“JUSTIFY THE WAYS OF GOD TO MEN”: A STUDY OF MILTON’S ARGUMENT IN PARADISE LOST

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B.A., California State University, Sacramento 2008

THESIS

Submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

ENGLISH
(Literature)

at

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SACRAMENTO

FALL
2010
“JUSTIFY THE WAYS OF GOD TO MEN”: A STUDY OF MILTON'S ARGUMENT IN PARADISE LOST

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Abstract

of

“JUSTIFY THE WAYS OF GOD TO MEN”: A STUDY OF MILTON'S ARGUMENT IN PARADISE LOST

by

Jennifer Howarter

Paradise Lost stands on the shoulders of all Milton's writings that came before it, and it cannot be fully understood by the reader without knowing the triumphs and tragedies that shaped the author. In fact, Paradise Lost is often misinterpreted by readers, not just because they are unfamiliar with Milton's life, but also because they fail to understand the complex political and religious theories that lie at the center of the poem's meaning. Modern readers, especially, will bring their own contemporary biases to the poem and fail to understand it in its seventeenth century context. A detailed study of common misconceptions on the arguments, characters, and language of Paradise Lost will demonstrate how, through careful rhetorical analysis of the text and a basic knowledge of political and religious climes, one can come to a fuller understanding of Milton's intentions.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

It took the experiences of nearly an entire lifetime filled with both joy and sorrow for John Milton to compose his crowning achievement, *Paradise Lost*. The epic poem stands on the shoulders of all Milton's previous writings, and it cannot be fully understood by the reader without knowing the triumphs and tragedies that shaped the author. In fact, *Paradise Lost* is often misinterpreted by readers, not just because they are unfamiliar with Milton's life, but also because they fail to understand the complex political and religious theories that lie at the center of the poem's meaning. Modern readers, especially, will bring their own contemporary biases to the poem and fail to understand it in its seventeenth century context. A detailed study of common misconceptions about the arguments, characters, and language of *Paradise Lost* will demonstrate how, through careful rhetorical analysis of the text and a basic knowledge of political and religious climes, one can come to a fuller understanding of Milton's intentions.

As *Paradise Lost* is very much a product of Milton's experiences, many readers who are unfamiliar with Milton's life tend to misinterpret his main objectives. Thomas Corns in *Regaining Paradise Lost* argues that “the epic itself is permeated with a political consciousness shaped by the English Revolution” (130), and Barbara Lewalski adds in her biography *The Life of John Milton* that “into *Paradise Lost* Milton poured all that he had learned, experienced, desired, and imagined about life, love, artistic creativity, theology, work, history and politics” (442). In order to appreciate *Paradise Lost*, the
reader will necessarily need to know basic biographical details on Milton, and more importantly, how Milton viewed kingship, a republic, and liberty. Later on in this chapter, we will briefly explore Milton's life and begin to introduce the connections between *Paradise Lost* and Milton's contemporary politics, and discover how key outside influences shaped *Paradise Lost* into the epic that it is.

Once a background has been established, chapter two will delve into the poem itself, beginning with what most commonly confounds modern readers: the arguments. We will examine how the denizens of Heaven and Hell argue the concepts of free will and foreknowledge and kingship. One of the more popular misconceptions is that Satan’s rhetoric is sound. It is easy for readers to be swayed by the seductive arguments of Satan—the story of the underdog is always appealing, after all. The end result of this misreading is that Satan is the hero of the poem, and God is a corrupt ruler that Satan rightfully rebels against. Those who side with Satan and view God as a tyrant generally mistake what Milton means by free will and foreknowledge, which is very dependent on Milton's religious views. William Empson in *Milton's God* is one of those seduced readers, and leads the contemporary charge against God, building upon those that have come before him, saying that “surely one must also feel horror at the God who has deliberately reduced [Satan] to such a condition” (70), suggesting that Satan had no free choice in his actions. Empson falls almost completely for Satan's arguments, such as when Satan argues that God hid His strength, “which tempted our attempt, and wrought our fall” (1.642). Maurice Kelley, however, looks at Milton's *De Doctrina Christiana* in *This Great Argument – A Study of Milton's De Doctrina Christiana as a Gloss upon*
Paradise Lost and concludes that “what therefore is to happen according to contingency and the free will of man, is not the effect of God's prescience but is produced by the free agency of its own natural causes, the future spontaneous inclination of which is perfectly known to God” (80). If readers examine not just Satan's rhetoric, but Heavenly rhetoric as well, they will start to understand Milton's thoughts on free will and foreknowledge. The speeches of Abdiel, God, and the Son are essential to a complete understanding; thus, after Satan's arguments are given due consideration, we will examine these concepts from the other side.

After sufficiently exploring free will and foreknowledge, chapter two will move into the heavenly monarchy that Milton employs in his poem. Lucy Newlyn suggests that today's readers often misunderstand the power dynamics in the poem because of the modern move to secularism. She argues that people believe that “God wrongly 'assumes' rank and power when he promotes Christ” (102). But as C.S. Lewis points out, in the heavenly monarchy of Milton's poem, “everything except God has some natural superior … The goodness, happiness, and dignity of every being consists in obeying its natural superior and ruling its natural inferiors” (73). Thus, when Satan attempts to disrupt this government, it not only causes pain for him, it also disrupts everything around him. Satan can only justify his vie for leadership if he is the natural superior of not only his fellow angels, but God and the Son as well. According to Barbara Lewalski, Milton claims that “Good kings … seldom happen except in an elective monarchy. … [And] no man can rightfully hold royal dominion over other men, except for Christ. … All other monarchy is a species of idolatry” (392). The final part of chapter two will argue that Satan's
rhetoric never had any truth to it, for he does not even meet the definition of a king. As such, he could never be a legitimate ruler.

Satan's charisma also leads to a misunderstanding of Milton's intentions—such as Blake's referring to Milton as “of the devil's party” (English Romantics 105). Some contemporary readers fall into the same trap, for as J.B. Broadbent in Some Graver Subject – An Essay on Paradise Lost rightly surmises, “Satan's prototype is not the villain but the epic hero” (73). What readers fail to understand is that, for Milton, the traditional heroic virtues of the epic hero are incompatible with Christian values. Satan's speeches to his legion and his soliloquy in Book IV are also critical in constructing an accurate analysis of Satan's character, as Milton is careful not to omit any detail that exposes Satan as a chronic liar. Chapter three, then, will explore these issues with Satan, as well as analyze crucial sections where Milton discredits Satan and what he stands for, leaving no doubt of Satan's role in the poem. The first section will focus on why Satan continues to seduce readers even after they understand his sophistry. John Diekhoff suggests that Satan is presented in the first book and again and again throughout, so that the reader feels himself better acquainted with Satan than with any of the other agents—and nearer akin to him. … But Satan, evil as he is, is built on a grand scale and, for purposes of the narrative and of the proof, must be. … The grandeur of Satan has led some who do not admire God into admiration of the Devil. (26)

Satan's charisma and seeming courage seem much more appealing than God's apparently aloof rhetoric. Even the secondary characters in Hell—Beelzebub, Mammon, Belial, and Moloch—have moments in the first two books when they actually seem quite reasonable.
However, the second section of this chapter will take all of these supposed heroic characteristics and examine how Milton systematically destroys them—leaving the careful reader with the unshakable realization of Satan and the other fallen angels as villains. Finally, this chapter will end with a comparison of the Son and Satan. Milton was not content with merely inserting false rhetoric or nasty metaphors to tarnish Satan's character; to completely paint Satan as an antagonist, Milton compares Satan with the ultimate protagonist—the Son. As Stevie Davies rightly says, “Satan and Christ share nearly everything—chariot, ascension, and sun-analogy, centrality within an enveloping host of subsidiary angels (cherubs), and the acclamation of all” (179). After a thorough comparison of Satan's character with the Son's, we will move on to our final chapter, which compares Heavenly and Infernal rhetoric.

The most common complaint against God's character is that He is dull, boring, and flat compared to the more exciting and vibrant character of Satan. However, the critics who both criticize and praise the language that God uses place an unfair emphasis on what they deem to be dull language. The first section of the chapter will examine Satan's language; in particular, we will look at the uncertainty and duplicity that Satan exhibits in his language, but more importantly, the overwhelming sense of despair that is present throughout all words spoken by the fallen angels. The second section will focus more on the divine language of God. Peter Berek in “‘Plain' and 'Ornate' Styles and the Structure of 'Paradise Lost'” believes that “the sense of passion produced by elaborate tropes and vivid description is exactly what is missing from the speeches of the Father” (240). However, I will argue that God's speeches do not lack passion, and when He does
seem a bit more declarative and less ornate, it is because God does not need overly
descriptive language to communicate what simply is. This section will offer a close
examination of God's passionate praise of his creations. God's rhetoric may not have the
bombast of Satan's, but once readers begin to understand the nature of Heavenly rhetoric,
it becomes more satisfying than the rhetoric of Hell, even if it is not as dramatic. To
illustrate Milton's preferred rhetoric, the final section will look at how Milton makes the
language his “fit audience” is supposed to approve of an obvious choice, by using Adam
and Eve as examples, since they employ both Heavenly and Infernal language within the
poem.

Of course, as mentioned earlier, in order to understand how deliberate Milton was
in his composition, one must have a grasp of the politics that were a major influence in
Milton's life. Rajan asserts that “we will never know Milton unless we know him as a
poet” (36), but our knowledge of him must go a step further—we must know Milton not
only as a poet, but as a statesman and revolutionary. While some youths may outgrow
their rebellious spirit—he refused to go along with the average pursuits of young men,
even though he was reportedly teased for abstaining from wine and women at
Cambridge—Milton held on to his beliefs even when it was unpopular to do so. He did
not believe in the concept of the trinity, as many of his peers did; rather, he believed that
the Son was subordinate to God. He also “denies that the Old Testament can offer any
kind of model for the New Testament church government” (Lewalski 146), and he
opposed the ecclesiastical hierarchy in the Church, which led to him joining sides with
five writers who worked under the pseudonym Smectymnuus; in this venture, Milton
wrote several tracts denouncing the church hierarchy—one of the first instances where he engaged in polemical debate. His fiercest tracts, however, were in response to the royalist argument, and after the execution of Charles I, he was the commonwealth’s greatest ally. Milton was not one to find common ground with those he disagreed with, and even while he enjoyed his time working for England’s new political majority, he also participated in a couple of bitter political feuds, most notably with Alexander More and Cladius Salmasius. The jabs they traded back and forth were often quite poisonous, with More presenting “a vicious attack defaming and degrading Milton's person” (289), and Milton responding with “special fury” (327). Yet, even when these royalists attacked Milton's blindness and spread horrid rumors about Milton's supposed extracurricular activities, he refused to bow out of a fight he felt was supported by truth. When the power of the commonwealth began to wane under the leadership of Richard Cromwell, Milton saw his fledgling republic coming to an end, and even though the climate was steadily becoming more dangerous for him and his allies, he still published The Ready and Easy Way to Establishing a Free Commonwealth in a final attempt to head off the inevitable Restoration. This, as Lewalski says, “was the more remarkable, since he ran the serious risk of not being able to finish the great epic he had begun” (359). With the coming of Charles II, he saw many of his friends die and, with them, their dream of a free commonwealth, and Milton himself went into hiding; completely blind at this point, he was not only at the mercy of a hostile government, but he was also physically powerless to defend himself. He was quieter in his later years—the very real threat of being drawn and quartered is always an effective deterrent—but he could not be silenced completely,
for his last major works, including *Samson Agonistes* and, of course, *Paradise Lost* still include subversive elements.

Rebellion and the question of rightful rule, of course, are major themes in *Paradise Lost*, and if one is to read the poem with care and understanding, then one must know Milton's ideas on heavenly and earthly rule. Terms like liberty, tyranny, and rebellion are abstract enough that even in contemporary times we can never come to a consensus on their definitions. However Milton, although his ideas do evolve over time, provides many examples to allow his readers (even if they do not agree with him) to work from the same definitions that he uses in *Paradise Lost*. Many of his ideas are more explicitly explained in his tracts and polemical works, which his seventeenth century readers were intimately familiar with, but his modern readers unfortunately are not.

