

## Satanic Whispers: Milton's Iblis and the "Great Sultan"

### Abstract

The seventeenth century witnessed a burgeoning of Arabic studies in the universities and the first English translation of the Turkish *Alcoran* (1649). However, John Milton has generally been passed over in scholarship concerned with the influence of Arabic studies on early modern literature. Yet, since Islam was recognized as one of the great challenges to the true faith at this time, it would be surprising if its presence were not felt in Milton's great Protestant epic, *Paradise Lost*. This article hopes to demonstrate how, at times, Milton's depiction of Satan is intriguingly similar to that of his Qur'anic counterpart Iblis. Without overstating the Qur'anic influence, it offers for consideration a number of instances where the outlines of both fallen angels converge in a way that amplifies understanding of particular narrative moments in the poem. Readers familiar with the way Milton appropriates narrative paradigms from classical epic, both to enhance Satan's characterization and subvert classical conceptions of heroism, might find it interesting to speculate whether he also deployed a similar, though not so extensive, strategy in relation to Islam, drawing on Qur'anic imagery in the cause of Christian truth, while at the same time tarring Muhammad's teachings as impostures of Satan.

Keywords: *Paradise Lost* Qur'an Islam Muhammed

When examining the representation of Islam or Muslim characters in early modern literature, it is usually the work of dramatists such as Christopher Marlowe and William Shakespeare, or the "Turk plays" of playwrights like Robert Daborne (*A Christian Turned Turk*, 1612) and Philip Massinger (*The Renegado*, 1623) that take centre stage.<sup>1</sup> Aside from his exploitation of the image of "Turkish tyranny" in political polemic and, most famously, to discredit Satan's republican stance in *Paradise Lost*, John Milton has generally been passed over in scholarship concerned with the influence of Arabic studies on early modern literature.<sup>2</sup> However, since Islam was recognized to be one of the great challenges to the true faith at this

time, it would be surprising if its presence were not felt in Milton's great Protestant epic, *Paradise Lost*. Given that together with "paganisme" and "Popery", "Mahumetanisme" was viewed as one of the three "grosse mistakes" that had been "raised in the darke,"<sup>3</sup> by the devil himself, the place to look for its presence would surely be Hell and, more specifically, in the representation of Satan, the leader of the fallen angels.

### ***The Alcaron of Mahmomet (1649)***

When considering the possible presence of Islamic ideas and imagery in Milton's poem, it is important to bear in mind the intellectual environment that was beginning to take shape when Milton was a young man: the early part of the seventeenth century was a time of significant expansion in Arabic studies, and Cambridge University was at the forefront of these important developments.<sup>4</sup> Although Abraham Whelocke was only installed as the first Sir Thomas Adams' Professor of Arabic in 1632,<sup>5</sup> just as Milton was leaving the University, he had been appointed University Librarian three years before in 1629. Whelocke immediately showed himself eager to develop an Arabic collection, which he began in 1631 when William Bedwell, a notable Arabic scholar, bequeathed his copy of the Qur'an to the library.<sup>6</sup> Whelocke was also instrumental in ensuring that an important collection of Arabic manuscripts that had been amassed by Thomas Van Erpe, the first Leiden Professor of Arabic, came to the university in 1632.<sup>7</sup> It seems unlikely that Milton would have been altogether unaware of the exciting developments in oriental studies that were taking place around him at Cambridge.<sup>8</sup>

Perhaps stemming from a generally dismissive attitude to Milton's possible knowledge of Arabic literature or Islamic belief in favour of an overly exclusive emphasis on his interest in classical literature, critical analysis has not attributed to Milton's work any significant Arabic or Islamic influence; in fact, there is a marked tendency to reject this

possibility.<sup>9</sup> Recently, however, a few scholarly endeavours have reconsidered Milton's attitudes towards Islam and its most influential text, the Qur'an.<sup>10</sup> The main obstacle that has hindered such studies is, as Eid Dahiyat has stressed, conclusive proof that Milton ever read the Qur'an,<sup>11</sup> and yet, given the fascination it held for Milton's intellectual and religious milieu, it would surely be more remarkable if he had not.

In the 1640s, with the early blossoming of oriental scholarship at Oxford as well as Cambridge,<sup>12</sup> attention increasingly focused on the need for an authoritative edition and translation of the Qur'an, regarded as an essential tool for refuting the errors contained in the sacred text of Islam. Abraham Whelocke had undertaken an ambitious Latin-Greek translation of the Qur'an accompanied by a thorough refutation of its teachings in Arabic. Although the project enjoyed widespread support at the University, and approval had even been won for forging a new Arabic font at the university's expense, it was eventually abandoned after Whelocke had sent a sample of his work to Samuel Hartlib, and it failed to find favour: "Mr. Hartlib returned my Papers, and told me they were not, or else my Intention was not, approved. I purposely was desirous to be ignorant who should give this severe Censure."<sup>13</sup>

In the summer of 1648, Samuel Hartlib was notified that John Boncle was also at work on "an exact Concordance upon the Alcoran," which he planned to produce with the original text and a translation, together with evidence to prove "how ignorantly and falsly Mahomet hath taken his stories and doctrines out of the Bibel or other Legends".<sup>14</sup> Interest in the Qur'an was thus not simply confined to scholars of Arabic: it is clear that Samuel Hartlib was at this time particularly interested in such undertakings and was playing a key role in gathering information about their progress.

By June 1648, Moses Wall had let Hartlib know that a "friend" of his had finished an English translation of the Qur'an but was waiting for "a Historie of Mahomet's life and his

Religion” before proceeding to publish. Just six months later the first English translation of the Qur’an, together with “The Life and Death of Mahomet, the Prophet of the Turks, and Author of the Alcoran,” was entered in the Stationer’s Register on 29 December 1648. It would not be unreasonable to assume that Milton was aware that such an eagerly-awaited project had come to fruition through his own association with Hartlib,<sup>15</sup> and perhaps also through an acquaintanceship with Abraham Whelocke and Moses Wall himself. Hartlib had known both Milton and Wall since the early 1640s, and Milton may have known Wall since their time together at Cambridge.<sup>16</sup>

Given the commotion that followed the announcement in Parliament that the first translation of the Qur’an into English was about to be published,<sup>17</sup> it would seem even more plausible to credit Milton with having read the Qur’an than to presume that he would have neglected to read it,<sup>18</sup> especially when the timing of this particular incident is taken into account. It was on 19 March 1649, the day before Milton was inducted into his new role as Secretary for Foreign Tongues to the Council of State,<sup>19</sup> that Colonel Anthony Weldon had caused a stir in the House of Commons by an inflammatory speech in which he sought to bring to members’ notice the forthcoming publication of the English translation of the Qur’an. Weldon was commissioned to “make Search for the Press, where the *Turkish Alcaron* is informed to be now printing”; two days later the matter was referred to the Council of State “further to examine the Matter”.<sup>20</sup> After a short delay, publication of *The Alcaron of Mahmomet* went ahead towards the end of April, albeit now accompanied by a lengthy “health warning”, penned by Alexander Ross: “A needfull Caveat or Admonition for them who desire to know what use may be made of, or if there be danger in reading the *Alcoran*.”<sup>21</sup>

