

ANGLICA

An International Journal of English Studies

26/1 2017

EDITOR

Grażyna Bystydzińska [g.bystydzienska@uw.edu.pl]

ASSOCIATE EDITORS

Marzena Sokołowska-Paryż [m.a.sokolowska-paryz@uw.edu.pl]

Anna Wojtyś [a.wojtys@uw.edu.pl]

ASSISTANT EDITORS

Katarzyna Kociołek [kkociolek@uw.edu.pl]

Magdalena Kizeweter [m.kizeweter@uw.edu.pl]

Przemysław Uściński [przemek.u@hotmail.com]

ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDITOR

Barry Keane [bkeane@uw.edu.pl]

ADVISORY BOARD

Michael Bilynsky, University of Lviv
Andrzej Bogusławski, University of Warsaw
Miroslawa Buchholz, Nicolaus Copernicus University, Toruń
Bernhard Diensberg, University of Bonn
Edwin Duncan, Towson University
Jacek Fabiszak, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań
Jacek Fisiak, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań
Elzbieta Foeller-Pituch, Northwestern University, Evanston-Chicago
Piotr Gąsiorowski, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań
Keith Hanley, Lancaster University
Andrea Herrera, University of Colorado
Christopher Knight, University of Montana
Marcin Krygier, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań
Krystyna Kujawińska-Courtney, University of Łódź
Zbigniew Mazur, Marie Curie-Skłodowska University, Lublin
Rafał Molencki, University of Silesia, Sosnowiec
John G. Newman, University of Texas Rio Grande Valley
Michał Jan Rozbicki, St. Louis University
Jerzy Rubach, University of Iowa
Piotr Ruskiewicz, Pedagogical University, Cracow
Hans Sauer, University of Munich
Krystyna Stamirowska, Jagiellonian University, Cracow
Merja Stenroos, University of Stavanger
Jeremy Tambling, University of Manchester
Peter de Voogd, University of Utrecht
Anna Walczuk, Jagiellonian University, Cracow
Jean Ward, University of Gdańsk
Jerzy Welna, University of Warsaw

GUEST REVIEWERS

Dorota Babilas, University of Warsaw
Bartłomiej Błaszkiwicz, University of Warsaw
Maria Błaszkiwicz, University of Warsaw
Rafał Borysławski, University of Silesia, Katowice
Anna Branach-Kallas, Nicolaus Copernicus University, Toruń
Janusz Kaźmierczak, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań
Anna Krawczyk-Laskarzewska, University of Warmia and Mazury, Olsztyn
Ewa Łuczak, University of Warsaw
Małgorzata Łuczyńska-Holdys, University of Warsaw
David Malcolm, University of Gdańsk
Marek Paryż, University of Warsaw
Daniel Reynaud, Avondale College of Higher Education, Australia
Karolina Rosiak, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań
Paweł Stachura, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań
Ryszard Wolny, University of Opole



UNIVERSITY
OF WARSAW

Tomasz Jabłoński
independent scholar

John Milton's 'Chaotic' Satan

Abstract

This article investigates the affinity between the characters of Satan and Chaos in John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. My aim is to show the connections between those characters that appear surprising in the light of Milton's professed theodicy. On closer inspection certain contradictions become manifest, which may enable analysis of the epic not usually advocated by Miltonic criticism. I propose a fusion of more or less customary *Paradise Lost*'s criticism with 20th century's existential philosophy exemplified by Nicolai Berdjajev.

It appears that the question of God's authorship and of the existence of evil cannot be solved unless we address the issue of Creation with its relationship to the other, significant and highly prominent figure in John Milton's epic, namely that of Chaos.¹ The place of Chaos, its literary representation, interaction with Satan and the divine attitude towards it are issues that have not been successfully clarified neither by Milton's contemporaries nor current Miltonic criticism. The ontological status of Chaos varies depending which variant of the myth of origin is taken into consideration. There are three main possibilities open to our analysis: a) creation understood as battle with pre-existing Chaos embodying the forces of nothingness, void and destruction; b) *creatio ex nihilo*; c) materialistic approach, claiming that all matter (including that of Chaos itself) originates from God.² Of course, while embarking on the analysis of creation, first matter, and the principle of evil in the Universe, one comes across hot debates concerning dualism and Manichaeism that occupied the minds of the seventeenth century readers. The echoes of those debates reverberate in the fabric of *Paradise Lost*.

The war in Heaven which in Milton's epic poem explains the origin of evil links this narrative with the ancient myths of beginning.³ As the creation of Earth and man follows the defeat of Satan, it can be argued that the war in Heaven was necessary to make room for the creation of our world. This way the ancient image of creation through war is evoked. Its most prominent parallel in ancient literature is the Babylonian epic poem *Enuma Elish*, where we have Marduk (a male deity) defeating a female monster of the primordial waters, Tiamat. After the successful struggle the body of Tiamat is cut in two and Marduk separates the

lower waters from the upper, creates the sun, moon and stars and thus proceeds to establish divine order over defeated, chaotic monster. This account of creation is similar to Genesis 1. An Ugaritic text featuring the myth of Baal presents him as fighting yet another river (or sea) evil deity, Nahar, or Yamm respectively. The account and the outcome of that struggle closely resembles the one depicted in *Enuma Elish*. The echoes of those ancient myths of the beginning presented as a battle between a deity and chaos are also to be found in the Bible. In the Book of Isaiah, for instance, we encounter their transformation into the apocalyptic vision of God's glorious victory over the old enemy prophesied:

In that day the Lord with his hard and great and strong sword will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, Leviathan the twisting serpent, and he will slay the dragon that is in the sea. (Is. 27:1)⁴

In *Paradise Lost*, Milton compares Satan to Leviathan (I. 201) whereas Chaos is described as “illimitable *ocean* without bound” (II. 892; emphasis mine), which joins together the image of Chaos and Satan as the enemies of God, both rooted in the ancient epic tradition of the Middle East.

