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Revisiting John Milton: A Thematic Exploration of Selected Poems

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A B S T R A C T

The study aims at analyzing the poetry of John Milton who is an important poet of the sixteenth century English literature. It explains the period in which the poet appeared, namely the age of Renaissance in English literature. It also sheds light on his life, and his writing which its importance can be found within. It focuses on his epic "Paradise Lost" as an example of his literary ability in creativity.

The study aims at shedding light on Milton's life and his great works and failure ones as a trial to what is going on in the mind of a famous English poet like John Milton.

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مراجعة جون ميلتون: استكشاف موضوعي لقصائد مختارة

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الخلاصة:

تهدف الدراسة إلى تحليل شعر جون ميلتون وهو شاعر مهم في الأدب الإنجليزي في القرن السادس عشر. توضح الدراسة الفترة التي ظهر فيها الشاعر ، وتحديداً عصر النهضة في الأدب الإنجليزي. كما يسلط الضوء على حياته وكتاباته التي تظهر أهميتها في هذه الدراسة. تركز الدراسة على ملحمة "الفردوس المفقود" باعتبارها مثالا على قدرته الأدبية في الإبداع.

تهدف الدراسة إلى تسليط الضوء على حياة ميلتون وأعماله العظيمة وكذلك أعماله الفاشلة كتجربة لما يدور في ذهن شاعر إنجليزي شهير مثل جون ميلتون.

INTRODUCTION

The current study concentrates on two main poems of John Milton: They are *Paradise Lost* and *The Pasion*. The study aims at eliciting each poem to show what each poem is considered among Milton's poems. The period of Milton's writing, from (1620) to (1674) which was a turning - point in English history conflicts of the economy and elsewhere which had been building up for decades, often in excess or even in spite of the conscious intentions of their protagonists, came to be head in the Revolution of the (1640) , and through much that was radical in that war was lost in the hesitations of the interregnum and the reaction of the Revolution, transformation that had taken place proved in the event to have been' irrevocable. Changes were confirmed and substantiated in (1688) with the effect that the world of the late seventeenth century was in many ways recognizable modern (Terry, Eaglet, 1988:10).

The Objectives of the Study

This study aims at analyzing each poem to show what is each poem considered among Milton's poems. The study aims at showing the value of each poem.

The Value of the Study

This study is of a high value to those who study English literature because it presents a critical analysis of three of John Milton's poems. This study is also valuable because it enriches the knowledge of its readers with a huge amount of information about the three poems under study.

1. The Renaissance in English (1500-1600)

In the opening of fourteenth century, there was an intellectual movement that have come to call it Renaissance which is the rebirth of scholarship based on classical tearing and philosophy (Pforclresher,et,al 1998:159).

‘‘The Renaissance can be divided into three sections; the rising of the Renaissance under the early monarchs (1500 1600), the rise of Renaissance under Elizabeth I (1558 1603), and the refusal of the Renaissance under the Stuart monarchs’’ (1603 -1649) (Ibid:160).

‘‘In the last period, the greatest of the puritan poets, and one of the most prominent English poets, was John Milton’’ (Ibid: 164-165). Melton's most direct service to the state came with his appointment in 1649 to the office of Latin secretary to the newly created commission of Foreign affairs where his task was to translate the Latin letters from foreign countries and write replies in the same language (Buckler, 1967:348).

2. 1 The Age of Milton

After Shakespeare's death, great changes took place in English life. English society began to split into two earring camps. The division was between the new way of life and the old one. On the one hand, there were those who gained their wealth from the land of old estates, and the others who encouraged the prevailing monarch and agreed upon the established religion of England. On the other hand, there were those livelihoods came from trade. In other words, the division in the divine country was a triple one; economic, political and religious (Ibid).

Milton is the greatest in both verse and prose and the dwarfs who are the writers of the opposing camp so completed that we are right to call this age as The Age of Milton. But, the seventeenth century strikes one curiosity, as a century of 'charming' rather than great work (except for the gigantic Milton), and sweetness and grace pre culminate surprisingly in a period of such bloody struggle. There are the new men of England, the men who gained their wealth

from trade, were in dirt to a sort of religious belief very different from the established faith of England. They were the puritans most of them wanted a more honest king of Christ tangy than the one brought to the country by the Reformation (Wilson, 1969:131-133).