Alexander Ross prudently recommended circumspection when approaching the Qur’an: “they only may surely & without danger read the Alcoran, who are intelligent,

judicious, learned, and throughly grounded in piety, and principles of Christianity”, cautioning that “weak, ignorant, inconstant, and disaffected mindes to the truth, must not venture to meddle with this unhallowed piece, lest they be polluted with the touch thereof”. Thomas Ross, the likely translator, understandably put a more positive construction on how his translation, by exposing this “gallimaufry of errors”,<sup>22</sup> would strengthen rather than damage the reader’s faith: “viewing thine enemies in their full body, thou mayst the better prepare to encounter, and I hope overcome them”.<sup>23</sup> His approach has much more in common with Milton’s combative spirit in the *Areopagitica* (1644) where he had urged that the wars of truth should be openly fought with the confident assurance that Truth will never come off worse if she were permitted to grapple in a “free and open encounter” with Falsehood.<sup>24</sup>

Indeed, in the *Areopagitica* Milton had explicitly likened the wilful suppression of truth by the Roman church to the deliberate imposition of ignorance on the followers of Islam. From this perspective, licensing was “first establisht and put in practice by Antichristian malice and mystery on set purpose to extinguish, if it were possible, the light of Reformation, and to settle falsehood”, thus little differing from “that policie wherewith the Turk upholds his *Alcoran* by the prohibition of Printing”, the implication being that Islam would no longer hold sway over its adherents were the Qur’an to be published and its deficiencies and errors fully exposed.<sup>25</sup>

Even if Milton’s interest was not piqued by the publication of the first English version of the *Alcoran*, he may well have **looked at [been familiar with]** the Latin translation that had been readily available since the mid-sixteenth century when Theodor Bibliander had published *Machumetis saracenorum principis eiusque successorum vitae ac doctrina, ipseque Alcoran* (Basel: Joannes Oporinus, 1543), heavily based on the translation produced four centuries earlier by Robert of Ketton, provocatively entitled, *Lex Mahumet pseudoprophete* (1143). The Parker Library of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, 0000 **Marlowe’s** college,

had a copy of the second edition (1550), and certainly, the playwright shows an impressive degree of familiarity with the Qur'an in *Tamburlaine*. In a passage that conflates the more familiar classical mythology with Islamic imagery, Orcanes imagines Sigismund's torments in the afterlife,

Now scalds his soul in the Tartarian streams,  
And feeds upon the baneful tree of hell,  
That Zoacum, that fruit of bitterness  
That in the midst of the fire is ingrafted  
Yet flourisheth as Flora in her pride,  
With apples like the heads of damned fiends.

(*Tamburlaine*, part ii, II.iii.16–20)

“Zoacum” clearly alludes to the description of how “Zacon, the tree of hell ... cometh out of the bottom of hell, it riseth high, and the branches themselves resemble the heads of devils; the damned shall eate of the fruit thereof, they shall drink boyling water” (*Alcoran*, Ch. XXXVII, 276-77). As Abu-Baker observes, Marlowe “had clearly done his research, and offers the Islamic view of hell with an authority equal to that which the Christian and classical views of the afterlife were conventionally offered” (90). If Marlowe cited the Qur'an to add authenticity to this Islamic view of the afterlife, then it would seem likely that the scholarly Milton would be as concerned to acquaint himself with its teachings and to mine its imagery for his own purposes.

Indeed, it might surprise western readers unfamiliar with Arabic or Middle-Eastern beliefs to learn how frequently readers familiar with Islamic teachings recognize in the account of the Fall in *Paradise Lost*, a narrative that bears remarkably close parallels with the Qur'anic account in numerous instances. As MacLean points out: “writers schooled in the Islamic tradition can and do recognize common cause with the Christian tradition; at least

with Milton's often revolutionary version of it".<sup>26</sup> Most notably, it is in Milton's depiction of Satan that readers well versed in the Islamic tradition find a representation that speaks to Islamic belief; indeed, Omar Farrukh, former professor of Philosophy at the Lebanese University, has gone so far as to claim that, Milton was greatly influenced by the "Qur'anic account of Satan's disobedience of God's orders".<sup>27</sup>

This paper proposes to demonstrate how Milton's depiction of Satan is intriguingly similar to his Qur'anic counterpart Iblis. Without overstating the Qur'anic influence, it offers for consideration a number of significant instances where the outlines of both fallen angels converge together in a way that may be felt to amplify our understanding of the particular narrative moment. While scholars have frequently acknowledged the potent symbolism attached to the image of "Turkish tyranny" in early modern literature, Milton's own writing included, little attention has been accorded to the reception of Arabic or Islamic mythology. Readers are familiar with the way Milton appropriates narrative paradigms from classical epic both to enhance Satan's characterization and subvert classical conceptions of heroism; it is interesting to speculate whether he also deployed a similar, though not so extensive, strategy, in relation to Islam, drawing on Qur'anic imagery in the cause of Christian truth, while at the same time tarring Muhammad's teachings as impostures of Satan. However, in order to appreciate more fully the points of convergence between Satan and his Qur'anic counterpart Iblis, it is worth looking briefly at the narrative trajectory of the latter's rise and fall as it is traced in the Qur'an.<sup>28</sup>

### **Satan and Iblis, the Demon of Melancholy<sup>29</sup>**

For countless ages, Iblis,<sup>30</sup> known as Azazil before his fall,<sup>31</sup> devoted himself to the worship of God, surpassing all his fellow angels in piety. Gradually ascending through the seven

skies, after eventually reaching the first sky, or as it is known in Islamic literature, *al-sama ad-dunya*, and after thousands of years of continuous worship, he finally reached the Throne of God itself.<sup>32</sup> At this point occurred his unfortunate fall.<sup>33</sup>

It is in the Qur'an that we find the fullest account of Iblis' tragic fall which occurs after he, together with the other angels, is introduced to God's newest creation, Adam. God orders all the angels to prostrate themselves before Adam: all, except Iblis, obey. Following this act of defiance, a dramatic confrontation takes place between the two: God calls into question Iblis' disobedience; Iblis retorts by reasoning that he is superior to this new creature:

We<sup>34</sup> created and formed you, and commanded the Angels to worship *Adam*, which they performed, except the devill, to whom we said, what hindred thee to worship *Adam*, when we commanded thee? He answered, I am better then he, thou hast created me of fire, and hast created man of the mire of the earth.

