

## MILTON'S CONCEPTION OF «PARADISE LOST»

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The article dwells upon the permanent antagonism between spiritual and materialistic values within the individual and presents the major aspects of Milton's axiological ethics. The conclusions are drawn pertaining to the poet's philosophical inclinations and recommendations which continue to have value for the world literary heritage and mankind in general.

**Key words:** fall; individual; integrity; Milton.

## КОНЦЕПЦИЯ «ПОТЕРЯННОГО РАЯ» МИЛЬТОНА

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В статье, на примере постоянного конфликта между духовными и материальными ценностями внутри индивидуума, рассматриваются основные аспекты аксиологической этики Мильтона и делаются выводы, касающиеся философских убеждений и рекомендаций поэта, продолжающих представлять ценность для мировой литературы и общества в целом.

**Ключевые слова:** грехопадение; индивид; Мильтон; честность.

John Milton, who was born in 1608, from his earliest life seemed to have been selected for a special destiny, i.e., highly gifted, of uncertain disposition, but of tremendous intensity of dedication, he is remembered as one of the most significant literary figures in the history of Europe. He also had the principal distinction of being one of the few men of letters of his time who chose to write in English. This in itself was an interesting phenomenon because somewhat fifteen years before the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, English was, basically, an impossible dialect, viz., it was slightly better than the pure Chaucerian which almost no one could comprehend. And, yet, twenty-five years after that, we have one of the greatest examples of English literature ever accomplished, i.e., the King James Bible, a masterpiece, resulting from a tremendous upheaval in thinking, in style, and in education that occurred in those years.

Apart from being a classical poet, Milton has also been remembered as one of the greatest pamphleteers who ever annoyed government, but by the time he was through with his political career, John Milton went completely blind. This had very little effect

upon his career, viz., having been liberated from his political involvements, he turned his attention to the cultivation of a great religious epic, *Paradise Lost*, and *Paradise Regained*, which he hoped would have a lasting effect upon human society.

*Paradise Lost* was practically a summary of the opening chapters of Genesis. It was based entirely upon the Protestant interpretation of the early parts of the Old Testament. There were certain additions, however, which arose from Milton's basic scholarship. He was well aware of the ancient legends of the Jewish people, he was conversant with Greek and Roman antiquities, theology, and theogony, and he was more or less aware of the contemporary thinking of scholars of his own time.

Milton used the medium of poetry in the presentation of his work which was, of course, also, the popular medium of nearly all of the early literary figures of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. He was in the same group as the earlier Greek poets. There was something about his work that showed that he was well versed in the *Odyssey* and *Iliad* of Homer. Milton was like many of the later men like Dryden, who made a poetic translation of the *Aeneid* of Virgil, and, of course, Dante, whose *Divine Comedy* was written in verse. The great epics of that time were nearly always in poetic form. There was a tremendous vocabulary involved in this procedure and it is amazing that any person unable to see would be able to continue to call upon the internal resources of his mind sufficiently to be able to dictate (Milton dictated the whole poem to his daughters) these very complicated expressions with the most involved use of unusual English terms.

*Paradise Lost* gained so much popularity that between the years 1700 and 1800 there were over a hundred editions, whereas at the same time there were only a dozen editions of Shakespeare. In those days, Milton's poem had a very wide circulation because it touched into the religious life of the people very intimately. It was almost like reading the Bible, and to many people John Milton became another prophet.

The Old Testament has to do with that part of the life of our ancestors from the creation of the world to the flood of Noah, and this was the area upon which Milton prepared and wrote his *Paradise Lost*. The second part, *Paradise Regained*, was based upon the New Testament where Milton built the entire theme around the saving power of Christ. The main message of *Paradise Lost* can be best summarized in the words of the poet himself:

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 ... [1, p. 1].

