

John Milton: A Revolutionary Poet

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Please Silence Cell Phones

- Father was disinherited for Protestantism
- Became a Puritan: opposed Catholics as well as Stuarts
- Latin Secretary to the Commonwealth Government & Protectorate
- Imprisoned during Restoration
- Published *Paradise Lost* 1667

Biography 1608-1674



Classical Epic and Christian Epic

- Homer's Achilles and Odysseus are models
- Individualistic Hero
- Proud
- Warlike
- Problem: How to reconcile warrior ethic and individualism of classical hero with Christian values?
- Obedience

Thematic Overview

- Two man characters, Satan and Adam, offer two contrasting outcomes for those who Disobey God
- Obedience to the Will of God is the primary value
- Satan is cast into Hell; He is hopeless and his only avenue is to destroy what God has made
- Though disobedient, after suffering Penance, Adam (and Mankind) can be redeemed

Hierarchy and Grace

- There is a spatial hierarchy that reflects a political one
- Heaven: God and Angels
- Earth: mankind (Man/Woman)
- Hell: Fallen Angels and Damned
- Interestingly, Satan, Adam and Eve are all rebels to this hierarchy
- But Adam and Eve ultimately submit; and, they suffer because they rebelled.

Satan as Hero

- William Blake and Percy Shelley first to Heroize Satan; “of the Devil’s party without knowing it.”
- Satan as an Achilles
- Proud; Willful; Independent



Satan as Classical Hero

“To bow and sue for Grace
With suppliant knee, and deifie his power,
Who from the terrour of this Arm so late
Doubted his Empire, that were low indeed,
That were an ignominy and shame beneath
This downfall;” (I.110-115)

- ❑ To supplicate is to submit; it implies weakness and is an appeal for mercy

Satan Glories in Hell

“Hail horrors, hail
Infernal world, and thou profoundest Hell
Receive thy new Possessor: One who brings
A mind not to be chang’d by Place or Time.
The mind is its own place, and in it self
Can make a Heav’n of Hell, a Hell of Heav’n...
Here at least
We shall be free...
Here we may reign secure, and in my choyce
To reign is worth ambition though in Hell:
Better to reign in Hell, then serve in Heav’n.” (I.250-263)

Comments on Satan's speech

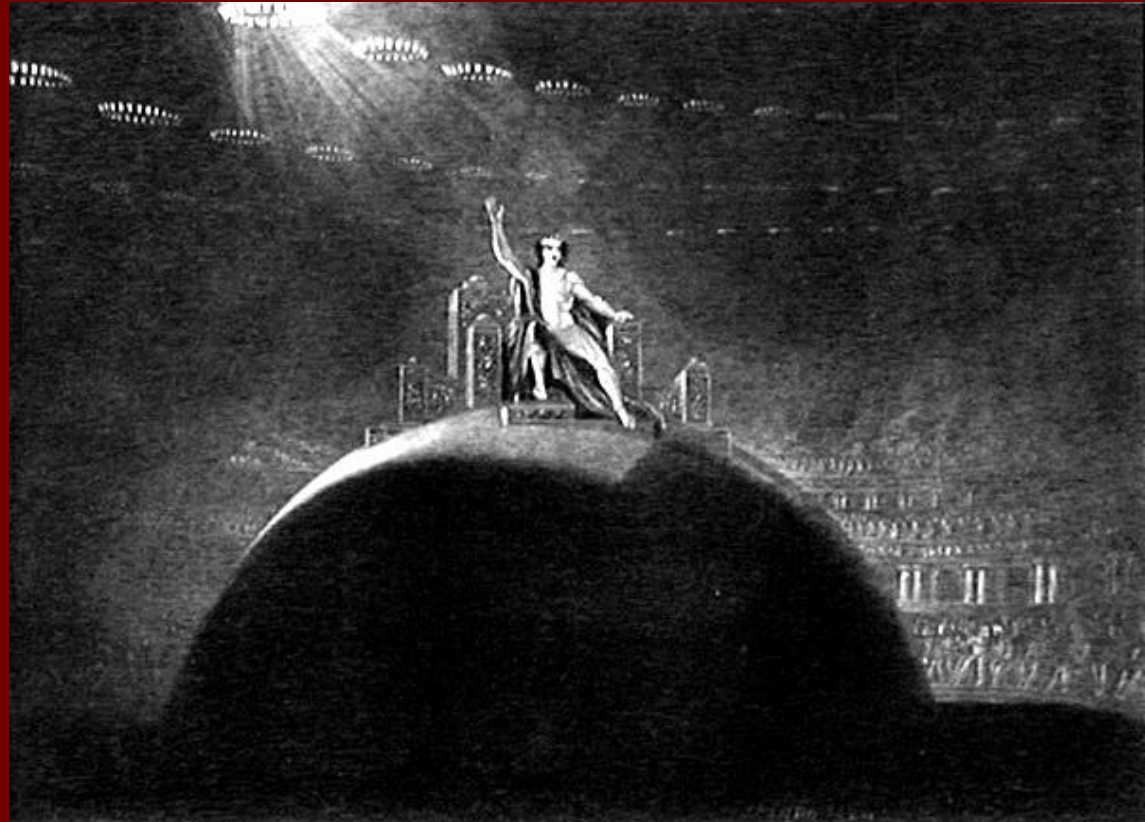
- ❖ Reverses Achilles words to Odysseus in the Underworld: "better to be a slave in life than a King in the underworld."
- ❖ Champions the idea of Kingdom where the people are Free. God is presented as "tyrant," not unlike King Charles



