

Classical Allusions in Paradise Lost part IX

Classical Allusions in *Paradise Lost* part IX

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Abstract

As one of the most well-read poets of his time, Milton's depth of knowledge and skill with language is evident in his literary works. The use of allusions are a distinctive feature of his writing. The abundant use of classical allusions in Milton's epic poem *Paradise Lost* part IX add to the rich descriptions and images included in the poem. The paper attempts to list and analyse the important classical allusions which are found in the passages of *Paradise Lost*. As they enhance understanding as they help the reader to anticipate the events by comparing the myth with the event in the poem for similarities or differences.

Keywords: Milton, Paradise Lost, classical allusions, myth, gods, goddesses.

Introduction

The word 'allusion' is derived from the late Latin 'allusion' which means "a play on words" or "game"¹. This term has been defined by many authors and poets as a "A reference, usually brief, often casual, occasionally indirect, to a person, event, or condition presumably familiar but sometimes obscure or unknown to the reader" (Shaw ,1976 [1972]). According to Leppihalme "Allusion is more or less closely related to such terms as reference, quotation or citation, borrowing ... and the more complex intertextuality" (Leppihalme 1994:6). It is a figure of speech which gives the writings more depth and meaning².

¹-<https://www.britannica.com/art/allusion>.

²<http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/allusion>

This figure of speech has been used by poets from different cultures and languages as it enriches the piece of literature. However, the reader and the writer should both be aware of the event, person or literary text being alluded to avoid ambiguity. Thus, "when using an allusion, a writer tends to assume an established literary tradition, a body of common knowledge with an audience sharing that tradition and an ability on the part of the audience to 'pick up ' the reference"(Cuddon, 2013:26).

Readers from other cultures and languages experience difficulties as they fail to understand the context and meaning of the reference in the allusion because they are based on assumption. Thus, being uninformed about a particular culture or its body of literature may create problems in understanding the context or the work, and therefore becomes the translator's responsibility to clarify the allusions to the readers.

The epic poem *Paradise Lost* is full of images from classical myths and medieval romances, geography and science and those derived from Jewish and Christian learning. The poem's central character, Adam, is not heroic in the classical sense. His heroism lies in his Christian virtue of submitting to faith, doing penance and penitence for his disobedience. The villain of the story is Satan, who is presented in the style of the classical hero. He manages masterly to fuse the pagan with the religious into works that have both classical and religious appeal. The poem's structure is both dramatic and tragic, showing virtues of both the genres (Dahiya & Bhim, 2009: 78)

However, some poets, such as John Milton, have used vague and complex allusions in their works that they know few readers will readily understand. An allusion can be used to provide further meaning to the text, but it can also be used in a more complex sense to make an ironic comment on one thing by comparing it to something. Milton's *Paradise Lost* incorporates many classical allusions some of them are direct, where he

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attracts his readers minds to something which is very specific. And the others are indirect where even native readers cannot realize them. The reader must be acquainted with great information about Greek, Roman and historical happenings.

Milton makes a considerable and original use of allusions in his poem. He uses stories of gods and goddesses in a multifaceted way that we find him criticizing myths saying his characters are more refined than the classical ones, while comparing other mythical figures with Christ. (Collett, 1970: 88)

He develops the scene or the idea of the pagan myth that not only reconciled its careful use in his epic, but he also reveals a value and the truth for it (ibid.). He uses classical allusions excessively for tangible expression. In *Paradise Lost* Part 8, classic allusions have a double function of description and thematic development. Each allusion contributes to the prediction of the major events of the poem. They give the reader a hint of what is going to happen later in epic. He chooses certain myths and compares them with his epic.

Many Greek and Roman mythologies have been referred to in this poem. All gods and goddesses have their own tasks and authorities, for example, Apollo is the god of light and truth, Athena is the goddess of wisdom, reason and purity, and Aphrodite or Venus is the goddess of love and beauty.

There are also heroes, the descendants of the mating between deities and human beings. Examples are Hercules, the son of Zeus, and Aeneas, the son of Aphrodite³. *Aeneid* (29-19 B.C.), tells the story of Aeneas, a Trojan warrior, who travelled to Italy, where he became the ancestor of the Romans. Aeneas was son of Aphrodite, the goddess of love. It is likely to say that classical allusions make Milton's work more solid, it evokes a vast size and limitless space of imagination. His impress on modern

³Greek Mythology", [http/ www. Brainyencyclopedia. Com](http://www.Brainyencyclopedia.com). Retrieved from the Internet on 6/11/2007. p. 5 of 11.

literary texts is often "a matter of allusions that arouse his works to supply context or ironic contrast" (Lewalski 2003: 46).

