Satan in Milton and Dante

*Paradise lost* is an epic poem, which take place in the Universe: in heaven, hell and Eden. This poem tells the biblical story of Adam and Eve, with God and Satan, who is thrown out of the Heaven and later tries to corrupt humankind. Satan, the most beautiful of the angels, is hurled into Hell with his stunned followers as a consequence of this defeat in the war in Heave.

Milton composed it after about three hundred years from the Dante Alighieri’s marterpiece. In the Divine Comedy and in Paradise Lost there is a description of Hell. In these two works there are some similarities but also a lot of differences, owed by the temporal differences and therefore cultural.

Both authors were religious and claimed their works were rooted in divine inspiration. After that they have different ideas of Satan.

One of the most notable difference is that Dante’s Satan becomes a means of punishment, while Milton’s is a twofold symbol of God’s eternal justice.

Dante’s Lucifer created hell through impact from his fall, in Paradise Lost Satan was free to move around and converse with the other archangels and they even built a palace. Milton is also influenced by the portrayal of Hell, as the demon.

There is an important influence from Dante on Milton's physical description of Hell and Satan: Dante describes Satan as being massive, with wings that appear as big as windmills. (He has got three faces: one is yellow/white (frailty), one is red (hatred) and the last one is black (ignorance). As regards its physical appearance, it is between a mythic monster and a medieval satyr). This description of Satan is used by Milton when he ascends to speak to the demons and is described as a massive being. (He lives in the Hell and he is prone in a flood of fire. He has flames on his hands and expanded wings.) In describing the massive size of Satan, Milton also describes his shield as being as big as the moon and his spear as being so big that the biggest mast from a ship would appear like a needle next to it

Dante's Satan has the exact opposite personality of Milton's Satan in every sense of the word. Dante creates a crying Satan that seems pathetic and not able to speak because he is busy chewing the sinners. This Satan is an instrument of God, as he is used to give out punishment to the sinners and does not seem to be the cause for any of the sins committed. By creating an impotent Satan, Dante is suggesting that all the sins that the souls have committed are of their own free will and they have chosen to commit the sins that sent them to Hell.

Milton on the other hand, creates a Satan that is very active, and very admirable as he gives speeches to encourage the demons to rise against God again. Although Milton's Satan also weeps, when he does, it does not make him seem pathetic, but rather sympathetic as he is crying while giving his speech to the demons.  This is a Satan that seems very attractive to the reader as he describes his viewpoint on his fall from Heaven.

Milton will describe Satan the terms in which he describes an epic hero , according to a conventional scheme and classical heroism , thus ending up to look like some typical heroes of the tragedies of Elizabethan England .

Unlike Dante , Milton does not describe Lucifer as a monster of so frightful but as a " fallen Archangel ", the " former glory " was " darkened " in part, an angelic creature and rebel who together with his followers lost the battle against the Almighty , and of which she was still " deep scars on your face " that had been dug lightning . Then fell from the sky , along with legions of followers, in the middle of "Chaos" , in a " hot tide " ( and therefore not in a frozen lake ) linked by chains of adamant .

In Paradise Lost Satan has a pair of wings , a sign of its former nature " angelic " like Dante's Satan.

In the first book of Paradise Lost Lucifer is not left alone, but the fact accompanied by Beelzebub (Hebrew , " Lord of the Flies ") the prince of darkness , "who had been closest to crime and Power" , and together with them an endless host of angels (portraits also dressed as a warrior ) finally defeated but not beaten , waiting for the call from the leader to take their revenge. In Dante's Inferno Satan is alone.

The Arch Villain in Milton, unlike what happens in Dante's Inferno, is immobile and resigned for eternity to a role devoid of all authority : while acknowledging the power of the Almighty , why not top suspect, he will claim a legitimate ambition to rule according to its nature (ie : doing evil ) , claim sanctioned by the fateful " better to reign in hell than serve in heaven." And ' therefore pride, word repeated several times in the text , the main feature of Satan despite the defeat suffered by God , by his words , looks like a tyrant , a "great enemy that now with unrestrained joy / triumphs and reigns only , holding the sky in his tyranny . "

In The Divine comedy Satan is not the main character,he lives in the “Inferno”, in an iced lake called “Caina”. In Paradise lost, Satan is the protagonist, and it has not the typical epic hero character, he is more philosophical, who must learnt to control himself but he ha salso courage and leadership.

All of these comparisons and differences between the two Satans show the different viewpoints that each author it trying to portray about the nature of sin. While Dante shows an immobile Satan, suggesting that sins originate from free will and the sinners' own decisions, Milton describes a very active Satan that observes God's creations and then plans to manipulate and turn them against God. Milton and Dante therefore have contradictory views on the nature of sin as the creation of Dante's Satan show that he is not the root of all sins, while Milton's Satan is active and therefore is the root of all sins and lead to the corruption of human soul.

Another difference is: Satan is described in Dante's Inferno by Dante character, while in the work of Milton describes himself, because Satan is the protagonist.