(*Alcoran*, Ch. VII, 91-92)

The confrontation concludes with God relating how he had banished Iblis from Heaven as punishment for his proud defiance, and in return Iblis had challenged God to permit him to attempt to lead humankind astray, proving their unworthiness. God accedes to Iblis' demand and defers his punishment until the end of time, at which point Iblis will be doomed to an eternity of hell fire together with those he has succeeded in seducing:

then said we to him, depart out of Paradise, it is not the habitation of the proud, thou shalt be in the number of them that shall be laden with ignominy; the devill answered, let me alone until the day of the Resurrection of the dead; wherefore hast thou tempted me? I will seduce men from the right way, I will hinder them on the right hand, and on the left, and on all sides, to believe in thy Law, and the greatest



part of them shall be ungratefull. We said to him, be gone out of Paradise, thou shalt be abhorred of all the world, and deprived of my mercy; I will fill hell with such as shall follow thee.<sup>35</sup>

(*Alcoran*, Ch. VII, 92)

It can be argued that the Devil in the Qur'an shares more intriguing similarities than differences with the Devil in *Paradise Lost*; <sup>36</sup> pride is, of course, a defining characteristic in both figures.<sup>37</sup> The essential difference, however, is that although Satan and Iblis both defy God's command, Milton develops a variation on the Qur'anic narrative, changing an essential detail: unlike [Milton's] Satan who rebels against God and his Son, in the Qur'an, Iblis' fall is consequent upon his refusal to bow to Adam. Milton reworks the Islamic incident that prompts Satan's rebellion, in such a way that it highlights the flawed nature of the Qur'anic narrative [if known] to the Christian reader. From a Christian perspective, it would be unreasonable for God to demand that the angels prostrate themselves before anyone other than their creator and God, in the person of his Son. In *Paradise Lost*, Satan, who has seduced other angels to his cause and has attempted to supplant God by force of arms, fixes upon mankind as the instrument of his revenge upon God. Satan and the rebel angels understand the new "Race call'd Man" to be "less / In power and excellence" than themselves (II. 348-50), at most "equal or not much inferior" (Argument to Book II), certainly not superior to them. Mankind thus becomes an easy target, but rather than wreaking revenge by destroying God's "favour'd" (II. 350) race by force, they determine upon a more than "Common revenge" (II. 368). Just as Iblis wants to prove to God mankind's unworthiness by "seduc[ing] men from the right way", the rebel angels' devilish plan is likewise to "Seduce them to our Party" (II. 371) and reap the satisfaction of seeing

... when his darling Sons

Hurl'd headlong to partake with us, shall curse

Thir frail Original, and faded bliss,  
Faded so soon.

(*PL*, II. 373-76)

Although the chronological order of the events comprising the respective falls of Iblis and Satan are not entirely identical in the Qur'an and *Paradise Lost*, this is a natural consequence of the crucial change in the incident that provokes the rebellion in each case.

Both Iblis and Satan lament the loss of their previous state, lost without hope of recovery after their respective acts of disobedience and rebellion. This is echoed in Satan's compellingly affective soliloquy, as he arrives in view of Eden,<sup>38</sup> prompted by his contemplation of the glorious majesty of the sun,

O thou that with surpassing Glory crown'd,  
Look'st from thy sole Dominion like the God  
Of this new World;  
(*PL*, IV. 32-35)

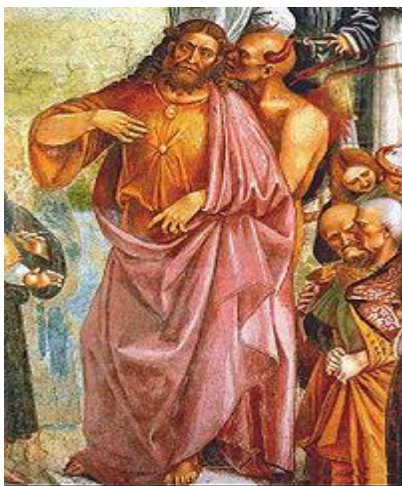
and his melancholy reflections on the loss of his own previously elevated, almost godlike rank, far in advance of the sun, since lost by pride and ingratitude:

... how I hate thy beams  
That bring to my remembrance from what state  
I fell, how glorious once above thy Spheare;  
Till Pride and worse Ambition threw me down  
(*PL*, IV. 37-40)

While the reasons for rebellion may differ slightly between Iblis and Satan,<sup>39</sup> the latter's elevated rank and his very closeness to God had tempted Satan to supplant Him:

lifted up so high  
I sdeind subjection, and thought one step higher  
Would set me highest, and in a moment quit  
The debt immense of endless gratitude.  
(*PL*, IV. 49-52)

After Iblis loses his elevated position and preeminent power, as the closest to God's throne and highest of the angels, he, like Satan, who had been "great in Power, / In favour and pre-eminence" (V. 660-1), must likewise resort "to fraud or guile" (I. 646) to exert his influence.<sup>40</sup> Whispering sinful thoughts, into the ears of his victims becomes Iblis' characteristic mode for ensnaring his prey, who may, in turn, become conduits for transmitting his false teachings. Understandably, such imagery was not unknown to early modern Christian Europe, as exemplified in the detail from the fresco below. The Antichrist, masquerading as a Christ-like figure, is preaching to the people, but it is Satan, standing so close beside him that his hand looks to be a continuation of Satan's arm, who is whispering in his ear and telling him what to say.



[Figure 1 Detail from the Deeds of the Antichrist; fresco by Luca Signorelli in Orvieto Cathedral (c. 1501)]

However, what is of especial note is that during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries such imagery is particularly associated with representations of Muhammad who is frequently depicted as preaching or taking dictation of the Qur'an with the devil at his ear. The intention is clearly to discredit the origins and message of Islam by exposing the devil's whisperings as the source of the inspiration for Muhammad's false teachings and to portray its founder as the Antichrist.<sup>41</sup> For example, in Wynkyn De Worde's *Here begyneth a lytell treatise of the turks lawe called Alcoran*, Muhammad is shown preaching from a pulpit, while a horned devil, with a firm grip on his shoulder, whispers into his left ear. The manner in which the two figures are depicted in such close proximity, suggests that Muhammad is merely a mouthpiece of the devil, or an extension of the devil himself.<sup>42</sup>



[Figure 2 *Figure 2 Wynkyn De Worde, Here begyneth a lytell treatise of the turks lawe called Alcoran. And also it speketh of Machamet the Nygromancer (London: 1515), facing title page.*<sup>43</sup>]

Over a century later, Thomas Heywood's *The Hierarchie of the Blessed Angells: Their Names, Orders and Offices; The Fall of Lucifer with His Angells*, similarly suggests that the

Qur'an is in effect the devil's handiwork. The image depicts the devil, his work complete, glancing back approvingly as he strides away, while Muhammad is shown intent upon his task of writing down the Qur'an.



[Figure 3 Thomas Heywood, *The Hierarchie of the Blessed Angells* (London: Adam Islip, 1635)

Influenced by the Qur'an, which shows humankind to be dangerously susceptible to the devil's whispering,<sup>44</sup> Arabic folklore and literature is replete with graphically disturbing accounts of Iblis' powers to lead humankind astray in this manner:

قَالَ عُمَرُ بْنُ عَبْدِ الْعَزِيزِ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ: "سَأَلَ رَجُلٌ رَبَّهُ أَنْ يُرِيَهُ مَوْضِعَ الشَّيْطَانِ مِنْ قَلْبِ ابْنِ آدَمَ ،  
فَلَمَّا كَانَ فِي الْحَوْلِ رَأَى فِيهَا بَرَى النَّائِمِ جَسَدَ رَجُلٍ يُشْبِهُ الْبَلُورَ يَرَى دَاخِلَهُ مِنْ خَارِجِهِ ، وَرَأَى الشَّيْطَانَ  
فِي صُورَةِ ضِفْدَعٍ قَاعِدٍ عِنْدَ مَنْكِبِهِ الْأَيْسَرِ بَيْنَ مَنْكِبِهِ وَأُذُنِهِ ، لَهُ خُرْطُومٌ طَوِيلٌ رَقِيقٌ ، قَدْ أَدْخَلَهُ مِنْ  
مَنْكِبِهِ الْأَيْسَرِ إِلَى قَلْبِهِ يُوسَّوسُ إِلَيْهِ ، فَإِذَا ذَكَرَ اللَّهُ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ حَنَسَ ."