The poet's approach to epic is not however, a negative one. He does not merely reject earlier epic patterns. He keeps much of machinery of classic epic, like Homeric similes and invocations to the Muse. He has his own doctrine to put in its place. And this doctrine must be presented in a suitably elevated style to match the greatness of its subject. The aim of his study is to show the classical allusions (gods and goddess) and how they enrich Milton's work, as he treats allusions as a vast store of knowledge and sources of characters and situations .

Classical Allusions

Milton(1562-1647) came at the heart of the Renaissance in which the classics surrounded him from his education, his study and the environment. Therefore, Latin has been his preferred language and the Greeks his masters; the titles of his works, verse or prose, his style, and his technique are influenced by the classics. His major poetical works: *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes* are, in techniques, classic. Indeed, all Milton's works whether in verse or prose runs in the orbit of the classics.

Milton's *Paradise Lost* is classical in its techniques, but English in everything else. His treatment of classical techniques into his own techniques is unique. He manages masterly to fuse the pagan with the religious into works that have both classical and religious appeal. He always asserts that the classics have moral lessons, and they sustain the religious messages; therefore, he explains that "The Apostle Paul himself thought it not unworthy to insert a verse of Euripides into the text of Holy Scripture"(Bush,1966 :517). Moreover, Milton has taught other English poets how to handle and deal with the classical myth, legend, and technique to employ them into English works. In the light of this statement, Shelley and Keats learnt a lot from

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Milton; they make their own attempts and have been successful, *Prometheus Unbound* is a good example.

The epic opens with Satan flying towards this world and foretells the fall of man. Satan gains entrance into the garden of Eden, where he finds Adam and Eve and becomes jealous of them. He overhears them speak of God's commandment that they should not eat the forbidden fruit. Uriel warns Gabriel and his angels, who are guarding the gate of Paradise, of Satan's presence. The punished Satan returns to Earth and, enters in the form of a serpent. Finding Eve alone he induces her to eat the fruit of the forbidden tree. Adam, resigned to join in her fate, also eats the fruit. Their innocence is lost and they become aware of their nakedness. In shame and despair, they become hostile to each other. Adam reconciles with Eve. God sends Michael to expel the pair from paradise but first to reveal to Adam the future events resulting from his sin. Adam is saddened by these visions, but ultimately revived by revelations of the future coming of the savior of mankind. In sadness, mitigated with hope, Adam and Eve are sent away from the Garden of Paradise.

Milton starts his epic comparing it with classic works as *Iliad* and *Aeneid*, he says that his characters are more superior than *Achilles*, who is considered as one of the powerful warriors in the *Trojan War*, he kills Hector the son of Priam and drags his body around the walls of *Troy* (Delahunty et al., 2001:3). The poet continues comparing his characters with *Turnus*, who is a famous warrior and leader of the Rutuli people. *Turnus* is known as the son of *Daunus* and *Aeneas*'s major rival. He is the favourite suitor of *Lavinia*, daughter of King *Latinus*. But *Latinus* engages *Lavinia* to marry *Aeneas* instead that makes *Turnus* angry, he wage a war against *Aeneas* and the *Trojans*⁴.

⁴britannica.com/topic/Turnus

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*Not less but more Heroic then the wrauth
Of stern Achilles on his Foe pursu'd
Thrice Fugitive about Troy Wall; or rage
Of Turnus for Lavinia disespous'd,
Or Neptun's ire or Juno's, that so long
Perplex'd the Greek and Cytherea's Son ;(p112)⁵*

Milton than shifts to *Homer's* epic where he talks about his hero *Odysseus*, who is the main protagonist. He says that his characters are more eloquent speakers and cunning trickster than *Odysseus*, who is the King of *Ithaca* in Greek mythology. He spends ten years returning home to his wife Penelope after the Trojan War is over (Delahunty et al.,2001:124). But *Neptune* who is "Old Italic god of flowing water" prevents him to go back. (Lurker ,2005:135).

Another classical allusion is *Juno*, who frustrates *Cytherea's* son. In Roman mythology *Juno* is the Queen of Heaven she is also called *Hera*. (Delahunty et al. 2001:13). She symbolizes the youthful powers of women. She is the goddess of marriage and defender of married women (Lurker ,2005:96).

