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The Paradise Lost - Adam as the logical Hero

John Milton is certainly one of the greatest English poets. His 'Paradise Lost' is a classical epic poem. It deals with the fall of man and the justification of God's ways to men. Critics have long debated as to who the true hero of the poem is. Blake, Shelley and Byron, who created the 'Salvance School' of Milton's criticism, contend that Satan is the true hero. But, a thorough study of the poem reveals that it is Adam, not Satan, who can be its hero. The character of Satan, no doubt, is one of the greatest creations in any language. He is a majestic figure surpassing the legendary Telam in might, whose rage is higher than that of sea-beast.

Leviathan whom God of all his works
Created largest that swim the ocean stream.

He is a brave hero who voluntarily takes the perilous journey through chaos into enemy territory. He is a military genius who arouses his defeated forces from lethargy with his clarion call.

"Awake, arise, or be forever fall'n"

But, as the poem proceeds, his character gradually diminishes from grandeur and magnificence to baseness and final degradation. Besides, he is not a human being, so it is difficult to imagine his circumstances and psychology. Moreover, he is not related to us as intimately as Adam and Eve are. In any case, it is obvious that Milton cannot choose Satan as his protagonist for his fall occurs before the poem begins.

Structurally, there is no doubt that Adam is the hero of the poem. This is made abundantly clear by Milton himself in the Prologue. In conformity to the classical tradition, he announces the hero and the subject of the poem. He clearly

declares what he is going to bring about
of man's first disobedience, and the fruit
of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste
brought death into the world, and all our woe
with loss of Eden, till one greater man
Restore us, and regain the blissful seat

It is about man and his fall that Milton
is going to bring about. It is not ^{about} Satan who
is not even mentioned in the whole Prologue.
The critics, really, should have taken Milton's
word for it.

Even a casual reading of the poem cannot
impress upon us that it is not entirely cen-
tered on man and his fall. The act of disobedience
on the part of our original parents is the
centre theme of the poem. The following lines,
describing this central action, form the climax.

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'Her rash hand in evil hour
Forth reaching to the fruit, she plucked, she
Earth felt the wound, and Nature
cal from her seat

Sighing through all her works gave sigh of woe
That all was lost.'

These lines form the axis around which the
whole poem revolves. All other events are
but preludes or postludes to this central
action.

A closer examination of the plan of the
Paradise Lost makes this point still clearer.
In Book I and II, where Satan resolves to
bring about the down fall of Man, is not
more than a prologue to the main action.
The 'flash backs' in Books V-VIII are also in the
same position, related to the whole epic.
Raphael's stories are designed to prepare Adam
for the coming crisis, while Adam's replies

are, in various ways, ominous of his impending fall.

Book ix is the centre of gravity of the whole poem. It is highly dramatic and a psychological masterpiece. Book x continues the story of the fall and begins the movement back to hope. Books xi and xii have been disliked by many critics, but they are structurally necessary to the Christian scheme of the poem. Here, we return to the pathos and beauty of the fallen man and woman.

Thus, the scheme of the Paradise Lost largely centres on man and his fall. Milton leaves us in no doubt as to who he intends to be his hero. Those who contend that Satan is the hero of the poem, should account the gradual displacement of Satan from the centre of action to his complete disappearance from the poem in Book x.

The moral struggles, successful or unsuccessful, of man are Milton's themes in all his major poems like Paradise Lost, Paradise Regained and Samson Agonistes. In all these poems, the hero is outwardly inactive. The wrestling is not with flesh and blood, but with the spirit of neckedness on the inner recesses of the mind. In this Milton is in the long tradition of psychological drama, like the Shakespeares of Hamlet and Macbeth.

The rejection of military exploits as an epic subject is made explicit when Milton declares that he considers

"..... the better fortitude
of patience and heroic martyrdom."
as the true quality of an epic hero.

Now, it is clear why Adam does not

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Such a romantic career of noble bravery and perilous adventures. He is ever a man as he recognises his own weakness and accepts his responsibility and faces life with true courage. His battles are within him as is fitting for the hero of a great religious epic.

Thus, we conclude that Adam is the true hero of the Paradise Lost.

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