

“Thou Resemblest Now thy Sin”: Milton’s Spiritual-Aesthetic Translation

OSCAR DELGADO CHINCHILLA
Escuela de Lenguas Modernas
Universidad de Costa Rica

Abstract

In his production of *Paradise Lost*, John Milton finds himself forced to express in words the physical qualities of objects that have no actual tangible form. Seemingly instinctively, the writer solves his necessity of aesthetic form by transforming the spiritual, moral and behavioral traits of his characters into physical features that he is able to describe, translating goodness into beauty and evil into ugliness.

Key words: *Paradise Lost*, Satan, ugliness, beauty

Resumen

Durante su producción de *Paradise Lost*, John Milton se ve forzado a expresar en palabras descripciones de objetos que carecen de una forma estética y tangible. El autor soluciona este problema transformando las cualidades morales y espirituales de sus personajes en cualidades físicas estéticas, de tal manera que traduce lo bueno como belleza y lo malo y lo malvado como fealdad.

Palabras claves: *Paradise Lost*, Satán, fealdad, belleza

Introduction: Depicting Beings without Form

Prior to any aesthetic or philosophic discussion on ethereal beings and with the best intentions of reducing ambiguity and academic disagreement, one must clarify that the forthcoming categorization of ethereal agents, such as demons and angels, as well as judgments based on or related to

them are the result of Milton's descriptive power and word choice. It is of common knowledge that demons and angels are spirits. As such, they do not possess a "physical form." Yet popular belief dictates that angels are beautiful and pure winged creatures while the aesthetics of demons inevitably convey dreadfulness; these now widely-spread collectively fashioned images are merely representations of these beings, and they have become iconic of the (Christian) religious tradition, and by extension of Milton's aesthetics.

This common religious view of spirits is evident in the work of the many celebrated artists who contributed over centuries to the illustration of numerous editions of *Paradise Lost*. Masters of the arts such as John Baptist Medina (in the 17th century); Sir James Thornhill, Louis Cheron, and Francis Hayman (in the 18th); and William Blake, Gustave Doré, John Martin, and William Strang (in the 19th) exploited oils, engraving, and watercolors to recreate Milton's descriptions. Their renditions vary greatly in their technique and style, but regardless of their pieces being classic, gothic, or baroque, the main features of these spirits remain unchanged. Although demons and angels are generally attributed wings, angels usually possess white-feathered wings and demons commonly feature bat-like wings. Also, both creatures are often differentiated by their gestures and attitudes towards other figures—while the former kind is frequently portrayed advising others and conversing, the latter appears menacing and sinister. In addition, demons often remain in the shadows, while angels at times even seem to radiate light from within them. Furthermore, it is not one's intention here to validate any particular tendency of representation of these spirits. Hereafter, one takes Milton's models as the unequivocally accurate and approved representation of such incorporeal beings. Hereafter one purely analyzes the traits of fictional characters in Milton's *Paradise Lost* as proof of Milton's aesthetic translation of evil into ugliness and goodness into beauty.

Considering the fact that Milton's text is full of imagery, characters, and settings that center on aesthetic objects that are not ordinary, one must first acknowledge that his main theme is out of the ordinary. As base for his fictional plot, the poet decides to "justify the ways of God to men" (I. 26) and to explain readers "of man's first disobedience" (I. 1), a topic that surpasses the descriptive faculties of any human being. Because of this otherworldliness of *Paradise Lost*, Milton finds himself forced to describe aesthetically the qualities of formless spirits. What the author does, then, is to translate spiritual beauty and ugliness into aesthetic imagery that readers can perceive and understand.

The Basics of Theory:

1. Kant's Empiric Judgments

Milton's aesthetic description of spirits is an approximation to what Immanuel Kant calls the "good" and "agreeable." *Paradise Lost* is Milton's translation of a spiritual account into an understandable aesthetic characterization. It

is indeed a reversal of Kant's theory. Kant is right when he claims that discerning and evaluating empiric judgments can be an intricate process, particularly, one would say, if such judgments take for an object figures as loaded and complex as Milton's characters. In *Critique of Judgment*, Kant states that aesthetic judgments can be divided into empirical and pure, and they are differentiated mainly because the former takes into account external factors, biases that influence the subject, and the latter does not. Depending on the modality of judgment one makes, different results appear—even from the same object:

Aesthetic judgments are empirical if they assert that an object or a way of presenting it is agreeable or disagreeable; they are pure if they assert that it is beautiful. Empirical aesthetic judgments are judgments of sense (material aesthetic judgments); only pure aesthetic judgments (since they are formal) are properly judgments of taste. (69)

A pure judgment, if accomplished, would allow calling the object "beautiful." Empiric judgments, in contrast, are biased and merely express the liking of a person in particular. Therefore, empiric judgments are much more common as they do not require a highly educated subject, universal acceptance, or an extensive testing process that determine the object's validity as beautiful. In addition, objects of empiric criticism are judged in accordance to their aesthetic features, their charms, and also their usage.

