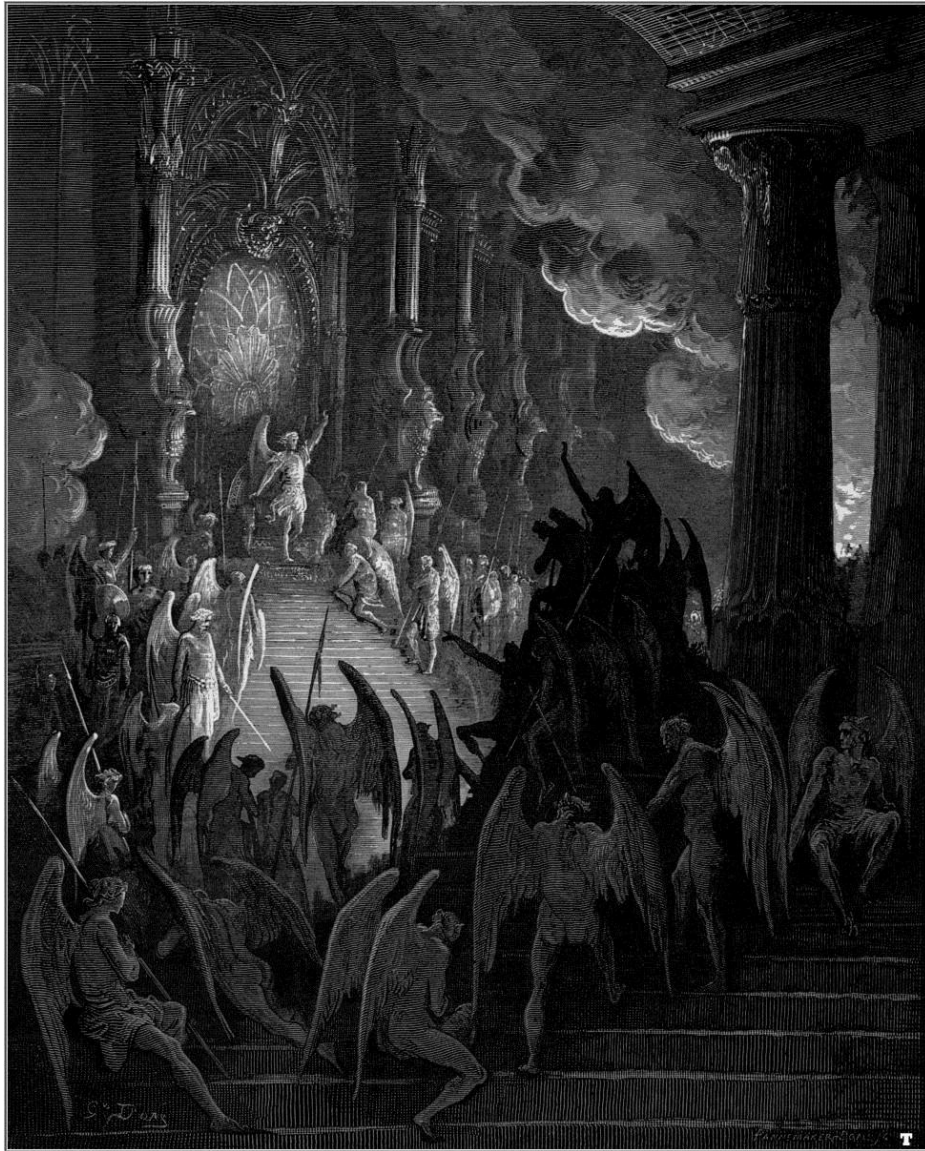


# Divine Kingship in *Paradise Lost*

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## Index

1. Introduction .....	4
2. John Milton – Conscientious Rebel .....	8
2.1 Causes of Rebellion .....	9
2.2 Ancient Liberty .....	12
2.3 Milton – Recasting Kingship .....	14
3. The Vain and the Virtuous – God, Satan and Adam.....	18
3.1 “Worthiest to be Obeyed” – God’s Kingship VS Satan’s .....	21
3.2 Satan – False Republican.....	26
3.3 Satan and Adam’s Anti-Heroism .....	28
4. The Greater Man.....	30
4.1 Heaven’s Awful Monarch.....	32
4.2 Satan – The Old Pretender.....	35
5. Conclusion.....	39
Consulted Works.....	42



## 1. Introduction

Three centuries since its first publication, John Milton's epic poem *Paradise Lost* still stands as a towering achievement of the English language: a tale of Biblical proportions, ranging from the grand scale of a cosmic conflict between Satan and God, to the intimate human household of Adam and Eve, where the future of mankind rests on the decision to eat a piece of fruit. But the reign of Milton's God is denounced as "the tyranny of Heaven" (*Paradise Lost*, Book I, l. 124) by Satan, whose heroic portrayal as an angelic revolutionary runs counter-intuitive to anything the reader expects. It is this theme of liberty and the battle against an oppressive monarch, that has come in for much discussion, in light of Milton's own republicanism: Roger Lejosne demonstrates just how bound up *Paradise Lost* is with the politics of the English Civil War, in which Milton served as spokesman for the Parliamentary side, by pointing out how the faithful angel Abdiel's admonishment of Satan's insurrection in Books V and VI of the poem resembles the arguments of the royalist defender Salmasius, whose *Defensio regia* prompted Milton to justify the execution of King Charles I in his political tract, *Defensio Pro Populo Anglicano*. Armand Himy's research concludes that Milton emphasises the equality of men, guided by divine law to live virtuously and establish a Commonwealth (which is superior to a monarchy), in order to safeguard men from tyranny, which is caused by ambition (of the few and the many) and the worship of false idols. Martin Dzelzainis' study into the classical sources behind Milton's political ideas is also a valuable contribution, as it emphasises his focus on responsible, virtuous rulership.

By extension of this debate on Milton's republicanism, however, one aspect that has not received as much attention has been Milton's portrayal of *kingship*. Numerous characters in *Paradise Lost* (including God, Jesus, Satan and arguably Adam) are depicted as kings or monarchs and to gain perspective on what rulership should and should not be in Milton's view, it may be that examining their actions and motivations is key. Given the author's own

role during the English Civil War, such issues as rulership, rebellion against authority and secular power become all the more prevalent. As such, there are three questions in particular that this thesis seeks to answer: firstly, how does John Milton portray the various “royal characters” in *Paradise Lost*; secondly, what role did these ideas of rulership play throughout his life; and finally, what are the implications of these observations for what Milton was trying to convey in *Paradise Lost*? Kingship and the right to rule is a significant theme of the poem, worthy of closer examination, and essential to understanding its writer.

