

The Psychology of Satan

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John Milton's Satan is a psychologically complex character. Satan has qualities which make him a brilliant leader, but which also cause him great pain. He is a militant ruler with powerful speeches, and a cunning deceiver with rich disguises. The actions Satan takes, however, cause him great anguish. It is through his soliloquies that Satan takes off his mask and reveals the troubled person he really is. John Milton in *Paradise Lost* portrays Satan as a proud, passionately manipulative, and complex character that endures an internal conflict from which he cannot escape.

Though Milton begins his masterpiece *in medias res*, we must start from the beginning with Satan as the angel Lucifer. Lucifer enjoys his high stature in Heaven, until the Son is anointed instead of him, and he becomes jealous. It is then that Lucifer draws emotionally away from God and Heaven. James Holley Hanford and James Taaffe show the results of this jealousy by commenting, "Following God's announcement of the Son's elevation, Satan initially defected from the angelic forces" (172). His defection is a result of being too proud of being a servant, which leads to anger and thus, his rebellion. Royland Frye points out the irony of Satan's refusal to become a slave in that Satan actually becomes a slave to his emotions. Frye says, "As a result of his choice, he becomes a slave to what would, psychologically, be called an 'ego-deal,' an identification of the self with an impossible image," (35).

Satan cannot escape his pride and refuses to repudiate it, so repentance is impossible (Frye 36). His fall from freedom is the arbitrary denial of his own potential. The narrator of *Paradise Lost* observes this pride in the following lines from Book 5 lines 665-666, "Through pride that sight, & thought himself impaired/ Deep malice thence conceiving and disdain." In his first soliloquy Satan addresses his pride himself. He admits, "How glorious once above thy Spheare;/ Till Pride and worse Ambition threw me down," he says (4. 39-40). Satan also admits that his rebellion was unjustified and that his denial of creation was a hoax. Furthermore, Satan acknowledges his lack of gratitude towards God when he says,

Forgetful what from him I still received,
And understood not that a grateful mind
By owing owes not, but still pays, at once
Indebted and discharged; what burden then? (4. 54-7).

Because of his pride, everything good to Satan has no meaning to him,

and he travels down an evil path. Destruction through his misery is the only thing he can achieve for himself, which he becomes a master of through his manipulative diction.

In speaking out against the “hierarchy in heaven,” and referring to God as a “tyrant,” Lucifer is very manipulative in the diction he uses, gathering over one third of the angels as followers. He says to them,

His equals, if in power and splendor less,
In freedom equal? Or can introduce
Law and Edict on us, who without law
Erre not, much less for this to be our Lord,
And look for adoration to th’ abuse
Of those Imperial Titles which assert
Our being ordain’d to govern, not to serve? (5. 795-802)

Lucifer uses the power of lies to influence the angles. Roland Frye agrees, saying, standing now as the antagonist of Creator and of creation, Satan operates through the perversion of truth and the invention of lies (28). Lucifer’s passionate speech is convincing though, and there is much rejoicing. The War in Heaven begins.

Immediately after being expelled from Heaven, Lucifer, now as the Prince of Devils, Satan, begins to plan for revenge. He consoles his fellow fallen angels in the lake of fire using passionate speech. He proclaims,

All is not lost; the unconquerable Will,
And courage never to submit or yield:
And what is else not to be overcome?
That Glory never shall his wrath or might
Extort from me. (1. 106-11)

Thomas Wheeler writes that Satan “gives hope and renewed life to his followers” (100). Through his speech, however, Satan also reveals his evil. Evil to Satan is his good. To do ill is his sole delight.

Not only does Satan use passionate speech to manipulate his devils, he also uses it to pursue Eve. Satan manipulates Eve to eat the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge by playing a mind game with her. He questions her why God would not want her to contain the knowledge that the fruit bestows. Satan assures her nothing bad will happen, as nothing bad has happened to him. He explains this to Eve by worshipping the Tree of Knowledge. He says,

I turned my thoughts, and with capacious mind
Considered all things visible in Heav’n,
Or Earth, or Middle, all things fair and good;
But all that fair and good in thy Divine

Semblance, and in thy Beauties heav'nly Ray
Until I beheld (9.603-608).

Satan's approach with Eve is specious and deceptive, but it is also moving and persuasive (Wheeler 108).

Along with his powerful speeches, Satan's disguises are also scheming. In his costumes, Satan's manipulations are at its best. Satan disguises himself as a toad to whisper "Phantasms and Dreams" in Eve's ear. When Eve awakes the next morning she recalls the dream to Adam, telling him that a bird told her to eat the fruit of knowledge. She reiterates Satan's manipulative diction when she tells Adam what the bird said to her, "And O fair Plant...with fruit surchard'd / Deigns none to easy they load and taste thy sweet, / Nor God, nor Man; is Knowledge so despis'd? / Or envie, or what reserve forbids to taste?"

