



A Thematic and Stylistic Analysis of John Milton's Paradise Lost

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Abstract

This article aims to explore John Milton's poetic theme and style in his epic poem "Paradise Lost". Paradise Lost is an epic poem in blank verse. It explores the biblical story of the fall of man, focusing primarily on the rebellion of Satan and the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden. From the background above, this research aims to explain the theory of A Thematic and Stylistic Analysis of John Milton's Paradise Lost. The method used is a literature review, which includes the analysis and evaluation of scientific articles and journals that are relevant to the research problem. This research explains the Thematic study of the poem; we analyzed themes and gave significant clues about them. Finally, we tackled the style used by the author in the poem. Concerning the style, we have noticed that Milton's writing style in Paradise Lost is characterized by its elaborate use of figurative language, including epic similes, vivid imagery, and intricate metaphors.

Keywords: John Milton, Paradise Lost, theme, style

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Introduction

This point may be also entitled "Reflection on poetry", we are discussing poetry to have a clear understanding of the poem we will present in this article. Poetry came from the Greek word *poies*, which means making. Poetry says more intensely than ordinary language. Therefore, provisional understanding is needed to get the message that the poem carries. As a part of literature, poetry communicates significant experiences to allow us to live more deeply with our

imagination. Poetry's primary concern is with experience (Alghanem, 2023). Defining poetry is not easy. According to (Dillon, 2022), "poetry may be thought in various ways and the way one habitually thinks of it will qualify the poetry he writes. ". We face the idea that from one writer to another, there are different kinds of poetry. Our concern there will be to examine the role of only poetry and its form. This consideration will be mostly with Milton's poetry. Prose and poetry are two distinctive forms of a piece of writing. A slim line distinguishes prose and poetry. Ntumba Kapena who quoted Seymour Chtaman has noted two essential differences. "First it (poetry) permits greater liberties and secondly it imposes constraints, the liberties are taking the form of deviation from the semantic categories whereas the constraints consist of conversions found in the field of poetry (rhyme, meter, caesura, enjambment) (Ferrante et al., 2024); (Green et al., 2021). Through this quotation, we notice that the poet is free to use his style or diction (words). He gives meanings to words referring to the figurative level at the connotation one, that is, one element is substituted for another (Danaher et al., 2023). Lexical meaning conventions or reels are used in poetry to make a full work accepted to be poetry (Ullrich et al., 2017).

But to stand pointing out differences between poetry and prose, to construct a definition of poetry becomes more subjective. Poetry is a word that considers action which those words involve. From this point of view, we can assume that a poet is a man who uses words and who has to think of their arrangement so that from a given standpoint they become actions. We may join David Campbell who discusses poetry: "Poetry, which, in the main, may be said to be a composition expressed in vivid language of the imagination, may be found in the form of prose, while much of verse has been written is most poetry. " (Li, 2022). This poet argued strongly that poetry is an antithesis of thought and spirit. Verse not poetry is the proper opposite of prose, as both words refer to form. The prose itself uses ordinary written or spoken language of man; verse, on the other hand, is literature expressed in line of a definite length." (Flint, 2024). We can define poetry as simply the most beautiful, impressive, and widely effective mode of saying things. Considering all these definitions, we can assume that words are important to a poet in another way. They are not only a means of compressing his meaning but also of unlocking the imagination. As Joseph Early argues, "Too many poets, a word is not simply a group of letters or the name of something but a world of its own". (Knott et al., 2022). From the background above, this research aims to explain the theory of A Thematic and Stylistic Analysis of John Milton's *Paradise Lost*

Methodology

The purpose of this study is to find and explain the problems related to A Thematic and Stylistic Analysis of John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. For this study, a descriptive qualitative method is used. Qualitative research is a type of research that relies on data, explains existing theories, and creates new theories. In this study, the method used is a literature review, which includes the analysis and evaluation of scientific articles and journals that are relevant to the research problem. The main purpose of this study is to study the theory of A Thematic and Stylistic Analysis of John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. In the literature studied these theories will be discussed in depth and used as a basis for formulating research problems. In addition, this literature will be the basis for comparing the findings of previous studies to assess the extent to which A Thematic and Stylistic Analysis of John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. To attain our objective in writing this article, that of discussing the theme and style in John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, we have used the intrinsic method. This is the approach that consists of basing our interpretation and assessment of the poem on what is in the poem.