Although numerous passages in *Paradise Lost* may point to the Babylonian influence on Milton's theodicy, such a portrayal implies a significant fallacy: if we assume that Chaos is the primeval enemy of God, constantly threatening the newly established divine order with annihilation (as is the case with *Enuma Elish*, and Book II and VI of *Paradise Lost*), then its existence curtails the omnipotence of God. If personified Chaos (or at least the concept of chaos) is to be considered a true enemy, it must constitute a separate, autonomous ontological entity. Only then the battle, the ensuing victory, the sacrifice (in the form of Christ's Incarnation, Passion and Resurrection) can be in any way significant. But the price one has to pay for such a worldview is the fact that God is not the only entity in the Universe. As far as He can remain omniscient, he is no longer omnipresent, nor omnipotent.

Since my undertaking consists in connecting these voices from the 17th century with the way the problem of theodicy resurfaces in the existential philosophy of the 20th century. I need to invoke here the work of Nicolai Berdjaev, who in one ingenious gesture established the connection between the ontological significance of *creatio ex nihilo* and the existence of evil, freedom and divine potency, postulating that freedom was “part of the nothing out of which God created the world” (1960, 25). In effect, argues Berdjaev, “the myth of the Fall tells of this powerlessness of the creator to avert the evil resulting from freedom which He has not created.” Then he goes on to explain that:

There is in the very origin of the world an irrational freedom which is grounded in the void, in that abyss from which the dark stream of life issues forth and in which every sort of possibility is latent. [...] Freedom is not created because it is not

a part of nature. [...] God is All-powerful in relation to being but not in relation to nothingness and freedom; and that is why evil exists. (1948, 160)

Berdajev's argument neatly corroborates the Miltonic Satan's claim that freedom can be granted, revoked, constrained, or activated, but could not have been created. To some extent this view has been accepted by Milton's contemporaries (and the poet himself), when they acknowledged that God's potency could not be diminished on the grounds that even He could not do what was for instance ethically impossible.⁵ Therefore it remains perfectly logical that God cannot lie, nor create a stone so heavy that he could not lift it himself. It also becomes equally understandable that He, being the source of life, cannot at the same time identify himself with non-being, void and death, as He is not the father of any of these. Indeed, St. Augustine⁶ proves right when he claims that God could not have been the maker of evil while, on the other hand, we are reminded of the ancient myths about the world emerging from the war against chaos. Finally, attention must be paid to Berdjaev's crucial point that personal, individual freedom locates itself on the same ontological scale as nothingness. If the uncreated abyss is the mother of ontological freedom, it means that essence of an individual's ultimate personal freedom is located in the Eternity itself, in the Miltonic "ancient Night" (II. 986), "the eldest of things" (II. 962).

In *Paradise Lost*, as well as in the Bible, Creation is clearly associated with order and prescribing limits. In the Book of Genesis, we have the accounts of light being separated from darkness, waters from the skies, dry land from the sea. Ibn Ezra, a rabbinic commentator of the Bible, insists that the Hebrew word for creation, *bara* stems from the verb meaning "to cut" (Fletcher 1930, 83). Milton seems to follow the same tradition. Once again, Raphael's conversation with Adam should be examined most carefully. While narrating the Creation, Raphael mentions the Father's command to the Son: "ride forth, and bid the Deep / Within appointed bounds be Heav'n and Earth" (VII. 166–167). The idea that Creation is synonymous with prescribing limits informs the whole Book, culminating with the following image of God, the old mapmaker or geometrician, that inspired Blake's famous illustration:

He took the golden compasses prepared
 In God's eternal store to *circumscribe*
 This universe, and all created things.
 One foot He centered and the other turned
 Round through the vast profundity obscure,
 And said, "Thus far extend, thus far thy *bounds*,
 This be thy just *circumference*, O world!" (VII. 225–231; emphasis mine)

Surprisingly, however, at one point Milton's account of Creation becomes endowed with a more dramatic, not to say aggressive tone: no longer envisioned as a cold-minded project hatched in the brain of an unimaginative scientist, but as a battle, a military

conflict, a conquest of the void of chaos performed by the divine forces led by Christ. The image of Chaos as an enemy of God is enhanced with and supported by the description of the Son's equipage which He brings with him while setting out on his expedition:

About his chariot numberless were poured
 Cherub and seraph, potentates and thrones,
 And virtues, wingèd Spirits, and chariots winged,
 From th' armory of God where stand of old. (VII. 197–200)

The mention of war, or at least a battle points to the essence of any conflict, be it human, angelic, or divine: the fighting parties differ considerably as to their most intimate essence. Otherwise there would have been no strife, or at least it would not have been as dramatic as the one Milton envisages in his epic.