Here, happie Creature, fair Angelic Eve,

Partake though also; happie though thou art,

Happier though mayst be, worthier canst not be:

Taste this, and be henceforth among the Gods

Thy self a Goddess, not to Earth confined...and see

What life the Gods live there, and such live thou (5. 74-78, 81).

This dream foreshadows what is to come.

In the final temptation of Eve, Satan disguises himself as a snake. He manipulates her with his flattery. He says, "Thy Celestial Beautie adore / With ravishment beheld, there best beheld / Where universally admir'd" (9.540-542). His compliments mesmerize Eve. With a courtly appeal, Satan leads her to accept a flattering view not only of himself as a serpent but, as Wheeler suggests, more importantly of herself as a goddess (168).

Disguised as a Cherub, Satan first sees the garden. In this disguise, however, Satan is not manipulative. He is remorseful, and his internal psychological conflict shows its presence for the first time. He is conflicted because he recognizes the perfection of the garden and its resemblance to Heaven. In his soliloquy, he laments, "O Earth, how like to Heav'n, if not preferr'd / More justly, Seat worthier of Gods, as built / With second thoughts, reforming what was old!" (9. 99-102). Loletta Kuby writes "what impresses Satan is the sensual beauty of Eden, its lavish fertility and perfumes of luxuriant vegetation. He sees eternal springtime, free from decay and from winter; as yet he has not recognized what would be called spirit" (185). Satan also realizes that he will never be able to enjoy the garden and that the garden in fact was created as a result of his Fall, which causes him more pain. Milton writes, "Each passion dimm'd his face/ Thrice chang'd with pale, ire, envie and despair,/ Which marrd his borrow'd visage, and betraid/ Him counterfeit" (4. 114-17). Because Satan cannot control his emotions, he cannot conceal himself and the Angel

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Uriel detects his presence. The passions of anger, envy, and despair caused Satan's face to grow pale, feelings that as Roy Flannigan notes, cherubs usually did not possess (444 n.31).

In another soliloquy, Satan reveals more of his pained consciousness when he admits his volatile pride. This speech is significant because for a brief moment, Satan is repentant. He knows he should ask for forgiveness, but he doesn't because he is too prideful. Satan also knows that he cannot run away from Hell, because he himself is hell. He says, "Which way I flie is Hell; my self am Hell" (4.75). Furthermore, he also knows that if he were to repent, his actions would only be repeated when he says,

But say I could repent and could obtaine
By Act of Grace my former state; how soon
Would highth recal high thoughts, how soon unsay
What feign'd submission swore; ease would recant
Vows made in pain, as violent and void (4. 93-7).

John Carey agrees, saying, "Satan explains that even if he could repent and get back to heaven...it would do him no good, since, once back there, he would grow proud again," (163).

Thus, the only way Satan can find relief from his internal anguish is through destruction and he continues forward with his plan of the destruction of Man. He says, "For onely in destroying I find ease / To my relentless thoughts: and him destroyed" (9. 129-30).

Upon seeing Adam and Eve for the first time, Satan is once again overcome with pain and sorrow. Satan cries because he recognizes God's image in them. He also knows that he could have loved them. He says,

Creatures of other mould, earth-born perhaps,
Not spirits, yet to heav'nly Spirits bright
Little inferior; whome my thoughts pursue
With wonder, and could love, so lively shines
In them Divine resemblance, and such grace
The hand that formed them on thir shape hath pourd (4. 360-65)

For a minute moment, as Satan watches Eve, he becomes good. "He feels a kind of terror at the sight of Eve's beauty, and he acknowledges that there is terror in both love and beauty" writes Arnold Stein (227). Satan forces himself to back away, and arms himself with hate to protect the part of his mind that is only relieved through destruction. He uses this hate to tempt Eve with manipulative words, causing the downfall of Man..

Satan is a glorious character. He is so because of his inspiring speeches and his conceivable disguises. Thus gifted, he is a great manipulator, as he

chooses to do wrong with his talents. Through his soliloquies, though, the “real” Satan presents itself. While lamenting, Satan’s conformity of his undeniable belligerent stature is now considered a hoax; for under that illustrious “act,” Satan is very psychologically conflicted. Expressed throughout his soliloquies, the only time when he talks alone, true emotion and human qualities are shown. Satan is first the archangel Lucifer, then the Prince of Devils, and finally, tempter in the Garden. No matter what form he takes, however, Satan cannot escape his internal anguish.

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