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Satanic Synonyms: Symbolism in British Literature

Plastic pitch-forks on Halloween, a man dressed in old Franciscan Friar Robes, and sometimes a man with a goat's head. These are all symbols or descriptions used to allude to Satan in literature. Whether or not a person is religious, the name of Satan rings fear into many people's hearts and souls. Satan is oftentimes used as a tool in literature to either represent himself or the downfall of humanity. In both *Doctor Faustus* and *Paradise Lost*, Satan is used as both a poetic device as well as a character to analyze. Marlowe and Milton's versions of Satan took inspiration from the Bible and ended up using starkly different approaches to the character.

In Marlowe's infamous tale *Doctor Faustus*, Satan is not introduced by name and is rather mentioned by the other characters. There is an air of mystery surrounding Satan because of his deal with Faustus and in place of himself, sends over his minion to do his bidding. Marlowe's version of Satan is a simple one at that; it seems to be that he wrote him as an amalgamation of every Christian fear and paired it with the common idea that it's easy to fall into temptation.

According to Douglas Schuler in *Doctor Faustus in the Twenty-First Century: A Meditation on Knowledge, Power, and Civic Intelligence*, the devil takes on a new meaning other than just what he is able to offer to Faustus at the beginning of the play saying "Secularized and stripped of narrative, the devil in our current exploration can be more accurately described by social forces,

institutions, and the incentives, both positive and negative, that induce people to abide by the existing social forces”(257-266). Milton had very easily created a prototype of the devil, that was unknown to the world beforehand. Satan in *Doctor Faustus* is the monster in the back of your closet growing up; he is the guy who everyone cowers in fear of the reminder that the devil may actually exist. That being said, there really was no other character analysis of the devil outside of the bible at that time. So Marlowe took the idea that the devil was much more than what was discussed in the bible and that he was actually everything that was wrong in the world too. It is true that with time, literature may take up new meanings and it is perfectly exemplified by Marlowe’s Satan. Faustus was a man of science who believed that there was no other knowledge to be learned by him, and the next best thing was to take notes from the devil in exchange for his soul. Now at the time of this publication, it could be represented by the fact that there was a ton of scientific discovery happening throughout the sixteenth century. Marlow most likely wanted to entice people in only focusing on religion rather than what scientific discovery offered. Marlowe wrote Satan to be this incredibly manipulative character that could give you exactly what you want that you would not think twice about the consequences of his deal. A character that is so evil and sly, that the person ends up completely seduced by his words alone.

There is one thing that Marlowe had not included much of in his making of Satan in *Doctor Faustus*, and that was biblical accuracy. The play cuts to Satan having his minions, hellscape, and plan to take dominion over the world one human at a time. The most telling scene of this prevalence is when Satan introduces Faustus to the Seven Deadly Sins. There is no mention of them anywhere in the Bible, although it is believed that they were created in the medieval era as a means to emphasize how humans are sinful. Rosanne Gasse wrote in a review about *Medicine and the Seven Deadly Sins in Late Medieval Literature and Culture* that “For

concise articulation of moral behavior, they slowly gave way to an increased focus upon the Ten Commandments, although the Sins never disappeared and they remain cultural constructs to this day” (384-387). Since the Seven Deadly Sins were inherently famous as guidelines to religious living even before Marlowe was born, this is perhaps where he drew inspiration for his character to add impact. It shows that Satan desired for Faustus to know more about Hell and lead him further away from God. Despite there not being much added to the play about God as a character, he is mentioned as someone that Faustus should not speak of; “Talk not of Paradise, nor creation, but mark this show; talk of the devil and nothing else” (Robson, 644). Ostensibly, Satan is showing contempt for God’s name and will; it shows that Satan has removed himself as anything in relation to God and Marlowe has then established some frame of Satan from the bible into his work.

