

SATAN AND BEELZEBUB IN PARADISE LOST BOOK 1

In Paradise Lost, Book-I, Satan and Beelzebub, as having leading roles in launching war against God, have been interpreted and written about by John Milton in a very distinct and complex way. Especially the way he depicted Satan, the Fallen Angel, has long been debated. However, this very way and uniqueness in interpreting such magnificent subject made Milton even more popular. Of this uniqueness and distinction, the depictions and meanings Milton puts into characters of Satan and Beelzebub are the one that leads controversies and makes Milton a great poet. In regard of this, it seems necessary at the outset to state that the characteristics of both Satan and Beelzebub in Paradise Lost changes according to the new conditions Milton puts them in later books of his epic. It is considered that Satan in first two books are depicted and characterized as a heroic, brave and having utmost self-confidence while he gets into a more desperate and miserable character in Book IV. Moreover, such distinction appears on different levels. As Arnold Stein states, ‘‘the main difference between the Satan of the first two books and the later Satan is the difference between a leader making a public appearance and a leader on a solitary mission’’. In Book-I, however, it is Satan’s conversation with Beelzebub which reveals the contours of his apparent heroic grandeur.

In the first book of Paradise Lost, Satan is characterized in his soliloquy as very brave and heroic. However, Satan is brave when it comes to physical action though he has been informed that he is no longer superior and strong after his war against God. However, Satan continues to believe that he is so strong, superior and brave. As can be seen in the soliloquy, he does not care about the consequences of his future actions:

*‘‘What matter where, if I be still the same
And what I should be, all but less than hee
Whom Thunder hath made greater? Here at least
We shall be free; th’ Almighty hath not built
Here for his envy, will not drive us hence:
Here we may reign secure, and in my choyce
To reign is worth ambition though in Hell:
Better to reign in Hell, then serve in Heav’n.*

Satan still aspires to get back to heaven and defeat God in the battleground so that he could be the king of Heaven. He is ambitious and has the utmost self-confidence. He has nothing to fear since he is now known as the cruel and betrayer. He is so desperate to start his evil actions no matter what happens. Satan also knows that his scheme will go far enough:

*“To do ought good never will be our task,
But ever to do ill our sole delight,”*

Additionally, on the same purpose, Satan asserts:

*“Our labour must be to pervert that end,
And out of good still to find means of evil;”*

Of Milton’s depictions of Satan, one may consider again the feeling of heroism, hugeness, strength. Though he is chained in the lake, Satan as a fallen angel is portrayed just like a freedom fighter that has just warred against the tyranny and oppression.

*“Prone on the Flood, extended long and large
Lay floating many a rood, in bulk as huge
As whom the Fables name of monstrous size,
Titanian, Or Earth-Born, that warr’d on Jove,”*

Correspondingly, Satan becomes ambitious again and again and avers his future actions in his soliloquy that God’s kingdom has been shaken by his attack and starts to think of what future may come for him;

*“All is not lost; the unconquerable will,
And study of revenge, immortal hate,
And courage never to submit or yield”*

Satan here basically becomes hopeful and shows his utmost persistence and self-confidence, believing that he has an unconquerable will that will never lead his submission to God. This will can be connected to the idea of seeing Satan as again a freedom fighter whose will are being attempted to be broken by God.

Beelzebub, as being the lieutenant in Satan’s war, makes conversations with Satan on the previous war and the future actions. After his leader’s commitment on the continuity of warring against God, he slightly differs from Satan and becomes a more reasonable character. Whereas Satan is fearlessly wants to attack God, even though he will use more subtlety this time, Beelzebub isn't quite as eager to do so. Moreover, Beelzebub realizes that the mind and the spirit have returned and indeed "remain invincible":

*'As far as gods and heav'nly essences
Can perish: for the mind and spirit remains
Invincible, and vigor soon return'' (Milton 1975:12)*

In this regard, Beelzebub seems to be more psychologically tormented than Satan or, more accurately "realistic" in his assessment of things. He now confesses that God is, in fact, the "Almighty" because;

*'Of force believe almighty, since no less
Than such could have o'erpow'ered such force as ours'' (Milton 1975:13)*

Despite the fact that Satan sees God as an irrational, angry tyrant, Beelzebub is willing to recognize God as the Almighty, who has just won a battle.

*"But what if he our Conqueror....
Have left us this our spirit and strength entire
Strongly to suffer and support our pains,
That we may so suffice his vengeful ire,
Or do him mightier service as his thralls
By right of War, whate'er his business be
Here in the heart of Hell to work in Fire,
Or do his Errands in the gloomy Deep.." (Milton 1975:12)*

Beelzebub here puts forward his distinction from Satan, that he and Satan and the defeated angels are nothing more than God's thralls.

*"What can it then avail though yet we feel
Strength undiminisht, or eternal being
To undergo eternal punishment?" (Milton 1975:13)*

Beelzebub here thinks differently from Satan who considered that their being of sound mind and strength is an advantage to them, eventually leading them to glory. Beelzebub says, through this rhetorical question, that it is of no advantage to have the strength undiminished, since God can use the strength any way God likes.

After Beelzebub's proposal to reach newly created Earth and human beings, Satan finally decides to listen to the reasonable and rational Beelzebub with the council's agreement. Having accepted the proposal, Satan steps forward to reach Earth and deceive mankind. Beelzebub's rational proposal indicates his rationality as well as the contradiction he experiences on either completely trusting Satan's leadership or begging for forgiveness from the Almighty. Beelzebub, however, does not expose such dilemma but puts forward a rational

proposal as was expected of him. This clarifies the counselling role of Beelzebub along with an ambitious Satan.

It is only later in the text, especially in *Paradise Lost* Book-4, that Satan reveals the true depths of his self-deception. This evidently puts his relationship with Beelzebub in new light. In Satan and Beelzebub, Milton had portrayed two important ingredients of Renaissance Self-fashioning, popular in the humanist and court-circles. While Satan comes across as a man of rhetoric and courtly flourish, Beelzebub represents the rationality of a natural philosopher. Yet, Milton's text is a criticism of this celebration of human speech and intellect. Satan's rhetorical flourish and his humanist pretensions hide his own self-deceptions about God's Providential sway. On the other hand, Beelzebub's scheming and frank rationality is offset by his slavish dependence on Satan and his self-deceiving flattery of Satan's pretensions. Thus, though the Satan-Beelzebub exchange in *Paradise Lost*, Book-I, Milton scathingly exposed the unseemly, darker aspects of Renaissance court and academic culture.