These empiric judgments abound in *Paradise Lost*. Examine Gabriel's judgment of Satan at the time he catches the fallen angel in Eden plotting against Adam and Eve. After an exquisite battle of spoken arguments, Gabriel praises Satan's talents—his intellect and rhetoric mostly—which remain undiminished after his fall. He finds the fallen angel a great judge of wisdom and, incidentally, a great loss to heaven: "O loss of one in heaven to judge of wise" (IV. 904). Contrary to the beautiful, the good is completely dependent on the subject biases. Gabriel, as subject, completely alienates Satan's negative features from the positive ones and is capable of admiring the good in him. Although there is a very palpable interest attached to the good, there is no universality associated to it. Zephon, an angel recruited to persecute Satan in Eden, has a completely different opinion of the foe. Zephon mocks the fallen angel and makes it clear to him that he is no longer what he once was:

Think not, revolted spirit, thy shape the same,
Or undiminished brightness, to be known
As when thou stood'st in heaven upright and pure;
That glory then, when thou no more wast good,
Departed from thee, and thou resemblest now
Thy sin and place of doom obscure and foul. (IV. 835-840)

Zephon cannot see past Satan's scarred and tainted appearance, which incidentally is the reflection of his current fallen condition. It is his sin that makes

Satan disagreeable to the sight. Gabriel's and Zephon's contrasting opinions do not discredit each other. Nor do they imply a greater competence of any of the two subjects. These "opinions" are empiric judgments of taste. They express the particular liking or disliking of Satan. In other words, they distinguish him only as agreeable or disagreeable, instead of beautiful or ugly.

Milton's stylistic tendency to give polarized characters an opportunity to speak their minds is not the only reason empiric judgments are very common in his poem. Milton's narrator tends to make such judgments as well. As he describes the garden, the narrator repeatedly mentions the functions and usages of the landscape: "It was a place / chosen by the sovereign planter, when he framed / all things to man's delightful use" (IV. 690-692). The narrator also declares the trees and plants in the garden are valuable because of their fruit, and let us not forget, the emphasis on Adam and Eve (considered objects) as the guardians and curators of Paradise. It is undoubtedly hard, if not impossible, to standardize empiric judgments of taste, but one must remember this kind of judgment merely appoints objects agreeable or good. They are more common, and subjects may find them much more fulfilling than pure judgments, and most importantly, empiric judgments do not work to distinguish beautiful objects.

2. Ruskin: An Emphasis on Judgment and Taste

Appreciating beauty does not necessarily have to be a complicated practice. John Ruskin's thoughts concerning judgments of beauty and taste may just bring light into beauty. The artist, philosopher, and art critic writes his *Modern Painters 1* in 1843, in which he ponders on the way beautiful and sublime imagery in art contrast with each other. Contrary to Kant's concept of beauty, which involves serious thinking on the object, the pleasing feelings it may evoke, and the reasons for that pleasure, Ruskin emphatically states beauty is not intellectual. He calls beautiful "any object which can give us pleasure in the simple contemplation of its outward qualities without any direct and definite exertion of the intellect" (100). Hence, the subject merely contemplates beauty in an object, which incidentally rouses feelings of pleasure in him without demanding direct action from him. Ruskin's theory, like Kant's, suggests beauty is founded in the pleasure of the subject at the time of observing the object; however, Ruskin stresses that the cause of beauty is the sum of the "outward qualities" of the object. Beauty manifests itself to our eyes. And that manifestation is precisely what Milton seeks: the portrayal of good and evil through beauty and ugliness.

One of Ruskin's most striking ideas is his separation of judgment from taste, both of which are clearly defined as completely independent of each other. Ruskin believes a judgment is a "definite action of the intellect" (101), while taste refers to the "instinctive and instant preferring of one material object to another without any obvious reason, except that it is proper to human nature in its perfection so to do" (101), and since beauty is not intellectual but instinctive, let us say that our considering an object beautiful lies directly on our taste, not our

judgment. Ruskin believes that there are some secondary and artificial elements of beauty which may be intellectual: fitness, propriety, and relation; however, no subject can ever appoint any of them as the obvious or unique source of beauty in an object (102). For all accounts, Ruskin's vision of beauty is very simple and still complete and accurate.