The corruption of the Church and the oppression of Charles I helped shape many of Milton's ideas. Milton often had a complicated relationship with religion, and ultimately ended subscribing to a modified type of Arianism. One thing remained consistent, though: his insistence that religious freedom is paramount in a civilized society. According to Lewalski, Milton believed that “the value to be preserved above all else … is religious liberty [and] … only an environment of religious freedom can allow good men to serve God conscientiously and develop in virtue” (357). Milton writes in *The Reason of Church Government* that “the functions of church government ought to be free and open to any Christian man” (681), stressing the individual relationship that each man must have with God—a church official must not come between a person's ability and desire to read and interpret biblical scripture using his own reason. Often, Milton
would defend the right of individuals to approach God through their own path—it is through this that we can understand how Milton views free will and a person's relationship to God. God says in *Paradise Lost* that he made man “just and right, / Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall” (3.98-99); that is, all men and women are given the choice (and the ability) to follow God's laws or to resist them—anything other than complete free will, and God “must change / Their nature” (125-126). Through these snippets of Milton's philosophy, we begin to get closer to Milton's idea of liberty—since mankind has free will by God's decree, to tamper with it, either through religious or political means, is arguably a greater sin than tolerating perceived heresies. Lewalski adds that “God's grace is resistible and … human response to grace is both possible and necessary” (424). Liberty, then, according to Milton, presupposes the ability to either accept or resist God's grace. He is very clear that free citizens have a duty and a right to “challenge and resist institutional authorities who fell short of [their] standards” (Lewalski 1); that is, those who did not uphold Milton's strict definition of liberty.

Unfortunately for Milton, events during his lifetime were rife with corrupt officials and mindless masses who did not subscribe to the same definition of liberty as he did—often he felt, especially later in life, that he was “in darkness, and with dangers compassed round” (7.27), surrounded by those who dangerously clashed with his ethics and philosophy.

Charles I was the root of most of Milton's frustration, as even after the King's execution the royalists continued to make problems for Milton and those who thought like him. Charles I was the epitome of everything that Milton believed was wrong with a
monarchical government—he had Catholic sympathies, a corrupt court, and a healthy
disregard for his subjects and, more importantly, the English parliament. Charles, as
many kings did before him, believed himself to be on the throne by divine decree and
“refused to answer the charges against him on the ground that a sovereign king cannot be
judged by any earthly power” (Lewalski 223). In other words, Charles likened himself to
the divine, a heavenly king in earthly form. Milton, in direct contrast to Charles and the
royalists, believed that “the king, in his role as head of church and state, [was] simply a
placeholder for Christ” (145), who, on his return, would “put an end to all earthly
tyrannies” and proclaim his own “universal and milde Monarchy through Heaven and
Earth” (Of Reformation 74). Thus, Milton believed that any human king was not above
the law; rather, he was subject to it as strictly as any citizen. Charles also, beside his
megalomaniacal views, simply did not possess the virtues that Milton believed a good
ruler should have and neither did the majority of his subjects. Lewalski writes that
“Milton has concluded that the virtues needed by both rulers and ruled to sustain liberty
in a free commonwealth include reason, justice, magnanimity, temperance, fortitude, and
strong commitment to the common good and the preservation of liberty” (231); in other
words, both king and subjects had to possess Christ-like virtues, so that “the best and
most worthy, whatever their numbers, [would] govern” (313). Charles violated all of
Milton’s notions about how a ruler ought to behave; thus the King became Milton’s
prime example of a tyrant—“any absolute monarchy or any claims to a sphere of royal
prerogative outside the law” (231). Milton believes all citizens have the right to employ
free will in every decision they make—from private issues such as divorce and religion to
more public issues like participating in their government. A government is, therefore, tyrannical when it denies liberty to its citizens, acts outside the laws that society has created, or resists the formation of a republic, and a legitimate rebellion is one where the citizens rise up and remove a tyrannical government. As one works through this line of argument, it becomes obvious that many of Milton's most cherished ideas are echoed by Satan, leading many to believe that Satan is the secret mouthpiece of Milton's republican views. Indeed, Satan attempts to apply Milton's definition of tyranny to God; Satan's arguments and their failures will be explored in the next chapter.
Chapter 2

THINGS UNATTEMPTED YET IN PROSE OR RHYME’: THE ARGUMENTS OF HEAVEN AND HELL

To the modern reader, the arguments that both the heavenly and infernal sides lay out can be confusing, and applying modern sensibilities to Milton's seventeenth century ideals is inviting misinterpretation. Thomas Corns comments in *Regaining Paradise Lost* that “interpreting Milton's representation of Satan probably poses the major critical problem for the late-twentieth-century reader, especially if the reader is of a secular or humanistic disposition” (44). That is, when a reader today approaches *Paradise Lost* expecting to share Milton's assumptions about morality and government, the reader is bound to be confused by the seeming incompatibility between free will and foreknowledge, as well as the severe inflexibility of the heavenly monarchy in the poem. B. Rajan argues that to read *Paradise Lost* is to assume “some such background of assent” (82). Milton wrote his epic poem with his contemporaries as his audience, and it is clear that he assumed they would hold most of the same definitions, or at least the same concepts. Rajan continues: “it is a clear-cut though elementary morality and though it may not convince you, I ask you to believe that it was convincing in mid-seventeenth century England” (82); however, I do not think that one has to completely transport her mind into the very different mindset of the seventeenth century man in order to sympathize with or even understand Milton's arguments. Rather, a close and careful reading of the major arguments presented in *Paradise Lost* will be convincing to the reader regardless of the time period in which they are read. *Paradise Lost* is a complicated work, though, and one can become ensnared in false rhetoric as easily as the
other fallen angels. Three major arguments debated by both the heavenly and infernal host are the concept of free will and foreknowledge, and what constitutes a rightful king. The importance and role of free will is often confusing, especially since Satan complicates the idea with his twisted arguments. As such it is fitting to begin with one of the most easily (and perhaps willfully) misunderstood rhetoricians—Satan—as a springboard for understanding the true concept of free will.

“Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall”

Satan's entire motive throughout the poem is to undermine God and His position as King. His physical revolt may be more spectacular, but it is Satan's rhetoric that does the true damage to Heaven. Heaven may be rebuilt after the destruction caused by war, but as evidenced by the fallen angels and even Adam and Eve, Satan's lies and sophistical rhetoric will far outlast any material damage done to Heaven's landscape. In his quest to bring down God's Kingdom, Satan focuses his arguments mainly on the role of free will and foreknowledge.

Satan wavers in his argument between admitting he has free will and blaming his situation on fate. Some of his more fiery arguments center on his own grand free choices, flying in the face of what God would desire. He believes that down in Hell he has the choice to do evil and confound God's will, saying that “to do aught good never will be our task,” and “if then his Providence / Out of our evil seek to bring forth good, / Our labour must be to pervert that end, / … Which oft-times may succeed” (1.159, 162-164, 166). In one of the more powerful statements made by Satan, he tells Beelzebub that “The mind is its own place, and in itself / Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n”
With these lines, Satan is arguing that he can escape God's will, and that no matter what God may have planned, Satan is not bound by that foreknowledge and can exercise his free will to disrupt what God has ordained. In other words, Satan believes that his free will is stronger than any power that God has. However, he also tells his followers that God “tempted our attempt, and wrought our fall” (642), implying that since God allowed—perhaps even set up—a situation in which the angels would be more likely to fall, Satan and his legions are not entirely responsible for their fall. Instead, the fall is “wrought,” or carefully crafted by God. Satan points to how God and the Son “concealed” (641) their strength and says he would have hesitated to attack outright had he known the true extent of the hidden power. In essence, Satan is implying that since God hid His strength and constructed the circumstances that provoked Satan, he was not acting on his will alone. Furthermore, Satan argues that not only does God craft the fall of the angels and limit their free choice, He also has removed their ability to choose their own leader. That is, regardless of the fact that all angels are “equally free” (5.792), God and the Son had tried to take away the angels' freedom to reject the Son as the ruler and accept Satan instead or remain as they were—without a specifically defined head. By exalting the Son and placing him over all other inhabitants of Heaven, God—according to Satan—is removing the opportunity of the angels to live in equality. Satan, on the other hand, argues that he has restored free will to his legions. He invites “debate” (2.42) in Book II, giving the impression of free choice, and after the debate is concluded, he praises them, saying “Well have ye judged” (390). One must notice how he emphasizes that it is the fallen angels who have judged well—making it seem as though their votes
are not only important, but that they actually are in control of the situation. Thus, Satan sets up a dichotomy between himself and God—God takes away free will, and Satan restores it. Satan says that, unlike God, he offers the fallen angels an opportunity to exercise the free will that they have given themselves (for the fallen angels do not give credit to God for anything).

However, Satan is not always consistent. There are several places in the poem where instead of priding himself on his free choices he says instead that his situation is controlled by the whims of Fate. He tells Beelzebub in Book I that God is on the throne only because of “Chance, or Fate” (133). This statement attempts to deny his own responsibility for his deceit; if he can blame fate for the ills that occurred, then he does not have to look to himself. After the debate and vote in Book II, he praises the angels for a decision “which from the lowest deep / Will once more lift us up, in spite of Fate, / Nearer our ancient seat” (392-394). Satan refers to fate in this line in order to give himself an out—if he were to fail in his attempt to thwart God, there would be no shame, for he could simply blame fate. Therefore, when Satan wants to argue that he is equal to or greater than the denizens of Heaven and justify his actions against God, he calls upon free will, but when he wants to come up with reasons why his plans did not work out so well, he falls back on fate to escape responsibility. Yet, even he cannot keep up that farce forever. In Book IV, Satan in his most famous soliloquy reveals what he truly believes and—for the first and only time in the poem—speaks the truth. Satan tries to say that even if he had not led this uprising, “some other Power / As great might have aspired” (4.61-62), trying again to fall back on fate, but he admits to himself that “other Powers as
great / Fell not, but stand unshaken, from within / Or from without, to all temptations armed” (63-65). But, most telling, is his confession that he has been making his own choices the entire time, and fate has never played a part. “Hast thou the same free will and power to stand,” he asks himself, “Thou hadst: whom hast thou then or what to accuse, / But Heav'n's free love dealt equally to all” (66-68)? “Against thy will / Chose freely what it now so justly rues” (71-72), he admits to himself. Satan knows that he has free will, and he has no one to blame but himself for everything he has done. He cannot blame God, and he cannot blame fate. As much as he likes to pretend in front of the other angels, Satan finally takes responsibility in this small but important scene.

Even though Satan does a nice job of undermining himself, Milton is careful to provide a very obvious contrast between Satan's idea of free will and what God's intentions for free will are. For, when Satan gathers his followers in the North to discuss rebellion, there is one angel who stands up and decides not to fall with his fellows: Abdiel. In Abdiel's confrontation, the mere existence of the “dreadless angel” (6.1) points out many inconsistencies in Satan's concept of free will. Satan, as said above, argues in Hell that the free will he and the other angels possess allows them to make their own decisions, but that those decisions are constantly confounded by fate, which absolves the fallen angels of responsibility for their actions. However, in Abdiel's case, he exercises his own free will, even as he is faced with thousands of opposing, jeering angels. Dennis Burden summarizes the role of Abdiel well:

When Satan does address the other angels, Milton rightly treats the occasion as a public debate, not as a temptation. This helps to make the decision all the more an
individual one for each angel to make. This is where Abdiel's role is crucial and why he was invented. The fact that he is shown to have made his own decision, means that all the other angels must have made their own too. Their fall is thus wholly of their own will. (38)

The scene in Book V, then, is crucial to understanding free will. Satan tempts his followers, as he later will tempt Eve, with a lie. His lie to the angels (that they were going to set up a celebration for the Son's crowning) and his lie to Eve (that he ate the fruit and did not die) make it difficult for his victims to come to a sound, rational decision. If the very premise that one begins with is false, then it is more likely that the conclusion one arrives at will also be false. This makes it more difficult to exercise rational choice.

