

Jakub Jenč, *The Depiction of the Anti-Hero in Milton's Paradise Lost*

BA thesis

Supervisor's Report

The thesis attempts to examine a clearly defined problem: what makes Milton's Satan so attractive for the readers of *Paradise Lost* that some of them, such as Blake, could conclude that Satan was the true hero of this heroic epic? Or, more accurately, why is Satan given more compelling, exciting passages in the poem than God?

Jakub Jenč treats his topic in three chapters, the first dealing with Satan's relation to the heroes of classical epics (i.e. the epics of antiquity but also the narratives of the Scripture), the second discussing the Satanic rhetoric and the third portraying Satan with some psychological insight as a tragic mind coping with the "tyranny of Heaven." As he poignantly concludes, these three views correspond with the three historical conceptions of Satan, the Romantic, the "academic" and the Miltonian (i.e. autobiographic).

I consider Chapters Two and Three especially to be an interesting contribution to the topic. The student's analysis of the diabolic eloquence, ranking Satan among glib politicians, underscores the role of public spoken language as one of the dominant constituents of our social identity; this accent is then implicitly contrasted with the private, introspective language analysed in the following part. It is obvious that these are the two fundamental images of Satan by which not only the first human beings but also readers are seduced. Unfortunately, the way Chapter One is presented is much less convincing. The motif of weaponry, ironically ineffective in the hands of the diabolic hosts, is of course an important example of the subversion of classical heroic tropes in *Paradise Lost*, but I feel that the question of classical heroism deserves more detailed study. It is necessary to identify other basic tropes defining classical heroes and see in what way Milton deploys them. The short subchapter confronting Satan and Odysseus (Ulysses) is then particularly disappointing, referring only to Barbara Lewalski's critical ideas in the briefest possible manner. How should we understand Satan's journey to be "a complete mini-*Odyssey*"? Does the fact that Satan is crafty in his speeches and sometimes even a liar link him unquestioningly with Ulysses? Such contentions, if not supported by more subtle reading, sound very superficial. And one minor remark to the arguments of the Conclusion: it would be more productive, in my view, to see Satan not as a projection of Milton's own dilemmas but as a general situation of the critical mind confronted with authority, be it just or unjust.

Among the few linguistic errors scattered in the thesis' text I would mention "strived" instead of "strove" as perhaps the most serious one.

To conclude, I regard Jakub Jenč's thesis as a successful attempt to answer the questions the student asks in the introductory part, with reservations concerning Chapter One. The thesis can be recommended for defence, with a preliminary grade to be a "velmi dobrá".

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