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## **Milton's Satan and his Spatially-Sensuous Discovery of Authentic Subjectivity ... towards Absurdity**

In view of the fact that “Milton himself is often at pains to depict his Satan as [...] ‘big with absurdity’”<sup>1</sup> delineating in that manner Foe’s genuine personality, the article focuses its attention on occurrences during which the evil genius’s individuality seizes an opportunity to be progressively shaped, achieving its entirety in the lair of suffering, accurately called by the Great Puritan the “seat of desolation.”<sup>2</sup> The objective of the paper is to study events, places and other characters that exert a powerful influence upon the disposition of Satan whose path inexorably leads to the vicious circle of absurdity and emergence of consciousness – Camus acknowledges that to say that “life is absurd, the conscience must be alive”<sup>3</sup> and also “in order to exist, man must rebel.”<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, it is required to illustrate how Milton’s Fiend’s growing subjectivity and concoction of fervent emotions compel him to undertake daring and insubordinate action against God. Hence, Miltonian evil genius is to be studied with regard to his sensuous reactions to incidents stigmatizing his physical as well as mental journey, treated as a quest for self, from the Empyrean (the location of quotidian) through Paradise (the place of sheer sensuousness and sensuality) to Hell (the locus of absurdity and topsy-turvyness).

At the onset of the article it is necessary to declare that author’s conceptions included in the paper stand, to some extent, in contrast to the established concepts upon Milton’s Arch-fiend. Thus although it is well established dogma that Satan’s mind and disposition are ontologically unchangeable and wherever he betakes himself he carries hell-within which is inerasable, still the author believes that Fiend, in fact an extremely vibrant character, is prone to changes which are indicated by emotions he demonstrates during interactions with places and figures permeating Miltonian universe. He along with his identity are, in essence, influenced and shaped by those occurrences. Only then, upon returning to Hell after having successfully tempted Adam and Eve, he is to be treated as utterly unalterable in a matrix of

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<sup>1</sup> Zwi Werblowsky, *Lucifer and Prometheus: A Study of Milton's Satan* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Limited, 1952), p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (Edinburgh: Penguin Popular Classics, 1996), I. 181.

<sup>3</sup> Albert Camus, *The Rebel – An Essay on Man in Revolt* (New York: Vintage Books, 1956), p. 6.

<sup>4</sup> Camus, *The Rebel*, p. 22.

absurdity. “Absurdism [...] can, by returning upon itself, open up a new field of investigation,”<sup>5</sup> claims Camus.

Milton’s Empyrean, the “happy fields, / Where joy for ever dwells”<sup>6</sup> is the first phase of Satan’s quest for meaning of his existence. The adjective “happy” is a term quite consistent with other epithets attributed to this place throughout *Paradise Lost*, and although it stresses the sense of overabounding bliss and completeness, description of both the place and angles unquestionably denotes the reality of quotidian and lack of unrestrained activity. Giamatti quotes William Blake who acknowledges that “‘Devils are various, Angels are all alike,’”<sup>7</sup> stressing in that way the notion of hiatus as an attribute of Milton’s Empyrean. Despite overwhelming and universal happiness resulting from intimate interactions with God, one could be mistaken by claiming that subjects existing in Heaven are totally free. Moreover, to be more explicit, Belsey avows that “those who freely submit to custom and blind affections, ‘slaves within doors’ prefer tyranny [...] The consciousness of individuals, ‘men within themselves’, determines history.”<sup>8</sup> In fact, angels are delineated as immediately and unconditionally obeying God’s orders. They are constantly extolling their Maker, especially by singing divine songs. Peace and order are detected everywhere in the celestial air and, more importantly, all existing there appear to accept the fundamental principle underlying all relations in Heaven – God and His Son are unquestionable Lords attracting universal praise. Such a vision is, indeed, a marvellous picture of imagination, but, it is not complete. To say that all angels soaring in the Empyrean air share to the same degree the emotions of contentment and submission to their Creator is sheer untruth. Lucifer and his crew do not. “One would suppose that Lucifer, before becoming Satan, shared the habits and activities of the other good angels: adoring God and shouting Hallelujah. But no, he is severely rebuked by Gabriel for his pre-lapsarian virtues,”<sup>9</sup> asserts Werblowsky. Clearly, Lucifer’s existence in Heaven is drenched with defiance and faking, the prevailing emotions which, ultimately, shall be a condition of his achieving conscious being.

It is essential to enter this castle-like spatial entity so as to see what happens at this blessed place that Lucifer, under sovereignty of loving God, decides to commence a conspiracy against the Almighty; what impairment triggers him to trespass well known limitations. Herbert Read, in the foreword to Camus’ *The Rebel*, sheds some light upon the

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<sup>5</sup> Camus, *The Rebel*, p. 10.