However, Abdiel proves that, just as he made his own decision, each of the angels present at Satan's rebellious speech also made their own decisions. Abdiel heard the same false premise that the other angels heard, only he decides to counter Satan with his own rational argument that refutes the falsehood. The angels, then, make their own decision to fall or stand. Satan's temptation does not remove their choice. Dennis Danielson elaborates on this point, writing that “Was it not simply that those who were not tempted stood and those who were tempted fell? The story of Abdiel shows that the answer to this question is no” (119). And Abdiel does more than simply resist Satan; he also actively argues against him. Abdiel questions Satan, saying “Shalt thou give law to God, shalt thou dispute / With him the points of liberty, who made / Thee what thou art, and formed the Powers of Heav'n” (5.822-824)? That is, Abdiel reminds Satan that God is the one who has provided free will to all his creatures and has created the monarchy that Satan
disputes. Therefore, Abdiel asks Satan why he thinks that God, since He has given them the power to choose, would suddenly take it away? Satan's only argument against this is a weak counter stating that he cannot remember the moment of his creation; therefore, God must not have created him, and his free will is thus self-generated. Milton's purpose in using Abdiel, then, is to illustrate to his readers the power of reason that God's creations possess. God's expectation is that reason and free will go hand in hand, as it does in Abdiel's case, so every one of God's creations can stand on its own. However, even as they are “sufficient to have stood” they are “free to fall” (3.99). Danielson reminds the readers that “Evil, at least a great deal of it, is caused by the misuse of free will by angels and humans … God had no choice but to make no free creatures at all, or else to make ones who could cause evil” (93).

But the readers who can accept that Satan and the angels fell of their own choice also often find themselves balking at the thought of God using His foreknowledge in a universe governed by the free will of the created. The modern reader, especially, is uneasy with the thought of an omnipotent deity knowing everything that he or she has done and will do. It is especially unsettling when that same deity reveals in Book III that not only does He know that mankind will be tempted by Satan, but that He is not going to do anything about it. Maurice Kelley says that “God foreknew that Adam would fall of his own free will; his fall was therefore certain, but not necessary, since it proceeded from his own free will, which is incompatible with necessity” (78), which seems rather contradictory. If God knows what is going to happen, how can anyone make an autonomous decision? God, however, says that no one
can justly accuse
Their Maker, or their making, or their fate,
As if predestination overruled
Their will, disposed by absolute decree
Or high foreknowledge; they themselves decreed
Their own revolt, not I: if I foreknew,
Foreknowledge had no influence on their fault. (3.112-119)

He flatly contradicts Satan's complaints that fate rules his bad decisions. God argues that just because He knows what will happen, He does not make it happen. But, as Danielson says, “one has followed the argument … but one cannot shake off the suspicion that God might simply be disguising a sinister plan to ensure mankind's humiliation” (107), for why would God not step in to protect his new, frail creations from the false rhetoric of Satan? Why would He allow mankind to be doomed to thousands of years of unhappiness and despair? Even though Adam ends with the thought that his fall has been fortunate in many ways, a modern reader still cannot believe that God would know all these things will come to pass, yet do nothing. Even as readers may cry out against the apparent unfairness of God's apparent inaction, we must also remember that this inaction is key to the free will of both mankind and the angels. God, of course, knows when Satan is conspiring against Him, when Satan escapes Hell, when Eve falls to temptation, and when Adam succumbs as well. Nothing escapes His notice. However, God is careful to say that “they themselves ordained their Fall” (128). This is crucial, for with this line, God is explaining his apparent injustice. God's foreknowledge has no bearing on the
actions of his creations. He knows what they will decide, but He does not make their
decisions. Though he does dispatch Raphael to warn Adam and Eve of Satan, when Eve
faces Satan, she is on her own. He does not meddle in Eve's temptation, even when it
proves to do ill to His kingdom. God explains why free will is so important to His worlds:

Freely they stood who stood, and fell who fell.
Not free, what proof could they have given sincere
Of true allegiance, constant faith or love,
Where only what they needs must do appear'd,
Not what they would? what praise could they receive?
What pleasure I from such obedience paid,
When will and reason (reason also is choice)
Useless and vain, of freedom both despoil'd,
Made passive both, had serv'd necessity,
Not me. (102-111)

God says that He created free will precisely because He wanted genuine love and loyalty.
He could have easily forced Satan along a more docile path, but if He had, all would be
artificial. It would have been “useless and vain” if God had created angels and humans
who served Him out of necessity. Raphael echoes this in Book V, asking “for how / Can
hearts, not free, be tried whether they serve / Willing or no” (5.531-533)? God argues that
He could receive no pleasure “from such obedience paid, / When will and reason [is] … /
Useless and vain” (3.107-109). That is, God values obedience more when it is active
obedience—the obedience chosen freely over evil. The Son comments on the prayers of
Adam and Eve after their fall, saying “Fruits of more pleasing savour from thy seed / Sown with contrition in his heart, than those / Which his own hand manuring all the trees / Of Paradise could have produced, ere fall'n / From innocence” (11.26-30). These prayers are more pleasing not just because Adam and Eve are contrite but also because they are choosing to be contrite—they have recognized their wrong and have actively decided to do what is right. It is important to note that Adam and Eve did not have to fall in order to actively choose good, and they obviously did not have to be in a fallen state in order to be valuable in God's eyes—we only have to look to Abdiel to see that this is not so. Abdiel is faced with evil and rejects it. This earns him praise from God, who says:

well hast thou fought
The better fight, who single hast maintained
Against revolted multitudes the cause
Of truth, in word mightier than they in arms;
And for the testimony of truth hast borne
Universal reproach, far worse to bear
Than violence. (6.29-35)

Thus we can see, to God, the prayers and deeds of those who are actively choosing good, instead of merely following good because it is the only thing they know, are far more valuable.

Free will and foreknowledge, then, are not antithetical elements. God makes it clear that, despite free will being used to create evil, His worlds depend on the existence of choice, and that even though He knows what is to come, He is not responsible for it
happening. Free will is necessary not only for His creations to make the correct (or incorrect) decisions when faced with a dilemma, but it is also crucial in any loving, loyal relationship. This is the type of universe that God wishes for his creations, and while it seems that His omnipotence might be enough to stop an angel like Satan from rising against Him, it cannot if He wishes to preserve the free will of both the angels and mankind. Satan, unfortunately, uses his free will to choose evil and challenges God’s monarchy.

“Ye should be as gods, since I as man”

Milton, as we know, was a staunch republican, and to hear republican views expressed by Satan—who we know to be evil—is rather unsettling. However, Milton is not denouncing republicanism, nor is he defending an earthly monarchy. Rather, he is defining a particular kind of monarchy—a heavenly one—and once we understand Milton's justification for a divine monarchy, we can then see how that heavenly government will not work for earthly kingdoms. Thus, in his poem, Milton defends both God's kingdom and earthly republican governments.

One the surface, Satan presents rather convincing republican views, especially to modern readers who favor such governments. Rather than acknowledge that God and the Son (who has been endowed with God's power) are rightful rulers, Satan says that all residents of Heaven are equal, and as such, no creature should rule over another. “Who can in reason then or right assume” he asks, “Monarchy over such as live by right / His equals, if in power and splendour less, / In freedom equal” (5.794-792)? He acknowledges that God and the Son are more powerful, but says that what “reason hath
equalled, force hath made supreme” (1.248); that is, even though strength sets God and
the Son apart from the angels, strength does not qualify a leader, and neither does “old
repute, / Consent or custom” (639-640). Milton believes that a leader should not stay on
the throne simply because he happens to have the most power or his family has held it for
the longest; rather, he must have gained the position “by merit” (2.21), as Satan says he
does with his own position of power over the fallen angels. Joan Bennett explains
Milton's thought on this aspect of government very well: “The people, by virtue of the
power of self-government in creatures made rational in God's image, together create a
governor whose power is lent him as custodian of the law, not inherent in his person or
absolute, a governor who is the people's servant” (443). The people, in this type of
government, would choose their ruler, and this person would remain the ruler until he no
longer provides the services that the people require—rule is by merit or worth only. And,
in fact, in Book I, Satan claims that most of the angels did prefer him to God or the Son,
saying that there were “innumerable force of Spirits armed / That durst dislike his reign,
and me preferring” (1.101-102). So, interestingly, the same arguments that Satan uses to
justify his revolt are the same arguments Milton and his supporters used to get Charles I
off of the throne. Milton believed that monarchical government, and Charles' government
in particular, “produces tyranny and servility: the king wields supreme power, controlling
the army, [and] governing the church” (Lewalski 267). And Satan definitely considers
God's Kingdom to be tyrannical—he believes that “to bow and sue for grace / With
suppliant knee” is humiliating, and he calls “prostration vile” (1.111-112, 5.782). Most of
this defiance is directed at the Son, who has taken the reins from God and now leads the
angels, but Satan chafes under God's rule as well. He complains to the angels that serving under God and the Son is unbearable: “Too much to one, but double how endured, / To one and his image now proclaimed” (5.783-784). Satan already found service under God detestable, and now that he must serve under the Son as well, his situation is even more intolerable. Instead of a monarchy simply being placed there by God, out of custom as Satan believes, Satan aligns himself more with a merit-based monarchy, with elements of a republic.

Since Milton was vehemently against the hereditary monarchy in England, one might be tempted to think that he is secretly placing his republican views in Satan's mouth. Indeed, “in Milton's republican model parliament ... the people's representative is supreme in all these areas” (Lewalski 267), and Satan's seeming “debate” in Hell, asking for “who can advise” (2.42) appears to be more closely aligned with Milton's preferred government. However, the reader must consider one of the main objections that Milton had against Charles and all other kings—claiming the father role over their people. A king who acts on this belief does not govern by consent of the people, just as a father does not govern by consent of his children. Milton argued that since Charles was not the father of his people, to act as though he were was tyrannical. The only way for the Royalists to defend such tyranny was to back the assumption that kings act in a father role. Thus, “the Royalist aim was to prove that killing a king is not only tyrannicide but parricide, the crime that of all others most offends against natural and divine law” (Davies 164). Satan makes nearly the same claim that Milton and his peers did, and argues that neither God nor the Son is his father, but that he is “self-begot and self-
raised” (5.860). If this is the case, then God and the Son truly have no just claim to the Heavenly throne, and Satan is completely justified in his rebellion. More than simply denying that God or the Son is his maker, Satan also claims that God deliberately tempts Satan and his followers into a revolt, which would imply that not only is God governing without the consent of His people (since Satan was able to sway a third of the Heavenly Host), but He is also governing for His own benefit—tempting angels to rise against Him, so that He can orchestrate the fall of Satan and his legions. However, as Abdiel argues, this is clearly not the case.

When Satan tries to argue that God is a tyrant, Abdiel is quick to point out “How provident [God] is, how far from thought / To make us less, bent rather to exalt / Our happy state” (5.828-830). Abdiel appeals to Satan's own experience of God's goodness—Satan is unwilling to admit the truth here, but he does so in Book IV, when he says that God “with his good / Upbraided none; nor was his service hard” (4.44-45). Furthermore, Abdiel acknowledges that were Satan's arguments correct about the Son being equal to the angels, then he would be justified in his anger. He says to Satan, “But to grant it thee unjust, / That equal over equals monarch reign” (5.832); that is, Abdiel agrees that if they were all equal then it would be unfair for the Son to rule over them. However, this is simply not true. One cannot be equal to his maker, and since Satan is not “self-begot,” as he likes to say, he has a natural superior. Abdiel reminds Satan that the Son has created all of the angels and wields God's power, saying “by whom / As by his Word the mighty Father made / All things, ev'n thee, and all the Spirits of Heav'n / By him created in their bright degrees” (835-838). Thus, just as the Father created the Son, the Son created all
things afterward—including all the other angels and the new world of mankind. Therefore, according to the Raphael and Abdiel, the Son's rule over God's Kingdom is simply a natural progression of the heavenly monarchy. It is also important to note that even though the Son rules over God's creations, he does not take the opportunity to claim that he is better than God. In fact, at every turn, the Son acknowledges God's power through him. When the Son is about to use God's thunder to defeat Satan's rebellion, he says that “the Father, t' whom in Heav'n supreme / Kingdom and power and glory appertains, / Hath honoured me according to his will” (6.814-816). Notice that the Son does not claim the glory of the victory for himself. He realizes that he owes everything that he is to God, and all of the Son's words are a reflection of his place in the monarchy.