Results and Discussion

The author's biography and literary career

In the following lines, we give a biography of John Milton as it is stated by (Lynch, 2019), John Milton, born on December 9, 1608, was an esteemed English poet, polemicist, and civil servant during the 17th century. He is famously known for his epic poem “Paradise Lost”, which solidified his reputation as one of the greatest writers in English literature. Milton’s early life was marked by a strong emphasis on education and religion. He attended Saint Paul’s school in London and then proceeded to Christ’s College, Cambridge, where he gained a profound understanding of classical literature, theology, and philosophy. Influenced by his father’s passion for education, Milton immersed himself in the works of renowned writers such as Virgil, Homer, and Aristotle.

As a staunch Protestant, Milton’s religious convictions were deeply – rooted and permeated his writing. He advocated religious freedom and played an active role in the political and theological debate of his time. He denounced the supremacy of the Church of England and voiced his support for the establishment of a republican government. Milton’s life was tumultuous during the English Civil War (1642 - 1651). He served as a protagonist for the commonwealth government led by Oliver Cromwell, using his exceptional language skills to defend the interests of the Puritans. During this period, he penned numerous pamphlets and treatises, expressing his political views and advocating for the overthrow of the monarchy. Despite being temporarily imprisoned and losing his eyesight, Milton’s creative output remained extraordinary. “Paradise Lost”, his magnum opus, was published in 1667 and garnered widespread acclaim. The epic poem explores themes of human rebellion, the fall of man, and the eternal struggle between good and evil.

Milton’s elegant use of language, vivid imagery, and complex characters solidified his position as a literary genius. In addition to “Paradise Lost”, Milton composed other notable works such as “Paradise Regained”, “Samson Agonistes”, and various sonnets. His writing exemplified his profound understanding of theology philosophy, and the human condition. John Milton’s contribution to English literature and his unyielding dedication to intellectual and political freedom have cemented his legacy as one of the most influential figures of his time. He passed away on November 8, 1674 leaving behind an extraordinary body of work that continues to inspire and captivate readers to his day.

Background on poetry

This idea of poetry reveals that of the poem. This last word may be defined in “ the Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of Current English “as” a piece of creative writing in verse form especially one expressing a deep feeling or noble thought in beautiful language, composed with the desire to communicate on experience, it is written in elevated style. “(Huang, 2020). Thus the poem “Paradise Lost” is composed in books and also in verse and relates an experience of one human being who wants to communicate with us. The deep feelings felt in it (poem) must be understood since the elevated style is adopted. We side with Joseph Wood Krutch when he argues that” in a poem, the sound must be seen as an echo to the sense. (Berget & Bugge, 2022). This means that sounds work out the meaning the author wanted to express and is expressing. Indeed the following paragraph exhibits a particularly useful classification of different kinds of poetry: Epic dramatic, heroic, narrative, and lyrical poetry. In epic poetry, the author/poet/appears in his own person, describes the scenes, and narrates the events concerning other beings; dramatic poetry is poetry written to be acted or on stage, that is to mean, the author does not appear in person, but creates the character, imagines the scenes, and provides the dialogue; heroic poetry treats the great deeds of an individual hero; narrative poetry concerns also human actions but the details are more general; and lyrical poetry may be defined as the rapid utterance of the emotions that exercises the

poet impassioned, away over the human heart (Ardoin et al., 2020). However, it is useful to divide poetry into three great classes: epic poetry, dramatic poetry, and lyrical poetry.

But as the poet David Campbell argued few poems conform entirely to any one type, although the modes of poetic expression yet to be noted might in a general way – be classed under one or other of these headings: didactic poetry, which conveys instruction and makes wisdom; satirical; whose aim is to scourge vice and expose folly; pastoral poetry, which treats about rural life and shepherd, descriptive poetry whose object is the description of natural scenes; and elegiac poetry which expresses regret for the dead. It is a mournful poem. Originally, however, it was only the expression of melancholy sentiment. (Campbell D. *ibid*). As is said above, the poem “Paradise Lost”, can be classified as the first great class of epic poetry. We may refer to the above definitions to examine the role and form of a poem. William Benet Rose defines a poem as “a definitive statement in the meter of something worth saying” (Johnson, 2020). In general, concerning the form, we can speak of both traditional and modern poems. The difference between the two forms is that the traditional poets were very concerned with their modern poets often metrical feet, rhythm, rhyme, and scheme whereas the modern poets often use free verse. But Milton is always and still original in his poems. However, despite the variety in forms, we agree with David Campbell when he sustains that “a poem aims to teach and to delight. He carries on by arguing strongly that it conveys (poem) instruction and makes wisdom.” (Latapí Agudelo et al., 2019). All definitions we have pointed out and suggestions made to support those definitions lead to one point: there is a correlation between the basic idea that poetry is created to convey meaning (in a sense to teach) and to please (to delight). It can also carry a bit of information to the readers as in “Paradise Lost” but not necessarily a moral lesson.