It also appears that Milton had certain attitudes about life which were completely related to the early Protestant movements in England, and this had to do with the problem of original sin. The later became a very important factor in Milton's thinking, not because it satisfied him entirely, but because it was the only approach that was at

that time acceptable to the 17<sup>th</sup> century religious thinking. There was no way of trying to solve the great problem which is summed up in the words of Buddha, namely: «If God cannot prevent evil, he is not God; and if he can prevent it and does not prevent it, he is not good».; Consequently, the problem was to solve this dilemma, and this became the basic background of Milton's theology, i.e., to try to determine and understand the problem of original sin. Milton, of course, approached it in the terms of his own day, but in so doing, he has also left to us a number of speculations which were inserted with certain variations upon the biblical theme. And in the study of these specializations, we get a glimpse of Milton's philosophy which, perhaps, has considerable current value for us today.

According to Milton, this perverseness in human nature which resulted in the fall of man was the direct result of the interference of Satan in the descent of the human family. Milton, however, seems to represent that this perverseness in human nature is, in some way, inherent, not necessarily because of the sins of our remote progenitors, but because of certain continuing complications in our own natures. In other words, most individuals, throughout time that we have record of, have fought a struggle within themselves, and, in order to achieve some form of integrity, each individual has had to overcome himself in one way or another, because the self (according to Milton) is composed of a combination of spiritual values and material pressures. In other words, the individual would do right, but evil is ever nigh unto him.

Milton accepts the general theory that this evil originates in the beginning of the race, but he also broadens his foundations by making Adam and Eve become symbolical of a collective humanity. Milton came to believe that the individual was given, in some mysterious way, the power of personal choice. If man has no choice, then he can have no virtue because virtue must be a decision. And if there is no possibility of a decision, then there can be no choice. Many of the mystics have assumed that this is the factor that separates man from the angels. The angels, not having any power of limited individualism, obey the law of heaven, but man has to choose to obey. And this choice of obedience is, in some significant way, essential to the person's growth and development. Perhaps, this can be brought down to the level of family life today, i.e., children grow up under the protection of their parents, but at a certain time they break away from their parental influence. In the Bible, the way Milton understood it, this breaking away from parental guidance, more or less, represents the fall. The individual becomes responsible for himself, he must make his own decisions and choose his own integrities, he must dedicate his life to the unfoldment of his own resources, and he is given the privilege of being right. This is a very important point in the whole thing, and Milton brings this out in *Paradise lost* when the time comes for Adam and Eve to be sent away from the Garden of Eden which represents childhood and parental control. Now, in the case of Adam and Eve in the allegory, they are sent out into a world in which they have the right to bear their own integrities and must face life. In a strange way, when they are cast out of Eden, it means that they have reached the age of adulthood and, suddenly, they are individuals.

So, apparently, the reason why the individual is forced upon his own resources is because his compound nature, which he has gradually evolved over millions of years, has brought him into a complex situation within himself. He is composed now of a moral nature and an ambition. He is a pessimist and an optimist. He is healthy and he is sick. He is successful and he is unsuccessful. All of these things are due primarily to his own equipment, to the subjective forces of his own life. Gradually, it is crucial that man shall become greater than the angels, and this is only possible by virtue. In childhood, he is innocent, in adulthood, he must be virtuous. This, probably, represents the wisdom of the guiding power, i.e., we no longer need to think of God as either unable to control evil or unwilling to. It is no longer this at all. It is the problem of a conscientious parent determined to lead its child into maturity, to make the child a complete person, to make the child capable of becoming the foundation of the future, so that humanity can establish a dynasty of growth and progress which will continue until ultimate perfection is attained.

The process by which the individual accomplishes this is one aspect of evolution, for evolution is not only the growth of forms through natural selection, it is also the unfoldment of potentials from within the person. Many mystics of ancient times were convinced that the spirit of negation in man is the demon and that the fall of man is the fall of the human being away from his own integrities through inexperience and immaturity. Every individual makes mistakes. Every mistake is a fall. Most people who are thoughtful learn something from their mistakes, and this is an ascent.

The whole story of *Paradise lost* is man compromising his own integrities for the justification and satisfaction of his ambitions and appetites. As long as this continues, we are going to have exactly the same thing. Milton's *Paradise Lost* is verily the story of what we did wrong, and *Paradise Regained* is what we must do to repair the mistakes which we have made.

## References

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