Aesthetic Beauty: The Son

The Son, the Miltonian character who alludes to Jesus Christ, is the epitome of goodness. His description, of course, is that of a beautiful being. The reader can effortlessly perceive Milton's intention to elevate the Son to the most prestigious position in Heaven. As a leader and the most important combatant in the battle of Heaven, the Son is portrayed as a glorious and beautiful warrior: "He in celestial panoply all armed / Of radiant urim, work divinely wrought, / Ascended" (VI. 760-762). In addition, The Father, who seems to appear in the narrative merely to enable the Son, declares him an extension of himself. In direct speech, God refers to him as "thou in whom my glory I behold / In full resplendence, heir of all might" (V. 719-720). Here Milton purposely implants ideas of infinity and omnipotence in the reader, and most importantly, he maintains these ideas vivid in the subjects' minds throughout *Paradise Lost* in all the appearances of the Son.

An aesthetic study of these appearances makes it seem more plausible to categorize the Son as beautiful; however, the poet's phrasing of the magnificence of this character suggests a beauty that surpasses the writer's capabilities to portray. Throughout *Paradise Lost*, the figure of the Son is persistently soothing and distinguished. Characters are constantly comforted by his presence, and he is ultimately the savior of Heaven and redeemer of humankind in the story. Goodness and beauty seem to accompany him; in fact, his very presence changes his surroundings, embellishing them to match his own aesthetics:

Before him power divine his way prepared;
At his command the uprooted hills retired
Each to his place, they heard his voice and went
Obsequious, heaven his wonted face renewed,
And with fresh flowerets hill and valley smiled. (VI. 780-784)

The Son has the power to turn a battlefield into a field of roses. He is, nevertheless, always exalted amid this beautiful imagery: "he on the wings of cherub rode sublime / On the crystalline sky, in sapphire throned" (VI. 771-772). The writer places the Son's beauty above—arguably all—other objects of beauty in the poem. He favors the Son as the most beautiful being among his already pristine species, but Milton's subject matter (the supernatural divine) once again plays an important role affecting his writing. At times, the poet seems unable to satisfy his own wish to fully develop the aesthetic characterization of the Son with

his already exquisite phrasing. Milton describes the Son as a “Lightning divine, ineffable, serene” (V. 733-734). He does his best to express the Son’s ineffability through words, and inadvertently creates a new source for the Sublime, one that has the potential to inspire such enthusiastic passion in a reader that tries to create an image that is aesthetically impossible. It is, in Milton’s words, “ineffable.” The Son’s characterization reveals that he is Milton’s favorite character to embellish, and his goodness is the immediate source of his beauty.

Aesthetic Beauty: Satan

Ironically, the Miltonian translation of “the good” into beauty is never clearer than in his description of Satan. In this study, the analysis of Milton’s Satan follows his existence chronologically. Hence, one’s journey into the study of Satan begins with a version of the character that is not so commonly known yet is well represented in Milton’s *Paradise Lost*: a beautiful Satan. Milton’s poem does not center in Satan as a beautiful being, as most of the account takes place once he has fallen from grace. However, his original conditions as a beautiful being, a heavenly angel, are mentioned in numerous occasions throughout the plot.

One has already established, in previous sections of this study, that Kantian judgments of beauty are divided into two kinds: pure and empirical (*Critique of Judgment*). As far as pure judgments are concerned, the angelic presence of Satan is a beautiful one, as angels are universally considered radiant—literally radiant as they even seem to emanate light from within themselves. This kind of aesthetic judgment is not affected by the subject’s bias. Empirical judgments, on the other hand, rely on external factors and are affected by biases that influence the subject’s judgment. Empirical judgments in *Paradise Lost* commonly acknowledge Satan’s aesthetics positively as well. However, this empiric acknowledgement should only define Satan as agreeable and good.

Satan’s ex-comrades, other heavenly inhabitants, clearly demonstrate the mechanics of empirical judgments of a once beautiful Satan. These numerous characters are acquainted with Satan before his revolt, when they considered him beautiful. Interestingly, they also interact with the former archangel after he has turned evil and has fallen. This second version of Satan is considered, of course, ugly by the angels remaining in Heaven. Their judgments of Satan are the most comprehensive in the poem, to the extent that they have experienced both sides of the character, before and after his fall (and his consequential uglification). Thus, the reader can understand through the descriptive accounts of these characters the constant change of Satan, both in terms of aesthetics and behavior. Their accounts carry a lucid loathing of the fallen Satan, but they also expose an equally clear praising of the angel in Heaven, narrated through flashbacks and other recounts of the past in the poem’s plot. For example, Raphael shows an unenthusiastic praising of a beautiful Satan. As he relates the story of the revolt in Heaven—which is a past event, prior to the main plot of *Paradise Lost*—Raphael is fast to note Satan’s greatness: “he of the first, / if not the first

archangel, great in power, / in favour and pre-eminence" (V. 659-661). Glorious and beautiful as any of the other archangels, if not more, that former Satan is held in great esteem by his now enemy Raphael. In addition, this former beauty is further evidenced by the angel Zephon. His recognition of beauty in a former friend, who is now an adversary, is exemplary of Milton's narrative power to express their complicated two-phased relationship. That is, most of the lines in Milton's piece acknowledging Satan's beauty are accompanied by a clause disclaiming that such beauty still exists. Zephon tells Satan:

Think not, revolted spirit, thy shape the same,
 Or undiminished brightness, to be known
 As when thou stood'st in heaven upright and pure;
 That glory then, when thou no more wast good,
 Departed from thee. (IV. 835-839)

As he passes his judgment on Satan, Zephon is clear to indicate that there used to be beauty in him, but it extinguished since the moment of his fall. Once again, Milton's theme of the supernatural divine compromises his narrative possibilities. He is forced to adjust his description of Satan. Since Satan is a spirit, his beauty should count for a spiritual one, and such divine beauty is obviously stained by his sinning. The poet's challenge is to transfer that spiritual relapse into aesthetic unpleasantness in order for his reader to understand it, and the poet giftedly achieves it. Milton finishes Zephon's speech with the phrase: "Thou resemblest now thy sin" (IV. 839-840), in a brilliant transference of spiritual into aesthetic value. The aesthetic experience of Satan is the aesthetic experience of his sin.

Milton's Subtle Reference to Former Beauty

In Heaven, Satan is as beautiful as glorious, but Milton is obligated to diminish that aesthetic beauty in his description of the spirit after his fall. Raphael is the character who introduces the archangel to Adam (who is incidentally a synecdoche of humankind). It is particularly important that he is introduced by the name of *Satan*. Milton chooses this name extraordinarily accurately in an effort to obliterate all beauty in Satan. While Raphael introduces his counterpart by this new name: "Satan, so call him now, his former name / is heard no more in heaven" (V. 658-659), Adam never gets to know Satan's previous name. He had never heard about Satan before, and with this speech, Raphael makes sure that the human has no reason for considering Satan anything but ugly, evil, and destructive. Though Satan's beauty is already lost, it is the work of Raphael's rhetoric that eradicates the remainders of the fallen angel's beauty. Nevertheless, Raphael's rhetoric is slightly flawed to the eyes of the reader of Milton's piece. One must notice that the "former name" is never specified in the presence of the humans in the story, but by merely mentioning the existence of such a

“former name,” Milton, once again, implies a distinct and beautiful glory in the past of the fallen angel. Of course Milton means this reference to be understood by the reader without adding any further complication to the particular passage. Adam never realizes Raphael’s mistake, but the reader is completely aware of the reference. In the end, any notion of Satan’s beauty is absent from the human characters in the poem, but the reader is conscious of it because of the suggestive language of the poet.

Milton makes reference to Lucifer, the light-bearer or the morning star, several times throughout the poem, and interestingly, he often seems willing to insert subtle details of Satan’s beautiful past:

Know then, that after Lucifer from Heaven
 (So call him, brighter once amidst the host
 Of angels, then that star the stars among)
 Fell with his flaming legions through the deep
 Into his place. (VII. 131-135)

Milton’s usage of parenthetical information suggests that the poet tries but cannot avoid mentioning the archangel’s beauty before his fall, and the explicit association with light reinforces the idea of beauty in Lucifer. As a star, he emanates light from within himself, just like the Father has also been said to do. In fact, Milton refers to him as “the morning star that guides the starry flock” (V. 708-709). Here, the poet is saying not only that the archangel is luminous, but that he is the most luminous of nearly all others in Heaven. And his poetic imagery, which ambushes the reader in a starry evening firmament, demonstrates Milton’s willingness to depict beauty in Satan. This willingness, however, is shown with subtlety. Beauty was in Lucifer, but it does not persist once he has fallen from grace. “Lucifer, so by allusion called, / of that bright star to Satan paragoned” (X. 425-426), Milton writes, regarding a name that expresses praising of the past and at the same time repulsion of the present.