“Better to reign in Hell, than serve in Heav'n”

Once we understand heavenly monarchy in Milton's poem, we can turn our attention to how Satan uses this idea in his revolt and whether or not he is justified in doing so. For Milton seems to suggest that even God on His throne would not be absolutely secure. If the majority of the angels really did prefer Satan as a leader, then He would have no choice but to step down. Milton, however, believes that what works in Heaven does not necessarily work for mankind, and assuming that it does is the biggest mistake that many readers make. While in Heaven an absolute monarchy is not only justified, but necessary, an absolute monarchy on earth is the equivalent of tyranny.

First, the reader must understand what Milton believes a true king should be. Aside from God, there are two kings in Paradise Lost—Satan and the Son. If one does a quick comparison between the ruling styles of Satan and the Son, it becomes apparent
which type of monarchy Milton prefers. Satan is the first king set before our eyes, and he does seem to be worthy of such a title. He is, by far, the strongest and most courageous of all the fallen angels. He invites debate amongst his people, seemingly valuing all that they have to contribute. He willingly takes on a sacrificial and dangerous journey across Chaos to discover the new world that God and the Son have created, so that others are spared “difficulty or danger” (2.449). However, as I will argue in the next chapter, beneath each selfless action lies a darker motive—every political move Satan makes is to secure more power for himself. The Son, in contrast, willingly acts as a liaison between God and the angels, as well as God and Adam and Eve. He questions God in Book III, asking Him to explain how God will save mankind from “fraud, though joined / With his own folly” (3.152-153), and he carries the prayers of Adam and Eve after they have sinned, asking to “interpret for [them], me [their] advocate” (11.33). He opens lines of communications between angels, man, and God, but not for his own glory. Even when God sends the Son to deal out judgment and punishment to Adam and Eve, the compassionate king “[pities] how they stood / Before him naked to the air” and clothes not only their outer bodies but their “inward nakedness, much more / Opprobrious, with his robe of righteousness” (211-212, 221-222). His chief concern is for the well being of God's newest creation. All of the considerable strength of the Son is gained through God (as is Satan's), and that strength allows him to single-handedly defeat the entire rebellion. Further, the Son takes on the greatest sacrifice of all—death—and does so without staging it, as Satan does (a point I will return to in the following chapter).
There is a clear contrast, then, between Satan and the Son. Satan, as king, bases all his actions in selfishness and power-mongering. The Son marks all his actions “both by obedience and by love” (12.403). Milton is arguing, then, that to truly be justified in ruling over others, a king would not only have to be superior in every way to his subjects, but more than that, he would also need to rule without a lust for power or personal gain. He would have to be untouched by greed—to do anything solely for himself would make his rule tyrannical. In other words, the king would have to be perfectly good. The Son, in his infinite goodness, clearly embodies this ideal more than Satan. Once armed with this knowledge, how then can we accept Satan's argument for a rebellion?

As said, there are two reasons why a king should ascend the throne—first, because the king is worthy of the throne; this king would by merit be raised above his fellows. I define merit in two different ways here: moral and physical. Moral merit is the more important of the two, and without moral superiority, no king could rightfully take a throne. Although there are obvious moral deficiencies in Satan's acts, the Son is always a paragon of virtue, and Milton makes it painfully obvious which king we should prefer based on moral merit. Physical merit is also important—like the Son, Satan is more powerful than those he is ruling—but it cannot be separated from moral merit. In fact, physical merit derives its power from moral merit, as we can see with both Abdiel and the Son. Abdiel is able to make Satan recoil “ten paces huge” (6.193) not because Abdiel is physically stronger than Satan but because his stronger moral might—backed by the strength of God—allows him to land such a heavy blow on the much larger angel. Satan possesses only physical might, and as we can see from his actions, physical merit divided
from moral merit is not only weaker, it is also more dangerous and certainly undesirable. Additionally, the Son is also much more powerful than Satan and his entire army. In the final battle in Heaven, the Son shoots “pernicious fire / Among th' accursed, that withered all their strength” (6.849-850), so in one volley, he is able to sap the strength of all Satan's legions. And that is not even all of the damage that the Son is capable of when armed with God's thunder. Raphael explains to Adam that “Yet half his strength he put not forth, but checked / His thunder in mid volley, for he meant / Not to destroy, but root them out of Heav'n” (6.853-855). With this attack, he sends Satan and his followers into Hell like a herd of swine falling off a cliff—and Satan is incapable of offering any resistance. While this is an impressive display, the Son does not resort to violence lightly. He is careful to explain that the only reason he does this is because God wishes the rebellious angels to “have their wish, to try with me / In battle which the stronger proves, they all, / Or I alone against them, since by strength / They measure all” (818-821). That is, the Son only shows his physical might because it is the only aspect of leadership that the fallen angels will respect.

The second reason a king should ascend his throne is to allow the king to reflect similarity to God. The Son is simply closer than Satan is to God. In Book XI, the Son says that “I with thee am one” (11.44), referring to God, and Abdiel says that the Son is “the head” of the angels (5.842). Satan even admits in Book IV that “he deserved no such return / From me, whom he created what I was” (4.42-43). In this line, he refers to God's power, which the Son is endowed with after his creation; thus, the Son is more akin to
God than are any of the angels. Therefore, the Son is naturally above Satan and more powerful, and as such, Satan's rebellion cannot be justified.

It is important to note that while this definition of a king works in Heaven, and is indeed the only way the monarchy can be preserved, Milton never encourages such a government on earth. Lewalski reminds us that for men, “the king, in his role as head of church and state, [was] simply a placeholder for Christ” (145). In fact, Michael specifically warns Adam against the tyranny of earthly kings, and Adam agrees, saying:

He gave us only over beast, fish, fowl,

Dominion absolute; that right we hold

By his donation; but man over men

He made not lord; such title to himself

Reserving, human left from human free. (12.67-71)

Adam rightly says that God has only given mankind the right to rule over those that are lower in the hierarchy—the animals and plants. But, just as Satan could not rule over his equals, so mankind should not rule over theirs. Adam is able to rule over animals because he is different in kind from them, much the same way that God is different in kind from the angels. In this way, Milton is able to write of a monarchy that does work—but only in Heaven. Since there will never be a perfect man or woman who would be able to rule without greed or lust for power, there can never be a true earthly king. Even an elected monarchy is not totally free from tyranny, since to be a true ruler, that king would need to have those Christ-like attributes, which no mortal individual possesses.
After breaking down Satan's arguments on free will and rebellion, one might wonder how any reader could ever admire a character who is so completely wrong—and more than that, he admits to his wrong doing! However, Satan is still admired by many, and it is because while we may be able to dismiss Satan's arguments, we are still taken in by his charisma. The next chapter will explore this seduction, and demonstrate how a careful reader can neatly avoid Satan's appealing ethos and remain Milton's “fit audience” (7.31).
Chapter 3

“PALE, IRE, ENVY AND DESPAIR”: A STUDY OF THE DAMNED

Readers are drawn to Satan—it is an almost universal reaction upon first reading Paradise Lost. Stevie Davies writes that “there is a psychological pull in Satan's chant of 'self-begot, self-raised' to which many readers must respond with excitement. It is an ultimate liberation, surreptitiously dreamed of in adolescence, to shed one's father as safeguard and authority and choose oneself as a preferable source” (174-175). Indeed, Satan denies that he even has a creator, asking Abdiel “who saw / When this creation was? remember'st thou / Thy making, while the Maker gave thee being? / We know no time when we were not as now” (5.856-859). Satan does more than simply rebel against his father; he denies the existence of a father. Even as the reader knows that Satan is lying about this—and he admits it in Book IV when he says God “deserved no such return / From me, whom he created what I was” (4.42-43)—the reader's initial reaction is still one of admiration and even sympathy. Much of this impression, though, stems from Milton's use of traditional hero imagery—Satan and the fallen angels often call to mind a classical hero like Odysseus. Once we understand why Satan is appealing, it is important to take a closer look at the subtle images that Milton weaves into his poem in order to provide the careful reader ample reasons to distrust and dislike Satan. For while Milton describes Satan's battle prowess and cunning, he also slips in subtle condemning comments of both the Arch Fiend and his followers. And when we are tempted to view Satan as seemingly selfless or noble, Milton is careful to offer a comparison in the Son, so the discerning reader can see who the truly virtuous character is. Thus, even though Satan’s character is
not attractive to many readers, paying close attention to how Milton discredits Satan and the fallen angels is crucial if readers hope to come closer to a more complete understanding of Milton’s intentions.

“Glory obscured”

To understand why Milton wants his readers to see Satan as an antagonist, it is first necessary to understand why Satan might seem sympathetic. Most readers would agree that it is hard to deny Satan's charisma. We are introduced to Satan as he is chained on the burning lake, where he says to Beelzebub in his first speech: “What though the field be lost? / All is not lost; the unconquerable will, / And study of revenge, immortal hate, / And courage never to submit or yield” (1.105-108). Our first impression of Satan, then, is one who will never be conquered and, ever resourceful, will always attempt to turn defeat into victory. In this manner he is a very appealing general—and he has the size and weapons to support this image. Milton says that Satan's shield “hung on his shoulders like the moon” (287), his spear is like the “tallest pine” (292), and his appearance compares to those “whom the fables name of monstrous size” (296). Truly he is a fearsome sight to behold, and so are his soldiers. Milton's description of them is impressive:

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; and thronging helms
Appeared, and serried shields in thick array
Of depth immeasurable. Anon they move
In perfect phalanx to the Dorian mood
Of flutes and soft recorders—such as raised
To height of noblest temper heroes old
Arming to battle, and instead of rage
Deliberate valour breathed, firm, and unmoved. (544-554)

It is an incredibly powerful scene—banners waving in the air, spears and shields moving in perfect formation, and music playing that recalls to mind “heroes old.” Notably, they are also acting out of “deliberate valour” instead of anger.

But the fallen angels are not simply picturesque. During the debates in Hell, Milton demonstrates how the fallen angels are able to argue persuasively—Moloch, Belial, and Mammon all prove that they are capable of complex thought. Their arguments are not without weaknesses, of course, and the three angels illustrate some of the more notorious vices that can be held by people or angels. But, as a reader hears Moloch's argument, one cannot help but understand the despair that he feels: “His trust was in th'Eternal to be deemed / Equal in strength, and rather than be less / Cared not to be at all; with that care lost / Went all fear” (2.46-49). We cannot help but admire the last desperate act of violence that a fallen enemy commits before being completely vanquished, and Moloch is very human in his reaction to imminent defeat; therefore, regardless of his rash and ill-conceived desire for revenge, he can be thought of as sympathetic in his speech. Likewise, Belial, who “pleased the ear, / … with persuasive accent” (117-118), is an appropriate counter to Moloch's unbridled fury, for his words are
“clothed in reason's garb” (226). Even though Milton says that Belial “counselled ignoble ease and peaceful sloth, / Not peace” (227-228), after such a display by Moloch, Belial seems to have a fairly good idea—he knows that God is not to be underestimated and realizes that greater punishment may be in store for them if the fallen angels were to rashly attack Heaven. He can indeed “make the worse appear / The better reason” (113-114), and it is possible that readers may be persuaded to think him better than he is, especially after Moloch. Mammon, the last angel to speak before Beelzebub parrots Satan's plan, takes Belial's idea even further. He urges the fallen angels to “seek / Our own good from ourselves / … preferring / Hard liberty” (253-256). What reader would be immune to such an idea? Mammon takes the situation that they are given and seeks to make the best of it. Such a plan echoes Satan's words earlier in the poem: “The mind is its own place, and in itself / Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n” (1.254-255). Milton creates a deliberate progression here in the debates of the angels: there is the immediate reaction of Moloch, rage and despair; followed next by a more placid idea from Belial, an acceptance of what is and a call for inaction; and concluded by Mammon's move beyond mere acceptance to more decisive action. They will not throw themselves away in illogical war, nor will they simply sit around and hope that they are “changed at length” (2.217); rather, they will deliberately try to confound their punishment and change the environment around them to suit their desires. Milton's construction here is clear, for each idea becomes more acceptable and the angels more sympathetic. If one were to question why Milton would choose to allow these characters such complexities, Adam’s words in Book IX, “subtle he needs must be, who could
seduce / Angels” (307-308), provide an answer. Milton must create antagonists who are not, seemingly, completely evil, for the obvious appearance of evil is easy to resist. Rather, Milton must pen characters that are not only completely capable of seducing angels, but also the reader. Milton's fallen angels, then, are not immediately reprehensible; instead they are subtly seductive in their heroic images.