<sup>6</sup> Milton, *Paradise Lost*, I. 249 – 250.

<sup>7</sup> A. Bartlett Giamatti, *The Earthly Paradise and the Renaissance Epic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), p. 122.

<sup>8</sup> Catherine Belsey, *John Milton: Language, Gender, Power* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), p. 86.

<sup>9</sup> Werblowsky, *Lucifer and Prometheus*, p. 10.

concept of rebellion and it is necessary to grasp some theoretical interpretations in order to comprehend Lucifer's standards of behaviour in a more profound manner. He accentuates that "revolt is one of the 'essential dimensions' of mankind"<sup>10</sup> which is, in truth, "a principle of existence"<sup>11</sup> and "the basis of the struggle."<sup>12</sup> Besides, it is the "origin of form, source of real life."<sup>13</sup> As the narrative of *Paradise Lost* is being gradually constructed, one can see that Satan condemns himself, by the means of revolt, to an imaginary world in the frantic hope of achieving a more profound existence, which is not possible to be revealed in the unanimous world of always worshiping and obeying subjects. Camus declares that "rebellion is born of the spectacle of irrationality, confronted with an unjust and incomprehensible condition. But its blind impulse is to demand order in the midst of chaos, and unity in the very heart of the ephemeral. It protests, it demands, it insists that the outrage be brought to an end. [...] Its preoccupation is to transform."<sup>14</sup> The above miscellaneous definitions of rebellion classify Milton's condemned archangel as a genuine insurgent who avails himself of such an audacious, but in the long run the only possible, move so as to grasp an opportunity of unearthing his own subjectivity. Needless to say, Fiend is fervently engaged in mutiny perceived as a turn to ludicrousness.

God's greatest seraph is forced to fight since, in his heart of hearts, he senses that one thing has gone absolutely awry in the impeccable Empyrean – adulation of Son, whom Lucifer treats his equal. Mutiny, though ostensibly negative, appears to be intensely positive in that it exposes that part of archangel which should always be fortified. He is perceived as scrupulously struggling for the integrity of elements comprising his complex being. In that context, the magnificent archangel is confronted with an unbearable situation which pushes him into remonstrations against and, finally, negation of God as Giver of meaning. Hence, Lucifer, according to the author of *The Rebel*, "considers himself compelled to do evil by his nostalgia for an unrealizable good. Satan rises against his Creator because the latter employed force to subjugate him."<sup>15</sup> In truth, the significance of rebellion for the narrative of *Paradise Lost* is so considerable that the narrative voice does not falter to delineate fallen angles' Monarch in his true colours, just at the beginning of the Book I:

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<sup>10</sup> Camus, *The Rebel*, p. viii.

<sup>11</sup> Camus, *The Rebel*, p. viii.

<sup>12</sup> Camus, *The Rebel*, p. viii.

<sup>13</sup> Camus, *The Rebel*, p. x.

<sup>14</sup> Camus, *The Rebel*, p. 10.

<sup>15</sup> Camus, *The Rebel*, p. 48.

He trusted to have equalled the Most High,  
If he opposed, and with ambitious aim  
Against the throne and monarchy of God  
Raised impious war in Heaven and battle proud,  
With vain attempt.<sup>16</sup>

As it seems the essence of his hitherto existence in the Empyrean is called into question on account of having broken the union with Him who is solely responsible for distributing life and meaning in the universe. Lucifer's revolt marks the divining line beyond which there is nothing more than his yearning for being the best, preferably God himself; the desire which, according to him, could satisfy him with a brand new subjectivity dotted with ensuing forms of revolts and iniquity. Belsey accentuates that "only a subject can choose, [...] Thus Satan, envious of the Son's pre-eminence, and believing himself injured by it, withdraws from God his love and his obedience. [...] The new object of Satan's desire is Sin, who springs out of his own head and represents a perfect image of him."<sup>17</sup> In sum, Heaven is the place where Lucifer sensuously rebels not only against God as an unshakeable Lord who denotes an impossibility of unearthing archangel's genuine identity, but also against unbearable tediousness. More importantly, however, Lucifer rebels on account of an offended sense of justice. "Awareness, no matter how confused it may be, develops from every act of rebellion,"<sup>18</sup> claims Camus.