A thematic study of the poem

Presentation of the poem

After having discussed the biography of the author and reflections on poetry, at this point, we are to look out for the themes found in the poem and relate them to the semantic organization of the poem before analyzing it. *Paradise Lost* is an epic poem in blank verse. Its first version, published in 1667, consisted of ten books with over ten thousand lines of verse. A second edition followed in 1674, arranged into twelve books in the method of Virgil’s *Aeneid* with minor modifications carried throughout and a note on the versification. It is considered by critics to be Milton’s major work. It increased his reputation as one of the greatest English poets of his time.

The subject matter of the poem

The story opens in hell, where Satan and his followers are recovering from defeat in a war they waged against god. They built a palace called Pandemonium, where they held a council to determine whether or not to return to battle. Instead, they decide to explore a new world prophesied to be created, where the safer course of revenge can be planned. Satan undertakes the mission alone. At the gate of hell, he needs his offspring, sin and death, who unbar the gates for him. He journeys across the chaos and still sees the new universe floating near the larger globe which is heaven. Good sees Satan flying towards his world and foretells the fall of man. His son, who sits at his right hand, offers to sacrifice himself for man’s salvation. Meanwhile, Satan enters the new universe. He flies to the sun, where he strikes an angel, Uriel, into showing him the way to man’s home.

Semantic organization of the poem

John Milton’s epic poem, *Paradise Lost*, relies on the underlying structure of ancient epics to portray the Christian worldview as noble and heroic, arguing that god’s actions, for people who might question them, are justified, hinting that humankind’s fall serves God’s greater purposes.

Themes

The concept “theme” as defined by Edward Ronshein (quoted by NTUMBA KAPENA) in “Choice, change, and Fate as seen in four poems from Robust Lee Frost” “is usually used to describe a topic or problem which is found in the action of literary work and which seems both author and significant in our own experience in the world of reality. In “Paradise Lost” Milton does not speak of one single idea. He deals with a great deal of themes. Some of the favorite themes are the importance of obedience to God the hierarchical nature of the universe, and the fall man’s party fortunate.

a) The importance of obedience to God

The first words of *Paradise Lost* state that the poem’s main theme will be “man’s first disobedience”. Milton narrates the stay of Adam and Eve’s disobedience, explains how why it happens, and places the stay within the larger context of Satan’s rebellion and Jesus’ resurrection. Raphael tells Adam about Satan’s disobedience to give a firm grasp of the threat that Satan and humankind’s disobedience pose. In essence, loss presents two moral paths that one can take after disobedience: the downward spiral of increasing sin and degradation, represented by Satan, and the road to redemption, represented by Adam and Eve. While Adam and Eve are the first humans to disobey God, Satan is the first of all God’s creation to disobey. His decision to rebel comes only from himself – he was not persuaded or provoked by others. Also, his decision to continue to disobey God After his fall into Hell ensures that God will not forgive him. Adam and Eve, on the other hand, decide to repent for their sins and seek forgiveness. Unlike Satan, Adam and Eve understand that their disobedience to God will be correct through generations of toil on Earth. This path is the correct one to take: the visions in books XI and XII demonstrate that obedience to God, even after repeated falls, can lead to humankind’s salvation.

b) The hierarchical nature of the universe

Paradise Lost is about hierarchy as much as it is about obedience. The layout of the universe – with Heaven above, Hell below, and Earth in the middle – presents the universe as a hierarchy based on proximity to God and his grace. The spatial hierarchy leads to a social hierarchy of angels, humans, animals, and devils: the son is closest to God, with the archangels and cherubs behind him. Adam and Eve and Earth’s animals come next, with Satan and the other fallen angels following last. To obey God is to respect this hierarchy.

Satan refuses to honor the son as his superior, thereby questioning God’s hierarchy. As the angels in Satan’s camp rebel, they hope to beat god and thereby dissolve what they believe to be an unfair hierarchy in Heaven. When the son and the good angels defeat the rebel angels, the rebels are punished by being banished away from Heaven. At least, Satan argues later, they can make their hierarchy in Hell, but they are nevertheless subject to God’s overall hierarchy, in which they are ranked lowest. Satan continues to disobey god and his hierarchy as he seeks to corrupt mankind.

