SATAN’S SPEECHES IN PARADISE LOST

Raleigh says: “The epic value of paradise lost is centered in the character and achievements of Satan.”

One of the most prominent and distinguished achievements of Milton in the history of English literature is the depiction and portrayal of Satan’s character. He has infused all his literary and intellectual abilities to create a character like Satan. Satan is brave and heroic like Prometheus, a sincere, devoted and a powerful leader like Napoleon. He is noble like Robinhood and in oratory, he can be compared with Antony and Socrates. In deception and conspiracy, he can be compared with Ulysses. Satan makes five speeches in the poem. These speeches bring before the true character of Satan before us. To study his character, now let’s have an analysis of Satan’s speeches one by one respectively.

There is no doubt in the fact that Satan’s speeches are great examples of Satan’s political oratory. His speeches are the key to his character and excel the best of Roman rhetoric. Only because of Satan’s pride and wrong guideline, the fallen angels have lost “Happy fields, where joy forever dwells.” Satan has now the task of restoring their courage and does so by the sheer-magic of his high-pitched oratory. All his speeches are a clear proof of Miltonic lyricism. In his opening speech to Beelzebub, he addresses in the following way.

“If thou best he, but oh how fallen! How changed

Myriads, though bright.”

These words clearly show the character of Satan as a great leader. The way he encourages his followers and incites them against the monarchy of God forces us to accept Satan as a great political leader. He shows no signs of repentance. Rather, he shows great contempt for God. His intelligence and exceptional courage prove Satan a hero.

“What though the field be lost,
All is not lost, the unconquerable will,
And study of revenge, immortal hate,
And courage never to submit or yield.”

Again, he encourages his comrades and persuades them to start an endless war either by using force or cunningly even he knows that defeat is his fate in the end.

“We may with more successful hope resolve
To wage by force or guile eternal war,
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Sole reigning holds the tyranny of Heaven.”

The second speech delivered by Satan is also of great significance. He starts this speech in heroic view but his evil intentions are soon revealed to us and lower him in our eyes. He loses his greatness and from hero, he becomes zero.

“To do ought good never will be our task
But ever to do ill our sole delight.”

Whatever Satan is doing, he knows God’s superior strength but it is enviable quality in Satan that he is determined to fight against God and says to his companions. “To be weak is miserable doing or suffering.”

In the third speech, Satan feels proud to be new possessor of Hell. He is not worried to lose Heaven. He is happy to find freedom. He shows apathy for slavery. Though he is shocked to see the region which he got in exchange of Heaven, he prefers to reign in Hell than to serve in Heaven. “Better to reign in Hell, than to serve in Heaven.” However, it is only Satan’s cunningness and hypocrisy which the reader is unable to understand.

“Thou profoundest Hell,
Receive thy new possessor. One who brings
Mind not to be changed by place or time.
The mind is its own place, and in itself
Can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven.”

After knowing the evil intentions of Satan, only an evil reader can show his sympathy for Satan when he delivers this speech. However, apart from moral considerations, it would not be justice rather it would be narrow mindedness not to accept Satan’s heroic qualities.

Next speech by Satan also makes him a towering personality among all his companions. It is a fiery speech. He addresses the fallen angels who are lying about in deep despair. He wants to awaken them from deep slumber in which they are lying to take some action.

“Princes, Potentates, Warriors, the flowers of Heaven,
Once yours, now lost.”

This speech is so fiery that his followers get energy and arise out of their deep slumbers.
In the fifth and final speech, Satan addresses the fallen angels once again and cajoles them. He calls them “Matchless Powers.” He encourages them saying that they have fought a glorious war against monarchy of God, though the results are terrible and disastrous. He has no mission in his mind except to fight to get their blissful place i.e. Heaven. He is determined to wage war. The speech which he makes is full of absurdities and contradictions. He addresses in the following words.

“War then war
Open or understood must be resolved.”

To sum up, no doubt the speeches delivered by Satan make an impression of true heroism in Satan’s personality. They clearly show that Satan has will power, power of endurance, iron will and courage. He seems a great leader who has the ability to show grace under pressure and can keep up the spirits of his companions. But the contradictions and absurdities in these speeches cannot be overlooked because he is trying to throw dust in the eyes of his followers. He is trying to invoke war against God on one hand, and on the other hand he desires to have peace which is never possible with a war. Moreover, whatever he says amounts to very little. However, one thing is certain. That’s why, he cannot be called a hero due to his evil designs made against God and human beings. He is just the central figure and motivating force in “Paradise Lost.” He is a tragic figure like Macbeth. In basic details, he is more like Brutus. Like Oedipus, he is a tragic figure caught in the web of fate and like a true tragic hero, he is faced with “Hubris” due to his pride.  

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