



MILTON'S *PARADISE LOST*

**SATAN: REBELLION,
HEROISM, *RECTA RATIO***

POLITICAL CONTEXT: Meet the new boss, same as the old boss

- DISILLUSIONMENT: 1650's the Commonwealth succumbs to the very practices of authoritarian rule that Milton fought against in 1640's.
- RESTORATION 1660 → Royal reprisals
- Milton saved only by the intercession of his friend Andrew Marvell
- SPIRITUAL and POLITICAL "homelessness"

LITERARY CONTEXT: Biblical and Epic Genres

Two versions of *Paradise Lost*:

- 1667: 10-book structure based on the BIBLICAL model:
 - Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, 4 gospels, Revelations
 - TRAGEDY of the Fall
- 1674: 12-book structure based on the CLASSICAL EPIC (eg. *Odyssey*, *Aeneid*):
 - The story of the birth of the nation;
 - STRUGGLE and GLORY

POETIC NATIONALISM

- Milton's aim:

"to fix all the industry and art I could unite to the adorning of my native tongue; not to make verbal curiosities the end, that were a toylsom vanity, but to be an interpreter & relater of the best and sagest things among mine own Citizens throughout this lland in the mother dialect."

SPIRITUAL EPIC: the *invocatio*

- In the *invocatio* (the traditional Classical invocation of the Muses), Milton calls on both Urania, the "Heavenly Muse" (6) and on God, the "Spirit."
- He claims that his poem will "with no middle flight ... Soar / Above the *Aonian* Mount (14-15).

What is the function of this **double invocation**?

SPIRITUAL EPIC: the *invocatio*

- Authority of *tradition* + assertion of *innovation*;
- Expanded SCOPE: Earth, Heaven, Hell;
- RELOCATION of the epic struggle for identity and meaning from the *nation* to the *soul*;
- HISTORY + NATIONALISM + PROPHECY=

ALLEGORY

TYRANNY: Might makes Right

EIKONOKLASTES (1649)

Milton accuses Charles I of establishing "an arbitrary government... [which supposes] that all Britain was to be tied and chained to the conscience, judgment, and reason of one man; as if those gifts had been only his peculiar prerogative entailed up on with his fortune to be king."

PARADISE LOST

Satan wonders at his exile from God, and concludes:

.... Be it so, since he
Who now is Sovran can dispose
and bid
What shall be right: fardest
from him is best
Whom reason hath equall'd,
force hath made supreme
Above his equals....
(245-49, my emph.)

RECTA RATIO redux

- ARISTOTLE: reason as the basis of all human virtues;
- CICERO: reason as the natural compulsion to do good.
- Separates HUMANS from BEASTS
- Gives humans the ability to MASTER APPETITES and PASSIONS

Christian RECTA RATIO and the Paradox of FREE WILL

REASON = GOODNESS = GODLINESS=

FREE WILL

"The moment reason ceases to dictate to the will, the moment the will is directed by... anything but reason, it loses its freedom, and having lost its freedom, it is incapable of choosing to serve God and freely serving him."
(William Walker)

- The sinful mind is *deluded* and *blinded* and is a *slave to appetite*.

GROUP 1: SATANIC HEROISM

William Blake famously asserted that Milton was "of the Devils party without knowing it."

What: Is Satan a HERO?

Consider:

- His speech to his compatriots (105-24);
- His critique of tyranny and assertion of indomitable will (245-63);
- The descriptions of his army (535-74).

So What: What is the **function** of his heroic presentation, given Milton's stated mission to "justify the ways of God to man" (26)?

GROUP 2: FREEDOM

Satan tells his assembled angels on the lake of fire: "... Here at least / We shall be free Better to reign in Hell, than serve in Heav'n" (258-63).

What: Is Satan free?

Consider:

- His rising from the lake of fire (209-13);
- His instructions to the devils to "fix/ thir Seats long after next the Seat of God / Thir Altars by his Altar" (382-4);
- The construction of Pandaemonium (713-37).

So What: What do these examples tell us about the nature of Satan's power? What do they tell us about the nature of God's power?

GROUP 3: HELL and *RECTA RATIO*

Paradise Lost begins *in medias res*, after the war in Heaven, when Satan wakes up on the lake of fire where he ruminates on "lost happiness and lasting pain"(55).

What: What is the relationship between Hell and *Recta ratio*?

Consider:

- The first description of Hell (61-63);
- How the devils build their city (679-90);
- The motif of darkness and noise as compared to Milton's *invocatio* where he appeals to God: "What in me is dark/ Illumine" (22-3).

So what: What does this relationship tell us about the nature of sin and salvation? What does sin do to nature?