Indeed, Satan is the most seductive of them all, beginning with his first speeches to his troops. He commands his soldiers to “Awake, arise, or be for ever fall'n” (1.330), a call that one can almost imagine echoing throughout the plains of Hell. It is composed of staccato bursts, rousing the senseless angels on the ground and perhaps the reader as well. The troops were not immune to “the fierce pains” of the fiery lake, but “to their General's voice they soon obeyed” (336-337). Satan's command over his troops is such that they will continue to follow him even after he has led them to disaster; Milton explains that the angels actually experience “some glimpse of joy, to have found their chief / Not in despair” (524-525). Satan is not without emotion, and he knows that “millions of Spirits for his fault amerced / Of Heav'n, and from eternal splendours flung / For his revolt” (609-611). Thus, when Satan addresses them, “thrice he assayed, and thrice in spite of scorn, / Tears such as angels weep, burst forth” (619-620). It is a wrenching scene, and Milton even includes a romantic image of “forest oaks or mountain pines” which have been “scathed” by “Heaven's fire” (612-613). It is hard to imagine a reader who would not be moved by the hopeless situation in which Satan and his fellows find themselves and the pathos that they evoke. In Satan's subsequent speech to his troops, he blames God for their fall, and after such a charismatic opening by Satan, it is tempting to believe him.
He argues that God sits on his throne “upheld by old repute” (639) and that they have—through their revolt—“emptied Heav'n” (633).

Like all good leaders, Satan appears to value the input of his people. After the construction of Pandemonium, Satan asks his angels “by what best way, / Whether of open war or covert guile” they should make their next move, and invites them to “debate, who can advise, may speak” (2.40-42). Since Satan characterizes God as a tyrant who would not allow His best and brightest to come to the forefront out of jealous power-mongering, Satan's move here to seemingly let his people contribute to the discussion is a powerful one. If any of the angels harbored any doubts about whether or not it was a good idea to follow Satan, they may have been convinced by Satan's offer to stand with him in supposed equality. And when the favored plan is put forward by Beelzebub not Satan (although the careful reader will remember that it has always been Satan's plan), it lends even more to the appearance of Satan's valuing the thoughts and concerns of others, allowing someone else to construct the plan that the entire group will follow. The plan is then put to a democratic vote, for “the bold design / Pleased highly those infernal States, and joy / Sparkled in their eyes; with full assent / They vote” (2.386-389). It is an artful representation of a republic, and it appears that all of the angels have bought into the farce. Beelzebub praises them saying “well have ye judged, well ended long debate, / Synod of gods, and like to what ye are, / Great things resolved” (390-392). Regardless of reality, the angels are flattered by Beelzebub's praises, and these same words might have an almost equal effect on the reader. However, what comes next is Satan's crowning achievement in securing the fallen angels' loyalty as well as the readers'.
Beelzebub takes a page from Satan's book and first builds some anticipation. The decision on the table is choosing the brave angel who will search for the new world rumored to contain God's new creations. Beelzebub says,

Who shall tempt with wandering feet
The dark, unbottomed, infinite Abyss,
And through the palpable obscure find out
His uncouth way, or spread his airy flight,
Upborne with indefatigable wings
Over the vast abrupt, ere he arrive
The happy Isle? What strength, what art, can then Suffice, or what evasion bear him safe,
Through the strict senteries and stations thick
Of Angels watching round? Here he had need
All circumspection: and we now no less
Choice in our suffrage; for on whom we send
The weight of all, and our last hope, relies. (404-416)

The task laid before the angels is a dangerous one indeed. Not only is the uncharted path wrought with peril, but whichever hapless angel agrees to take it on will bear the extra burden of being the fallen angels' “last hope.” It is painfully daunting. No wonder, then, that the angels “all sat mute, / Pondering the danger with deep thoughts; and each / In other's count'nance read his own dismay / Astonished” (420-423). After Beelzebub's speech, the reader is acutely aware of how overwhelming the task seems—for the angels
are in a strange, frightening place and have just suffered a humiliating defeat. A reader may very well feel empathy for the angels, for who would want to attempt to sneak into a new world that will be surrounded by the alert angels of God? It is precisely such thought that Satan capitalizes on. After letting the silence continue for a suitable period, “Satan, whom now transcendent glory raised / Above his fellows, with monarchal pride / Conscious of highest worth” (427-429) accepts the quest. It is not only his acceptance that endears him to his troops and Milton's readers, but also his spoken reasons for accepting. Satan states that “I should ill become this throne, O Peers, / … if aught proposed / And judged of public moment, in the shape of difficulty or danger could deter me from attempting” (445, 447-450). Satan is proving that he is the most worthy of the throne, not just because he is the most powerful, but because he is willing to sacrifice his own safety and comfort for the good of his people—his “peers” as he insists on calling them. In this manner, he is telling his followers that even though he is their elected leader, he still considers them to be his equals. However, it is the sacrifice that is the most compelling; he promises “deliverance for us all” (465). The angels, and perhaps readers, are convinced—“towards him they bend / With awful reference prone … / Nor failed they to express how much they praised, / That for the general safety he despised / His own” (477-478, 480-482). Yet, even though Satan is taking this journey to ensure his rule over the other angels, it is truly not without danger. Satan's courage in the face of this task cannot be denied. However, his courage is not enough to make him a sympathetic character, as Milton repeatedly proves throughout the poem.

“No leader but a liar traced”
Although the fallen angels may appear to have their charms, the careful reader is certain to catch how Milton desires his readers to view the rebels. While Satan's legions are compared at one point to “heroes old” (1.552), Milton also compares them to “autumnal leaves that strow the brooks” and “scattered sedge” (302, 304). In the same section, they are also compared to Pharaoh’s army of “floating carcasses” (310) after the Red Sea drowned them all. After the angels awaken from their stupor on the burning lake, Milton likens them to lazy soldiers: “as when men wont to watch / On duty, sleeping found by whom they dread, / Rouse and bestir themselves ere well awake” (332-334) and then to “a pitchy cloud / Of locusts” (340-341). Finally, Milton uses the image of the “multitude” of “barbarous sons” (351, 353) that destroyed the Roman empire. All of these similes occur within a mere fifty lines, and are followed by a standard trope of epic poetry—the list—where the angels are connected to the heathen gods inspired by them. These angels turned gods promoted such horrors as “human sacrifice” (393), “lustful orgies” (415), and “injury and outrage” (500). These descriptions provide a far from flattering view of the fallen angels. Thus, while there are those brief moments where Milton seem sympathetic to the fallen angels, the images he chooses to degrade them are much more powerful.

C.S. Lewis remarks that “what we call bad things are good things perverted” (66), and what a reader may call good things in the fallen angels are actually vices dressed up in virtue's garb—Moloch's defiance that one might briefly admire is also incredibly damaging and selfish. All his fear is gone, and “worse / He recked not” (2.48-49), and one might be tempted to equate that with courage. However, blind courage is never good,
and while Moloch believes that such actions may lead to their annihilation, he does not care. His only concern is escaping the “den of shame” (58) to which they have been exiled; his only motivation is revenge. In contrast, Belial is introduced as “graceful and humane” (109), but Milton quickly adds that “all was false and hollow; though his tongue / Dropped manna … / for his thoughts were low; / To vice industrious, but to nobler deeds / Timorous and slothful” (112-113, 115-117). Milton is more forthright with Belial's shortcomings—he writes that Belial “counselfed ignoble ease and peaceful sloth, / Not peace” (227-228), so those that might be tempted to think Belial makes some good points would quickly change their minds. Mammon's idea is initially favored by the legions, and may seem to be the most reasonable to the readers as well. But Milton adds after Mammon's speech that the angels were agreeable to peace because “such another field / They dreaded worse than Hell: so much the fear / Of thunder and the sword of Michael / Wrought still within them” (292-295). In other words, the angels favored peace not because it was the more noble thing to do, but because they were frightened of Michael. Their cowardly nature is not very appealing. Additionally, in Book I the reader must recall that Mammon “admire[es] more / The riches of Heav'n's pavement, trodden gold, / Than aught divine or holy else enjoyed / In vision beatific” (1.681-384). While Mammon may seem to just try and make the best of things, what he really seeks to do is fashion a new Heaven in Hell, and not for any conceivable good reason. Rather, he creates a faux Heaven for his own glory and love of riches. It is obviously a vain attempt—no one except God could ever recreate Heaven, and to attempt to do so is as
foolish as the hapless attempts to construct the Tower of Babel. However, it is not just Mammon who attempts to usurp God's glory. Satan is the far worse offender.

Satan’s charisma is unparalleled, and his most admirable moments are when he seemingly allows his angels to participate in a debate on affairs that will affect them as a whole and his acceptance of a most dangerous mission. But a closer look reveals that these moments are stained with pride and corruption. Pandemonium, a seeming republic of fallen angels, is more closely aligned with a tyrannical monarchy, with Satan as King. The court holds “great Seraphic Lords and Cherubim / In close recess and secret conclave” (1.794-795). Much like the House of Lords, there is a clear distinction between the chosen of Satan and the rest of the angels. Satan himself sits “high on a throne of royal state” (2.1), which is hardly becoming in a republic. Later on, he is called “Hell's dread Emperor with pomp supreme, / And God-like imitated state” (509-511). Thus, it is not just that Satan wants to be King, but that he wants to be the highest King—equal to God in stature. He tries desperately to imitate God's court, with “a globe of fiery Seraphim” around his throne and “trumpets regal” (512-515). Indeed, before he left Heaven he had aspired to God's throne, and in his final days in Heaven “he / Affect[ed] all equality with God, / In imitation of that Mount” (5.762-764). And it is not merely God's throne that he seeks to copy, but His thunder as well. During the battle of Heaven, Satan creates infernal machines in order to fool “whatever stands / Adverse, that they shall fear we have disarmed / The Thunderer of his only dreaded bolt” (6.489-491); even more horrid is the nature of these machines. While the thunder is pure (though destructive), the machines are described as “those deep-throated engines belched, whose
roar / Embowelled with outrageous noise the air, / And all her entrails tore, disgorging foul / Their devilish glut” (586-589); they are abominations in Heaven. Satan knows that he cannot really copy God—the machines are effective only briefly in the battle—which is why it is so offensive that Satan even attempts the imitation. Satan is not higher than God and does not deserve to be higher than his current state, yet he still attempts it with his faux throne and thunder. The fallen angels, though, do not seem to grasp what Satan is doing, and believe that they will have an equal part in this new government that Satan is trying to create. For Satan refers to his followers as his “peers,” but he does not trust them enough to let the debate go along unfettered. The plan to find God's new creation was conceived by Satan first, and Beelzebub, as second in command to Satan, acts only as his mouthpiece. Since Satan criticizes God for his unwillingness to share power, one would think that in Satan's own government he would be eager to avoid making the same perceived mistake. However, Satan is concerned only with putting himself into power, not with allowing access to the other angels.