It is enough for the Son to ride into the mass of rebel angels to drive them out of Heaven and "locate" them in Hell. He even says to the faithful troops: "Stand still in bright array, ye saints, here stand / Ye angels armed, this day from battle rest!" (VI. 801–802). He rides in the midst of enemies with a clear purpose, previously stated in his conversation with the Father:

Then shall thy saints *unmixed* and from th' impure
 Far *separate*, circling thy Holy Mount,
 Unfeigned hallelujahs to Thee sing. (VI. 742–744; emphasis mine)

This passage is a fragment of Son's proleptic speech, designed to enhance the temporal scope of epic narrative.⁷ What is, however, more pertinent at this point of our analysis is the recurring motif of shape-giving contours, which explains the persistent use of such adjectives as "unmixed" or "separate" (contrasted obviously with the "impure," i.e. contaminated, adulterated and mixed hybrid forms) as well as accounts for the Son's command issued to the angels, bidding them to abstain from battle in order not to mingle with the abhorred opponents. Setting the boundaries and prescribing limits is synonymous with giving shape, and shape-giving, as we have already argued, is the most important feature of the divine act of Creation in *Paradise Lost*. Conversely, breaking limits appears to be associated with negating or undoing Creation: whether because it entails tumbling back into the primeval matter, i.e. the formless because as yet un-formed and un-shaped *hyle*, or through the association with the fall of angels, which in this context appears tantamount to deformation, effacement, disfigurement.⁸

Small wonder then that the notion of divinely sanctioned circumference stands in sharp contrast with the image of Hell from Book II, where stress falls precisely on all grotesque, misplaced and misshaped things which in effect prove also abominable because they cannot be properly named; defying reason which

rests on clear-cut concepts, they also escape language which is subjected to the logic of reason:

O'er many a frozen, many a fiery alp,
 Rocks, caves, lakes, fens, bogs, dens, and shades of death,
 A universe of death which God by curse
 Created evil, for evil only good,
Where all life dies, death lives, and nature breeds
Perverse all monstrous, all prodigious things,
 Abominable, inutt'able [...] (II. 620–626; emphasis mine)

The highlighted lines are most revealing as they present clearly the most illustrative aspect of evil: the confusion of life and death. All hybrids and mixtures appear vile, as they violate the order sanctioned by Divine Legislator. We soon discover a very clear pattern of Milton's design: all order and right placement in *Paradise Lost* is divine in its origin, whereas all mixture, displacement, disorder and shapelessness belong to the devil. Moreover, Hell itself is presented a site of most unnatural mixtures and confusions: it includes both regions of fire as well as icy cold winds; its fire glares, yet gives no light but issues forth darkness (I. 62–63), and provides no warmth, but consumes. The chief of all geographical hybrids is Satan's "prison cell": the fiery lake, which embodies the confusion of the form (container) with the matter (content), as a lake is supposed to hold water and not fire.

The vocabulary used to describe Satan's prison house is also rich in suggestion of disorder. The poet says: "At once as far as angel's ken he views / The dismal situation waste and wild" (I. 59–60), where the word "wild" likewise suggests lack of order. Later on, the narrator describes Hell as "boundless deep" (I. 177), which distinguishes it sharply from all the perfectly delineated and demarcated regions of the divine territory.

As might be expected, Milton suggests certain correspondence between the prison and the prisoner. The notions of mixing and mingling, together with the idea of limits *versus* limitlessness, are ever alive both in the mind as well as in the deeds of the Fallen One. The moment he wakes up in Hell, after having been thunderstruck, his emotions and the mode of perception are described in the following manner:

Round he throws his baleful eyes
 That witnessed huge affliction and dismay
Mixed with obdurate pride and stedfast hate. (I. 56–58; emphasis mine)

This can also be the reason why he prefers to focus on the "mingling and involving" Hell with Earth as is his professed goal. He betrays such sentiments when he professes that his ambition to rule in Heaven is an "unbounded hope." His hatred

of limits is also noticed and commented upon by other characters in the poem. Gabriel, for instance, while spotting Satan in Eden reprimands him for what he is: a destroyer of limits:

Why hast thou, Satan, broke the *bounds prescribed*
 To thy *transgressions* and *disturbed* the charge
 Of others who approve not to transgress
 By thy example, but have pow'r and right
 To question thy *bold entrance* on this place;
 Employed, it seems, to *violate* sleep and those
 Whose dwelling God hath planted here in bliss? (IV. 878–884; emphasis mine)

All the quoted passages point to the fact that Satan is portrayed as a notorious violator of the prescribed limits. Indeed, if God is the one who prescribes limits, then Satan – the “Adversary” – is paradoxically *bound* to do the adverse, that is to disrespect them. Even in his banter with Gabriel Satan obsessively returns to this question: “Let Him surer bar / His iron gates, if He intends our stay / In that dark durance” (IV. 897–899) The word “durance” denotes here “forced confinement,” but Satan wishes to challenge God’s verdict by an interesting kind of deflection. What has been hurled at him as an accusation (the mode of his punishment, namely confinement), now rebounds as an insult fired back at the accuser:

Then when I *am* thy captive talk of chains,
 Proud *limitary* cherub! But ere then
 Farr heavier load thyself expect to feel
 From my prevailing arm though Heaven’s King
 Ride on thy wings and thou with thy compeers,
 Used to the *yoke*, draw’st his triumphant wheels
 In progress through the road of Heav’n star-paved! (IV. 970–976; emphasis mine)

The word “limitary” literary means “guarding the frontiers,” but that explanation does not in the least neutralise the venom of Satan’s offence. He certainly wishes to imply that his opponent is in fact “limited” because he is so devoted and dedicated to borders, therefore slavish, which seems corroborated by the phrase: “used to the yoke” (line 975). Ultimately, however, it turns out that the sense of the utterance varies along with the speaker: for Gabriel all words meaning limits, borders, proper placement, or just confinement bear positive, or at least neutral connotations, whereas for Satan each such reference is synonymous with the infringement of his liberty. To him they are an offence and slight to his honour.