As is apparent from his political works, such as *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*, Milton was firm in his belief that kingship ultimately arose from a social contract between a king and his people: kings and magistrates were chosen as executives of the people’s will and a good king was one “who governs to the good and profit of his people and not for his own ends” (Milton, “The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates”, p. 1750). It is also true, however, that Milton was not wholly opposed to kingship. Rather, as Thomas Corns points out, he argues that the only way a king would have the right to rule godly men by right of his father is if a king is truly superior to other men (Corns, p. 46). In *Paradise Lost*, this analogy does *not entirely* apply to God (as he is without origin), but His inherent superiority as a transcendent, all-powerful being in contrast to both man and angel could be what Milton sees as the key difference between God’s rightful reign and Satan’s rebellion. This distinction between divine and earthly monarchy is crucial. However, in this thesis, I argue that it is the concept of virtue that is the decisive factor to understanding Milton’s views on rulership and freedom – and to do so, we have to more closely examine those characters that Milton not necessarily equates with, but depicts as monarchs.

William Blake has famously stated that Milton was “of the Devil’s party without knowing it” (Lejosne, 106). However, I would argue that, rather than debating whether Milton is on the side of God’s monarchy or Satan’s supposed republicanism, investigating the

driving forces behind these characters, what Milton believed in political terms and what repercussions this has for our perspective on *Paradise Lost* is paramount. My thesis will deal with these three topics in each chapter respectively: chapter 1 will look more closely at Milton's other writings on kingship, republicanism and what role these ideas played throughout his life; chapter 2 will examine the way Milton portrays the Godhead, Satan and Adam as rulers in *Paradise Lost*; finally, chapter 3 will combine these perspectives to determine the political, theological and moral implications this has on the meaning Milton seeks to convey in *Paradise Lost* by his monarchical representation of some of the main characters.

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## 2. John Milton – Conscientious Rebel

To gain insight into such a complex work as *Paradise Lost* is perhaps a futile exercise without understanding its author – and John Milton's own presence more than most looms heavily throughout the entire poem, both in the role that he himself as narrator takes up throughout the text, but far more so in the way that aspects of Milton's life have shaped part of the story. His work on behalf of Parliament throughout the English Civil War (Milton was the first to defend the execution of King Charles I and later served as Secretary of Foreign Tongues for the Council of State) and some of the parallels between 'The Good Old Cause' and Satan's own in *Paradise Lost* have already been noted. What is far more intriguing is that the rebellion against monarchy appears to be the result of a great shift in old traditions of loyalty across all of English society, rather than the aspirations of a select few. As such, Milton essentially became the spokesman of an entire sociological change that represented one of the first steps towards modern democracy in the West, with *Paradise Lost* almost as the epic culmination of these changing ideals. This chapter will explore the socio-political landscape of the time in which the themes of *Paradise Lost* took shape by investigating the changing ideas of loyalty and freedom that served as one of the causes of the English Revolution. It will also examine the classical education and inspiration that became the basis for Milton's republicanism. It will then focus on his actual political beliefs, as presented in his other writings.

## ***2.1 Causes of Rebellion***

First of all, given the aforementioned comparisons that have been made between the English Civil War (from 1642-1651) and Satan's rebellion in *Paradise Lost*, it is worth examining the former conflict in greater detail. Though many, seemingly sudden, radical changes in regime can be difficult to explain, the underlying causes of the English Revolution are particularly elusive. Though the reasons are manifold and deeply complex, the result of economic and social change, as well as political and religious conflict, I believe the origin can ultimately be traced back to the changing role of kingship, caused by a widening gap between the differing perspective of the monarch on the one hand and that of their subjects on the other. By the 17th century, England had already cast kingship in a different frame than in Continental nations: the creation of the Magna Carta under King John (1199 – 1216) as a means for the nobles of the realm to gain some measure of control over their ruler, the troubled reign of Henry III (1216 – 1272) and the depositions of both Edward II (1307 – 1327) and Richard II (1377 – 1399) all sprung from the desire of the aristocracy for competent rulership that allowed their own voices to be heard. Dan Jones, in his excellent study of the Plantagenets, points out that the usurpation of Richard's throne by Henry IV (1399 – 1413) in particular set a dangerous precedent for the stability of the monarchy. Because of his disputed claim to the throne, it opened the way for others to supplant the established dynasty: “[the Wars of the Roses] began as political wars but – thanks to the unanswered questions raised by Henry IV's usurpation – they swiftly became wars of Plantagenet succession” (Jones, 592), leading to the deposition of Henry VI (1421 – 1471), but also of Richard III (1483 – 1485). In other words, with the rise of Parliament, a king was increasingly being recognised only in so far as he was accepted by the realm. But this growing development of Parliament having the final say in who was fit to rule the country (undisputably affirmed in the Glorious Revolution in 1688-9) was incongruous with the way the English kings saw themselves. As early as the reign of

Henry VII (1485 – 1509), the “Spanish Ambassador ... reported home that Henry VII ‘would like to govern England in the French fashion, but he cannot’” (Stone, 58). Lawrence Stone (whose book, *The Causes of the English Revolution, 1529 – 1642* still provides an outstanding insight into the long- and short-term developments that led to the English Revolution) believes that there was an increasing subordination of power to the king. The Divine Right of Kings was further emphasised through the use of the Anglican Church: James I (1603 – 1625) even asserted that “God gives not Kings the stile of Gods in vaine / For on his throne his Scepter doe they sway” (Lejosne, 116).

In practice, however, this belief in the absolute power of the monarch was being challenged by the English people themselves, particularly by the gentry. The age of feudalism had ended, but as the kings and queens steadily aggregated more power to themselves, sapping that of the great magnates that had dominated the previous centuries, the classes just below these profited: “In the short run, the decline of the influence of the aristocracy meant increased dependence of the gentry on the Crown; in the long run, however, it meant the liberation of the gentry from the influence of either noble or Crown” (Stone, 74). Without a lord to exert the power of the monarch over his subjects on behalf of the Crown, the old hierarchy was disturbed, ultimately eroding the king’s image: with no lord to govern them by leave of the king, it raised the question of why the king should ultimately be obeyed in the first place. Rather than the threat of a dissenting handful of powerful noblemen to their reign, kings would have to heed the views of a growing number of citizens – citizens who were increasingly exercising their voices in Parliament, weakening the monarchy in the long run. The rise of the middle classes was also the result of economic change: “there was a very significant increase both in population and in total economic resources which began in about 1520” (Stone, p. 67), which created a society where, unlike many other European nations, “the relations between landlord and tenant [were] governed by the laws of the market place

rather than by customary relationships of service” (Stone, p. 71). As a consequence of these developments, it is unsurprising that “[t]here was a sea-change in men’s ideas of loyalty” (Stone, 74): despite their best efforts to bolster their own power, kings were actually no longer seen as the undisputed source of authority. That now lay with men themselves, their loyalty to their country and to God. The spread of these ideas, coupled with the extensive number of grievances that Parliament had with the reign of Charles I, proved to be the catalysts for the English Revolution. The rise of Puritanism, which argued that men had a duty to strive for constant moral improvement (made possible by the fact that almost anyone could now read and interpret the Bible for themselves) further reinforced this newfound independence. It was exactly within this changing period in English history that John Milton was born and raised.