Satan knows how to fool the angels, though. As mentioned earlier, Satan guides the debate in Hell so as to receive their endorsement of his own plot: seeking out God's newest creation to “seduce them to our party” (2.368). After Beelzebub makes the task—dangerous though it is—seem impossible, Satan takes the opportunity that the orchestrated silence of the fallen angels gives him, and accepts the task, but not without due theatrics. He tells his legions to essentially keep house while he “abroad / Through all the coasts of dark destruction seek / Deliverance for us all: this enterprise / None shall partake with me” (463-466). Satan claims that he can offer deliverance to his angels,
which is something that only God can give. Once again, he tries to imitate God, even though his attempt is as hollow as his words. He stresses at the end that he will journey alone, and while this may seem like a courageous act, it is actually to prevent anyone from upstaging him:

Thus saying, rose

The Monarch, 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. (466-473)

Satan, then, is not taking on this task because he really believes that he can offer deliverance; rather, he takes it on because he wants to gain glory and power over his fellows. The other angels, just as corrupt as he is, would have tried to ride on Satan's coattails and obtain glory for themselves without actually having to do the deed. One might make a comparison here between the fallen angels and Satan, and think that at least Satan has the courage to take the quest himself, while these angels would try to gain “cheap the high repute.” However, while Satan does display courage at times, ultimately Milton exposes him as a coward.

It is understandable that Satan is rightly afraid of the angels who remain in Heaven, especially since all of the angels derive their strength from God, and God has
withdrawn His strength from Satan. (4.1011, 1012). However, Satan should have no reason to fear Adam and Eve, and his interactions with the human pair reveal his cowardly nature. In all of Satan's encounters with God's new creation, he chooses to be in disguise—more than that, he chooses to go after Eve, the weaker of the two. Satan says that he wants to avoid Adam, “whose higher intellectual more I shun, / And strength, of courage haughty, and of limb / Heroic built” (9.483-485). In other words, Satan chooses the weaker of the two because he is afraid of being intellectually and physically bested. It is hardly a courageous move—what warrior with any amount of pride would choose to destroy an enemy decidedly weaker than himself? There is no honor in battling a weaker enemy. Thus, not only does Satan deliberately go after a frailer target, but he does not even do so in his own person. Satan, despite his former bravery in battle (even Raphael admits that until fighting Michael, Satan “met in arms / No equal” [6.246-247]), will not face his slight foe without a disguise to protect himself. He first assails Eve in her dreams, “squat like a toad, close at the ear of Eve” (4.800). He does not even seek to reason with her, instead hoping to “raise / … distempered, discontented thoughts, / Vain hopes, vain aims, inordinate desires / Blown up with high conceits engend'ring pride” (806-809). The honorable, courageous foe would at least seek to meet his enemy on a level playing field, where none would have an obvious advantage over another, but Satan seeks to sneak his way into Eve's thoughts, to take her at her most vulnerable. When this fails, he takes the form of a snake; again he refuses to face her as he is. Satan may stand against other, more powerful foes, but he freely admits this is because “more glory will be won, / Or less be lost” (4.853-854). That is, if he wins, there is much praise to be
gained, and if he were to lose against powerful enemies, it would not be shameful.

Standing against Adam, however, who Satan believes could best him, would not bring personal glory. Adam is not even a powerful angel, and defeating a man in battle—physical or mental—would not bring glory, but losing to Adam would heap shame upon Satan's head. Thus, Satan, in an attempt to avoid hurting his swollen pride, goes after Eve, the safest choice, but the least honorable—and certainly more cowardly. Finally, when Satan does succeed in his mission, he does not stick around to see the consequences—when the Son descends to pass judgment over the pair, Satan flees “terrified / … not hoping to escape, but shun / The present, fearing guilty what his wrath / Might suddenly inflict” (10.338-341). Yet, even Satan's cowardice and corruption is not enough for Milton to discredit the Arch Enemy—Satan's ultimate downfall as a character is through a direct comparison to the Son.

“Heav'ny love shall outdo Hellish hate”

If a reader were to pay close attention to how many times Milton parallels Satan and the Son's experiences and reactions, it would be obvious how dependent the two characters are on each other for development. J.B Broadbent argues that “Satan succeeds as a symbol of human corruption because, like us, his own best self is foil to his worst” (71). However, we can expand that—Satan and the Son are foils to each other. That is, Satan would not seem as horrible an angel if he could not be compared to someone as good and pure as the Son; likewise, the Son would not be thought of as so good and pure without someone as evil as Satan. Davies writes that “Satan and Christ share nearly everything—chariot, ascension, and sun-analogy, centrality within an enveloping host of
subsidiary angels ... and the acclamation of all” (179). Additionally, Satan and the Son also share a sacrificial scene, participation in a debate, a descent into flesh, and a display of strength. The different way in which each approaches these important events allows Milton to construct a definition of evil and good, with Satan the personification of one and the Son of the other.

One characteristic that Satan and the Son share is the admiration of their followers. In Hell, the legions “extol [Satan] equal to the highest in Heav'n” (2.479), and in Heaven, the angels bow “lowly reverent / Towards either throne” (3.349-350); that is, the angels of Heaven revere the Son as much as they do God. While the adoration is equal between the two, the source of the emotion is radically different. Even as Satan's followers admire him, they are also his rivals. Satan hurriedly cuts off any attempt of the other fallen angels to outshine him after he accepts the mission to find God's new creation, for as mentioned earlier, he must prevent others from “winning cheap the high repute / Which he through hazard huge must earn” (2.472-473). Notably, what stops the other angels from trying to upstage Satan is that “they / Dreaded not more th' adventure than his voice / Forbidding” (473-475). In the previous book, Satan rouses his followers with a stern speech, and the angels jump like they were “found by whom they dread” (1.333). That is, they follow and praise Satan more out of fear than love. Fear, of course, retains loyalty, but it is not true, unwavering loyalty. Additionally, Satan starts his recruitment of all his followers—before the revolt in Heaven has even started—with a lie. He tells his second in command to rally everyone to the North: “Tell them that by command ... / Homeward with flying march where we possess / The quarters of the
North, there to prepare / Fit entertainment to receive our King / The Great Messiah”
(5.685, 688-691). While the fallen angels of course make their own decision to defect
against Heaven, it is important to note that Satan's entire rebellion begins with a lie; thus
his people are initially bonded to him through falsehood.

The Son, of course, does not lie. Everything that he does is based on love and
truth. While Satan is compared to a dreaded general whom the angels fear, in the Son's
countenance “divine compassion visibly appeared, / Love without end, and without
measure grace” (3.141-142). Milton never describes the fallen angels as looking to their
leader with love; only the Son receives love from those he commands. Thus, when the
Son takes on the task of saving mankind, there are no rivals who seek to upstage him, for
they follow him without question. Instead, “admiration seized / All Heav'n” (271-272)
and “with solemn adoration down they cast / Their crowns” (351-352). This is not the
admiration of a group who blindly follows a leader, though. As evidenced by Abdiel's
more than capable argument in the face of so many dissenters and Gabriel's quick
counters to Satan's rhetoric, these residents of Heaven definitely possess critical thought
and the ability and willingness to question the world around them. The difference, then,
between the Son's followers and Satan's followers is both in the way they follow their
leaders and in the manner that they do so. While the Son's angels are able to see through
duplictitous words, Satan's followers are fooled by him more than once.

In fact, the way in which debates occur in Heaven and Hell present yet another
difference between Satan and the Son. Satan, of course, stages the debates in Hell, giving
the fallen angels a false sense of freedom and liberty in their faux republic. Beelzebub
officially proposes the plan to find and corrupt God's new creation, but it is “first devised / By Satan, and in part proposed” (2.379-380). Thus, when the angels vote on the plan that they believe has been proposed democratically and with full disclosure, in reality they are all just pawns of Satan's corrupt government. Pandemonium has all the appearance of a republic or democracy, with each angel allowed inside of the court and theoretically allowed a voice, but the fallen angels have as much autonomy as the stifled Parliaments under the rule of Charles I. Satan has rigged the debate; the outcome is never in question.

The Son does not have a debate with the rest of the angels, but he does question God. After God lays out his plan for mankind in Book III, the Son asks:

Or shall the Adversary thus obtain
His end, and frustrate thine? shall he fulfill
His malice, and thy goodness bring to naught,
Or proud return, though to his heavier doom,
Yet with revenge accomplish'd, and to Hell
Draw after him the whole race of mankind,
By him corrupted? or wilt thou thyself
Abolish thy creation, and unmake
For him, what for thy glory thou hast made?
So should thy goodness and thy greatness both
Be question'd and blasphem'd without defence. (3.156-164)
The Son actively questions God's plan and is rewarded for it; God replies that “all hast thou spoken as my thoughts are” (171). This exchange between the two is genuine. God did not plant the Son there to merely further His own agenda, and the Son surely did not question God in order to gain glory or further a plan of his own. Rather, the Son is curious about how God intends to save mankind from the clutches of Satan, and God answers him fully and openly. As Dennis Danielson writes, “It is as if God replies: 'I was hoping you would ask me that'” (108). God is not going to direct the Son to ask anything—He may hope that the Son will ask Him, but He is certainly not going to make a theatrical production out of it. Unlike the debates in Hell where each rhetorician was only a pawn in Satan's game, the dialogue in Heaven is truly a dialogue, where each party is able to exchange questions and information in an unfettered manner.

While angels and God can converse freely in Heaven, no one ever forgets that God is owed every allegiance, and the Son always gives that allegiance and gratitude freely. However, this is not the case with Satan. Satan, at every opportunity, takes glory for himself and denies God any credit whatsoever. He argues openly with Abdiel that they are “self-begot, self-raised / By our own quick'ning power” (5.860-861); that is, he doubts that either God or the Son had any hand in creating the angels, and that they simply came into being, for they “know no time when we were not as now” (859). Satan also seems to think that, though God placed him in Hell, He has no control over what happens down there and is helpless before Satan's evil. Satan claims that “to do aught good never will be our task, / But ever to do ill our sole delight” (1.159-160), and Satan is arrogant enough to think that an omnipotent deity will be powerless before such a
declaration. It is due to Satan’s own narcissism that he feels this way—his own self-love cannot permit owing anything to anyone, including his creator. He has such faith in his own greatness that he, despite all evidence to the contrary, actually believes that he will be able to thwart God’s will. As Milton repeatedly proves, Satan is only concerned with himself and his own glory.

The Son, however, is not concerned with personal glory. Even though he does some of the more impressive actions in the poem, he always turns to God and gives Him credit, as he knows that without God, he would be nothing. In the final confrontation in Heaven, the Son joins the battle in his chariot, but even though he delivers the coup de grace, he does not seem to be interested in using this opportunity for personal glory the way Satan would. Rather the Son says to the faithful angels:

[S]tand only, and behold

God's indignation on these godless poured
By me; not you, but me, they have despised,
Yet envied; against me is all their rage,
Because the Father, to whom in Heaven s'preme
Kingdom, and power, and glory appertains,
Hath honoured me, according to his will.
Therefore to me their doom he hath assigned;
That they may have their wish, to try with me
In battle which the stronger proves; they all,
Or I alone against them; since by strength
They measure all. (6.810-821)

The Son seems almost apologetic to the angels, saying that this entire war is due to jealousy directed at him. Thus, he is to be the one to end the battle—and notably, this is not because he has decided it, but because God has willed it. Even though the Son can match Satan and his legions in strength, he takes no joy in doing it. This battle is simply because “by strength / They measure all.” And, of course, the Son says that the power and strength come not from him, but God. Finally, the Son knows that he lives only through God's will—“Thou has given me to possess / Life in myself for ever, by thee I live” (3.243-244). This is a far cry from Satan's “self-begot, self-raised” claim, and it is a perfect illustration of how differently Satan and the Son approach glory.