2.2 The Life of John Milton (1608- 1674)

John Milton was born and brought up in London, the son of a well-to-do scrivener (notary) who also dabbled in real estate. Sent to set pails shoed, Milton applied himself so energetically to his studies that by 1625 he had mastered Greek, Latin, and he drew a number of modern European languages as well. He received his B.A and M.A, from Christ college Cambridge (Pforclresher: 29)

Milton refused prodigious taxes orders after he earned his M.A. Instead, he spent the next five years reading according to a study plan of his own devising, a tour of Europe in 1638 and 1639 completed his splendid education. From 1640 to 1660 he was already known as a poet for the masque. Comus and the elegy-to- Edward king, Lyeidas, but Milton dedicated himself to the "pamphlet wars" (Lecxer, et.al, 1987:36). Setting up residence in London, he busied with his writing and with tutoring his two nephews. Later he added several other boys. By this time Milton had seriously considered the epic poem he intended to write, trying to come up with a suitable subject for it. In 1642 Milton married Mary Powell, died in childbirth in 1652, leaving him with three daughters.

‘‘Warned that he would lose his sight if he continued to do close work, he decided the cause was important enough for him to risk his vision’’. He became totally blind 1651, at the age of forty-three.

In 1656, Milton married a second wife "Katherine" wood cock, who died in childbirth in 1658. No longer active politically, Milton was free to write the epic poem he had set aside for so long, that is paradise lost. (Pforclresher:292).

2.3 On His Blindness

‘‘When I consider how my light

Ere half my days in this dark world and wide

And that one talent which is death to hide

Lodged with me useless. through my soul mere do it

To serve there with my Maker, and present

My true account, last he returning chide’’.

‘‘Doth God exact day-labor, light denied?’’

‘‘I fondly ask. But patience, to prevent

That murmur’’, soon replies ‘‘God doth not need

Either man's work or his own gifts. who best

Bear his mild yoke, they serve his best. His state

Is Kingly: thousands at his bidding speed.

And post Over land ocean without rest

They also serve who only stand wait’’. (Buckler:386).

2.4 Milton's Paradise Lost

Like all epic poems, Milton's *Paradise Lost* is narrative of events on a grand scale. In the case of *Paradise Lost*, the scale is one of the grandest possible, for the poem has as its setting the whole universe. The maijor figures are: God, his Sooh Adam and Eve, and the Satan.

"The theme is the fall of man as embodied in the biblical story of the temptation of Adam and Eve and their expulsion from paradise". He probably began writing paradise lost about 1660, completing in 1663. (pforclresher:293).

Because he was blind, he dictated the poem to his three daughters, who served as secretaries, the poem was published in 1667, followed in 1671 by a shorter sequel, paradise Regained. (Ibid: 292).

Paradise Lost is his supreme creation. The poem was an attempt to "justify the ways of God to men" it is, like Homers Iliad, the biblical psalms, verges Adenoid and Dante's Divine Comedy, a large Scale expression of western civilization. (Buckler:96).

"Of manes first disobedience, and fruit

Of that forbidden tree whose natural taste

Brought death into the world, and all our woe,

With loss if Eden, till one greater man

Restore us, and regain the blissful seat,

Sing, Heaved muse, that no the secret top".

This part of the poem shows us the whole subject - Man's

disobedience, and loss thereupon of paradise (Frye,1951:5). Hierarchy is even more pronounced in Paradise. Adam and Eve are not even equal to one another, while, in relation to the other created things, they are like the lords of all. The reason of their one restraint, the arbitrarily forbidden tree, is to show that they agree their place in a hierarchic order dominated by God. The divine prohibition is

‘‘The only sign of our obedience left

Among so many signs of power and rule

Conferred upon us, and dominion given

Over all other creatures that possess

Earth, air, and sea’’ (Eaglet:39-40).

2.5 The Passion

Regardless its spectacular hesitation, twentieth-century Milton criticism is practically concurrent of the matter that concerns with Milton's failure “fragmentary” poem, *"The Passion*". He enhances the credibility of the verdict. In a note which is supplemented to the poem in the 1645 release, he wrote of being “nothing satisfied with what is begun", also leaves “it unfinished”. In other words, self-criticism stands the tune of time, as being a careless of making samples of modern opinion proposes. In an original study, J. H. Hanford asserts that "Milton does not fully realize the conditions of the great exercise of his poetic faculty” when he wrote *"The Passion*", after one year, Hanford noticed-in "A Milton Handbook" that’s Milton’s “lack of revelation in "The Passion" is so obvious.

Further, in 1930 E. M. W. Tillyard’s really a biography of famous can talk about “the ruins of The Passion” and summarize that “the failure is done”.

"Later Tillyard confessed that the poem is aspirant while he calls it an “inspiration failure”. Brooks and Hardy in 1951 determined Milton’s “self-consciousness” as “at last the key to the whole failure… of the poem,” whereas Malcolm Ross 1954, claimed that the poem “fails, clearly, because Milton has not, as in the Nativity Ode, place out a controlling idea which Christ can make to serve". Louis Martiz, at the same year in a vintage study, "judged that the last line" in “*The Passion*” was the worst line ever Milton has written. At last, "to cross some twenty-one years" it is found that "David Aers in the recently published Cambridge edition of John Milton, Odes, Pastorals and Masques", supposing that the poem's failing throughout his criticism, is charging Milton for “manufacturing temporal motifs of no theological value”, and then asking of those motifs: “to what purpose are they?”.