Omar bin Abdulaziz, May Allah be pleased with him, said: "a man asked his Lord to show him where Al-Shaytan [Satan] dwells in the heart of the son of Adam. He saw in a dreamlike manner the body of a man whose insides and outsides are transparent as a crystal, and he saw Al-Shaytan [Satan] in the image of a toad, resting on his left side between his shoulder and ear. He [Satan] had a long thin trunk,

which he has inserted from his left side into his heart whispering to it. If he [the man] recalled Allah *Azza wa Jal* (Mighty and Majestic is He [God]), [Satan] is silenced.”<sup>45</sup>

While it is less likely that Milton was aware of this particular passage from the Hadith, in comparison to the more available Qur’anic account, it remains noteworthy that the first victim of such an assault according to *Paradise Lost* is Eve, the first woman.<sup>46</sup> After first spying upon Adam and Eve, Satan enters the bower while the couple are asleep; he is discovered there by the angelic guard. The similarities between the “Devilish art” practised by Satan and that of Iblis are so striking that the passage is worth quoting in full:

[...] him there they found  
 Squat like a Toad, close at the eare of Eve;  
 Assaying by his Devilish art to reach  
 The Organs of her Fancie, and with them forge  
 Illusions as he list, Phantasms and Dreams,  
 Or if, inspiring venom, he might taint  
 Th’animal spirits that from pure blood arise  
 Like gentle breaths from Rivers pure, thence raise  
 At least distemperd, discontented thoughts,  
 Vaine hopes, vaine aimes, inordinate desires  
 Blown up with high conceits ingendring pride.  
 (PL, IV. 799-809)

Satan’s choice of assuming the shape of a toad is of particular interest, not only because toads were thought to be poisonous,<sup>47</sup> but also because it is the form, according to Arabic and Islamic demonology, specifically ascribed to the whispering Iblis, as exemplified above.

What is also remarkable is that the Islamic tradition depicts Iblis whispering in this manner not only to emphasize his cunning but also to stress his degradation, the agent of evil reduced to being “one who flatters with ruses” in the guise of a toad, a lower form of life.<sup>48</sup> This is entirely in keeping with the spirit of the passage from *Paradise Lost*, where Zephon’s acerbic retort to Satan’s contemptuous scorning of the angelic guard – when they at first fail to recognize him in his true form – draws attention to Satan’s own debasement:

Think not, revolted Spirit, thy shape the same,  
 Or undiminish’d brightness, to be known  
 As when thou stoodst in Heav’n upright and pure;  
 That Glorie then, when thou no more wast good,  
 Departed from thee, and thou resembl’st now  
 Thy sin and place of doom obscure and foule.  
 (PL, IV. 835-840)

Like Iblis, Milton’s Satan is no longer the angel closest to God, whom “one step higher” might have set “highest” (IV. 50-51), as once he claimed; he is now the “Artificer of fraud” (IV. 121), who acts with “sly circumspection” (IV. 537) plotting against humankind. Both devils undergo a physical fall from the heavenly realm followed by a spiritual fall represented in their assumption of a bestial disguise and the eclipsing of their power; the only influence left to them is to deceive, tempting through illusions, dreams or fantasies, and to resort to spying in order to attain knowledge from which they have been excluded.

In the Qur’an, the outcast devils, hungry for celestial knowledge that is now denied to them, attempt to pry into heavenly secrets by eavesdropping upon the angels as they converse together; when they are detected doing so, the heavenly bodies protect the security of heaven, and they are driven away, pursued by flaming meteors:

We adorned the Heaven and the Earth with Planets, and have kept them safe from the malice of the Devils; they cannot hear what is spoken in the Firmament,<sup>49</sup> they are shamefully driven away on all sides, and shall be eternally tormented; if they hear any thing spoken, they hear it greedily, and follow [it] speedily, but the shining Planet [a meteor or a shooting star]<sup>50</sup> pursueth them, and detecteth their malice.

(*Alcoran*, Ch. XXXVII, 275).<sup>51</sup>

It is worth pointing out the strong affinities between the way the devilish spirits are repelled from the heavenly realms in the Qur'an and the situation in Paradise when the night watch discover Satan at the ear of Eve and drive him out of Eden. Milton prepares for the confrontation by introducing a celestial guard under Gabriel, appointed to keep Eden secure; there is a tense air of expectation as the "Chief of th' Angelic guard" waits for nightfall while

About him exercis'd Heroic Games

Th' unarmed Youth of Heav'n, but nigh at hand

Celestial Armourie, Shields, Helmes, and Speares

Hung high with Diamond flaming, and with Gold.

(*PL*, IV. 550-554)

Their weaponry, together with the timely arrival of Uriel, Regent of the Sun, who comes "gliding through the Eeven / On a Sun beam, swift as a shooting Starr" (IV. 555-56) create a dazzling effect. Thanks to Uriel, Gabriel learns of an evil spirit lurking somewhere in the garden, and the angelic guard divides into two bands to search him out, "As flame they part / Half wheeling to the Shield, half to the Spear" (IX. 784-5). The depiction of the celestial guards and the fearsome defence they mount against malicious interlopers is evidently powerful in both accounts.<sup>52</sup>



Just as in the Qur'an, where the heavenly bodies (stars, planets and meteors), repel the eavesdropping devils, in *Paradise Lost* we learn how "the Starrie cope / Of Heav'n" would have been "disturbd and torne / With violence of this conflict" (IV. 992-5) had not Satan took flight. Moreover, like the Qur'anic account, which threatens the rebel spirits who come on such spying missions with the prospect of being eternally tortured by hellfire (*Alcoran*, Ch. LXVII, 356), Gabriel, on uncovering the motive for Satan's mission, that he had come to "spie [on] / This new created World" (936-7), offers to drag him "Back to th' infernal pit" (965).

In Islamic and Arabic demonology, the devils utilize the knowledge gained from eavesdropping in order to tempt humankind to disobey the word of God. Iblis is the evil enticer, the tempter, and more specifically "the whisperer" (*alwaswas*, الوساوس) who whispers sinful thoughts into the hearts of his victims. By eavesdropping on Eve's conversation with Adam, Satan learns that the fruit from the tree of knowledge has been forbidden to them. Satan succeeds in persuading Eve to disobey God by tempting her to eat the Forbidden Fruit; he prepares the ground for this act by familiarizing her with the idea and enticing her with his dreamlike whispers. It is not only the single image of a whispering devil in the shape of a toad that is analogous in both accounts, but also the surrounding context of this act that is undeniably similar. This is not, of course, to suggest that these satanic traits are by any means exclusively Islamic, nor that the figure of Iblis is the main source for Milton's Satan, but rather that, by ascribing such Islamic imagery to his devil, Milton not only enriches the texture of his verse by drawing on accounts of Islam with which his reader might be familiar, but he also undermines the political authority of the *Alcoran* and thereby the authority of the Sultanate.