An obvious theme throughout all this is humility. Satan is not a humble angel. When he takes on his serpent disguise, he laments about what depths he is sinking to: “O foul descent! That I who erst contended / With Gods to sit the highest, am now constrained / Into beast, and mixed with bestial slime” (9.163-165). Interestingly, even though it is Satan's decision to take on a disguise to meet Eve, he still has to complain about how low it is. Additionally, he flatters himself by saying that he actually was a contender to sit highest in Heaven when that was never the case. This is in direct contrast with the Son, who accepts not only descending into flesh, but also death without batting an eye. “Behold me then,” he says, “me for him, life for life / I offer, on me let thine anger fall; / Account me man; I for his sake will leave / Thy bosom, and this glory next to thee / Freely put off, and for him lastly die / Well pleased” (3.236-240). The Son gives up far more here—he gives up his place next to God, his glory, and his immortality, and he
does so without complaint. God rewards such a faithful decision: “Nor shalt thou by
descending to assume / Man's nature, lessen or degrade thine own / … Love hath
abounded more than glory abounds, / Therefore thy humiliation shall exalt / With thee thy
manhood also” (303-304, 312-314). Since the Son is moved to do this by love, he is
rewarded; on the other hand, Satan, whose every action is rooted in hatred and pride, is
completely degraded and transformed into a hissing snake, deprived of even the ability to
speak. Satan's pride brings him ever lower, while the Son's humility only brings him
exaltation.

The greatest parallel between the two, however, is the sacrifice, for it illustrates
the fundamental difference between them—love and hate. Satan's sacrifice—to take the
dangerous journey across chaos and find God's newest creation—is staged from the
beginning. It is the product of Satan's vie for superiority over all of the other angels and
cements his position as leader. In his acceptance speech, Satan picks up the theatrics
where Beelzebub left off, describing all of the horrors that he will have to face and telling
the angels “with reason hath deep silence and demur / Seized us” (2.431). Satan does this
not only to promote his own glory, but also to make certain that every member of his
army knows that he cannot be challenged. However, more importantly, his sacrifice is
intended to destroy an entire creation. Satan calls it a “deliverance” (465), but as he says
when he beholds Eve, “What hither brought us, hate, not love” (9.475). There is no
thought of peace or kindness—Satan has come to Paradise to destroy all pleasure (477),
and his entire motivation is based on envy and a desire for the destruction of all good.
Milton must have known what a powerful comparison he was creating when he placed these two sacrifices almost side by side. In the very next Book, the Son makes a sacrifice of his own—and for reasons not the least bit sinister. After the Son offers to die to redeem mankind, his countenance “breathed immortal love / To mortal men, above which only shone / Filial obedience: as a sacrifice / Glad to be offered” (3.267-270). His sacrifice is motivated purely by love, not hatred or envy; his love for mankind is so great that it is second only to his love of the Father. Additionally, the Son's speech does not call attention to himself and his noble act. Unlike Satan, the Son shuns theatrics, trusting in God's goodness and judgment. As the Son finishes

    his meek aspect

    Silent yet spake, and breathed immortal love

    To mortal men, above which only shown

    Filial obedience: as a sacrifice

    Glad to be offered, he attends the will

    Of his great Father. (266-271)

Despite his sinister motives, many readers still find Satan's flamboyant language far more appealing than the bland and sober language of Heaven. Did Milton's inspiration fail—as many critics assert—when he came to write speeches for God and the Son? The next chapter will address this question.
Chapter 4

“THY WORDS / ATTENTIVE … / I HAVE HEARD”: THE LANGUAGE OF THE INFERNAL AND DIVINE

We have explored the arguments and characters of Heaven and Hell, but it is still necessary to examine the different characteristics of the language that each side uses. Satan's language is seductive and subtly corrupting, and in this chapter, we will examine the words that Milton carefully chooses for Satan in order to further the argument of the poem. Satan's language cannot be explored on its own, though, for the language of God is not only easily misunderstood but also provides a neat counterpart to the language of Hell. Critics from nearly all time periods have misunderstood God's language; Lewalski notes that Joseph Addison calls God's language "simply dull, a school divine delivering long sermons" ("Rhetoric" Lewalski 110), and Thomas Merrill says that the language of Heaven is “pettish [and] self-serving” (37). Even those critics who profess to be on God's side tend to underrate Heaven's language. This chapter will first explore the deliberate lies Satan tells in order to mask his true intentions as well as the dark despair that permeates nearly everything he says. We will then examine how some critics argue that God's language is not as appealing as Satan's, but despite their somewhat flimsy defense of God, our reading will reveal that God displays the same passion that so many people praise in Satan, without Satan's rhetorical malevolence.

“But all was false and hollow”

Satan does not always rely on bombastic speeches to sway people to his side. Many times he relies on duplicity, and if one pays close attention to Satan's speeches, it becomes obvious how Satan twists definitions or tells outright lies in order to deceive his
audience, for as Peter Berek reminds us, the fallen angels' “use of artful rhetoric to create the appearance rather than the reality of logical argument recurs again and again” (240) in Hellish speeches, and nowhere are Satan's lies more damaging than when he discusses knowledge with Eve. Readers must remember the admonition that Raphael gives Adam in Book VII; he will answer Adam's questions “within bounds; beyond abstain / To ask” (7.120-121). Raphael refers to knowledge as a food, saying that mankind “needs no less / Her temperance over appetite” (126-127). Satan, however, corrupts the idea of knowledge before he even gets to Eve. Instead of Raphael's idea of knowledge that is only beneficial, or even desirable, to a certain point, Satan argues that knowledge should be sought after without exception and is in fact a road to power. After all, it is not just God's thunder that defeats Satan, it is God supposedly keeping the knowledge of his unconquerable power to Himself. Satan tries to explain that the fallen angels' knowledge of God's power and their own will guide their path now, saying “henceforth his might we know, and know our own / So as not either to provoke, or dread / New war” (1.643-645). Satan concludes with the thought that “who overcomes / By force, hath overcome but half his foe” (649-650). With this, he is arguing that God might be more powerful through physical strength, but through the fallen angels' new knowledge, they can combat God through “fraud or guile” (646).

Knowledge, Satan argues, should be relentlessly sought, and in Book IV he tries to turn an appropriately modest thirst for knowledge into something instead based on envy:

[K]nowledge forbidd'n
Suspicious, reasonless. Why should their Lord
Envy them that? Can it be sin to know?
Can it be death? And do they only stand
By ignorance? Is that their happy state,
The proof of their obedience and their faith? (4.515-520)

Since Satan is motivated by envy, he projects his reality on everyone else, including God, and assumes that all share the same motivations. He characterizes God as a power hungry tyrant, eager to keep those under Him ignorant because Satan is exactly that type of ruler. While telling Eve that she should rise above her current state, he attributes God's guarding of the tree to an envious hoarding of power. Satan asks Eve why God would forbid the tree, if not “but to keep ye low and ignorant, / His worshippers; he knows that in the day … / Ye shall be as gods” (9.704-705, 708). He ignores the purpose of monarchy in God's kingdom, and in his eagerness to prove God as a “suspicious, reasonless” tyrant, he conveniently forgets what he said earlier: that Heaven's love is “dealt equally to all” (4.68). There is no basis for Satan's accusations, then, except his own desire to seduce Eve. Interestingly, he does light upon the same argument that Heaven uses to call man's fall a fortunate one; however, Satan twists that argument as well, using Adam and Eve's ignorance as a reason to tempt them into eating the fruit of Knowledge, asking Eve “What can your knowledge hurt him, or this tree / Impart against his will if all be his? / Or is it envy, and can envy dwell / In Heav'nly breasts” (9.727-730)? And later on, with seeming reason, he points out that such knowledge will “lead / To happier life, knowledge of good and evil” (696-697). That is, since knowledge comes
from God, the acquisition of more knowledge cannot be hurtful and may even be praiseworthy. Knowing what good and evil is can only increase their happiness because then Adam and Eve will both be able to see with the clarity of the gods, and if death should come, it would only be “putting off / Human, to put on gods” (713-714). Here, of course, Satan is blatantly lying to Eve. But more importantly, he convinces her that this power is rightfully hers to take immediately, which completely contradicts Raphael when he says that Adam and Eve “may at last turn all to Spirit, / Improved by tract of time” (5.497-498). Eve, notably, takes the fruit because she thinks the serpent is good, but after tasting the fruit, she turns knowledge, like Satan, into a means of power saying that the fruit will “render [her] more equal, and perhaps, / A thing not undesirable, sometime / Superior; for inferior who is free” (824-825). Earlier in the poem, she prefers to gain knowledge through Adam and is comfortable with her relation to him (in Book IV, Eve tells Adam that “God is thy law, thou mine: to know no more / Is woman's happiest knowledge and her praise” [4.637-638]). But now she begins to speak of envy and a desire to surpass Adam in power. In doing so, she sounds very much like Satan, and she is also beginning to behave like Satan. Instead of using knowledge sparingly in order to be as close as one is supposed to be to God, Eve uses knowledge to separate herself further from God, even going so far as to call God the “great Forbidder” (9.815), echoing Satan when he calls God the “Threat'ner” (687) in the same book.

Eve changes her language when she starts to take on a few Satanic characteristics after her Fall, and indeed the language of Hell has a certain desperate taint to it. Often the sense of hopelessness in Satan's language betrays his true feelings—perhaps the tone of
Infernal language is so bleak and depressing because Satan knows that there is no hope for him, and with every lie he tells he is only damming himself more. The speeches in Hell as the fallen angels decide their next course of action are riddled with hopelessness. Belial argues that it is better to die, “swallowed up and lost / In the wide womb of uncreated Night, / Devoid of sense and motion” (2.149-151), but that even death might not be granted to them. Moloch makes the most desperate of the speeches, saying “what can be worse / Than to dwell here, driv’n out from bliss, condemned / In this abhorred deep to utter woe” (85-87). However, it is Satan in Book IV who truly captures what sort of bleak language the damned must now use:

Me miserable! which way shall I fly
Infinite wrath, and infinite despair?
Which way I fly is Hell; myself am Hell;
And, in the lowest deep, a lower deep
Still threatening to devour me opens wide,
To which the Hell I suffer seems a Heaven. (4.73-78)

Hell is not a physical place, after all. Satan carries his torments with him, and even as he hopes to escape the clutches of Hell and stake his claim to the new world that God created, he realizes that no matter where he goes, his punishment will go with him—an albatross that hangs about his neck. Satan knows that even if he were to repent there would be no relief, for his repentance would not be sincere. Therefore, he ends his soliloquy in Book IV with these lines: “So farewell hope, and with hope farewell fear, / Farewell remorse: all good to me is lost; / Evil be thou my good” (108-110). One might
say that, even more than lies and corruption, despair defines the language of Hell. Whenever any of the fallen angels speak, they do so with desperation, whether resigned, as in Satan's last words in his soliloquy, or frantic, like Moloch's in Book II. This desperation and hopelessness is physically manifested in Book X, when Satan and the others are turned into serpents. God creates a grove of trees like the forbidden one in Paradise, and the angels turned serpents all crowd about to devour the fruit, “parched with scalding thirst and hunger fierce” (10.556), but

instead of fruit

Chewed bitter ashes …

oft they assayed,

Hunger and thirst constraining; drugged as oft,

With hatefullest disrelish writhed their jaws,

With soot and cinders filled; so oft they fell

Into the same illusion. (565-566, 567-571)

With this, Milton creates a very visual scene to depict the despair that the angels feel—they are consumed by the desire for their former seat in Heaven, but every time they pursue it, they are met only with bitterness and failure. Each attempt is distasteful, even disgusting, to them, but they employ their corrupt language and selfish plans with the single-mindedness of someone possessed.

“Words with grace divine”

The language of Heaven, however, is not as easily categorized as the language of Hell. Irene Samuel reminds us that “we have to bear in mind from the first that we could
predict nothing of Milton's God and Heaven by simply inverting his Satan and Hell, though we are expected to learn much by observing their differences” (602). Thus, no simple comparison of Satan's and God's language will reveal Milton's purpose in the poem. Samuel goes on to say that God's speeches have “offended readers because they assume that the 'I' who speaks is or should be a person like other persons” (603). Indeed there are moments in which God appears to be toneless, but these sections are often given too much significance by both sides of the debate. When we explore the most important aspects of divine language—an emphasis on clarity and a surprising amount of passion and feeling—we can see that, regardless of what the critics say, Milton knows exactly what he is doing.