Let us briefly return to Milton’s description of Hell provided in Book II, where the key feature of Hell’s design is the *unholy* mixture of all properties and the violation of divine order: life that dies and death that lives⁹; perverse, monstrous and prodigious things – all these confirm God’s verdict of *un*-baptising the Creation in order to furnish the prison for the damned with the punishment

fitting their crime. According to Milton's professed theodicy, since Satan and his followers denied God as the author of Creation (of which even they constitute a part), in their punishment they will be excluded from it. Thus, the damned will confuse the reward with the punishment, the gain with the gravest loss, the fruit with the ashes. The violation of proscribed limits and forms issuing in the mixing of kinds, is clearly forbidden in the Bible: "You shall not sow your field with two kinds of seed; Nor shall there come upon you a garment of cloth made of two kinds of stuff" (Lev. 19:19). Yet in *Paradise Lost* we find numerous examples of the conflicting, subverted order of things, like the following image of Hell/hyle:

Beyond this flood [Lethe] a frozen continent
 Lies dark and wild, beat with perpetual storms
 Of whirlwind and dire hail, which on firm land
 Thaws not, but gathers heap, and ruins seems
 Of ancient pile; all else deep snow and ice,
 A gulf profound [...]; the parching air
 Burns froze and cold performs th' effect of fire.
 Thither by harpy-footed furies haled
 At certain revolutions all the damned
 Are brought and feel by turns the bitter change
 Of fierce extremes, extremes by change more fierce,
 From beds of raging fire to starve on ice
 Their soft ethereal warmth, and there to pine
 Immovable, infixed, and frozen round
 Periods of time – thence hurried back to fire. (II. 587–603)

Once again, we see that the main focus in this passage falls on unnatural confusion. A reader familiar with Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poetry may recognize in Milton's description a landscape which could have inspired the sublime scenery of *The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner*, but even more striking is the image of the wilderness taking over the ruined cities which well illustrates the idea of lost happiness. Most importantly, however, this is the land of endless commotion, perpetual storm, and perplexing confusion of the senses. The best illustration of this idea is the mention of "frore," i.e. frost which is sometimes to be found on the ship's railing. When touched, it produces the sensation so painful that it almost seems to burn the skin. This explains how "cold performs th' effect of fire." Upheaval and disorder are thus the most important characteristics of Hell. Its frighteningly spacious, seemingly infinite dimensions (ontologically compatible with the presentation of Satan) are suggested by the use of such phrases like "boundless deep" (I. 177) or: "At once as far as angel's ken he views / The dismal situation *waste and wild*" (I. 59–60; emphasis mine).

Not surprisingly then, since the structure of the prison rests on the principle of confusion, confusion marks also the behaviour of the afflicted. The desolate,

abandoned, deserted wilderness, where no paths or roads can lead the wanderer to a desired place of rest, becomes the arena of their desperate quest:

Thus roving on
 In *cónfused march forlorn* th' advent'rous bands
 With shudd'ring horror pale and eyes aghast
 Viewed first their lamentable lot and found
 No rest. (II. 614–618; emphasis mine)

The punishment fits the crime. Since the fallen angels, through their revolt, have upset the natural (divine) order of creation, they are constantly fed with the fruits of that upsetting. It manifests itself in their confinement to the region whose arrangement is principally anchored in disorder and confusion.

Yet this is not the only interesting feature of Milton's Hell. Far more intriguing is the parallel that a careful reader must draw between the penal colony for the rebels and the realm of Chaos, located between "the top" of Hell and "the bottom" of Heaven. Both places look startlingly alike, the latter being described in the following manner:

Illimitable ocean without bound,
Without dimension, where length, breadth, and height,
 And time and place are lost, where eldest Night
 And Chaos, ancestors of Nature, hold
 Eternal anarchy amidst the noise
 Of endless wars and by *confusion* stand. (II. 892–897; emphasis mine)

This is the view which presents itself to Satan after he has successfully managed to convince Sin to open the gates for him. The highlighted lines strike us as surprisingly familiar. These are the very same words that are used in the poem to describe the "dismal world" of Hell. It seems that the most conspicuous feature of this realm is the *lack of any boundaries*. Chaos is described as "illimitable," which means that it is a region "without bound" and "without dimension." The vocabulary used to describe the architecture of Hell ("boundless deep"), Satanic ambition ("unbounded hope") and the image of chaos ("ocean without bound") are identical. This is not the only parallel we can observe here: in Hell the inmates are afflicted by "the bitter change/ Of fierce extremes" (II. 598–599), which no doubt denotes intense turmoil and struggle between the opposing forces. Almost exactly the same image of merciless, armed conflict is used to describe the anarchy of "endless wars" in the realm of Chaos. Military overtones become even more prominent as we read on:

For Hot, Cold, Moist and Dry, four *champions fierce*
 Strive here for *mast'ry* and to *battle* bring
 Their embryon atoms. They around the *flag*

Of each his *faction* in their several *clans*,
Light-armed or heavy, sharp, smooth, swift or slow,
 Swarm populous, unnumbered as the sands
 Of Barca or Cyrenè's torrid soil. (II. 898–904; emphasis mine)

Further on we come across a direct reference to the Roman goddess of war, Bellona, who “storms / With all her *batt'ring* engines” (II. 922–923; emphasis mine) and intends to “raze / Some capital city” (II. 923–924). Of course, it might be argued that what we are dealing with is a simple instance of focalisation: the narrator describes Chaos the way Satan perceives it, and his is the language of armed conflict because this is the only language that the Adversary speaks. But such an explanation actually plays into the hands of our analysis: the image of Chaos which we receive through the eyes of Satan can be viewed as yet another literary exemplification of *Dasein's* power of disclosedness (the active shaping of the environment through intentional observation). We should not be surprised by this, since Satan is the one who brings “a mind not to be changed by place or time” (I. 252–253). His boastful claim rebounds a few hundred lines later, in the description of chaos, since it apparently is also the region where “time and place are lost” (II. 894) in “vast vacuity” (II.931).¹⁰

Furthermore, time and space merge into one when the narrator tells us that the sound of war in chaos is no less perplexing than at the end of the world, in other words: “than if this frame heaven of heaven were falling, and these elements in mutiny had from her axel torn / The steadfast earth” (II. 924–927). Still more importantly, chaos is a place of continuous revolt. The explicit reference to “mutiny” either means that Satan's arrival has such an impact on the frame of chaos that it begins to operate in accordance with the trespasser's professed worldview, or that Chaos, as an independent entity, is depicted in such a way in order to remind the reader of the chief outcome of all Satan's actions, namely rebellion. If we follow the latter option, we cannot miss the affinity between Satan and Chaos and we will have to assume that this description is not accidental.