## ***2.2 Ancient Liberty***

In addition to this background, there is some evidence that Milton's classical education at St. Paul's School (London) and Christ's College, Cambridge, would come to provide yet more support for these radical ideas. John Milton has been noted for his prodigious command of Latin, as exemplified by the fact that as "a schoolboy he was already writing poetry in both Latin and English" (Milton, viii) and the Latinate diction of *Paradise Lost*, as well as him being chosen for Latin Secretary for Oliver Cromwell after the deposition of the Stuart dynasty, "which meant that he wrote the official letters – mostly in Latin – to foreign governments and heads of state" (Reidhead et al, 1788). All this indicates that Milton's classical education was most likely excellent. This, coupled with his republican leanings, undoubtedly would have made Milton a terrific case in point for another political scholar: Thomas Hobbes. Hobbes considered education (particularly in the classics) as the very well from which rebellion sprung, going so far as to say that the universities "have been to this nation, as the wooden horse was to the Trojans" (Dzelzainis, 3). In the eyes of Hobbes, the focus on the teaching of the three Biblical languages at universities, Latin, Greek and Hebrew – all of which Milton spoke, along with English, Italian, French, Spanish and Dutch (Reidhead et al, 1786) – was giving students access to a dangerous body of work. Certainly, learning of the traditions of the Roman Republic and Athenian democracy and the writings of those ancient authors in praise of them would have likely imparted a greater sense of self-confidence and legitimacy to the Members of Parliament that wished to assert their own role in the workings of the state – MPs who, it should be remembered, were increasingly part of the progressively liberal gentry, with access to a university education: "[t]he period saw a very large increase in enrolments in grammar schools, universities and Inns of Court" (Stone, 88) and "[m]oreover many, both of the gentry and their electorate were being educated...by

ideological dissidents” (Stone, 88). It is no surprise that Hobbes was disappointed in the universities and wished to reform them.

Interestingly enough, Milton himself felt the same way, but for the exact opposite reasons: Milton was “profoundly disappointed in his university education” (Reidhead et al, 1786) for their emphasis on pointless rhetorical exercises and appeared to envision a grand transformation of the universities himself. For Milton, rather than spending an inordinate amount of time on meaningless philosophical debates, the first and essential duty of education is that the students were taught of virtue, so that “honour and attention” will be “waiting on their lips” (Dzelzainis, 13) and that they may better serve the Commonwealth because of it. Dzelzainis argues that this focus on virtue and moral fortitude can be attributed to the influence of Cicero’s writings and that Aristotle and Sallust are also important influences on Milton’s republicanism (Dzelzainis, 8). These two wholly different perspectives on the state of the universities and their influence on the rebellious might initially appear to be contradictory; instead, it seems likely that the truth lies somewhere in the middle: most universities did *not* actively promote dissenting values, not even through their education in ancient languages, but nonetheless provided their students, including Milton, with the means to discover the texts that *did*. As a result, this general improvement in education still inevitably contributed to a wider movement towards liberalism and republicanism. It seems clear that on top of the critical socio-economic, religious and political developments of the time, John Milton’s knowledge of the classics would have also been a source of inspiration, which could have led him to adopt a more critical perspective on kingship.

### **2.3 Milton – Recasting Kingship**

Then there are Milton's political writings to consider, in which his revolutionary views became fully developed. From the 1640's onwards, his first political tracts were published: these works (such as *Of Reformation Touching Church Discipline*) were mostly concerned with the ecclesiastical organisation in England, but as these religious issues became increasingly politically charged when Charles I was forced to convene Parliament to raise taxes (in order to fund his war against the Scots, caused when the king tried to impose a single form of church government throughout Britain), Milton's writings grew in a similar direction. Of these treatises, *Of Education* (concerning the reformation of the universities which we have previously discussed) may actually be one of the first signs of Milton's burgeoning republicanism represented in writing, precisely because it actively promotes classical values as the means to improve the state of the Commonwealth: "He... advocates the ancients as a touchstone of political wisdom" and "sees the solution to a political crisis as residing in the cultivation of virtue... to ensure that individuals will serve the Commonwealth more effectively" (Dzelzainis, 14). *Of Education* was followed by such works as *Areopagitica* in 1644, in which he argued the importance of the freedom of expression when the government was actively trying to suppress it; it is widely considered to be one of Milton's greatest works and still the basis for many modern laws on the freedom of the press today.

But two of the most important of Milton's publications and the most relevant to this thesis are those written on the eve of the monarchy's abolishment and the execution of Charles I, namely *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* and *Eikonoklastes*. Throughout *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*, Milton sets out to justify outright the execution of the king and the right of the people to choose or depose their own leaders as they see fit. Counter to such royalist defenders as Robert Filmer, who argued in his *Patriarcha* that the king was as a

father to the nation, or Salmasius, maintaining that kings were chosen by God and could thus not be opposed, Milton's views are essentially based on "contract theory", arguing that rulers only arose in the first place by virtue of being chosen by free men in order to uphold peace and authority within society: "Not to be their lords and masters... but... to execute... that justice which else every man by the bond of nature and of covenant must have executed for himself and for one another" (Milton, "The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates", 1750). If this contract is breached, such as when a king gathers too much power onto himself and becomes a tyrant, then the people have a right to find means to restrain him (such as by Magna Carta) or remove him. In *Eikonoklastes*, Milton also aimed to shatter the image of the king on behalf of the Commonwealth, asserting that there was no need for either idolatry or loyalty to Charles I. What should be emphasised, however, is that throughout his writings, Milton is never *completely* anti-monarchical. Surely, and interestingly enough, if the editor's notes throughout *The Prose Works of John Milton, Volume II* (by J.A. St. John) are to be believed, Milton never spoke out against "just and lawful princes" (St. John, 1) and "in advocating tyrannicide, takes the greatest care to distinguish between the king and the tyrant" (St. John, 1). It is possible that the editor was only coming to the defence of Milton in a time when the monarchy was held in greater esteem again, but it is likely that he has a point. Milton's intention never seems to be the complete abolishment of kingship for its own sake; instead, the goal of the revolution in his eyes appears to be to correct the misuse of power of the king under Charles and to firmly establish the right of the English people to select their own rulers. What matters to Milton is not who the people choose or what that office might be called, but (contrary to a hereditary monarchy) that they have the *freedom of choice* and that their chosen leader should exercise his reign with the virtue that Milton so esteems: to act as a guardian on behalf of the public, "to the common good of them all" (Milton, 1750), and that "since such authority is vested not in these servants themselves but in the offices they hold, on no account