## Satan the Great Sultan

The most familiar aspect of Milton's demonization of Islam is, of course, his association of Satan's rule of the infernal realm with "Turkish Tyranny". Hossein Pirnajmuddin has usefully summarized the way in which the "connotations of corrupt and corrupting luxury, spectacle, tyranny, disbelief, and evil", all associated with "the Muslim East in the Renaissance mind"<sup>53</sup> are powerfully created in a number of memorable narrative moments, such as the rich splendour and exotic spectacle of Satan displayed "High on a Throne of Royal State", breathtaking in its opulence:

[...] which far

Outshon the wealth of *Ormus* and of *Ind*,  
Or where the gorgeous East with richest hand  
Shows on her Kings *Barbaric* Pearl and Gold.

(*PL*, II. 1-4)

The poem explicitly and repeatedly associates Satan's monarchical style with that of Muslim rulers,<sup>54</sup> but nowhere more strikingly than when Satan is identified as the first "great Sultan", whose ["numberless" troops who "fill all the Plain" clearly exceed any possible Ottoman army:] military might is far more menacing even than that of the Ottoman Turks:

So numberless were those *bad Angels* seen  
Hovering on wing under the Cope of Hell  
'Twixt upper, nether, and surrounding Fires;  
Till, as a signal giv'n, th'uplifted Spear  
Of thir great *Sultan* waving to direct  
Thir course, in even ballance down they light  
On the firm brimstone, and fill all the Plain;  
(*PL*, I. 345-50, emphasis added)

It is worth speculating at this point whether the purpose here is, even if less overtly, to allude to the Qur'anic account of Iblis' power of temptation. After the dramatic confrontation between Iblis and God, the latter does grant Iblis his only wish: the capacity to beguile His new creatures in whatever way he can. However, His true believers are assured that Iblis will have no authority over them (إِنَّ عِبَادِي لَيْسَ لَكَ عَلَيْهِمْ سُلْطَانٌ):

[...] implore God to deliver thee from the malice of the devill, abominable to all the Creatures, he hath *no power* over them that trust in his divine Majestie, his *power* extendeth over such as goe astray, who obey not him, and adore many Gods [...].

(*Alcoran*, Ch. XVI, 168; emphasis added)

The word “power”, in the English translation above replaced the original Arabic سُلْطَان (‘sultan’). In the Qur’an, the extent of Iblis’ “power” or *sultan* is described in both affirmative and negative terms: Iblis has no power (*has no sultan* or is not the sultan) over God’s true believers; correspondingly, he has despotic power (*he has sultan* or he is the sultan) over those that are beguiled by him, including the fallen angels. In the first annotated edition of *Paradise Lost*, Patrick Hume noted that “Soldan or Sultan, are esteemed to be of Arabian, by others of Persian Original, and to signifie Power, Dominion”,<sup>55</sup> in keeping with the Qur’anic lines: Satan is the Sultan of the unbelievers, or the fallen. It is noteworthy that Milton chooses the word “Sultan”<sup>56</sup> to describe Satan’s absolute authority over his followers. For Milton, such a connection, in its suggestive irony, could not have been overlooked. Satan, the fallen angel, and the infernal Sultan, represents all that is misguided. Like the Ottomans and their *Alcoran*, Satan seemingly enjoys evident, albeit temporary, power, a connection that becomes further emphasised by merging the Qur’anic verses with the political figures of the Muslim empire.<sup>57</sup>

Lacking conclusive evidence to determine whether Milton did in fact read the *Alcoran*, the similarities between Satan and Iblis remain open for speculation as this paper concedes. However, given the rise of Arabic studies in seventeenth-century England, the numerous references to Judaism and Islam in Protestant writing, and the complex Anglo-Ottoman relations dominating the political sphere, it can be fruitful to reconsider this possibility. As a poet who aimed to write a [n epic] work of encyclopaedic comprehensiveness, it seems unlikely that Milton would fail to incorporate Islamic imagery, especially in his representation of Hell. It would seem likely, too, that he would turn to the *Alcoran* to ensure the faithful portrayal of an authentic Islamic demonic. By appropriating aspects of Iblis, the Qur'anic devil, for his portrayal of Satan, Milton not only extended the range of mythographic "shadows" of Christian truth within the epic, but also, by drawing attention to the unreasonable nature of God's command, adduced as the cause of Iblis' fall from grace in the Islamic tradition, Milton simultaneously undermined the authority of the Qur'an itself. Milton's contemporary reader is reminded that the earthly dominion of the Ottoman Sultanate, its threatening military power and its satanic allure are bound eventually to fade in the face of Christian truth.

## Notes

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We are grateful to Gordon Campbell for his helpful comments and encouragement when this article was in draft form.

<sup>1</sup> See Abu-Baker, “Representations of Islam and Muslims.” See too, Dimmock, *New Turkes: Dramatizing Islam and the Ottomans*, and Birchwood, *Staging Islam in England*. Birchwood demonstrates how a preoccupation with Islam permeated religious, political, diplomatic and commercial discourse in this period. Islam was identified with “the Turk” in the popular mind; this explains why so many references to the Qur’an at this time view Islam narrowly in terms of Turkey and the Ottoman Empire, the superpower of the day.

<sup>2</sup> Scholars interested in points of contact between Milton and Arabic culture tend to focus on the recent Arabic reception and translations of Milton’s work. For more on this topic, see Einboden, “A Qur’anic Milton,” 183-94; Dahiyat, “Aspects of John Milton in Arabic,” Issa, “Transforming *Paradise Lost*.”

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Hill, *The Militant Church*, 19.

<sup>4</sup> For Arabic studies in England, see Russell (ed.), *The Arabick Interest of the Natural Philosophers*; Toomer, *Eastern Wisdom and Learning*; Matar, *Islam in Britain*.

<sup>5</sup> The chair was endowed by Sir Thomas Adams, who had made his fortune as a London draper, “not only to the advancement of good literature by bringing to light much knowledge which as yet is locked up in that learned tongue; but also to the good service of the King and State in our commerce with those Eastern nations, and in God’s good time to the enlarging of the borders of the Church, and propagation of the Christian religion to them who now sit in darkness”. As cited in Brooke and Highfield, *Oxford and Cambridge*, 180.

<sup>6</sup> On the first leaf of the manuscript is an inscription in Whelocke’s hand, marking the donation (Ms Ii.6.48 l.1). Bedwell had been planning to publish the first Arabic-English

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dictionary, and had also bequeathed his notes, together with a set of damaged Arabic type, to the University for that purpose, but the project never came to fruition. For a more detailed account of the establishment of Arabic studies at Cambridge, see Toomer, *Eastern Wisdom and Learning*, 85-93.