In *Paradise Lost*, there is a slightly less sinister side to the character Milton wrote. The play finds Satan directly after he was ousted from Paradise, a noticeable distinction from where we found Satan in *Doctor Faustus*. Milton’s version of Satan was written with the context that his version will explain why God does the things he does, but in reality, his interpretation of Satan was not well received. Jawad Anwari says in *A Comparative Study of the Islamic Satan and the Miltonic Satan* that “Satan's Character and his role are by far magnified and overstated by Milton” (1254-1258). This statement proves to be true because the first several books are written from Satan’s point of view, and one can write the story of *Paradise Lost* without Satan’s perspective and yet Milton chose to not only include him in his story as a main character, but as a narrator. It seems that Milton had Satan’s character in mind for a remodel, and wanted to explain Satan’s side of the story as well, which definitely was in poor taste. Anwari continues to say that “... though Satan desired to defile or ruin the creation of God, God avoids Satan's infernal and

mischievous intention invisibly within the *Paradise Lost*” (1254-1258). It somewhat contradicts the idea that Satan just did not care about God’s will, but rather that he wanted to challenge it and make it his own in a way. Karen Winstead explained about Milton in *British Literature to 1800* that “One of his greatest achievements is his depiction of Satan as a fallen angel wracked by self-doubt and resentment yet determined to rise again” (Winstead). It is not outlandish to say that Milton intentionally wrote Satan in *Paradise Lost* as someone who represents the underdog. This story reads as though he wanted so badly to understand why God wanted to punish Adam and Eve for going against his wishes, but went so far as to go on the opposite end of the spectrum agreeing with what Satan did. Even the way that Winstead explains the story, Milton wanted to take advantage of the fact that Satan was downtrodden at the beginning of the story and turn it into a revenge tale of sorts.

Satan in *Paradise Lost* is in the beginning stages of his innate inclination to ruin every and all of God's creations due to God banning him from his role as an angel. P. T. Forsyth wrote in *The Contemporary Review* “All the poet’s efforts to invest God with sublime glory are powerless to prevent our feeling that it is Satan who is the author’s own hero. He honours God but he likes Satan” (450). There is no telling how Milton wanted his play to be understood, other than the fact that it was entirely written to be a thinkpiece about God’s will. Albeit, Satan is the protagonist for the first half of the play and somehow Milton ends up giving Satan more depth in his character analysis than he did for God. For someone who wrote an entire story about how God came to the decision to punish Adam and Eve, he started out on a sour note by following Satan and his cronies around. God acts apathetic to Adam and Eve’s situation and then Jesus steps in to save their souls from the terrible sin they have committed. There is no real biblical accuracy from this standpoint in the story, other than Jesus. Milton wrote God to be this

all-powerful omnipotent guy who was able to snap his fingers and decide whether or not a human being is worthy of spending life in paradise or hell from one mistake, whereas he wrote Satan to be the type of guy who saw the flaw in God's will and wanted to capitalize on it. Milton gave Satan a platform to speak upon where he is able to explain his reasoning as to why he desires to end God's creations, and sympathizes a little too much with Satan in order to get his point across. The central theme that Milton was selling in this play was that God has wrath and he is not afraid to use it. It should have included a little more interpretational writing from the Bible in this case because it would have shifted the entire meaning of the play. It is not clear whether or not, Milton's Satan was meant to be this character of ambiguity, but it was generally perceived as one by the masses. On the other hand, it could be argued that Milton's Satan was a character of mass manipulation as he is known to be, and that the readers were also forced into looking at his perspective from the beginning of *Paradise Lost*.

In conclusion, Satan is not a character to write incorrectly and is somehow also up for interpretation. It is not mandatory that when penning a book about Satan, you have to include every possible finite detail about him from the Bible. However, it is important for the person to include some accuracy so that it does not give people the wrong impression of Satan. Marlowe's version gave society an incredible piece of literature to build upon for centuries and is where we get most of our inspiration for Satan in today's literature and media. Despite the fact that Milton's version of Satan was convoluted and harder to understand, Satan in *Paradise Lost* gave people a controversial character to analyze and interpret in their own ways. Both authors created a critical blueprint for what was to come in modern times and gave us insight into what society back then was wondering about in the Bible. It is intrinsic that *Paradise Lost* and *Doctor*

Faustus continue to be taught because they teach the importance of not being led astray from morality.

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