should they regard it as a personal possession” (Dzelzainis, 18). In other words, by emphasising the importance of the leader’s selflessness on behalf of the nation, Milton effectively transcends the debate between monarchy and republic: what matters is not one particular form of government, but that the people maintain the right to approve and disapprove of their leaders, who should conduct their reign with virtue, to ensure that their government does not descend into tyranny.

To summarise, Milton’s life, education and historical background were instrumental in shaping his political ideas, which would go on to have a profound influence on the themes of liberty and rulership that are woven throughout the narrative of *Paradise Lost*, as evidenced by Milton’s political writings. The socio-political developments in England at the time were creating a long-term disparity between the king’s view of the natural order and that of his people, causing a growing discontent among citizens which led them to question the authority of the monarchy in general; Milton was further strengthened in these ideas by his classical education, which led him to conclude that power ultimately lay with the people themselves and that they had the freedom to choose their own leaders; furthermore, these leaders were given this power only to exercise it for the sake of the people that had chosen them. Keeping all this in mind, it seems all but inevitable that John Milton saw his own rebellion against established authority to be entirely justified. But does he vindicate Satan the same way in *Paradise Lost*?

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### 3. The Vain and the Virtuous – God, Satan and Adam

We have already noted that, although Milton probably did not directly envision God, Jesus, Satan and Adam as kings or princes in *Paradise Lost*, his portrayal of them is so pervaded with royal elements that they can be perceived as such. There are many cases in point that illustrate this: take this passage, for example, when God reveals Jesus as his heir.

Hear all ye angels, progeny of light,

Thrones, dominations, pryncedoms, virtues, powers,

Hear my decree, which unrevoked shall stand.

This day I have begotten whom I declare

My only son, and on this holy hill

Him have *annointed*, whom ye now behold

At my right hand; your head I him appoint;

And by myself have sworn to him shall bow

All knees in heaven, and shall confess him lord (*PL*, Book V, l. 600-8, emphasis mine)

More interesting is Satan being likened to both prince and potentate: he is referred to by a myriad of titles throughout the poem. He is called the rebel angels' "great sultan" (*PL*, Book I, l. 348), "great commander" (*PL*, Book I, l. 358) and "emperor" (*PL*, Book I, l. 378). Then consider this description of Satan's seat in the parliament in Hell:

High on a throne of *royal state*, which far

Outshone the wealth of Ormuz and of Ind,

Or where the gorgeous East with richest hand

Showers on her kings barbaric pearl and gold,  
 Satan exalted sat, by merit raised  
 To that bad eminence (*PL*, Book II, l. 1-6, emphasis mine)

Adam could also be seen as a kind of king, when he is being described by Michael as potentially having been honoured above his progeny.

[Eden] had been  
 Perhaps thy capital seat, from whence had spread  
 All generations, and had hither come  
 From all the ends of the earth, to celebrate  
 And reverence thee their great progenitor. (*PL*, Book XI, l. 342-5)

And these are only a handful of examples; as we shall see later on, God is also constantly being referred to as a monarch.

As has been previously established, the theme of kingship in *Paradise Lost* has been less closely examined than that of republicanism; many would argue that these themes are interlinked, as it is precisely the contrast between people's right to self-governance and that of imposed rule from a hereditary monarchy that causes the conflict between Satan and God that Milton uses to drive the narrative forward. However, it is reducing the conflict to this simple dichotomy (two forms of government, linked only in their opposition to each other) that can lead to a fundamental misunderstanding of how Milton explores these political concepts. We also know, from *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*, that Milton does not necessarily attack monarchy as an institution, but rather, the over-stepping of its boundaries: in his opinion, "the power of kings and magistrates is nothing else but what is only derivative,

transferred and committed to them in trust from the people, to the common good of them all” (Milton, “The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates”, p. 1750) and therefore, the people have the right to “either choose [a king] or reject him...merely by the liberty and right of freeborn men to be governed as seems to them best” (Milton, “The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates”, p. 1751). As such, Milton does not divide, but effectively unites the concepts of kingship and Commonwealth: a ruler, whether he be a king, magistrate or Lord Protector, only exists by right of his people. So Milton did not oppose kingship, but rather *the perversion of what he believed kingship ought to be*. And it is this aspect of *righteous* rulership that comes to the forefront upon analysing the aforementioned ‘royal characters’: God, Jesus, Satan and Adam. Throughout *Paradise Lost*, John Milton supports this notion of responsible rulership in three distinct ways. First of all, Milton contrasts the harsh, but just reign of the Godhead with Satan’s prideful and selfish designs. Secondly, he brilliantly has Satan himself undermine his supposed republican ideals of liberty through his own actions. And finally, Milton decides to have Adam clearly surpass Satan in virtue (despite his equally fallen state), demonstrating the important traits of virtue and magnanimity that are necessary to a true ruler.

### 3.1 “Worthiest to be Obeyed” – God’s Kingship VS Satan’s

The first method that Milton uses to illustrate the fundamental quality of rulership is to draw a stark contrast between the reign of God and that of Satan. On an initial reading, this comparison may not seem to reflect all too favourably on God: God, the Father, can come across as severe, authoritarian and, because of this, almost alien to our eyes. This is made explicit from the very beginning of *Paradise Lost*. First impressions can be telling and the very first time Milton introduces us to his version of the Father, after God remarks on Satan’s future actions, He condemns mankind for their moral weakness, setting an iron tone within the first few lines:

so will fall,

He and his faithless progeny: whose fault?