Speaking of accidents and coincidences, I would like now to concentrate on the episode where the ruler of chaos is presented together with his train. This is how Milton describes the sovereign lord of the anarchic zone:

Levied to side with warring winds and poise
 Their lighter wings. To whom these most adhere,
 He rules a moment. Chaos umpire sits
 And by decision more embroils the fray
 By which he reigns. Next him high arbiter
 Chance governs all. (II. 905–910)

In other words, personified Chance plays an important role in the domain of Chaos. It functions as a high arbiter (a judge), next in rank to Chaos. According to some

critics, it enjoys an even more prominent role. Dennis Burden, for instance, claims that Chance is the “ideological enemy in *Paradise Lost*” (65), who, allied with Chaos, can successfully wage the campaign against the Almighty, exactly along the lines voiced by Belial in Book II (232–233). It appears therefore that chaos is a territory independent of Heaven, since it has its own, separate ruler. Thus, although some critics – Lewis among them – insisted that the mention of chance indicates commonplace fortuitousness, I want to argue for the opposite. In my opinion there is nothing contingent, random, or accidental about Milton’s Chance paired with Chaos. Their deliberate actions become most apparent when Satan decides to resume his flight through the unknown wilderness. At this moment, the relatively easy journey becomes much harder, not to say desperate:

At last his sail-broad vans
 He spreads for flight and in the surging smoke
 Uplifted spurns the ground, thence many a league
 As in a cloudy chair ascending rides
 Audacious but that seat soon failing meets
 A vast vacuity. All unawares
 Flutt’ring his pennons vain, plumb down he drops
 Ten thousand fathom deep and to this hour
 Down had been falling had not by ill chance
 The strong rebuff of some tumultuous cloud
 Instinct with fire and nitre hurried him
 As many miles aloft. (II. 927–938)

I quote this passage at length in order to recall briefly the following course of events: first, Satan, full of pride and confidence (“spurning the ground”), dives into the realm of Chaos seemingly without great effort. He travels “audaciously” for a while and only then, it can be inferred, he hits a sort of void (“vast vacuity”). All his powers fail him then, and he plunges down helplessly. His course is altered when a cloud of fire and nitre pushes him upwards. The hidden mechanism of this unexpected help is termed by the narrator “ill chance.”

Here lies the heart of the misunderstanding in some of Miltonic criticism. Clive Staples Lewis, for instance, in his obviously jeering manner eagerly seized upon this... chance to undermine Satan’s achievements when he concluded that Satan’s passage through chaos was no victory at all, since an accident helped him (1941, *passim*). A similar interpretation is to be found in John S. Tanner’s *Anxiety in Eden. A Kierkegaardian Reading of Paradise Lost*:

Ironically, Satan shows himself unable to act in a realm that lacks necessity, a world of sheer possibility. [...] Satan is helpless in a realm of actual anarchic freedom. That he escapes from the abyss at all is only by “ill chance” (2. 935) – and the high permission of Providence (2. 1025). This dependency undercuts his boast of absolute autonomy. (155)

Though I agree with Tanner in many other respects, this time I believe his conclusion to be questionable. Chaos is not “a realm of actual anarchic freedom,” since it has a ruler. Although Tanner understands the word “chance” in its literal sense, i.e. that of a blind accident, I would rather propose the meaning which, for example, Belial ascribes to the word “chance” when, during the debate in Pandemonium, he proposes to wait for more favourable time when war with God would make sense, and that would be when Chance and Chaos side with the rebels:

Him to unthrone we then
 May hope when everlasting Fate shall yield
 To fickle Chance and Chaos judge the strife. (I. 231–233)

In the light of this advice, the help which Satan receives at the beginning of his journey points to a deep affinity between the anarchic realm and the “advent’rous” angel. The cloud of fire and nitre is the evidence of open support given to Satan by the king of this realm of confusion. And “ill chance” operates as a sort of messenger sent to guide Satan’s flight towards its master, rather than an unplanned occurrence devoid of any significance. The alliance I am trying to describe here becomes even more obvious when we remember what the war in Heaven looked like. In Raphael’s description of the conflict, we find a mention of “sulphurous and nitrous foam” (VI. 512) which is dug out from the soil of Heaven by the rebellious crew to produce gunpowder. Firing the cannon Satan manages to introduce a temporary disorder in the ranks of the loyal angels. And since we have argued that confusion reigns both in Hell as well as in Chaos, when we look back at Raphael’s story and witness how the escalation of the conflict causes that “horrid confusion heapt / Upon confusion” (VI. 668–669), we cannot avoid the impression that soon Chaos will appear behind Satan’s back to claim this new fought territory for himself, as such suggestion indeed appears in line 670. The affinity, truce, likeness, or cooperation (I am not sure which word is most suitable here) that exists between Chaos and Satan is so clear that it is surprising how little attention this issue has received in Milton’s criticism so far.