Eve in the epic is compared with *Diana*, *Ceres* and *Circe*. *Diana* is the goddess of the woods mountain's nymph, but *Eve* is not armed with arrow and bow as *Diana*. The later in Roman mythology, is associated with hunting, virginity, and beauty. She is the personification of feminine grace and power (Tilak ,2011:131). Then the poet compares *Eve's* walk with *Pomona* "a Roman goddess, the wife of the vegetation-god *Vertúmnus*; she is often presented as the beloved of *Picus*. Her name comes from Latin *pomum* which means fruit of a tree". (Lurker, 2005:154)

⁵ Tilak ,Raghukul.(2011).*Paradise Lost*. IX, Rama Brothers, Delhi.

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***Oread or Dryad, or of Delia's Trainee,
Betook her to the Groves, but Delia's self
In gate surpass'd and Goddess-like deport,
Though not as shee with Bow and Quiver armd,
But with such Gardning Tools as Art yet rude,(p130)***

Ceres is the old Roman goddess of agriculture, fertility and of marriage in religious observance (Lurker, 2005: 41), closely connected with the earth goddess, in the middle of her youth and before she gives birth to *Proserpine* by *Zeus*, who is respected as the Supreme god of the Greeks (Ibid: 208).

*Likeliest she seemd, Pomona when she fled
Vertumnus, or to Ceres in her Prime,
Yet Virgin of Proserpina from Jove.(p130)*

Circe (Circean), in Greek mythology is a beautiful enchantress who lives on the island of *Aeaea*. She has the ability to turn all men to pigs, she turns *Odysseus'* men into swine. *Odysseus* protects himself with a kind of herb. To break the spell and bring back his men, he is enforced to stay for a year. Both woman (Eve and *Circe*) are not afraid of all kind of beasts as they obey both of them (Ibid:137).

Another allusion is not a character, but a place called paradise in *Aden*, it is more beautiful than *Alcinous*, the gardens of the host of *Laertes*, which is fairer than the magnificent orchards where the wise king *Solomon* first meets his Egyptian beloved. In this garden *Adonis* is kept hidden (Tilak, 2011:133).

***Spot more delicious then those Gardens feign'd
Or of reviv'd Adonis, or renown'd
Alcinous, host of old Laertes Son,(p132)***

Adonis is a god who dies and is resurrected. According to Greek legend, he was born from a myrrh tree, he is loved by both *Aphrodite* and *Persephone*. When a wild hog kills him *Aphrodite* begs *Zeus* to restore him to life. *Zeus* announces that *Adonis*

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should spend the winter months of each year in the underworld with Persephone and the summer months with Aphrodite in Alcinous. (Ibid)

In both classics and *Paradise Lost* paradise is beautiful in scenery and weather ,as it is spring all the year. Man makes no effort to survive; the earth gives up its produce spontaneously (Rivers,2005 :10).

Finally, Animal allusion which is represented by a serpent (Satan disguises as snake) the poet says that his snake is more attractive than *Hermione* and *Cadmus*, *Epidaurus* or *Aesculapius* (god of healing).

*And lovely, never since of Serpent kind
Lovelier, not those that in Illyria chang'd
Hermione and Cadmus, or the God
In Epidaurus; nor to which transformd
Ammonian Jove, or Capitoline was seen,
Hee with Olympias, this with her who bore
Scipio the highth of Rome. (p136)*

Conclusion

Milton comes at the heart of the Renaissance in which the classics surrounded him from his education, his study and the environment. He becomes a master of classical culture and learning, he has a thorough appreciation of all writers over the world.

Milton supports every event in the epic with a classical allusion, he shows their behaviour towards one another, and exhibits their parentages, battles, squabbles and jealousies. Though his insistence that his characters are real not like classics ,but still they have their own beauty when he present them in his work .

His literary allusions are characters, incident, and places. They are presented directly and indirectly. They provide a reader

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with better knowledge. They also help the reader to draw parallels with the literary work and understand the idea that is being discussed in more clarity, as it gives him/her references to something that falls outside the range of the present work. Classical allusions are a rich body of stories belonging to the Ancient Greeks or Roman concerning their gods and heroes, the nature of the world and the origins and significance of their own cult and ritual practices . The poet Miltonizes those classics to his own idealistics to create one of the best English works.

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