<sup>7</sup> The collection had been purchased by the Duke of Buckingham on Erpe's death in 1624. The Duke had been elected Chancellor of the University in 1626, but after his sudden death two years later, it seemed unlikely that the university would benefit from the collection. However, Whelocke wrote to the Duke's widow, urging her to donate the collection to the University: since, as he put it, there wanted "only matter & store of Bookes to encourage & cherish this new Studdy amongst us" (Toomer, *Eastern Wisdom and Learning*, 93).

<sup>8</sup> Indeed, Campbell and Brook have claimed that "Milton could read three ancient Oriental languages: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Syriac" ("Milton's Syriac," 74).

<sup>9</sup> For example, Dahiyat states: "there is no concrete evidence that Milton read the Qur'an. Milton's depiction of Satan, the war in Heaven, and the fall of the devil and his followers are derived from the Old and New Testaments, the books of the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, Talmud and Tagrums, as well as from classical mythology", *Once upon the Orient Wave*, 102.

<sup>10</sup> There have been a few works that have given some consideration to Milton's representation or knowledge of Islam. See MacLean, "Milton among the Muslims," 180-94, and, "Milton, Islam, and the Ottomans," 284-98; Currell and Gleyzon, "Milton and Islam Bridging Cultures," 1-5; and Dahiyat, *Once upon the Orient Wave*. For work that argues for an Arabic, Islamic or Middle-Eastern influence on Milton's *Paradise Lost*, see Mohamed, "Milton's Enmity towards Islam and the Intellectus Agens," 65-81, where he propose an influence of Islamic philosophy on Milton's invocation of light. See also Sid-Ahmad, "Ibn

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Tufayl's Hayy and Milton's Adam," 355-78 and Sharihan Al-Akhras, "The Anima at the Gate of Hell," 43-57.

<sup>11</sup> Dahiyat's was the first work to ever tackle the possibility that Milton read the Qur'an. However, he dismisses the possibility and lays stress on there being no supportive evidence to suggest that Milton read the Qur'an; he also fails to find a Qur'anic influence on Milton's Satan, and, indeed, a substantial part of the chapter is devoted rather to Milton's influence on the depiction of Satan in Arabic literature (see 111-26). Nevertheless, MacLean has challenged Dahiyat's conclusions by his timely reminder that "absence of evidence has never been evidence of absence" ("Milton, Islam, and the Ottomans," 294).

<sup>12</sup> Edward Pococke became the Laudian Professor of Arabic in 1636; Archbishop Laud (Chancellor of the University, 1633-45) endowed the chair in perpetuity in 1641. Laud also purchased materials for the Bodleian Library; in a letter of thanks, the University acknowledged that he had "greatly enriched" its treasury of books "by importing Araby into Oxford" (see Birchwood, *Staging Islam*, 30).

<sup>13</sup> HP 15/6/27A; Ussher, *Works*, 16:176. Although Whelocke refused to speculate about who was responsible for his failure to secure Hartlib's support, it has generally been attributed to the manoeuvrings of Christian Ravius who had embarked on a similar project. For a more detailed account of these and similar projects, see Feingold, "The Turkish Alcoran," 475-501. It is interesting to note that Milton's and Whelocke's signatures appear together in an album belonging to Christopher Arnold, a German scholar who travelled to England in 1651. Milton also met John Greaves, an Arabic scholar at Oxford (see Dahiyat, *Once upon the Orient Wave*, 45).

<sup>14</sup> *Ephemerides* (1648), HP 31/22/9A-B, as cited in Feingold, "The Turkish Alcoran," 499.

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<sup>15</sup> Both Milton and Wall are listed with other names by Hartlib under the heading, “commissioners for the Act of Council for schooling” in an undated note, possibly dating from 1647. See Malcolm, “Moses Wall,” 38.

<sup>16</sup> Wall entered Emmanuel College as a pensioner in 1627 and took his BA in 1632; Milton was at Christ’s from 1625-32. While it is uncertain whether or not Milton knew Wall during the five years that they were both at Cambridge, in a letter Wall wrote to Milton in 1659, thanking him for his *Treatise of Civil Power in Ecclesiastical Causes*, he recalled his “Respect for your Friendliness to Truth in yor early Years”, which may suggest that he knew Milton as a young man at Cambridge. See Malcolm, “Moses Wall,” 25.

<sup>17</sup> *The Alcoran of Mahomet* was itself a translation of Andre Du Ryer’s *L’Alcoran de Mahomet*, a direct translation of the Qur’an from Arabic into French (Paris, 1647). For a detailed discussion of the controversy surrounding the publication, and its perceived significance, see Malcolm, “The 1649 English Translation of the Koran,” 261-95; and Feingold, “The Turkish Alcoran,” 475-501.

<sup>18</sup> The book was much in demand and ran to a second edition within the year.

<sup>19</sup> On 13 March 1649 the Council of State decided to invite Milton to become its Secretary for Foreign Tongues. Milton accepted the post two days later on 15 March, and was inducted on 20 March 1649. See Milton French, *The Life Records of John Milton*, 2:234.

<sup>20</sup> *Journal of the House of Commons*, 6:168; 6:170.

<sup>21</sup> That the publication was not suppressed has been attributed to the prevalence of “tolerationist sympathies” in the Council of State at this time, see Malcolm, “The 1649 English Translation of the Koran,” 294.

<sup>22</sup> Intriguingly, this relatively unusual expression is echoed in a tract published two years later that has been fancifully attributed to Milton, *The Life and Reigne of King Charls, Or the Pseudo-Martyr discovered*, (London: Printed for W. Reybold at the signe of the Unicorn



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in Pauls Church-yard, 1651) in which Falsity is once again allied with Islam and Truth with the reformed faith. The author argues that the “grand Imposture” practised by the *Eikon Basilike* could only satisfy those that “have a desire to be cosened out of their understandings”, staunchly concluding that, “I think an Asian beliefe would better fit them than an European Faith, a gallymaufried Alcoran, rather than a true and rationall Remonstrance, drest with no other Rethorick than the naked truth” (186). Indeed, in the preface, Charles I is himself explicitly aligned with Muhammad in the egregious nature of their alleged deceit: “with his picture praying in the Frontispiece, purposely to catch and amuse people, magnifying all his misleads for pious actions, canonizing him for a Saint, and idolizing his memory for an innocent Martyr, an imposture without other parallel than that of Mahomet” (sig. A.8r-\*A.IV).

<sup>23</sup> Thomas Ross, “The Translator to the Christian Reader” in *The Alcoran of Mahomet*, A2. All quotations from the Qur’an are taken from this translation.

<sup>24</sup> All quotations from Milton’s poetry and prose are taken from *The Riverside Milton*.

<sup>25</sup> That the Turks themselves are prohibited from reading the Qur’an, “for feare lest the vniuersality of learning should subuert their false grounded religion and policy; which is better preserued by an ignorant obedience” was a line of argument expounded by Sandys in his popular travel narrative, *A Relation of a Journey*, 64. Richard Holdsworth, one of the tutors at Cambridge, had included it in his recommended reading for students: “Directions for a Student at the University”. For further discussion of Holdsworth’s curriculum, see Bryn Roberts, *Puritanism and the Pursuit of Happiness*, 30-33. Following the line of reasoning anticipated by Sandys and Milton before him, Alexander Ross wryly remarked: “that merchandise may justly be suspected which will not be sold, unlesse unseen”, “The Translator to the Christian Reader” (*Alcoran*, sig. A3–A3v).

