

John Milton: Paradise Lost (Book

@ Q.) The greatness of 'Paradise Lost' lies in Milton's elevated / grand style. Illustrate from Book I. / Critically comment on the style of Milton's 'Paradise Lost', Book I.

Ans.) In his essay on Translating Homer, Matthew Arnold says: 'The grand style arises when a nature, poetically gifted, treats with simplicity or Severity (= strictness) a noble subject'. Milton's Paradise Lost has this grand style. Grandeur and sublimity is the essence of Milton's poetic style. It is almost uniquely literary and intellectual, freighted with (= loaded with) learning and bookish phrases, elaborate in construction, and often alien (= unknown) in vocabulary, it achieves a unique effect of dignity (= self-esteem) and aloofness (= superiority), and becomes a perfect medium for the restrained and elevated yet intensely passionate personality of its author.

Analyzing some features of Miltonic style, one notices frequent use of inversion (= reversal) of natural order of words and phrases for a grand and impressive effect. His use of words in their original Latin sense, Latin constructions and inversions is not pedantry (= literalism) or vulgar show of knowledge. In his application of Latinisms, there lies the grandeur. There are Latin constructions like "since created man", "summons read" etc. archaism and Latinism in vocabulary ('areed', 'nocent', 'attrite', etc.); ellipsis (=short form) such as "fallen such a pernicious (= deadly) height"; interchange of parts of speech: "the great consult began" (verb used as noun), "dark with excessive bright" (adjective used as noun); striking oxymorons like "darkness visible" and "palpable (= clear) obscure". The sonorous proper names like 'Montalban', 'Damasce', 'Morocco', and 'Terbisord' give the effect of sonority to the entire poem.

Miltonic style has a rich masculine cadence. He is a master of alliteration ("under the conduct and in dreadful deeds") and onomatopoeia ("clashed on their sounding shields the din of war"), and unusual compound-epithets analogous to those in Homer: "three-bolted thunder", "double-Punted streams"). etc. One also comes across some instances of solemn punning:

"To have found themselves not lost

in loss itself... .."

Suggestiveness is another characteristic of Milton's style. Macaulay has pointed out, "His (Milton's) style opens out vast vistas before the readers. He throws out broad hints and leaves the readers to imagine the rest". Milton suggests much more than he actually states or describes:

"... ifn from those flames

No light; hut rather darkness visible"

Allusiveness and use of similes are essential ciialities of Milton's poetic style. Classical and Biblical allusions are in plethora. These illusions are woven into the texture of his language. His similes ennoble (= elevate) and adorn his narrative. Most of his similes refer to natural

phenomena, notwithstanding his mytholr./gical, Biblical or historical recourses resort); e.g.

(2)

"....like that pygmean race

Beyond the Indian mount...." (780-81)

Or,

"....fountain some belated peasant sees", etc.

In his choice of images Milton reveals himself as a true Elizabethan. Miltonic style has too often been criticized as exotic (= peculiar), ornate, artificial, "a satin brocade, stiff with gold", he could also write lines essentially simple, full of poetic fervour (= passion) and lucid (= coherent) beauty:

".....from morn

To noon he fell, from noon to dewy eve,

Dropt from zenith like a falling star", etc. (742-45)

Milton's use of blank verse consolidates his style; he develops verse-paragraph which according to Saintsbury is "his greatest contribution to English versification".

Thus through the delicate (= subtle) anticipations (= eagerness) and echoes, Milton creates a style which is not only grand but also suggestive. It is not true that the mind that invested Milton's grand style had renounced (= give up) the English language. Milton's style is matched with his grand theme and grand scale in which heaven, earth and hell are included. This makes for the greatness of Paradise Lost. To conclude with James Holly Hanford who very finely sums up Milton's grand style: "Rhythm, vocabulary, sentence-structure, imagery, all unite indistinguishable (= impossible to tell apart) combination to form the majestic garment of Miltonic thought and feeling".

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