The first two Books of *Paradise Lost* situate Satan in Hell, which is indubitably the next chapter of his exploration for subjectivity – as one can perceive "the enormous creative energy that Satan evokes from Milton does not lessen; it simply moves away from the exhausted centre of Satan's own expression of his inner life,"<sup>19</sup> emphasizes Stein. From now on, Milton's narrative visualizes him as a condemned idol, masterfully deploying the aptitude of rhetoric and reviving his crew after the atrocious fall. Grossman acknowledges that from the matrix of relations and speeches permeating the universe of Hell "emerges a portrait of the satanic subject as disjoined from the universe of light" whose „exorbitant desires slip down an endless chain of displaced objects that turn out to be projections of the self in search of itself."<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Milton, *Paradise Lost*, I. 36 – 44.

<sup>17</sup> Belsey, *John Milton*, p. 73.

<sup>18</sup> Camus, *The Rebel*, p. 14.

<sup>19</sup> Arnold Stein, *The Art of Presence: The Poet and Paradise Lost* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), p.

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<sup>20</sup> Marshall Grossman, *Authors to Themselves: Milton and the Revelations of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 46.

Milton's Hell is delineated as an apparent reversal of Heaven. First of all, it is replete with an uninhibited activity performed by the army of the fallen perceived as beings of tragic wisdom and masterful willpower. After the diabolical synod, demons disperse in all directions all agog to perform a plethora of diverse tasks, such as mining, idle rationalizing or even singing; their scattering is clearly sketched as a turnaround in their former experiences in Heaven which were marked with monotony and submission. What is more, the absurdity and confusion of the den of sadness is introduced while being delineated as possessing clashing weather conditions; the entropy of elements is bewildering – “Beyond this flood a frozen continent / Lies dark and wild, beat with perpetual storms / Of whirlwind and dire hail, [...] / [...] all else deep snow and ice, [...] the parching air / Burns froze, and cold performs the effect of fire.”<sup>21</sup> It is significant to assert that what the reader perceives through rebel's eyes is an external world that mirrors in physical terms Satan's internal suffering and uncertainty. The dividing line between his awakening subjectivity and its objects is being gradually blurred.

The manner of Foe's flying through Hell reinforces the impression that the lair of absurdity is a matrix of labyrinths positioned horizontally and vertically with many winding paths and dark places, in stark contrast to Empyrean ubiquitous light. Soaring up to the infernal gate and passing it, treated as a form of infernal King's *rite de passage*, may be regarded as a symbol of Satan's birth and emergence of subjectivity. From now on, he is a wanderer constantly taking a perilous path to authentic identity which becomes more and more perceptible in his existence as his proclivity for iniquity is unremittingly expanding. Belsey claims that rather than “give up the struggle, he renews his former assertion of imaginary mastery, resolving to take charge of meaning in order to take possession of hell. [...] His project is to eliminate difference and its implications by identifying the subject as the origin of meaning. In Book IV he reiterates the attempt, and more succinctly: ‘Evil be thou my good.’”<sup>22</sup> In Milton's Hell Satan sensuously fights against the pain and suffering which is vehemently inflicted upon him by both the place itself and the memory of his high position in Heaven.

One of the most dramatic stages in Fiend's increasingly absurd and, curiously enough, more meaningful, existence is the moment, at the beginning of Book IV, he delivers his address to sun, the celestial body which acts as a stimulus to awaken memories of what he has been deprived of after the sin of disobedience. The speech, during which “each passion

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<sup>21</sup> Milton, *Paradise Lost*, II. 587 – 589, 591, 594 – 595.

<sup>22</sup> Belsey, *John Milton*, p. 75.

dimmed his face, / Thrice changed with pale ire, envy, and despair / Which [...] betrayed / Him counterfeit,”<sup>23</sup> is a decisive moment for Satan who sensuously exposes sincerity and positive emotions. The potent light of sun penetrates his clandestine character, forces him to reveal emotions which have been buried under the heavy consignment of evil and discover, for good, his world which is overflowing with “intemperance and exhibitionism.”<sup>24</sup>

In its entirety, the address is the horrid cry of an alienated character who abhors anything which is associated with light and good. Undeniably, it is abounding with a shattering hesitation (being itself the portent of sprouting self-discovery) and ultimately, it is the scream of the accursed who knows that return to God is out of question, since such a radical move could reflect the return to ambiguity, boredom and hypocrisies. Being soaked with a spectrum of both negative and positive emotions reigning Satan’s heart it is a next period of pursuit of the authentic meaning in his existence.