Whose but his own? ingrate, he had of me

All he could have; I made him just and right,

Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall. (*Paradise Lost*, Book III, l. 95-9)

From our fallen, human perspective, God’s attitude, even as our creator, does not seem entirely fair. Perhaps his judgment would have seemed more appropriate if man, like Satan and the rebel angels, “by their own suggestion fell / Self-tempted, self-depraved” (*PL*, Book III, l. 129-30). Instead, we have the unusual situation in which an omnipotent, omniscient deity is already aware that Satan will succeed in tricking mankind into condemning itself and does nothing to prevent it. Is God not partially to blame? His assertion that His servants require free will to render their loyalty in any way meaningful does not entirely seem to absolve Him, though God’s lack of direct action is mitigated when He sends the archangel Raphael to at least warn Adam and Eve of the temptations they may face. Nonetheless, God’s

unforgiving nature, to both man and angel, does not invite sympathy: can we blame Satan for denouncing God as a tyrant when God Himself declares that anyone who refuses to obey His Son “falls / Into utter darkness, deep engulfed, his place / Ordained without redemption, without end” (*PL*, Book V, l. 613-15)?

By comparison, Satan himself initially appears to be a paragon: he is described as “Fearless” (*PL*, Book I, l. 131) and proves it, at first by challenging the Almighty, the second time when he alone ventures through Chaos to explore Earth. He clearly has the respect and admiration of his fellow angels and even Raphael describes him as “of the first / If not the first archangel, great in power, / In favour and pre-eminence” (*PL*, Book V, l. 659-61). Satan has not only been granted his title from God, but is also a leader upheld by the rebel angels for his own merit: such a charismatic commander should have the right to make all the decisions for those under his command, yet he still calls a parliament in Hell to consult his peers. In short, Satan seems to fulfill Milton’s idea of a social contract between a leader and his people. Despite his crimes, we often find ourselves on Satan’s side more than God’s. Because of this, we are, as Stanley Fish remarked, “surprised by sin” (Martindale, 39): our inevitable sympathy for the Devil demonstrates how fallen we have become.

However, I would argue that Milton does not only mean to hold up a mirror to ourselves: rather, he uses Satan’s grandeur not only as misdirection or a trap for the unwary reader, but as a means to *enhance* Satan’s evil. Because for all of Satan’s seeming glory as a character, he never lives up to it, for one crucial reason: he is never motivated by anything other than himself. He does not arrive on Earth “in hope to find / Better abode” (*PL*, Book IV, 938-9) for his fellow rebels, as he lies to Gabriel: his single goal is revenge on God through either the destruction or corruption of Adam and Eve. Although he bears a closer resemblance to other epic heroes than any other character in *Paradise Lost*, “he is unsatisfactory also by Homeric or Virgilian standards” (Martindale, 38): Satan is not a self-

sacrificing, deserving hero, but one who continually, consciously, draws the wrath of higher forces upon himself – all for the sake of his own pride. Even when volunteering to undertake the journey to Earth alone, Satan seems more concerned with reaping glory for himself, rather than the success of the mission, as Milton illustrates with Satan's cunning manipulation of the infernal parliament: the plan to spite God by targeting man is proposed by Satan's companion, Beëlzebub, but was actually devised by Satan (*PL*, Book II, 378-89), which serves to make Beëlzebub seem wiser and Satan more honourable for undertaking parliament's request all by himself. In reality, Satan effectively tricked parliament into agreeing with him and he volunteers for his *own* plan! This is supported by the fact that Satan immediately dissolves parliament afterwards, allowing no further discussion to make sure no one attempts to accompany him, ensuring he will be exalted above anyone else, satisfying Satan's huge pride:

[T]his enterprise

None shall partake with me. Thus saying rose

The monarch [Satan], and prevented all reply,

Prudent, lest from his resolution raised

Others among the chief might offer now

(Certain to be refused) what erst they feared;

And so refused might in opinion stand

His rivals, winning cheap the high repute

Which he through hazard huge must earn. (*PL*, Book II, l. 465-73)



Interesting also is Satan's association with the Roman and Ottoman Empires: we have seen him referred to as an emperor and a sultan, but there is also this description of his armies, which appears to link him with foreign despotism and underlines his military might:

All in a moment through the gloom were seen  
 Ten thousand banners rise into the air  
 With orient colours waving: with them rose  
 A forest huge of spears (*PL*, Book I, l. 544-7)

The specific manner with which Milton chooses to depict his 'hero' gives the impression not of a liberator, but a conqueror. Taking all this into account, Satan does not abide by Milton's social contract at all; he is in fact the worst example of that perversion of rulership that Milton opposed.

All of this is thrown into sharp relief by the Godhead: while the Father is more closely associated with justice and the Son with mercy (Corns, 18), they are nonetheless both continuously absorbed by the matter of mankind and their impending fall. Not once does either God or Jesus take action for the sake of himself – only for others. Even the Son's victory over the rebel angels that God grants him was a victory on behalf of God:

O Father, O supreme of heavenly thrones  
 First, highest, holiest, best, thou always seek'st  
 To glorify thy son, I always thee,  
 As is most just. (*PL*, Book VI, l. 723-6)

Paradoxically, true glory for one's self can only be reached by serving a cause greater than the self: a lesson that Satan fails to learn. As a result, Satan's magnificence is revealed as vanity; God's stern reign as true majesty; Jesus as "worthiest to be heir / Of all things" (*PL*, Book VI, l. 707-8).

### ***3.2 Satan – False Republican***

Another way that Milton exposes Satan as an unworthy ruler is through the subtle manner he delves into his justification for his rebellion: his assertion that God nor Jesus have any power over him and that he and the other angels should have the right to rule themselves. Even if Satan is shown to be self-centered, we still cannot help but feel a grudging admiration for his courage in the face of insurmountable odds, his refusal to bow down to someone he does not perceive as his superior, his rejection of royal authority altogether and his desire for freedom. Once again, the parallels with Milton's own part in the English Civil War rear their head, for who better than a revolutionary to describe the arch-fiend's rebellion against "Heaven's awful monarch" (*PL*, Book IV, l. 960)? However, I argue that the significance of the comparisons between the Civil War and the War in Heaven lie not in their parallels, but in their contrasts. Not only is there the earlier question of whether divine monarchy has stronger grounds than earthly monarchy (because of God's genuine superiority as king compared to man), but after closer examination, it is doubtful whether Satan can be considered a republican at all.