This surprising but altogether not impossible correspondence and mutual bond is additionally manifested when we take a look at the manner of Satanic progress through chaos. Milton describes it as follows:

[...] so eagerly the fiend
 O’er bog or steep, through strait, rough, dense, or rare,
 With head, hands, wings, or feet pursues his way
 And swims, or sinks, or wades, or creeps, or flies. (II. 947–950)

The *confused* mode of kinesis where all categories are blurred, therefore distorted, is proper to both Chaos and Hell. On purely syntactical level, the arrangement of

words reveals also a familiar pattern: the sharp, machinegun enumeration of one syllable adjectives and verbs is supposed to mimic the fragmentation and therefore disorder of both regions (Chaos and Hell). The same jerky rhythm could be heard in the description of Hell analysed above:

O'er many a frozen, many a fiery alp,
Rocks, caves, lakes, fens, bogs, dens, and shades of death,
 A universe of death which God by curse
 Created evil, for evil only good. (II. 620–623; emphasis mine)

Unsurprisingly, the same pattern is used when Milton describes chaos:

For Hot, Cold, Moist and Dry, four champions fierce
 Strive here for mast'ry and to battle bring
 Their embryon atoms. (II. 898–900; emphasis mine)

And also in the following account of Satan's prospect on the realm of Chaos:

Into this wild abyss,
 (The womb of Nature and perhaps her grave)
Of neither sea, nor shore, nor air, nor fire,
 But all these in their pregnant causes mixed
 Confus'dly [...], and which thus must ever fight
 Unless th' Almighty Maker them ordain
 His dark materials to create more worlds.
 Into this wild abyss the wary Fiend
 Stood on the brink of Hell and looked a while,
 Pond'ring his voyage, [...]. (II. 910–919; emphasis mine)

Apart from the fractured and chaotic syntax, which can be interpreted as the stylistic indication of the semantic message, in the last quotation we have again the mention of a “wild abyss” which denotes lack of boundaries, infinity (which belongs to Hell and Chaos) and also distemper. The adjective “wild” could also easily be paraphrased as “unnatural” and from here there is only one step to call it “evil.”¹¹ The word “confusion” in line 914 serves as a lexical buckle, joining together the literary representations of Chaos and Hell. Finally, the military character of the chaotic region that has been very strongly established in lines 923–924 by direct reference to Bellona and a city under a siege, is here recapitulated by “mixed pregnant causes” that must “for ever fight” among one another.

In fact, the military imagery is not only a clear evidence of Milton's determination to cast his narrative in the proper “epic” form, but in the following passage it is interestingly fraught with important Biblical references, which remind us of the comparison of the “numberless” band of bad angels to “a pitchy cloud / Of

locusts, warping on the eastern wind, / That o'er the realm of impious Pharaoh hung" (I. 340–342). In the following passage the army of those twisting and distorted (*warped*) bodies turns into another kind of swarm, the "confus'd" mass of ever warring elements. In that they resemble Democritean or Epicurean atoms:

They around the flag
Of each his faction in their several clans,
Light-armed or heavy, sharp, smooth, swift or slow,
Swarm populous, unnumbered as the sands
Of Barca or Cyrenè's torrid soil [...]. (II. 900–904; emphasis mine)

The reader is clearly encouraged to associate this description with a warning from the Book of Leviticus:

Every swarming thing that swarms upon the earth is an abomination... You shall not make yourself abominable with any swarming thing that swarms; and you shall not defile yourself with them, lest you become unclean. (Lev. 11:41–43)

All things that swarm, due to that kinetic propensity itself, fall under our suspicion, and rightly so, as Regina M. Schwartz hastens to explain: "Swarming things are particularly unclean because their mode of locomotion is unclear; they neither swim, walk, nor fly and so they fail to belong to either sea, land, or air" (15–16). Furthermore, Schwartz suggests that the very direction of passage can be morally charged. In the Bible there are numerous references to the upward (therefore rightful) movement: the ascend to the Promised Land; the top of Mount Sinai, or Heaven itself. On the other hand, the downward movement always indicates falling (in the Christian and Miltonic sense of this word): descend to Egypt, death or Sheol (see Schwartz 8–39). The Book of Numbers, for instance, records Moses' warning against the rebels which almost immediately came true since the moment Moses finished his speech "the ground *under* them split asunder; and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up [...]. So they [...] went *down* alive into Sheol" (Num. 16:29–33; emphasis mine). Satan's journey also leads him downwards, into the lowest regions: "Flutt'ring his pennons vain, plumb *down* he drops / Ten thousand fathom deep" (II. 933–934; emphasis mine).

After having received an unexpected backing from chaotic elements, Satan directs his way towards Chaos's "dark pavilion" (II. 960). There he explains the nature of his intrusion and asks for directions while at the same time he tries to make a bargain by promising to "expel all usurpation" (II. 983) from Heaven, in fact enlarging Chaos's domain. Chaos answers thus:

I know thee, stranger, who thou art,
That mighty leading angel who of late
Made head against Heav'n's King, though overthrown. (II. 990–993)

This is no doubt a moment of epic *anagnorisis*, which usually denotes a sudden reversal of fortune, resulting in the protagonist's transition from ignorance to self-knowledge. Milton however, presents us with another meaning of recognition which may either denote straightforward identification: as Chaos indeed recognizes in the "stranger" the very same warrior who waged war against the King of Heaven, or may point to mutual recognition which signifies a bond of gratitude, mutual acknowledgement and appreciation: as indeed Chaos's diplomatic welcome pays due respect to the unexpected guest's military prowess which he stresses calling him "mighty leading angel [...] though overthrown." At this point a stranger immediately transforms into an ally. Chaos has no doubt heard about the mutiny and war in Heaven. He must have seen the rebellious bands pursued through his domain by the divine troops. He is aware of the existence of Hell and Earth, as he describes both those worlds as "Hung o'er his realm" (II. 1005). And hoping not all is lost, he decides to offer Satan help: "If all I can serve / That little which is left so to defend" (II. 999–1000). A few lines later, still without any special encouragement, he voluntarily seals the pact, clearly securing his share of the deal: "Go and speed: / Havoc and spoil and ruin are my gain!" (II. 1008–1009).