A Satan of Beauty and Glory

Furthermore, this luminosity that Milton gives to the archangel goes hand in hand with Lucifer’s grandeur, with the high positioning Milton gives him in Heaven. Theoretically, Lucifer belongs to a “low” order in the hierarchy of Heaven. Angels are traditionally grouped in factions call “orders” or “choirs,” according to their position in a hierarchical heaven. As stated in *The Celestial Hierarchy*, a text attributed to Dionysius the Areopagite, “the highest Order. . . must be regarded as hierarchically ordering in a bidden manner the second Order; and the second Order of Dominions, Virtues and Powers, leads the Principalities, Archangels and Angels more manifestly” (176). Archangels, such as Lucifer, Michael, or Raphael, are grouped in the third order of Heaven. Such order is at

the bottom of the hierarchical structure, and in consequence its occupants share the least power and authority in Heaven, but Milton purposely disregards this traditional order and lifts Lucifer's rank. Milton's Heaven is also hierarchical, but this hierarchy is unique of his poem. This is evidenced by Milton's multiple references to choirs and orders, and the systematic ladder of power, which has the Father in the head, followed by the Son, and then Lucifer and the other archangels. In *Paradise Lost*, Lucifer is exalted to the highest positions of the power system. He commands his numerous celestial minions to pleasure, and they obey to his greater nature:

All [orders] obeyed
 The wonted signal, and superior voice
 Of their great potentate; for great indeed
 His name, and high was his degree in heaven. (V. 704-707)

Interestingly enough, Milton does not simply assign a higher order to Satan. Instead, he reverses the entire structure of Heaven and gives archangels a major importance in his Heaven. Tradition dictates that the basis to establish the hierarchical orders of angels is the spirit's proximity to God. Dionysius explains that, "each Order is the interpreter and herald of those above it, the most venerable being the interpreter of God who inspires them, and the others in turn of those inspired by God" (180). The closer one is to God, the higher one is on the hierarchical order of Heaven. But in *Paradise Lost*, Milton reverses the established notions once again. In the poem, the most important order is not that closest to the Lord, but rather the one that is closest to humans. In short, Milton's Satan is great and dominant, as he is beautiful.

Milton's poetic diction reflects this prestige of Satan. The poet gives descriptions of Satan with heightened sensibility. It is noteworthy that Milton has the skill to combine beauty and sublimity in what seems a natural marriage as he relates the happenings and mishaps of this character. The poet seems to truly apply himself to the construction of a beauty in the lines that involve this former figure of a heavenly Satan. His writing becomes more refined, his metaphors more delicate. Take the following as an example; Satan guides his angel-minions as the revolt in Heaven begins:

Satan with his powers
 Far was advanced on winged speed, an host
 Innumerable as the stars of night,
 Or stars of morning, dewdrops which the sun
 Impearls on every leaf and every flower. (V. 743-747)

Milton skillfully combines the description of the "harsh" innumerable numbers of Satan stars (his troops) with the delicate imagery of dewdrops that seem to almost float on petals and leaves. This Miltonian imagery of the beautiful evokes the infinite, and the beauty he describes reflects Satan's grandeur.

The Miltonian Aesthetic Transition

Satan is not always good and beautiful in *Paradise Lost*. Milton also has to deal with an ugly version of the character, and what seems even more complicated, the poet also has to describe the gradual transition of that beauty into ugliness and that good into evil. The revolt in Heaven and the consequential fall of the rebel angels is the starting point for Milton's epic plot, and they also prove a great challenge to the poet's ability. The narration of the fall is complex because Milton considers that it is a transitional phase in the aesthetics of *Paradise Lost*. Milton begins his poem in the middle of the action. The poem's opening passage narrates the fall of Heaven's fiends and their disgraceful regrouping at the bottom of Hell. This sequence of events is the link between evil and good, and therefore, also between beauty and ugliness.

One has claimed that Milton intends an aesthetic translation of spiritual traces. The difficulty with the imagery of the fall is that angels are not transformed into devils immediately. Their sin corrupts them, but it does not disrupt their beauty instantly. Milton gives the impression of condescending to their disgrace. In their introduction to *Paradise Lost*, editors Stephen Orgel and Jonathan Goldberg sustain that, "we are offered a classical version of the fall of the rebel angels, in which it is no longer sinful or painful, but beautiful, and Milton's eloquent account is full of compassion for the loss of a particularly ephemeral beauty" (XIX). Milton is indeed ambivalent about the aesthetic description of Satan when he narrates the first moments of his existence after the fall. Nonetheless, this ambivalence is not caused by a lack of skill on the author's behalf, but by his empathetic attitudes toward the character. In a rather long description of the fallen angel, Milton compares him to an eclipsed sun. This description can be easily broken into three parts. The first part establishes the conditions of Satan as a fallen and sinful angel:

His form had yet not lost
All her original brightness, nor appeared
Less than archangel ruined, and the excess
Of glory obscured. (I. 591-594)

This "twilight" imagery is relatively neutral. Milton finds Satan guilty of "excess," but is reluctant to punish him with full hideousness; the following lines complicate the analysis of this three-part metaphor. In this second part, Milton heightens his language and creates a brilliant comparison between Satan and the eclipsed sun:

As when the sun new risen
Looks through the horizontal misty air
Shorn of his beams, or from behind the moon
In dim eclipse disastrous twilight sheds
On half the nations, and with fear of change
Perplexes monarchs. (I. 594-599)

In these lines, Satan is more beautiful than ugly in spite of his sinful deeds, and perhaps with the exception of a lessened light, his portrayal is also beautiful and inspiring. However, Milton's immediately following lines, the third part of his metaphor, further perplex the reader with another change in his attitude toward the character. The poet, for the first time in *Paradise Lost*, clearly ascertains that Satan's aberrant behavior has left him physically marked. This fallen Satan is scarred:

Darkened so, yet shone
Above them all the archangel but his face
Deep scars of thunder had intrenched, and care
Sat on his faded cheek. (I. 599-602)

His moral disgrace is finally shown as a mark in the archangel's face. In these last lines, Milton also proposes that Satan is dark but that he also manages to shine. His efforts to establish the fall as a transitional phase in the account of Satan culminates in this beautiful portrayal of ugliness. Milton's imagery is outstandingly proper for this aesthetic transitional stage of the fallen angels in the poem, and his usage of the eclipse masterfully combines light and darkness to suggest that this Satan who has just fallen from grace has not yet fully lost his beauty.

Ugliness: Satan

Milton cannot avoid exploiting the fall of Satan as an uglifying factor. His fall, which is both physical and spiritual, leads to the disfiguration of the angel's image. But being scarred and burnt is only the beginning of Satan's ordeal. Evil deforms his body, and the fallen angel himself has to sorrowfully acknowledge his condition: "pain / enfeebled me, to what I was in heaven" (IX. 487-488). It is not surprising that then, in the most horrible conditions, Satan confirms himself in evil and sequentially, conceives, plans, and executes his ideal revenge: to tempt man and bring doom upon him. The study of physiognomy suggests ugliness is but the outer facade of evil. In "Determinants and Consequences of Facial Aesthetics," Thomas Alley and Katherine Hildebrandt state that: "in addition to being associated with various biological handicaps, facial ugliness seems to be associated with character defects, mental illness and, perhaps, low intelligence" (137). Milton plays with the physiognomy of the character. His ugliness matches his evilness.

The Miltonian translation of spiritual into aesthetic once again plays a central role in the narration of this section of the poem. Milton aesthetically sinks Satan to the lowest level of ugliness to suggest his depravity. Furthermore, the poet's version of the seduction of man does not depart greatly from the traditional Christian story. Milton uses the same characters, a cunning Satan, the serpent, a naive Eve, and the same means for disgrace: the apple and a thirst for

knowledge. Nevertheless, it is Milton's tone and rhetoric that make the strongest case against Satan. Having to disguise a snake to approach his enemy represents yet another downfall for him:

O foul descent! That I who erst contended
 With gods to sit the highest, am now constrained
 Into a beast, and mixed with bestial slime,
 This essence to incarnate and imbrute,
 That to the height of deity aspired. (IX. 163-167)

This degradation from god to animal is the ultimate humiliation for Satan and his clearest uglification. Milton also suggests that Satan is imposing this degradation on himself as result of his incontrollable spite for God and his creatures. Furthermore, the author makes it clear that it is his purpose to humiliate the character, to portray his darkest hour with the most hideous form. Satan is no longer the great warrior he used to be, nor he behaves as the once prominent leader who "above the rest [of angels] / in shape and gesture proudly eminent / stood like a tower" (I. 589-591). This Satan sinks in sorrow and self-pity.

But that is not the only manner in which Milton demonstrates the uglifying powers of evil. The snake itself suffers the misfortune of being Satan's prey, and the consequential horrifying transformation. Milton writes that the snake is not evil in itself: "not yet in horrid shade or dismal den, / nor nocent yet, but on the grassy herb / fearless unfeared he slept" (IX. 185-187). Acknowledging the idea of the Garden of Eden, this snake is to be taken as mother of all snakes, progenitor of all to come, and it is neither evil nor ugly before Satan takes it. This is in fact just another creature in the Garden of Eden, which is said to encompass all beauty. Milton does in fact emphasize the animal's supreme beauty saying that, "pleasing was his shape, / and lovely, never since of serpent kind / lovelier" (IX. 503-505). It is Satan's meanness that renders the snake ugly. Interestingly, the poet is suggesting that the ugliness of the snake is not based on its form. Instead its ugliness has its foundation on the fear of the potential danger of the animal. Commonly, the ugliness of the object of an aesthetic experience, an animal in this case, frightens the subject. Regularly, one fears a snake because it is ugly and menacing, but this Miltonian snake is very particular. Its ugliness is caused by terror. Milton offers a reversal of one's common understanding, and with this instance of poetic genius, evil is thus confirmed as the preeminent uglifying factor in *Paradise Lost*.