This is primarily supported by the timing of Satan's rebellion: for if Satan was motivated by a desire for liberty, why was it not until God reveals the Son as "heir of all [His] might" (*PL*, Book V, l. 720) that he took any action? There is no definitive Christian vision on Satan's rebellion, but the involvement of Jesus is not necessarily a part of it. Once again, Satan's injured pride over the Son being honoured above himself is what is truly at the heart of his defiance, not any genuine desire for reform. This is another reason why the annointment of Jesus becomes a central part of Milton's narrative: without it, he runs the risk of actually casting Satan in the role of a libertarian hero, not merely a villain brilliantly disguised as one. His intent is to illustrate the difference between the rebel angels and the revolutionaries: in Milton's eyes, those who fought for the Commonwealth are justified because they were motivated by virtue, whereas Satan is truly a renegade, with the pretence

of a republican – as an angel gifted with free will, he *has* the right to self-determination, but only chooses to exercise it for a petty, not a virtuous, reason. As a result, Milton completely undermines Satan's justification for his actions. This argument is further supported by a remark from Gabriel to Satan in Book IV:

And thou sly hypocrite, who now wouldst seem  
Patron of liberty, who more than thou  
Once fawned, and cringed, and servilely adored  
Heaven's awful monarch? wherefore but in hope  
To dispossess him, and thy self to reign? (*PL*, Book IV, l. 957-61)

### ***3.3 Satan and Adam's Anti-Heroism***

Finally, the third way in which Milton reinforces the importance of virtue lies in his treatment of Adam and Eve. In the end, the princely, but false Satan functions as a foil to the more humble, but virtuous Adam, all leading up to the most pivotal layer of meaning within the poem: the theme of loss. While Adam and Eve do fail the one great test that God (through Raphael) warned them about and suffer the Fall, it is Satan who falls not once, but time and time again. His first fall he suffers in Heaven: it should be remembered that it is not precisely the appointment of the Son of God over him, but his own perceived suffering of injustice for it that stirs his pride. Satan has free will, but he never chooses to reflect on his own perceptions until after his defeat in Heaven. This prompts his second fall by rebelling against God. The third and greatest fall is his persistence in corrupting mankind. Satan's venture to Eden is almost an exact inversion of Joseph Campbell's traditional pattern of the Hero's Journey. In his research of an all-encompassing 'Monomyth' that he believed lies at the heart of countless myths, legends, folktales and stories, he defines the Hero's Journey as being comprised of three stages: "A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder (x): fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won (y): the hero comes back from his mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man (z)" (Campbell, p. 23). Satan journeys into the unknown to reach Eden; he overcomes potential obstacles, such as Sin and Death, the journey through Chaos, and Gabriel and his watchful angels. But unlike traditional heroes, Satan ultimately overcomes his doubts to do *evil*, instead of good, and the 'boon' he brings back to Hell is only further damnation. Satan's inner conflict in Book IV (*PL*, Book IV, l. 32-113) is a prime example of his struggle, as it highlights the fact that Satan is still not wholly lost: even now, he has within him the capacity to feel remorse for his actions and he still has the power of choice. But Satan is never capable of humbling himself and therefore continues to fall,

digging his own grave. Adam and Eve, however, fall but once: rather than futilely resisting, they accept their loss and their punishment and, in doing so, prove themselves superior to Satan; they have overcome him not through strength of arms, but inner strength.

To conclude, Milton demonstrates the importance of virtue in a ruler in three ways: he contrasts Satan's prideful reign with the selfless motivations of God and Jesus; he appears to stress that Satan is not motivated by republican values at all, but only by a love of power; finally, he shows that even after his fall, Satan still has the choice to do good, but rejects this choice, while Adam and Eve prove their strength by staying true and vowing to amend their ways after the Fall.

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## 4. The Greater Man

Having now examined both the theoretical framework that John Milton throughout his life believed kingship ought to be cast in (as a consequence of both the changing society he was part of, as well as his classical education and the political climate of the time) and the degree to which those rulers in *Paradise Lost* either conform to his vision or not, it seems quite certain that Milton's portrayal of these characters was highly deliberate and, consequently, of importance to understanding his work. One way to define Milton's form of kingship, applying both to kings and all rulers, might be: 'a socio-political contract between a ruler and the people that have collectively chosen him to be their leader: as part of this social contract, the king is obliged to use his power solely in a virtuous manner, namely striving to do what is best for the people and not himself, as he holds his office only at the people's discretion, and is therefore free to be opposed, restrained and/or deposed by the people, as they see fit.' However, merely understanding Milton's sophisticated vision of what kingship truly entailed and how it resurfaces throughout *Paradise Lost* still does not answer the central question that is at the heart of this thesis: 'what is the *meaning* and *function* of kingship within *Paradise Lost*?' It is this question that this final chapter now seeks to answer.

I would argue that the way that Milton discusses the concept of kingship is itself the means to accomplish the goal that the writer poses at the outset of his epic poem: to "justify the ways of God to men" (*PL*, Book I, l. 26). That is because, in order to justify God's actions, Milton first needs to justify God's kingship. Again, while he probably does not literally envision God as sitting enthroned in Heaven, Milton does seem to consider him the divine equivalent of a monarch: much like how Raphael attempts to explain celestial events to Adam "[b]y likening spiritual to corporal forms, / As may express them best" (*PL*, Book V, l. 573-4), Milton uses the trappings of earthly kingship for the reader's human convenience to discuss God's heavenly reign. After all, what right exactly does God have to

rule over any of us? Why could, or should, we not resist His reign, like Satan, no matter how twisted or petty his own true motives for rebelling? Understanding Milton's vision of kingship is essential to understanding his reasoning and how he ultimately supports the case for God's monarchy. Secondly, he utilises Satan's actions as a foil for God's, much like how God manipulates Satan into doing his bidding through his continuous resistance throughout the narrative.



### **4.1 Heaven's Awful Monarch**

The issue that is at the heart of *Paradise Lost* and which I believe to be the reason Milton depicts the Judeo-Christian vision of the Fall as a quasi-political struggle for supremacy between God and Satan is the problem of reconciling the liberty that those 17<sup>th</sup> century revolutionaries like Milton strove to secure for the English people, with God's dominance. If man is free, then why is he not truly in charge of his own destiny? There are always events that are beyond man's control, a fact that Milton would have been painfully aware of, having witnessed the triumph of his enemies at the Restoration of the monarchy in 1660. God's reign does not always seem fair and how can it be? The definition of Milton's kingship delineated above does not at all apply to God: He is not chosen by the people, cannot be deposed and there is nothing man can do to restrain Him. How then can His ways be justified? This is where Milton distinguishes divine from human kingship.

