducer of mankind.

This conception and development of his character may be described as a process of degrading change. Great beauty, great intelligence, great emotions, great physical daring — all these are his in the beginning. "Pride and worse ambition" prompt him to rebel against ~~God~~ the goodness of God with the inevitable result. Supreme among angels, he is still discontented and aims higher. He preaches his gospel of power and liberty to a band of angels and with them braves the wrath of the Almighty. They are vanquished and cast into hell to suffer the bitterest torments. Neither defeat nor torture has, however, the power to curbe the heroism of their leader's soul. Satan continues undaunted, inspires a new courage and a new faith into his followers, and offers to reconnoitre the new-created world to investigate the possibility of settling there. The worst torments would not make him bow and sue for grace on suppliant knee. That would be low, indeed, an ignominy and shame beneath this downfall.

The grandeur of the foregoing picture is unfortunately short-lived. From Book IV of the epic, it is the story of Satan's ~~degeneration~~ degradation.