<sup>26</sup> MacLean, “Milton, Islam and the Ottomans,” 293.

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<sup>27</sup> Omar Farrukh, *Hakim al-Ma'arrah*, 127, as cited in Dahiyat, *Once upon the Orient Wave*, 102; 157. See too, MacLean, "Milton, Islam, and the Ottomans," 293-98, where he detects a general similarity between Satan and Iblis.

<sup>28</sup> The Islamic tradition including Qur'anic commentaries, Hadiths and Oral folkloric narratives have amplified the story of Iblis. Whether a devil damned for his overweening pride, as generally understood in orthodox Islamic teachings, a devout worshipper, as interpreted by certain Sufi literary texts, or a symbolic representation of the "lower nature in man" as understood by Bahai readings, the devil has continuously engaged the minds of numerous writers. For a history of the Muslim devil in Sufi literature, see Awn, *Satan's Tragedy and Redemption*, 57. See also MacLean's "Milton, Islam and the Ottomans," where he proposes a similarity between the Sufi accounts of Iblis and Satan, based on the fact that both have progeny, a notion more credited in Judeo-Islamic accounts compared with Christian writings (293-98).

<sup>29</sup> In "To Mahummed, *the Illustrious Ermite of Mount Uriel in Arabia*," Giovanni Paolo Marana speaks of Iblis, or "Ablis," as he terms him, as "the demon of melancholy"; citing his fate as reminder of what happens to "those who [...] forget to pay the due veneration we owe to the author and source of providence and good success". See *Letters Written by a Turkish Spy*, 106.

<sup>30</sup> Recently, the word Iblis has been phonologically linked with the Greek διάβολος through the Syriac *d.b.l.s* (as *diblūs* or *diābūlūs*). It is suggested that while the Arabic term was borrowed from the Greek, through the Syriac, the initial "d", *dal*, was either mistook for an 'a' *alef* and dropped, or the *dālath* was assumed to be the genitive particle that often precedes nouns in Syriac; therefore, it was dropped transforming *diabolos* into *Iabolos* and eventually *Iblis*. See Reynolds, "A Reflection on Two Qur'anic Words," 675-89.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. "How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!" (Isaiah 14:12-15).

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<sup>32</sup> Ad-Diyarbakri, the sixteenth-century writer, recounts different versions of the story of Iblis; see *Tar'rikh al-khamis fi anfus nafis*, cited in Awn, *Satan's Tragedy and Redemption*, 30.

<sup>33</sup> Whether Iblis is a fallen angel or a devil remains a matter of dispute in Islamic accounts. This debate will not be a focus of concern in this paper, since the *Alcoran* of 1649 does not make reference to this otherwise crucial discussion in Islamic theology. The devil in the English *Alcoran* is presented as a fallen angel. MacLean suggests that this translation might be more influenced by Christian belief than Judeo-Islamic thought. In the latter, discussions of angels' propensity to sin or capacity to have progeny are more common than in the Christian tradition where angels are less sexual or sinful than darker spirits (like demons or *Jinn*). While the word "Jinn" is known to be associated with spirits that can be good or evil (mostly evil), Awn notes that certain Qur'anic commentators interpret the word "Jinn" as the name of an angelic "tribe or clan of angels to which Iblis belongs", thus establishing his angelic status. In fact, the "*jinn*, and Iblis in particular," according to Awn, "are angels entrusted with significant tasks; they are the guardians (*Khazana*) of Paradise (*al-janna* or *al-jinan*)," *Satan's Tragedy and Redemption*, 26. MacLean has argued that in the Judeo-Islamic representation of Satan's sexuality and progeny, Milton found an intriguing depiction of a devil that combines both angelic and carnal traits; see "Milton, Islam, and the Ottomans," 293-98.

<sup>34</sup> It is worth noting that the "We" in the Qur'an is a "royal we", perhaps translating the Arabic pronoun *nahnu* used for respect or glorification, not an expression of plurality. The *Alcoran* of 1649 dismisses the concept of the Trinity, three persons in one Godhead, out of hand, stating: "Certainly, they who affirme the Messiah, the Son of *Mary*, to be God, are impious; [...] Such as affirm there are three Gods, are impious: there is but one God" (*Alcoran*, Ch. V, 71).

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<sup>35</sup> In *Paradise Lost*, the reader is reminded that Satan's ability to tempt humankind is also ultimately sanctioned by God when He permits Sin to open Hell's gate for his passage to earth and observes, with his Son, Satan's progress towards Eden. God's refusal to extend mercy to Iblis is also in accord with the Father's reasoning that because unlike Man, Satan was "self-tempted and self-depraved", it is entirely equitable and reasonable that "Man therefore shall find grace, / The other none" (*PL*, III. 131-32). For Milton's Christian reader, this implicitly "corrects" the Qur'anic version in which Iblis feels himself unjustly treated by God because he has been led into temptation: "wherefore hast thou tempted me?" (*Alcoran*, Ch. VII, 92).

<sup>36</sup> Christian scholars found the Qur'an uncomfortably similar to the Judeo-Christian tradition. In fact, numerous theologians considered Islam as a dangerously heretical sect of Christianity because of its similarity. Its widespread appeal was of interest in Christian reformist dialogue by way of comparison and self-reflection. For more on this perspective on Islam, see Dimmock, *Mythologies of the Prophet Muhammad*, 64-111, and Evenson, *Judaism, Islam, and English Reformation Literature*.

<sup>37</sup> According to certain Sufi readings, Iblis' refusal to bow represents a perfect model for a Muslim life: as a true believer should, he refused to prostrate himself to anyone other than God, thus proving his true belief and rejecting *shirk*, the sin of worshipping any other but God. (See Awn, *Satan's Tragedy and Redemption*, 146-50.)

<sup>38</sup> It seems noteworthy too that the imagery that most directly introduces an association between Satan and Arabia is the allusion to Arabia Felix, which marks Satan's arrival in Paradise to tempt Adam and Eve after his journey from the infernal realms. (See *PL* II. 160-65).

<sup>39</sup> Such differences are to be found not only between the Qur'an and *Paradise Lost*, but also amongst varying religious traditions: Sunni readings of the Qur'anic narrative, unlike some

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Sufi interpretations, are closely in line with the Christian narrative, in the sense that Iblis' pride was the main reason for his challenge to God and refusal to obey his command and worship an inferior being, Adam: "I am better than he, thou hast created me of fire, and hast created man of the mire of the earth" (*Alcoran*, Ch. VII, 92).

<sup>40</sup> Of course, even before the war in heaven, Satan had stooped to "Ambiguous words" (V. 703) and "caluminous Art" (770) to draw over a third of the angels to his side. Likewise, the Islamic tradition is rich with exhortations warning against the temptations, the illusions and the fraudulent ways of the devil. See for example: *Alcoran*, Ch. VIII, 110; Ch. XI, 86; Ch. XXIII, 213; Ch. XXXVIII, 283. Indeed, God sardonically urges the devil: "deceive by thy speeches them whom thou shalt be able to deceive, seduce whom thou canst seduce [...] whatsoever thou shalt promise them shall be but vanity and falsehood" (Ch. XVII, 174).