Art Resource, New York City

The Assembly: Free Debate of Fallen Angels

- Assembly
- Satan is the first among equals
- Satan rules by virtue of “merit”
- Sheds “tears such as Angels weep” before addressing the Angels; Recalls tears of Odysseus and Achilles



Resolution of Rebellion

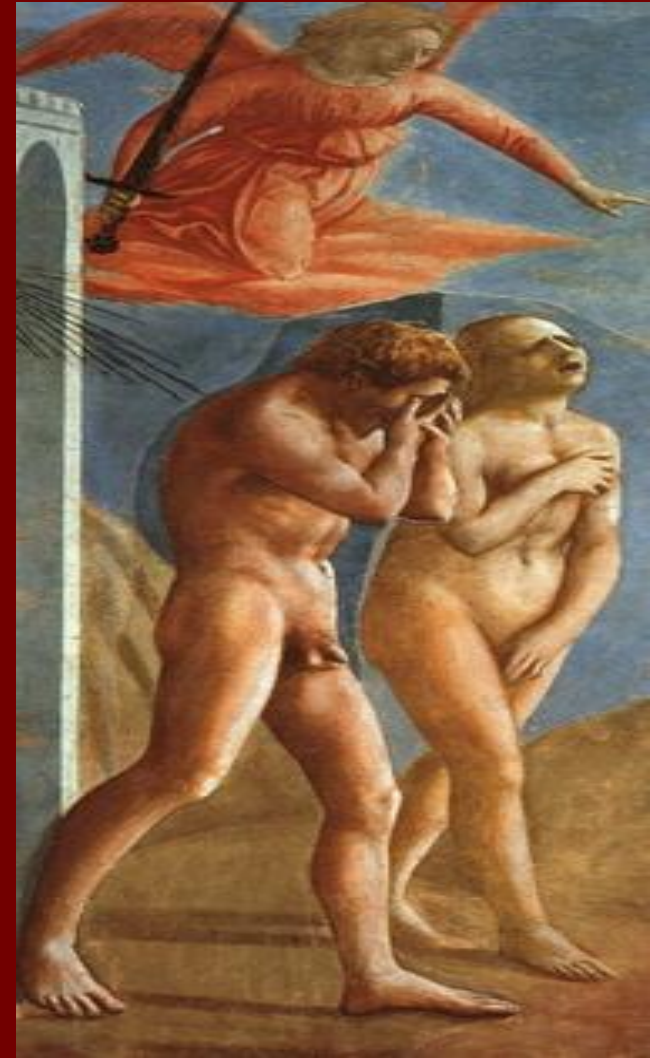
- Satan: "So farewell Hope, and with Hope farewell Fear, Farewell Remorse: all Good to me is lost; Evil be thou my Good; by thee at least Divided Empire with Heav'ns King I hold By thee, and more than half perhaps will reigne; As Man ere long, and this new World shall know."

Gender and Paradise Lost

- Eve is supposed to be subservient to Adam (for nothing lovelier can be found/in Woman, then to studie household good,/And good works in her Husband to promote.") IX.232
- Adam fails her by being weak; allowing her to seek out 'epic trials' to prove her worth, when he should protect her (ie., shelter her); "O much deceav'd, much failing, hapless Eve."
- Eve's Beauty Disarms Satan momentarily

Adam and Eve's Supplications

“ prostrate fell
Before him reverent, and both
confess'd
Humbly thir faults, and pardon
beg'd, with tears watering the
ground, and with thir sighs the
Air
Frequenting, sent from hearts
contrite, in sign
Of Sorrow unfeign'd, and
humiliation meek.”



Optimistic End: Epic Resolution

“They looking back, all th’ Eastern side beheld
Of Paradise, so late thir happie seat,
Wav’d over by that Flaming Brand, the Gate
With dreadful Faces throng’d and fierie Armes:
Som natural tears they drop’d, but wip’d them
soon;

The World was all before them, where to choose
Thir place of rest, and providence thir guide:
They hand in hand with wandring steps and slow,
Through Eden took thir solitarie way.” (XII.640)

Conclusions

- In Paradise Lost, Satan is the Classical Hero; Adam the Christian Anti-Hero
- Milton reveals a natural affiliation with Rebels (Satan, Eve, Adam); but, these rebels have no just cause for rebellion other than pride or vanity or delusion
- The Classical Hero must be rejected because he is too egoistical
- In the end, God's hierarchy is upheld and Obedience is shown to be the proper value
- Despite The Fall, Milton succeeds in presenting the Optimism of Christianity: After feeling remorse and suffering penance, eventually Mankind achieves Redemption and Forgiveness