Unquestionably, Milton’s Satan undergoes excruciating transmogrification while admiring an almost divine vision of dwellers of Paradise, Adam and Eve. “The Satan, who dominates the scene is created by Milton the sensuous and passionate poet,”<sup>25</sup> accentuates Hamilton. The process of degradation, therefore, is enhanced through his sense of sight while appreciating beauty of nature. Arch-fiend “[L]ooks down with wonder at the sudden view / Of all this World [...] [S]uch wonder seized, though after Heaven seen, / The Spirit malign, but much more envy seized, / At sight of all this World beheld so fair,”<sup>26</sup> asserts narrative voice. A vast majority of critics of *Paradise Lost* demonstrate that there is a yawning chasm between Foe of first two Books, who is brimming with intrepidity and resolve and Fiend of the next Books who expresses misgivings and unbearable remorse resulting from loss of Empyrean favours. Waldock’s estimation – “Satan of the first two books stands alone; after them comes a break, and he is never as impressive again”<sup>27</sup> – is a statement consonant with other scholars’ opinions upon two clashing visions of the same archetype of evil genius.

Upon reaching Adam and Eve’s bower Satan experiences even more burning desire than the one created by Paradisal vista, despite the fact that at times quotidian proves to be one of the features of Paradise as well – “The idyllic setting for ‘domestick Adam’, not much different from the revivalist heaven, is a poor foil for the activity of hell [...] Though Milton leaves us no doubt that kisses and embraces, to say the least, do take place in Paradise, yet

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<sup>23</sup> Milton, *Paradise Lost*, IV. 114 – 117.

<sup>24</sup> David Daiches, *Milton* (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1971), p. 168.

<sup>25</sup> Quoted in Werblowsky, *Lucifer and Prometheus*, p. 76.

<sup>26</sup> Milton, *Paradise Lost*, III. 542 – 43, 552 – 54.

<sup>27</sup> A. J. Waldock, *Paradise Lost and its Critics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1947), p. 81.

compared with the teeming life of hell it cannot but strike us as another Bower of Acrasia.”<sup>28</sup> At that moment Fiend appears to be utterly enthralled by a sway of passion and sensuality. His sensory perception is stretched to its limits and, consequently, he voices unconditional indecision as to his wicked objectives while admiring gorgeous Eve – “Such pleasure took the Serpent to behold / [...] / [...] her heavenly form / Angelic, but more soft and feminine, / Her graceful innocence, her every air / Of gesture or least action, overawed / His malice.”<sup>29</sup> Foe, the sworn destroyer, utterly stupefied by the first woman’s attractiveness and innocence, calculates rejection of a wicked course of action – “the Evil One abstracted stood / From his own evil, and for the time remained / Stupidly good, of enmity disarmed, / Of guile, of hate, of envy, of revenge.”<sup>30</sup> In truth, Satan stands before stunning Mother of Mankind as a living corpse devoid of those aspects that constitute his subjectivity, namely iniquity and its derivatives.

In fact, despite announcing an intention of rejecting negative approach, Fiend remains even more persistent in his malignity. His subjectivity, fed by rebellion, negation and evil, fights for pre-eminence in his existence – “But the hot hell that always in him burns, / Though in mid Heaven, soon ended his delight, / And tortures him now more that more he sees / Of pleasure not for him ordained.”<sup>31</sup> It cannot accept any positive approach and something which is blameless only enhances his depravity; it testifies to his being an unfathomable black hole, furiously annihilating all possible good. The fluctuation of extreme emotions attests to his experiencing the privation he fetches with him wherever he happens to be. The encounter with Eve displays Satan’s course of action dictated by his frantic subjectivity – he is capable of admiring, but afterwards, he has to attack and kill. The instinct of destroyer which “represents fallen appetites taken to the demoniac level”<sup>32</sup> is more powerful than his excitement, yet it is something which Foe has to fight with so as not to be led astray from his path to discovery of his true self. In Paradise, he rebels against sensuality which is looming large in his mind and body.

Upon returning to Hell after the triumphant mission, instead of contentment Milton’s Foe is brutally subject to an unvarying change for worse, with an excruciating finish as a hellish serpent, “the shape he once adopted – so he thought – on his initiative.”<sup>33</sup> Thus

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<sup>28</sup> Werblowsky, *Lucifer and Prometheus*, p. 23.

<sup>29</sup> Milton, *Paradise Lost*, IX. 455, 457 – 461.

<sup>30</sup> Milton, *Paradise Lost*, IX. 463 – 466.

<sup>31</sup> Milton, *Paradise Lost*, IX. 467 – 470.

<sup>32</sup> Margarita Stocker, *Paradise Lost: An Introduction to the Variety of Criticism* (London: Macmillan, 1988), p. 37.