Satan's Infinite Evil

The second evil form of the fallen angel is as infinitely ugly as it is immortal. Through genius poetic diction, Milton combines Satan's immortality with the notion that he plans to use this infinite time of his to envision and execute the destruction of the humankind. Thus, the poet is able to add a greater intensity

to the emotional impact of his characterization. The thought of undying evil, of a being of massive potential for destruction in perennial guard and plotting, is terrifying. This image of Satan renders him alien of life, its enemy, in fact. Milton is aware of this enmity of Satan and transmits it through his imagery as he narrates proceedings of the fallen angel, but Milton's description transcends the situation. Satan's immortality also reaches the reader in a more personal manner because of the empathy the fallen angel inspires. One of Milton's greatest achievements in *Paradise Lost* is the high level of empathy that most readers experience toward a humanized, doomed and defeated Satan. He is ugly, lessened. Ironically in the text, Satan's greatest attribute, his awareness, plays against him. Satan's immortality is terrible because he understands that he will be eternally punished with his ugliness, which represents his separation from God. Cast into Hell, Satan awakens to a terrible awareness of an eternity of chastisement:

He with his horrid crew
Lay vanquished, rolling in the fiery gulf
Confounded though immortal: but his doom
Reserved him to more wrath; for now the thought
Both of lost happiness and lasting pain
Torments him. (I. 51-56)

The angel suffers from both emotional and physical pain, though the former kind is the one Milton emphasizes mainly and is the one that affects the reader most deeply.

Satan and Terror

As the ultimate representative of ugliness in *Paradise Lost*, Satan's aesthetic characterization inspires terror. Satan is a creation of God, an angel, who initially (like all of his kind) enjoys a beauty that is naturally greater than human beauty. His fall eradicates the beautiful features God had given him. Furthermore, his latter ugly form leaves space for terror to manifest, a new passion that is not present in his initial beautiful form. Milton's writing reveals that Satan's figure after the fall is aesthetically ugly but still impressive. The writer continues to describe the foe as a supremely menacing being even at his lowest (one may also say ugliest) moment, while he rises from the lake of fire at the core of Hell:

Forthwith upright he rears from off the pool
His mighty stature; on each hand the flames
Driven backward slope their pointing spires, and rolled
In billows, leave i' the midst a horrid vale.
Then with expanded wings he steers his flight
Aloft. (I. 221-226)

Satan rises from the lake of fire by his own means and awakens to a new aesthetic reality. He becomes “the Devil,” that terrifying figure of fire and sulfur, burned flesh, pain, and power. Nevertheless, he overpowers the terrible conditions of the hellish pit and masters to remain glorious. Fallen from Heaven, Satan loses the aesthetic beauty that distinguished him as an Angel; however, his great presence remains. In *Beautiful Sublime: The Making of Paradise Lost, 1701-1734*, Leslie Moore claims that, “Satan’s strength, grandeur, and size, his sublime stature, are hardly impaired by his fall; his beauty, however, has ‘Wither’d,’ and it is this deficit rather than any lessening of power that signals his fallen condition” (101-102). Satan remains powerful after his punishment, and this magnificent power added to aesthetic ugliness results in terror.

Beauty Clashes against Ugliness: The War in Heaven

Milton’s translation of the spiritual into the aesthetic is evident in his narration of the battle between the armies of the Father and of Satan. The writer combines ugly and beautiful imagery to describe this encounter, which naturally also reflects the idea of good opposing evil on the battlefield. Previously in this study, the beautiful was linked solely to God and his creation, and the ugly has been connected to Satan and his fall. Nevertheless, in the battle of Heaven narrated in *Paradise Lost*, beautiful and ugly opponents and their attitudes and actions unite to convey the same motif: divine wrath. Milton’s translation of the spiritual into aesthetics is found in these passages once more, but this particular translation is further complicated. Divine wrath appears as a motif predominantly represented by violence and dread—the ugly in action. It is meant to be terrifying and foreshadows great malevolence for the reader. Both aesthetic sides of the battle demonstrate capabilities for great acts of wrath.