There is no dispute or debate between the two. This is all the more surprising, since even during the encounter with Sin and Death (therefore, in fact, with his daughter/wife and his son) Satan had to argue, convince and suggest. However, while talking to Chaos, Satan puts forward his plan, asks for directions (in a rather commanding manner), and his wishes are immediately granted. If any two characters in any other text met and behaved in a similar fashion, the conclusion would have to be one: there must have existed between them either a cooperation that had been established long time ago and which has just been finalised in action, or both characters have been woven from so identical a fabric that their mutual recognition and instant acceptance must be taken for granted.

When Satan explains to Chaos his dark designs, this is how he phrases them:

[...] direct my course;
 Directed no mean recompence it brings
 To your behoof, if I that Region lost,
 All usurpation thence expell'd, reduce
 To her original darkness and your sway
 (Which is my present journey) and once more
 Direct the Standard there of ancient Night;
 Yours be th' advantage all, mine the revenge. (II. 980–987)

He promises that once he has arrived at Heaven, he will wage a campaign that would reduce the dominion of God to its "original darkness" (l. 984). He promises to erect the "standard of ancient night" (l. 986). I consider this move of Milton's very dangerous, especially if he wanted the structure of *Paradise Lost* to encourage

the process of active reconstruction. What the reader ought to retrieve from the poem is the vision of innocence before the Fall. That encouragement is strongly present in all pastoral and homely descriptions of Books IV and V. What happens in Book II, however, should rather be termed Reconquista in the course of which the "ancient Night" seeks to reclaim "original darkness" over the lost regions of Heaven and Earth. Of course, I do not want to oversimplify my conclusion by claiming that the reader of these lines, after acquainting himself with the motif of active reconstruction (which, as it appears, is demanded of him) will suddenly agree with Satan and conclude, after one third of the fallen ones, that God is a usurper and that Heaven and Earth were built on the grounds stolen from Chaos. This is perhaps what Satan would like to achieve, but exactly that is why one may consider the narrative of Book II at least puzzling. Especially so, given the fact that the presentation of the relationship between God and Chaos is at best strongly ambiguous. When we take a look at the description of Chaos's "dark pavilion," situated in the "nethermost abyss," we see him

[...] spread
 Wide on the wasteful deep; with him enthroned
 Sat sable-vested Night, eldest of things,
 The consort of his reign, and by them stood
 Orcus and Ades and the dreaded name. (II. 961–964)

Needless to say this picture brings to mind our first encounter with Satan, whom we saw in Book I "prone on the flood, extended long and large" (I. 195), which is one more reason to treat the two characters as doubles, but even more striking is the appearance of the Night, called directly "the *eldest* of things" (II. 962; emphasis mine), which immediately evokes Satan's boast that he can reduce Heaven to its "*original darkness*" (I. 984; emphasis mine). In the context of Milton's consistent preoccupation with uncovering the lost origins, can we really blame his readers for a sudden flash of revelation that this is how things should be? How and why such a blasphemous intimation became part of Milton's epic will probably for ever remain one of the most intriguing questions for the critics.¹²

The riddle gains momentum in Book VII where Raphael tells Adam the story of Creation. In this account, the Son creates the Earth at the expense of Chaos, which is described as

Darkness profound
 Covered th' abyss but on the wat'ry calm
 His brooding wings the Spirit of God outspread
 And vital virtue infused, and vital warmth
 Throughout the fluid mass but downward purged
 The black tartareous cold infernal dregs
 Adverse to life. (VII. 233–239)

Milton also suggests that Chaos, like the raging sea in the Gospels, is the enemy of God, and since Satan denies his debt of life to the Almighty, this adversity towards life of Chaos makes him an immediate ally and accomplice to all Satanic designs. That is exactly why Satan is aided by Chaos with a sulphurous cloud, and that is exactly why there is never a shadow of dispute between them two. They are one. Even the language used indicates this deeply-running affinity: chaos is “adverse” to life, therefore he becomes the Adversary. “Adversary” is Satan’s second name.

Regina M. Schwartz in her book *Remembering & Repeating. On Milton’s Theology and Poetics*, confirms our findings. She concludes her discussion of the relationship between Chaos and Satan in the following manner: “A kind of Miltonic logic leads us to a conclusion that defies strict logic: chaos is evil because this uncreated realm cannot acknowledge its Creator” (22). Chaos does not owe his creation to God, exactly the same way Satan professes he has not been created by God. That is why Satanic “debt” to Chaos (if I can use this word) is ontologically opposite to the one Abdiel tries to impose on the fallen angel. Chaos’s main concerns is to remain true to himself and protect his freedom. Likewise, individuality and freedom are the two highways along which Satan’s progress of self-discovery and self-affirmation develops in *Paradise Lost*.

We may say then that when Satan claims: “We know no time when we were not as now” (V. 853), he actually describes his new-found (or maybe *reclaimed*) identity: that of the primeval darkness, the uncreated universe and anarchy which he wants to restore in Heaven. That is also why he deems divine “order” and divine Creation as a usurpation and an enforcement of an alien and secondary state of affairs. The moment of that realisation is also the moment when Satan’s true self surfaces from beneath the artificially established order of Heaven. It also appears that the rest of the “disloyal” crew feel the same affinity with darkness and nothingness. Satan’s insurrection is merely a facilitator which instigates their non-hesitant access to his cause. The Son’s appointment by the Father is a mere spark that sets on fire this huge potential for self-discovery.