<sup>33</sup> Stanley Fish, *Surprised by Sin: The Reader in Paradise Lost* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), p. 79.

although being majestic in his collapse, Fiend is crushed beneath an excruciating load of negative emotions and passions which step by step devastate Satan's appearance and resolve, but, ironically enough, as a sharp knife, they exert potential to unwrap him of layer of falsehood and, by doing so, they disclose his genuine subjectivity in the most profound shape. What is more, he is absolutely free at that decisive moment. Camus precisely asserts that the authentic dissenter "is willing to accept the final defeat, which is death, rather than be deprived of the personal sacrament that he would call [...] freedom. Better to die on one's feet than to live on one's knees."<sup>34</sup> He starts to disintegrate and he knows that. He is absolutely aware of the fact that his time is short, that is why he is shown as travelling swiftly towards Paradise and Hell, where the complex process of degradation abysmally comes to its end. Burden accurately declares that "Milton's account of the transformation scene in Hell presents precisely the sort of tragedy that he does not want us to see in Book IX. Acted out in Hell is the tragedy of doom, its heroes the damned. In the midst of their applause for Satan's success with Man, the devils are turned suddenly into snakes."<sup>35</sup> In Hell absurdity and topsy-turvyness are revealed in the most insightful figure as a result of a few noxious incidents which occur to Milton's Satan. First of all, he is deprived of his intrinsic ability to fly owing to his unexpected assuming a shape of a sly snake; he is absolutely at a loss while struggling to escape from suffering and despondency as the most inherent constituents of hellish universe. From this time forth he cannot deploy his eloquence, either. Hissing is a single symptom of his exceptional rhetoric which is left to a traumatized Satan. But, more importantly, King of Hell is perceived as thoroughly conquered by his ungoverned desires and wounded ambition; he is forced to devour ash pervading the lowest section of Hell – "they, fondly thinking to allay / Their appetite with gust, instead of fruit / Chewed bitter ashes,"<sup>36</sup> declares the narrative voice.

Finally, Milton's Fiend becomes what he consumes – the Hell-incarnate – and in extremis his authentic subjectivity is displayed in its entirety. The process is, unquestionably, triggered through the sense of hearing, sight, and touch. The narrative voice delineates Satan, a prey to sensuousness, in such a way:

So having said, a while he stood, expecting  
Their universal shout and high applause  
To fill his ear, when contrary, he hears,

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<sup>34</sup> Camus, *The Rebel*, p. 15.

<sup>35</sup> Denis H. Burden, *The Logical Epic: A Study of the Argument of Paradise Lost* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967), p. 147.

<sup>36</sup> Milton, *Paradise Lost*, X. 564 – 566.



On all sides, from innumerable tongues  
A dismal universal hiss, the sound  
Of public scorn; he wondered, but not long  
Had leisure, wondering at himself now more;  
His visage drawn he felt to sharp and spare,  
His arms clung to his ribs, his legs entwining  
Each other, till supplanted, down he fell.<sup>37</sup>

Thus although the vision of Satan in Hell is the absolute reversal of the image of Lucifer in the Empyrean, Foe, by reason of plummeting to a vicious circle of absurdity, is eventually strong enough to shatter the bondage of duplicity and hypocrisies he was forced to carry, as chain mail and a mask, in God's presence.

The author does not pretend to be capable of throwing an utterly new light upon the concept of John Milton's Satan's searching for authentic self by active interactions with both places and figures in the universe of *Paradise Lost*. What emerges, however, from the analysis is the undeniable fact that Great Puritan's intention is to present his evil genius as being inwardly stimulated by his relentlessly growing subjectivity to undertake a daring action with the target of discovery of genuine identity. Noticeably, in his new domain, demons' Sovereign is plundered of two fundamental layers constituting his former, bogus, visualization, namely, his brainpower, since as it is hinted by Lewis "Satan's level of intelligence has sunk below zero, as this is tantamount to asserting 'Nonsense be thou my sense'"<sup>38</sup> while announcing his pronouncement underpinning his moral principles – "Evil, be thou my Good"<sup>39</sup> and an apparel of a glorious archangel. Finally, Fiend, due to rebellion perceived as a perpetual state of tension and struggle, finds inner harmony since his self is now perfectly corresponding to objects it yearns for – sin and hubris incarnate is a powerful magnet for a variety of shades of rebellion and sinfulness. Henceforth, he does not have to fake anything.

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<sup>37</sup> Milton, *Paradise Lost*, X. 504 – 513.

<sup>38</sup> Quoted in Werblowsky, *Lucifer and Prometheus*, p. 8.

<sup>39</sup> Milton, *Paradise Lost*, IV. 110.