Likely, the coming effort is to answer the question, a huge one as well which Ares asks, “Why does Milton publish that poem if "nothing pleased with

it"? (p.46), Which he did not answer. I will talk like all the elements in the poem are guided, that it was perhaps not understood by its real founder to be unpleasant or incomplete, therefore “The Passion” could be demonstrate to be a well furbished, carefully made, also a quite successful artifact. The poem gets started retroactively: "Erewhile of Music and Ethereal mirth, wherewith the stage of Air and Earth did ring", and happy news of heavenly Infant’s birth, my muse with Angles did split to sing; but headlong happiness is ever on the wing, in a winter solstice like the short light. Sooner, swallowed up in the darkness and the long night, Milton’s “Erewhile” called us back to the lately done (December, 1629) ode in the Morrow of Christ’s Nativity. Moreover, the meter and rhyme scheme of *"The Passion*" a stanza of seven lines, "the first six lines iambic pentameter and the seventh an alexandrine, rhyming ababbcc" are comparable to the meter and rhyme scheme of the introduction-invoke to the Nativity Ode. Therefore, this information proposes that “*The Passion*'s” eight stanzas must be checked and estimated as the introduction-invoke to a poem about the passion. Also, the confessed failure to embody Christ’s solid is accidental to the success or failure as poetry.

Nevertheless, the question whether the stanzas are a segment currently be a question of their fulfillers as a preamble. In the other hand, presuppose that we only had a prologue of four stanza to the Nativity Ode suggests that Milton has even put down the chant itself, for any reason. In this case, we might talk about the introduction as a segment "although we would technically be inappropriate- it is a complete prologue", even that we may not criticize it for the failure to get an inspired vision of Christ’s Nativity.

Actually, we may judge its ordinary purpose to support a context for the chanting of the Ode and to call the inspiration. "The prologue is a short poem about poetry". Thus, it sounds that “The Passion” As a prologue-invocation it correctly talks about itself to the poet’s omission "while at the same time sketching the general contours of the uncompleted poem to which it is

prologue". It is purposeful- as it is hoped to prove the imagination carefully to accomplish an inspiration work in poetry. At the end, the poem is Milton's intentional and final orientation of why he frustrated a worthless poem on the passion. Milton thinks up a persona (the poet's alter-ago) who attempts but fails in putting him in the holy temper condition to writing a pleasant poem.

2.6 The Works of Milton

John Milton wrote in many branches of literature like poetry and Drama. These two types will be discussed in brief in this chapter.

2.6.1 Milton as a Poet

‘‘*Paradise Lost* itself will be a song of the muse directly inspired by the same spirit which inspired Moses. Shepherd of the Is realties in the wilderness and archetypal poet’’, in heaven 'they sing the song of mosses the servant of God' the song of triumph over the Egyptians swallowed up by the Red Sea while the children of Israel were saved. In addition, Mosses was the author of the Pentateuch, and thus the source of the creation epic itself, shadowing forth God's own works, 'In the beginning' The phrase opens the book of Genesis: ‘‘In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth’’. ' It also opens Gospel, where citation of Genesis prepares for transcription by the New Testament of the relations between God and his Creation 'In the beginning was the world'. (Ibid PP.39- 40).

2.6.2 Milton as a Playwright

Drama is a work to be performed by actors on stage, radio, or television; it is also called a play. Milton wrote a drama, but that was Charles II and it was on the throne, and anyway, Milton never intended it for performance. So, in his time the stage was silent (Burgess op.cit:132**).**

Conclusion

Milton is well known for his work *Paradise Lost*. It is mainly considered as the greatest epic poem in English. Alongside with Paradise Regained and Samson Agonists, it asserts the reputation Milton as one of the greatest English poets.

Milton called for the revocation of the Church of England and the execution of Charles I. From the first days of the English Civil Wars in 1642 too long after restoring of Charles II as king in 1660, he adopted a political philosophy that refused oppression and state-sanctioned religion in all his works. John Milton was the last great poet of the English Renaissance, is found within his work the foundations for the emerging aesthetic of the post-Renaissance era. He was also well read in Latin and modern Italian literature and ambitious to write a poem in English to be compared with Virgil's Aeneid. *The Passion* poem is considered the biggest failure for Milton, because many scholars and critics criticized this poem and said it is a big failure like saying inspiration failure.

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