There is an inherent fallacy in the idea of a mortal (or even the greatest of angels) in questioning the will of an omnipotent and omniscient being: not only is it impossible for God to be resisted, but if He is omniscient, then He by definition is in a superior position to rule than those who are not. Milton's definition of kingship is ultimately based on the premise that men are equally free: the king is not superior to his fellow man and is therefore only granted the power to rule over them by consent of the people. He is raised up above the people, by the people, and can be cast down again as such. If the king was truly superior, any approval would be unnecessary: his status as ruler over others would be unquestionable. Milton saw through the pomp, ceremony and ancient custom and recognised human kings for what they are – that is, human. In *Eikonoklastes*, he writes: "Indeed if the race of kings were eminently the best of men [...] it would in some reason then be their part onely to command, ours always to obey. But Kings by generation no way excelling others [...] that we should yeild them subjection to our own ruin, or hold of them the right of our common safety, and our

natural freedom by meer gift [...] we may be sure was never the intent of God, whose ways are just and equal” (Corns, 45).

On these grounds, God’s transcendence already elevates Him above any other ruler, but the defining feature that marks God’s kingship as just is exactly that trait which Milton emphasises time and time again: virtue. Because God’s is a kingship that cannot be cast down or restrained, He is not required to do *anything*: He is not bound by anyone. He could have as easily made the angels and mankind perfectly obedient and, as a tyrant, have them glorify His reign in perpetuity. However, He does *not*: God is a being that has infinite power and knowledge, yet He still decides to give all his servants free will. In so doing, God conducts His reign in a manner opposite to those earthly kings whose rule Milton decried: those who (like Charles I) used their position (which, in Milton’s eyes, they owe to the people) to take away some of the people’s freedoms and gathered more power onto themselves. God being all-powerful and still using that power to give other beings freedom is what proves His virtue. Therefore, it is precisely when Satan deplores God’s reign as “the tyranny of heaven” (*PL*, Book I, l. 124) that he proves it as the exact opposite! If God was truly a tyrant, Satan would never have been capable of defying Him in the first place! And that is why Milton casts Satan in the role of a hero of *Paradise Lost*: though he uses it wrongfully, he exercises his liberty to an extreme, proving the angels are free.

By drawing this thought that all men are equally free to its conclusion, Milton actually has God’s reign over man support the case of their natural liberty: it is God giving men the freedom to follow their own will, even if that is morally wrong, that demonstrates His kingship is virtuous and that His ways are part of a divine plan designed for the good of all, even if man is incapable of perceiving this. This proves that God is the only one true king and, therefore, the *only* monarch worth obeying. In Milton’s eyes, man is *free* from any tyrant on earth, precisely because they are accountable to *none* but God Himself. Again, this is

almost exactly what Milton states outright in his *Defensio pro Populo Anglicano*: “As to your saying [monarchy] was ‘patterned on the example of the one God’, who, in fact, is worthy of holding on earth power like that of God but some person who far surpasses all others and even resembles God in goodness and wisdom? The only such person, as I believe, is the son of God whose coming we look for” (Lejosne, 116). In light of this, the fact that (as Roger Lejosne observed) Milton has the loyal angel Abdiel resemble the royalist defender Salmasius suddenly appears more logical and in congruence with Milton’s passionate republicanism: Salmasius’ reasoning that kings cannot be resisted because they are God’s chosen is false because human kings (in Milton’s eyes) only reign by right of the people – but Salmasius’ reasoning does work for God Himself: He has not chosen Himself, but He does possess that natural superiority (in power, wisdom and goodness) that Salmasius would argue is conferred to human kings because they are God’s elect. As Lejosne remarks, in doing so, Milton effectively “made monarchy in Heaven justify republicanism on earth” (Lejosne, 106).

## 4.2 Satan – The Old Pretender

All of this is shown to be in contrast with Satan's aspirations. Throughout *Paradise Lost*, he serves as a foil for God not only because, as we have seen, he exemplifies everything that Milton associates with the wrong kind of rulership, but because his very desire to usurp God's throne is flawed and doomed from the outset. In his bold declaration to his fellow angels of his intent to challenge the Almighty, Satan declares that "[o]ur puissance is our own, our own right hand / Shall teach us highest deeds, by proof to try / Who is our equal" (*PL*, Book V, l. 864–6) – and try it Satan does, to his folly. In some sense, he could perhaps be forgiven for his initial attempt to test God's power, even if he is hasty to dismiss Abdiel's argument that they are what they are precisely because the Almighty "formed the powers of heaven / Such as he pleased, and circumscribed their being" (*PL*, Book V, l. 824-5) by refusing to believe they were created by anyone at all. The real problem sets in after the rebel angels have fallen into Hell: even Beelzebub, Satan's closest companion, God "now / Of force believe[s] almighty" (*PL*, Book I, l. 143-4), but Satan continually refuses to submit. Satan misses that God's "monarchy over them is not tyranny but rather an appropriate representation of their relative place in the universe" (Corns, 49). He fails to perceive, because his pride will not allow it, that, while he is free, all his actions are still the result of what God allows him to and even if they are Satan's own choices, those choices are all calculated into His plans. One passage in particular serves to illustrate this:

So stretched out huge in length the arch-fiend lay

Chained on the burning lake, nor ever thence

Had risen or heaved his head, *but that the will*

*And high permission of all-ruling heaven*

Left him at large to his own dark designs,

That with reiterated crimes he might  
 Heap on himself damnation, while he sought  
 Evil to others, and enraged might see  
 How all his malice *served but to bring forth*  
*Infinite goodness*, grace and mercy shown  
 On man by him seduced, but on himself  
 Treble confusion, wrath and vengeance poured. (*PL*, Book I, l. 209-20, emphasis  
 mine)

Keeping this in mind, it becomes clear that Satan *cannot* equal, overcome, or even injure God. The only possible way to end this conflict with God is to acknowledge His authority and still act according to your own will: according to Stanley Fish, “Milton’s point here is one he will make again and again; all acts are performed in God’s service; what is left to any agent is a choice between service freely rendered and service exacted against his will” (Fish, 18). The fact that Satan never learns this serves to illustrate the limits of that glorification of the self that is so prevalent in most classical epics: as Charles Martindale points out, Satan’s appeal to the rebel angels for “honour, dominion, glory and renown” (*PL*, Book VI, l. 422) is “an appeal that Achilles would have warmed to” (Martindale, 38). It is for this same reason that Milton both uses these epic conventions and tries to distance himself from them. Satan’s refusal to acknowledge anyone above himself is exactly what leads him further and further down the path of damnation, falling from his state as the radiant Lucifer, Prince of Angels, to that of Satan, the arch-fiend. Milton’s Satan is, perhaps, one of the greatest villains ever conceived precisely because Milton is so skilled at making the reader love him: by making us marvel at his speeches and his defiance in the face of impossible odds, Milton inevitably makes us sympathise with him and share his point of view. Consequently, Milton shows us