Notes

- 1 Following John Rumrich in his article “Milton’s God and the Matter of Chaos,” I adapt upper case for Chaos denoting a character and chaos to refer to a location or environment.
- 2 Paul Ricoeur proposes four other categories, namely: creation by generation, creation through combat, creation by fabrication and creation through a word (1998, 42) although with this categorisation he refers the reader to Claus

- Westerman, *Genesis. Biblischer Kommentar, Altes Testament*, Neukirschen – Vluyn: Neukirschener Verlag, 1966.
- 3 For a thorough analysis of the myths of beginning cf. Paul Ricoeur, *Symbolism of Evil*, trans. Emerson Buchanan, New York: Harper & Row, 1967.
 - 4 Other references in the Bible to the ancient sea enemy-deity are to be found in Revelation 12, the Canaanite myth, Daniel 7:3 and Isaiah 51:9–10. The Revelation identifies the dragon with Satan (Rev. 12:9, 21:1, 22:5), The Holly Bible. King James's Bible, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.
 - 5 *Omnipotence* is not only the power of doing all things that any or all creatures can do, but more than so, the doing all things that imply not a *contradiction*, (as the same thing at once to be and not to be, the doing of those being as impossible to God, as it is to lye) – see Henry Hammond, *A Pacifick Discourse of Gods Grace and Decrees* ([1660] 1674, 584); Britomart in Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queen* voices the same sentiments when she says in Book III, Canto 2 that “neither God of loue, nor God of sky/ Can doe [...] that, which cannot be donne” (3.2.36); Milton himself writes in *De Doctrina Christiana* that “The power of God is not exerted in those kinds of things which, as the terms goes, imply a contradiction” ([1823] 1973, 146).
 - 6 On occasion of fighting with the Manichaeon worldview St Augustine focused on the problem of *creatio ex nihilo*. In *De Natura Boni Contra Manichaeos* he claims that “All corruptible natures [...] are natures at all only so far as they are *from* God, nor would they be corruptible if they were *of* Him; because they would be what He himself is. Therefore, of whatever measure, of whatever form, of whatever order, they are, they are so because it is God by whom they were made; but they are not immutable, because it is nothing of which they were made” ([405 AD, XXVII] 1974, 129–150).
 - 7 Cf. Homer, *Iliad*, London: Collins Harvill, 1985, *passim*, or Virgil, *Aeneid*, London: Penguin Classics, 2010, *passim*.
 - 8 For the treatment of Milton's usage of the epic conventions cf. Charles Martindale, *John Milton and the Transformation of Ancient Epic*, London: Bristol Classical Press, 2002.
 - 9 On biblical references to the clean and unclean concerning life – death division cf. Lev. 21:11, Num. 6: 6–7.
 - 10 It would be most interesting to compare Milton's idea of uncreated chaos with St Augustine's ponderings on the nature of God, when he comes to realise that the idea of God as being in space is as idolatrous (limited) as any anthropomorphic likeness of God: “Because whatsoever I conceived, deprived of this space, seemed to me nothing, yea altogether nothing, not even a void, as if a body were taken out of its place, and the place would remain empty of any body at all, of earth and water, air and heaven, yet it would remain a void

- place, *as it were a spacious nothing.*” – St Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin; Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1961.
- 11 Cf. Fowler, Alastair, *Milton, John. Paradise Lost*: “Chaos, the ‘allegorical epitome of confusion, straying, error’ – too dark a conception for a power only *in potentia* evil” (154).
- 12 Stanley Fish in *Versions of Antihumanism* suggests a possible solution: “The true drama of this poem, then, is to be found not in the events of its ‘plot,’ but in the events occurring in the reader’s mind, and these are above all interpretative events where a reader must choose between various ways of interpreting scenes, and the choices given amount to a test of his spiritual understanding” (2012, 26).

References

- Augustine. 1960. *Confessions*. Trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin. Baltimore: Penguin Books.
- . 1974. “De Natura Boni Contra Manichaeos.” *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*. Ed. Philip Schaff. rpt. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Berdjaev, Nicolai. 1948. *Freedom and the Spirit* Trans. O. F. Clarke. London: Geoffrey Bles.
- . 1960. *The Destiny of Man* Trans. Natalie Duddington. New York: Harper & Row,
- Burden, Dennis. 1967. *The Logical Epic: A Study of the Argument of Paradise Lost*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- DeSelincourt, E. and J. C. Smith, eds. 1969. *Spencer: Poetical Works*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Fish, Stanley. 2012. *Versions of Antihumanism. Milton and Others*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Fletcher, Harris Francis, 1930. *Milton’s Rabbinical Readings*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Hammond, Henry. 1674. *A Pacifick Discourse of Gods Grace and Decrees. The Works*. <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=eebo;idno=A45400.0001.001>
- LaCoque, André and Ricoeur, Paul. 1998. *Thinking Biblically, Exegetical and Hermeneutical Studies*. Trans. David Pellauer. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Lewis, Clive Staples. 1941. *A Preface to Paradise Lost*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Milton, John. 1973. “Christian Doctrine.” *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*. Ed. Don M. Wolfe at al. New Haven: Yale University Press.

-
- Milton, John. 2007. *Paradise Lost*. Ed. Alastair Fowler. London: Pearson Education Limited.
- Schwartz, Regina M. 1993. *Remembering & Repeating. On Milton's Theology and Poetics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Tanner, John S. 1992. *Anxiety in Eden, A Kierkegaardian Reading of Paradise Lost*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.
- The Holy Bible. King James's Bible. 2010. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.