Likewise, humankind’s disobedience is a corruption of God’s hierarchy. Before the fall, Adam and Eve treat the visiting angels with proper respect and acknowledgment of their closeness to God, and Eve embraces the subservient role allotted to her in her marriage. God and Raphael both instruct Adam that Eve is slightly farther removed from God’s grace than Adam because she was created to serve both God and him. When Eve persuades Adam to rather work alone, she challenges him, her superior, and he yields to her, his inferior. Again, as Adam eats from the fruit, he knowingly defies God by obeying Eve and his inner instinct instead of God and his reason. Adam’s visions in Book XI and XII show more examples of this disobedience to God and the

universe's hierarchy but also demonstrate that with the son's sacrifice, the hierarchy will be restored once again.

c) The fall was partly fortunate

After he sees the vision of Christ's redemption of humankind in Book XII, Adam refers to his sin as a Culp or "happy fault", suggesting that the fall of humankind, while originally seeming an unmitigated catastrophe, does bring good with it. Adam and Eve's disobedience allowed God to show his mercy and temperance in their punishments and his eternal providence toward humankind. This display of love and compassion, given through the son, is a gift to humankind. Humankind must now experience pain and death, but humans can also experience mercy, salvation, and grace in ways they would not have been able to had they not disobeyed. While humankind has fallen from grace, individuals can redeem and save themselves through continued devotion and obedience to God. The salvation of humankind, in the form of the Son's sacrifice and resurrection, can begin to restore humankind to its former state. In other words, good will come in sin and death, and humankind will eventually be rewarded. This fortunate result justifies God's reasoning and explains his ultimate plan for humankind (Kirsh, 2023).

A Stylistic Analysis of The Poem

Before entering into details, we would like in this point to say a word about what style. The simplest way of defining "style" is to refer to it as "one's manner of expressing thoughts while uniting or speaking. (Ross, 2022). Generally speaking, the style of John Milton's his paradise Lost is:

- a) Big and Majestic – his uniting is grand and impressive, matching the epic seal of the stay.
- b) Fancy words and Fancy sentences – he uses complex words and long sentences to paint a rich picture.
- c) No Rhymes, just flow – instead of rhyming, he uses blank verse, which is like poetry without rhymes, giving his writing a smooth rhythm
- d) Lots of old-fashioned words Milton uses words and phrases that might sound old-fashioned to us today because he wanted to sound classical and timeless.
- e) Imaginative and detailed – his descriptions are vivid and detailed, helping readers visualize the scenes and characters

Use of imagery or symbolism

Through the reading of our poem, we noticed that the poet expresses himself indirectly in metaphoric language. There are some images that through association convey the meaning. Similarly, symbols, being the highest level of figurative reading have a process of association or fusion of two elements (Rona Mentari, 2023). This symbol itself begins with some concrete form – a physical condition, an object laminate or inanimate) or an event. In uniting literature, the following ideas are raised: "In the context of literature work, the concrete element suggests an abstract concept or meaning." (Carden et al., 2022). This refers to the poem, we have pointed out:

a) Imagery

Light and Dark. Opposites in Paradise Lost, include Heaven and Hell, God and Satan, and good and evil. Milton uses the imagery of light and darkness to express all these opposites. Angels are physically described in terms of light, whereas devils are generally described by their shadowy darkness.

b) Symbol

Paradise, as symbolized by the garden, is something that cannot be built through human effort alone, but rather seems to be a luxury randomly bestowed by God.

Tone/atmosphere

Tone can be defined by Professor Majambo in the Anglo – American Literature as “the attitude of the writer toward his subjects. “Literary speaking it refers to the mood of a work and how that mood is created through such devices as language, symbolism, and imagery (Campbell et al., 2023). Milton’s tone in *Paradise Lost* can be described as elevated and mournful – his invocation in Book I laments the mortal taste” of the tree of knowledge, which “brought death into the world, and all our woe.

Conclusion

In this article, we have chosen as our topic “the study of themes and styles in *Paradise Lost*, a poem by John Milton. Apart from the introduction and the conclusion, we have restricted the material of this dissertation to four points. Firstly, we have concentrated on the introduction. Secondly, because the sociological and biological approaches were used in this paper, we gave the biographical notes and later attempted to describe the impact of Milton’s life on his work. Thirdly, we concentrated on the reflection on poetry, which means that we left the background and attempted to apply his view / Milton’s/poetry to our poem. In this point, we defined poetry and poem, and classified poetry. In the fourth point, the thematic study of the poem; we analyzed themes and gave significant clues about them. Finally, we tackled the style used by the author in the poem. Concerning the style, we have noticed that Milton’s writing style in *Paradise Lost* is characterized by its elaborate use of figurative language, including epic similes, vivid imagery, and intricate metaphors.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.”

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