the temptation of evil. Satan's beauty is what tricks us and Charles Martindale makes a fine point when he brings up the words of J.R.R. Tolkien: "We find it difficult to conceive of evil and beauty together. The fear of the beautiful fay that ran through the elder ages almost eludes our grasp" (Martindale, 40). For Milton, that fear of beauty was still present, or at the very least, he refused to be taken in by that beauty. It is also striking that throughout the poem, the advances of science and technology are more often associated with Satan than with God: Satan's shield is described like "the moon, whose orb / Through optic glass the Tuscan artist views" (*PL*, Book I, l. 287-8), likely referring to Galileo, whom Milton met; the rebel angels construct weapons similar to cannons during the War in Heaven and Raphael's long answer to Adam's question concerning celestial motions (*PL*, Book VII, l. 66-178) ultimately comes down to him telling Adam not to search for meaningless answers, but to focus on man's life on earth itself. All of this suggests that Milton does not necessarily disapprove of science, but that he warns the reader not to try and go above their station and instead accept that there are some secrets of the universe that will remain with God: it is fitting then that Satan is linked with a school of thought that searches for answers outside of itself, instead of searching for answers within.

This brings us to the final conclusion on Milton's use of kingship as pertaining to Satan: he is not a true king, but only a pretender. As we have seen above, this is because contrary to human kingship, God's sovereignty is (in Milton's view) absolute. Furthermore, Satan's rulership is made even less by his lack of virtue. Even if Satan does not accept God's superiority, he would have still been ennobled if his actions had been motivated by concern for others. They are not and as such Satan loses all of the glory that God bestowed upon him, as the ever-faithful Abdiel points out: "That golden sceptre which thou didst reject / Is now an iron rod to bruise and break / Thy disobedience" (*PL*, Book V, l. 887-8).

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## 5. Conclusion

Reviewing the research done so far, I would argue that John Milton's use of kingship in *Paradise Lost* has a primary and secondary function. The primary purpose behind Milton's decision to depict some of the characters, particularly God and Satan, as monarchs is to explain God's actions and argue the case for God's righteous sovereignty over mankind. As a consequence of this, he also uses this form of symbolism for his secondary purpose, which is to imbue his narrative with a meaning that is at once political, religious and moralistic.

Milton achieves this primary purpose of kingship by making a distinction between its earthly and divine forms. The former is a human kind of rulership that is based on the premise that, even if in Milton's eyes men are not necessarily all equal, they are "Equally free; for orders and degrees / Jar not with liberty, but well consist" (*PL*, Book V, l. 792-3). All humans possess free will and as such, man also naturally possesses the freedom to accept or reject their own rulers. Because of that, king- and rulership on earth should not be a title meant to elevate one man above all others for their own gain, but an office held solely on behalf of the people. As we have seen, this form of republicanism is in accordance with the political views that Milton expressed and is a natural consequence of both the sociological developments of 17<sup>th</sup> century Britain and his classical education. The latter, divine form of kingship is, in essence, *true* kingship. The only way that actual, absolute kingship could justifiably exist in the world is if the king in question is naturally superior to men; the only existence that this could be applicable to is God, because of His omnipotence, omniscience and goodness. God's kingship is proven to be a righteous and virtuous kind because He is concerned with what is ultimately best for angel- and mankind, giving us all free will. In so doing, Milton employs kingship both to justify republicanism on earth through God's divine monarchy and vice versa: man is free on earth, because he is only accountable to God and God is the only true monarch, because man is free. This divine sovereignty is contrasted with



Satan's ignoble form of rulership: one that is based on the ego and cannot abide loss, leading him on a futile struggle which only serves to debase him.

The secondary purpose of kingship in *Paradise Lost* is for Milton to convey three levels of meaning. First of all, there is a *political* meaning: because of the adherence to God's kingship, *Paradise Lost* is disguised almost in such a way as to invite a royalist interpretation, as remarked by William Myers in *Milton and Free Will* (Lejosne, 106) and as we have seen, this is actually true on some level. However, I am confident that Milton's work definitely serves as a vehicle to further his republican politics. That does not mean his work is allegorical, however; Milton's ways are not as simplistic as that. Milton does not aim to equate the rebel angels with Parliament's struggle any more than he equates Satan's character to Charles I. Rather, it is through his brilliant depiction of Satan as a false king that he criticises the kind of faulty, ambitious and excessively authoritarian kingship that Milton hoped to put an end to. In so doing, Milton demonstrates that politics should be based on the ancient values of virtue and magnanimity that we have also seen him emphasise in some of his writings: true leadership is about acting in service to others, for the good of all, lest you should become "to yourself enthralled" (*PL*, Book VI, l. 181), as Satan is.

The second layer of meaning is *religious*: by arguing for God's kingship, Milton succeeds in 'justifying the ways of God to men', proving God's superiority to Satan. Finally, there is a *moralistic* meaning: Milton uses kingship and the actions of the royal characters in order to establish what exactly makes one the 'greater man' (*PL*, Book I, l. 4) and what that greatness of spirit is that allows one to transcend loss, even that of Paradise, and instead access that 'Paradise within... happier far' (*PL*, Book XII, l. 587). Adam and Eve succeed in overcoming the loss of Paradise precisely by trusting in God's kingship: there is no typical happy ending for any of the characters at the end of *Paradise Lost*; through Michael, Adam and Eve are only given promises by God of future redemption for mankind and the reason

they keep moving is because they trust that God is indeed superior to all others and that His ways are therefore just: their road may be difficult, but their loss becomes merely one component in a much larger divine plan. In so doing, Adam and Eve, weak humans as they are, succeed in overcoming the same loss that Satan continuously fails to cope with and prove themselves superior to what was once the greatest of angels: not through strength of arms, but through strength of heart.

All this serves to make *Paradise Lost* one of the greatest works in the English canon: just as it traces Satan's journey from the highest Heavens to the lowest Hell, so it takes the reader from a state of blissful innocence to experiencing original, supreme loss and all its subsequent stages of grief, delusion and acceptance. And all of this Milton brilliantly frames within the context of a political conflict between Satan and God, ultimately affirming the liberty that is man's right and is still at the heart of our Western democratic political system today, while simultaneously arguing the case for God's reign over all. It is a work that is at once timeless and a product of the time it was written in; at once republican and royalist; Christian and humanist; both a classic and modern epic that soars "[a]bove the Aonian mount, while it pursues / Things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme" (*PL*, Book I, l. 14-5). Milton's muse rises defiantly above the rest to 'justify the ways of God to men' and succeeds. It is a work fit for a king.

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