<sup>41</sup> Muhammad was often regarded as a mirror image of Christ. In *The Devil in Legend and Literature*, Rudwin observes how, just as "Jesus was the incarnation of God, Muhammad," it was reasoned, "was the incarnation of the devil or Antichrist," 21. See too, Akbari, "The Rhetoric of Antichrist," 297-307.

<sup>42</sup> In an unusually sympathetic portrayal of the prophet and his teachings, Muhammad is pictured with a white dove resting on his left shoulder with its beak positioned close to his ear as if it were whispering to him (Fol.243r in ms fr.226, Bibliothèque nationale de France); in this case, the iconographical detail of the white dove, symbolizing the Holy Spirit, emphasizes the divine source of his inspiration.

<sup>43</sup> Figures 2 and 3 are also reproduced in Dimmock, *Mythologies of the Prophet Muhammad*, on p. 55 and p. 186 respectively.

<sup>44</sup> See the Qur'anic invocation of protection against the whispering devil: "Say, 'I seek refuge in the Lord of mankind, [...] From the evil of the retreating whisperer – who whispers [evil] into the breasts of mankind'" (Qur'an, 114.1-5). This prayer for protection is indeed one of

the most popular in the Islamic tradition. In this connection, it is interesting to note how in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, Aaron, "the barbarous Moor" (OED Moor 1. "Moslem in religion;" 2. "A Moslem"), who is ultimately held responsible for the tragedy, being "Chief architect and plotter of these woes" (V.iii.3), demonstrates the extent of his villainy by actually calling for "Some devil" to

*whisper* curses in mine *ear*,  
 And prompt me, that my tongue may utter forth  
 The venomous malice of my swelling *heart*  
 (V.iii.12-14; emphases added)

<sup>45</sup> [http://library.islamweb.net/hadith/display\\_hbook.php?bk\\_no=4024&pid=666121](http://library.islamweb.net/hadith/display_hbook.php?bk_no=4024&pid=666121); the translation is my own. For more discussion of this Hadith, including other versions of it where, intriguingly, it is *Isa Ibn Mariam* (Jesus the son of Mary) who sees Satan, in the shape of a snake, attempting to influence the hearts of his victims, see Badr Al-Din Shibli, *Kitab Akam Al-marjan Fi Ahkam Al-jan*.

<sup>46</sup> Iblis' love for God in the Sufi tradition, with poetry treating this love in a similar way to the one of human lovers, is worth comparing with the feelings of longing that Eve evokes in Satan. Both devils are capable of emotions that transcend pride, envy and vengeance. For representations of Satan in Arabic and Sufi literature, see Awn, *Satan's Tragedy and Redemption*, 122-83.

<sup>47</sup> See Robbins, "The Truculent Toad in the Middle Ages," 25-48. In his second edition of *Paradise Lost*, Alastair Fowler draws attention to the significance of the toad in alchemic allegory and the way "More generally, the toad symbolized death and the devil, and figured in medieval shape-shifting", see note to IV. 800.

<sup>48</sup> Awn, *Satan's Tragedy and Redemption*, 57.

<sup>49</sup> In the Islamic tradition, specifically the Hadith, we learn that there are seven skies and God rests on his throne above the seventh sky. The devils are not allowed to ascend to the higher

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skies; they are limited to the lowest surface of the first sky where they attempt to eavesdrop on the angels as they converse in the hope of attaining divine knowledge.

<sup>50</sup> So too, in the “Chapter of Devils” it is alleged that “some devils have said, we have been as high as heaven, and found it furnished with guards and stars; we staid in a place a little distant to hear; there is one star that watcheth them that hearken, & drives them away” (*Alcoran*, Ch. LXXII, 364).

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Lancelot Addison’s *The Life and Death of Mahumet* (1679), where he refers to “*Ablisus the old Devil*” relating how: “The Moors believe that the Devils were wont to ascend into Heaven, and to hear the private discourses of the Holy Angels, and to steal away their sayings” (13). Because of their access to this hidden knowledge, attempts to communicate with these spirits through such means as fortune telling, cup reading and scrying were not uncommon occult practices in the Islamic world. It seems not without significance that in *Paradise Regained*, Satan boasts to the Son of God that he is not debarred entirely “from the Heav’n of Heav’ns” (*PR* I. 366), and claims that “by presages and signs, / And answers, oracles, portents and dreams,” he offers advice to humankind “Whereby they may direct their future life” (*PR*, I. 394-96).

<sup>52</sup> Cf. “we created signs in heaven, and adorned them with Stars, to content the minds of them that consider them; we sheltered them from the assaults of the devill, but the Butterflie followeth everything that Shines, and believeth it to be a Star” (*Alcoran*, Ch. XV, 159). In a similar, yet more elaborate verse on the torment that awaits the devils who attempt to disturb the protected spheres of heaven in spite of the stars, planets and meteors that are set to repel their advances, the *Alcoran* reads: “We have adorned the heaven, and the world with Stars; we expelled thence the Devils, we prepared for them a great fire, and the torments of hell [...] (Ch. LXVII, 356)”.

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<sup>53</sup> See Pirnajmuddin, “Milton’s ‘Dark Divan,’” 70. It is perhaps not without significance that during the mid1660s, Charles made a dramatic change in royal fashion. The diarist John Evelyn recorded how the King made a stir at court when he abandoned the traditional “doublet, stiff Collar & Cloake” and adopted “the Eastern fashion of Vest ... after the Persian mode”, 501. It is possible that Charles was influenced by the popularity of plays based on events in Turkish history, such as William Davenant’s *The Siege of Rhodes* (1662) and Lord Orrery’s *The Tragedy of Mustapha* (1665), which were presented before the King.

<sup>54</sup> The secretive and unholy nature of the deliberations of Satan’s council of state is suggested by the expression “dark Divan” (*PL*, X. 457), intimating that this mode of government finds its origins in Hell itself.

<sup>55</sup> P[atrick] H[ume]’s edition of Milton’s poetical works (1695) was accompanied by “explanatory notes on each book of the *Paradise Lost*.”

<sup>56</sup> It seems likely that Milton intended a play on the words “Satan” and “Sultan”, just as he had earlier made a similar play on the word “Ammiral” (I. 294) and the Arabic “Amir” (أمير “Prince”).

<sup>57</sup> Such an approach is in-keeping with much Protestant discourse in the seventeen century. In his preface to the *Anti-Alkoran*, Wenceslas Budova, for example, explained how by talking with “Turks and renegades”, he had endeavoured to research at first hand, “what the religion, or rather irreligion of the Turkes really was, and [...] depict for others that Turkish antichrist with his fables and other frauds”, had drawn attention to “the extraordinary edifice composed of parts of the New and Old Testament, in which that Satan (*i.e* the Sultan) endeavours to hide himself with his *Alkoran*,” as quoted in Edmund Gosse, “A History of Bohemian Literature,” 245-46.



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