Although Milton grants little action to the Father in his poem, he uses different characters to act for him. One of these surrogates is the archangel Michael, commander of the legions of heavenly angels. His battle with Satan synthesizes the conflict of the entire war. These great spirits fight face to face in the classic battle of “good versus evil.” Common knowledge dictates that Michael should be described as a supremely beautiful being while Satan would be the epitome of ugliness. However, in *Paradise Lost*, Milton’s aesthetic elements are mixed. First, this battle happens before Satan falls from Heaven, thus before his uglification. The not-yet-fallen angel is as beautiful as Michael, if not more. In fact, Milton is emphatic of Satan’s beauty by then unspoiled. At that time, he and Michael both reflect the image of their creator. Second, their behavior is ugly. Of course, their behavior is not a palpable object in itself, but it is an object of aesthetic appreciation in Milton’s text. The poet masters the language to describe the wrathful actions of both characters in such a way that he is able to create pictures in the subject’s mind. He achieves making something as intangible as their behavior an appreciable object of aesthetics:

Now waved their fiery swords, and in the air
 Made horrid circles; two broad suns their shields
 Blazed opposite, while expectation stood
 In horror. (VI. 304-307)

The outcome of this paradoxical glance at two beautiful beings is "horror," which has been suggested to originate from the ugly instead. Moreover, Milton implies great evil in the actions of Satan and Michael as he describes them as, "two planets rushing from aspect malign / Of fiercest opposition in mid sky" (VI. 313-314). The poet, in fact, provides an ambivalent portrayal of these characters. He mixes ugly and beautiful aesthetic traits and reveals a conflict between their features and behavior that complicates any aesthetic description.

In other occasions, this battle even seems indescribable. That is, Milton's translation of the spiritual into the aesthetic becomes limited by his nature as a human being. Though Milton's aesthetic characterization is somewhat irregular and unclear, he remains faithful to his ideas of immeasurable power and greatness, even as the spirits engage in raging battle:

Both addressed for fight
 Unspeakable; for who, though with the tongue
 Of angels, can relate, or to what things
 Liken on earth conspicuous, that may lift
 Human imagination to such height
 Of godlike power. (VI. 296-301)

In an effort to demonstrate the unimaginableness of the power of these warriors, the writer claims that such a fight is "unspeakable"—unless one can speak the superior tongue of angels. Ironically, Milton's language is merely human, so his description clearly places the battle out of the reach of human imagination. It is noteworthy that, though Milton is able to characterize the contenders of this battle, the armors, and weapons of choice, he is unable to recount details of their action. As a matter of fact, Milton implies not only that he lacks the verbal power to relate the encounter of these titans but also that he is unable to perceive it from the start. The actions of these characters surpass the writer's ability to comprehend, and thus to narrate. Milton definitely suggests that his account is merely an approximation to facts, those that surpass and escape human contemplation.

Conclusions

Milton's intentions to translate the spiritual into the aesthetic are clear, so is his success. This study has presented images of beauty such as the Son, God's army, Lucifer, and other celestial figures that endorse the idea that good is turned into beauty in Milton's narration. Furthermore, one has also provided instances that prove that all evil features of characters and their acts are described

as ugly. And finally, one has also commented on a third group of instances in which aesthetic elements appear to merge into an unformed cluster of imagery, neither completely beautiful nor ugly, that reveals the ambivalence of the writer towards a holy war and divine wrath.

The largest part of this study deepens on Satan as Milton depicts the character in *Paradise Lost*. Exceeding various other great characters, Satan proves to be the most relevant character to elaborate Milton's translation of the spiritual into the aesthetic. The present reading of Satan starts in his time of beauty, since "he above the rest [of angels] / In shape and gesture proudly eminent / Stood like a tower" (l. 590-591), and culminates with the consummation of his sin and the consequential uglification of his heavenly figure. Satan has proved particularly useful to establish concrete exemplification of beauty and ugliness since he reaches further than any other character towards both extremes. He is ultimately good and also ultimately evil. He is extremely beautiful and also incredibly ugly. John Milton's physical description of the character is the ultimate proof of his mastery of the English language and his exemplary poetic diction. He is in fact able to describe the indescribable. The poet transforms the moral and spiritual qualities of his characters, as well as their immaculate and deviant behaviors, into tangible physical traits that the readers may not just process and understand but also enjoy and be moved by them.

Bibliography

- Alley, Thomas R. & Hildebrandt Katherine. "Determinants and Consequences of Facial Aesthetics." *Social and Applied Aspects of Perceiving Faces*. Alley, Thomas R. (editor). Hillsdale, NJ.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1988. Web. Aug. 26, 2009.
- Dionysius the Areopagite. *The Celestial Hierarchy*. Web. July 31 2010 <<http://www.esoteric.msu.edu/VolumeII/CelestialHierarchy.html>>.
- Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Judgment*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1987. Web. Dec. 11, 2008.
- Milton, John. *Paradise Lost*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004. Print.
- Moore, Leslie. *Beautiful Sublime: The Making of Paradise Lost, 1701-1734*. Stanford, CA.: Stanford University, 1990. Print.
- Ruskin, John. *Modern Painters*. Vol. I. Boston: Aldine Book Publishing, 1877. Print.