For God, clarity in His proclamations is crucial, and one important way that He achieves this clarity is through repetition. God is not the conniving creator that Satan makes Him out to be. In fact, one of God's chief responsibilities is ensuring that His creations understand exactly what He is asking of them. In examining some of the more importance instances of repetition in God's speeches it becomes clear why Milton chose to have God repeat those words. Most examples of repetition can be found in Book III, when God is stating His case before the Son and the rest of the Heavenly host; due to his audience, He uses repetition in this speech in order to ensure that there is no ambiguity in what He wishes man to do. One of the concepts that He begins with is the contrast between standing and falling. God argues:

Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall.

Such I created all th' ethereal Powers
And Spirits, both them who stood and them who failed;
Freely they stood who stood, and fell who fell. (3.99-102)

It is obvious in this short passage that Milton deliberately chose to repeat the words “stood” and fell” because it is important for God to outline exactly what He means by obeying and disobeying His will. Interestingly, God uses “failed” in the penultimate line where He could easily say “fell,” but this is deliberate. It illustrates exactly what God means by fell—there can be no false interpretation here. God says that there are two choices: “they stood who stood, and fell who fell.” But, He ensures that His audience knows that those who fell are the ones who failed. By not saying “fell” in the penultimate line, He is strictly defining what “fell” means to Him.

God does this again with the important concept of foreknowledge. As outlined in a previous chapter, understanding foreknowledge is crucial to Milton's poem; as such, God ensures that He is conveying precise meaning to his audience when he says:

Or high foreknowledge; they themselves decreed
Their own revolt, not I: if I foreknew,
Foreknowledge had no influence on their fault,
Which had no less proved certain unforeknown. (116-119)

In each line, foreknowledge is repeated, so readers can be certain that God wants them to understand something critical here. God is separating action from foreknowledge—only one instance of foreknowledge is a verb, and it is a conditional one: “if I foreknew.” Foreknowledge, God argues, is a passive power; it does not give God the ability to control the outcome of His people's actions. The most active line in this small selection is
the latter half of the first one: “they themselves decreed.” It makes God's creations the active agents in this poem; God Himself is a passive observer. God makes a similar claim a little further on in the poem, concerning the idea of fate. He says:

I else must change

Their nature, and revoke the high decree

Unchangeable, eternal, which ordained

Their freedom; they themselves ordained their Fall. (125-128)

In these lines, God has orchestrated one action: the original declaration of free will. The effect of repeating “ordained” here is to drive home the point that God's only action was to set up the 'rules'; all actions henceforth are made by His creations. This is not to say that the Fall was always “unchangeable” but that Adam and Eve's decisions are. Once they have chosen to Fall, God cannot alter it. Adam and Eve's actions are as unchangeable as God's own. Thus, Adam and Eve have ordained their own action, and as a consequence of free will, God cannot intervene.

If readers begin to think that this type of language is not quite as colorful as Satan's, they would be correct. As with many politicians, Satan often speaks to emotions rather than reason in order to persuade his followers to accept his plan of action. God, on the other hand, has no need for persuasion during his proclamations. Samuel explains it well:

The flat statement of fact, past, present, and future, the calm analysis and judgment of deeds and principles—these naturally strike the ear that has heard Satan's ringing utterance as cold and impersonal. They should. For the omniscient
voice of the omnipotent moral law speaks simply what is. Here is no orator using rhetoric to persuade, but the nature of things expounding itself in order to present fact and principle unadorned. (603)

Yet, even Samuel in her efforts to defend God places an unfair emphasis on the sections in which God is speaking about the nature of things. God is stating unquestionable truth, yet His “calm analysis” is not without emotion. Thus, even though Satan is arguably the more charismatic speaker, Samuel is wrong in saying that God's language is completely “cold and impersonal.” While God is foretelling the Fall, His personality is especially apparent in these 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. (3.95-99)

Here is not a distant God who is making a “cold and impersonal” proclamation but rather a God who expresses the frustration that a father feels with a child who, despite his attempt to give the child everything he needs to be “just and right”, has still chosen the wrong path. God has given mankind everything that He could; thus, the fault lies with mankind, not God, but that does not stop God from feeling displeasure. Samuel goes on to say that “the compassion, love, and grace we are asked to observe in the Son are emphatically equated with the substantial expression of the invisible Godhead: the Son's compassionate tone is made possible by the passionless logic of the Father” (603). Here,
Samuel is arguing that God and the Son are dependent on each other—the Son would not seem as compassionate without the distant coldness of God. However, this could not be further from the truth. Not only does God display emotion during the so-called passionless proclamations, but later on He also expresses a touching affection toward his creations. Consider God's words after the Son has asked Him to further explain His reasoning behind condemning mankind:

O Son, in whom my soul hath chief delight,

Son of my bosom, Son who art alone

My Word, my wisdom and effectual might,

All hast thou spoken as my thoughts are. (168-171)

God could simply say the last line and be done with it. The praise and affection He gives the Son beforehand demonstrate the love He feels for His first creation. And it is not only the Son that God loves, but all his works: “Well thou know'st how dear / To me are all my works, nor man the least / Though last created” (276-278). Again, if God were all cold logic, these statements would be entirely unnecessary. He is also concerned about His angels' feelings, for in Book X, he comforts the angels returning from Earth, where Adam and Eve have recently fallen: “be not dismayed, / Nor troubled at these tidings from the earth, / Which your sincerest care could not prevent” (10.35-37). Later on, God wants to ensure that Adam and Eve themselves are not filled with despair at being removed from Paradise, and he tells Michael to “dismiss them not disconsolate; reveal / To Adam what shall come in future days, / … So send them forth, though sorrowing, yet in peace” (11.113-114, 117). All of these lines serve to demonstrate one of the core
aspects of Heavenly language: love and compassion. These characteristics, more than anything else, separate the language of Heaven from Hell. The despair that permeates everything that the denizens of Hell say is a stark contrast to the compassion that is constantly at work in Heaven.

“Nor are thy lips ungraceful, sire of men”

It seems fairly obvious which type of language Milton wants his readers to prefer, but just to make things a bit easier, he also offers some excellent examples of Adam and Eve using both Heavenly and Infernal language. The more dynamic scenes in which they use these two types of language are before and after the Fall, and, in these scenes what the pair chiefly adopt from Hell and Heaven are the feelings of compassionate humility and despair. Significantly, Milton writes of Adam and Eve “talking hand in hand” (4.689), and it is their unity that defines their prelapsarian speech. When praising God, Adam and Eve speak of “mutual help / And mutual love” (427-428), and like the Son, they attribute all goodness to God. Eve says of God that “we to him indeed all praises owe, / And daily thanks” (444-445). Not only are the pair dutifully obedient to God, Eve is also appropriately dutiful to her husband. Eve often demonstrates “meek surrender” and “submissive charms” (494, 497), and she addresses Adam as “O thou for whom / And from whom I was formed flesh of thy flesh, / And without whom am to no end, my guide / And head” (440-443). Significantly, what separates Adam and Eve's discourse here from the orchestrated lies of Satan is its spontaneity. In Book V, their prayers are described as “prompt eloquence” that “flowed from their lips” (5.149-150). Their
language before the Fall is a perfect reflection of the divine love and modest submission that is displayed in Heaven.

Unfortunately, that completely changes after the Fall. Instead of the loving addresses that both Adam and Eve used for each other, now Eve refers to her husband as “Adam severe” and Adam in turn calls his partner “ungrateful Eve” (9.1144, 1164). Much like Satan, they begin to blame each other—they would rather do anything than accept the blame for themselves. Eve tells Adam that “Hadst thou been firm and fixed in thy dissent, / Neither had I transgressed, nor thou with me” (1160-1161), and Adam immediately counters by saying “if evil thence ensue, / She first his weak indulgence will accuse” (1185-1186); that is, he is saying that Eve is taking the first opportunity to blame him, yet neither sees that they share the blame. Milton closes the Book with the lines: “Thus they in mutual accusation spent / The fruitless hours, but neither self-condemning, / And of their vain contest appeared no end” (1187-1189), which perfectly illustrates their sundered relationship—no longer are they hand in hand. Heaven is characterized by unity—the Son and the faithful angels are all in perfect alignment with God. Hell, on the other hand, is marred by falsehood, suspicion, and of course despair.

Some of the most heart-wrenching scenes in the poem are the laments of Adam and Eve after the Fall. Adam, especially, is filled with despair after the Son has passed judgment on them both. He cries out, “Increase and multiply, / Now death to hear! for what can I increase / Or multiply, but curses on my head” (10.730-732). He begs for death, much as Moloch does in the beginning of the poem, “O welcome hour whenever! why delays / His hand to execute what his decree / Fixed on this day? why do I overlive, /
Why am I mocked with death, and lengthened out / To deathless pain” (771-775)? In one of his darkest hours, Adam contemplates suicide, and like Satan on the burning lake, “outstretched he lay, on the cold ground” (851). The most apt comparison are Adam's final lines in this scene: “O conscience, into what abyss of fears / And horrors hast thou driv'n me; out of which / I find no way, from deep to deeper plunged” (842-844). Milton is nearly directly referencing the famous lines uttered by Satan in his soliloquy: “Which way I fly is Hell; myself am Hell; / And in the lowest deep a lower deep / Still threat'ning to devour me opens wide, / To which the Hell I suffer seems a Heav'n” (4.75-78). The despair that Adam feels after the Fall is exactly like the hopelessness that plagues Satan wherever he goes, for he carries his Hell within him, much as Adam now does.

It is at this moment of Adam's greatest need that Eve reintroduces the language of the divine. As the chief characteristic of God's language is compassion and forgiveness, it is fitting that she offers to take all punishment upon herself:

Both have sinned, but thou
Against God only, I against God and thee,
And to the place of judgement will return,
There with my cries importune Heaven, that all
The sentence from thy head removed may light
On me, sole cause to thee of all this woe,
Me me only just object of his ire. (10.930-936).

Eve takes the blame on herself and acts out of love for Adam, and even though she still displays some elements of despair, the simple fact that she is thinking of someone other
than herself proves that she is ready to repent. By offering to accept Adam's punishment as well as her own, she is performing a Christ-like act. Adam takes up her idea of repentance, but suggests that they repent together, saying:

What better can we do, than to the place
Repairing where he judged us, prostrate fall
Before him reverent; and there confess
Humbly our faults, and pardon beg; with tears
Watering the ground, and with our sighs the air
Frequenting, sent from hearts contrite, in sign
Of sorrow unfeigned, and humiliation meek. (1087-1092)

With these additional examples, it is clear that love and compassion are worthy of readers' admiration, as Milton intended. While we are undoubtedly impressed by Satan's language initially—its ornate engagement is without parallel—the despair that saturates each word makes Milton's “fit audience” yearn for the more compassionate language of the divine, and Eve and Adam, in their humble begging for forgiveness, illustrate to us what it is for humans to use this language. And, knowing this, we can understand Milton's intentions with his portrayal of God. It is not easy to understand His motivation, but as we can see, God's compassionate language is a perfect complement to His simple proclamations, and infinitely preferable to Satan's language of despair and lies.
Chapter 5

CONCLUSION

Milton opens his poem by begging his Heavenly Muse for the inspiration needed to write his epic:

what in me is dark

Illumine, what is low raise and support;

That to the heighth of this great argument

I may assert Eternal Providence,

And justify the ways of God to men. (1.22-26)

It is interesting that, so many years after Milton wrote these lines, readers are still debating whether or not Milton was successful in his attempt. There are many reasons why Milton's genius may be misunderstood; for modern readers, time may be the greatest obstacle, as our understanding of free will has changed drastically since Milton's time. However, what seems to be the greatest detriment to comprehending Milton's poem is simply that, as readers, we are too easily swayed by Satan's seductive rhetoric. I think that this says more about us as readers than it does about Milton as an author. We are drawn to the anti-hero, the rebel who shakes his fist at the sky. C.S. Lewis writes that “to project ourselves into a wicked character, we have only to stop doing something, and something that we are already tired of doing; to project ourselves into a good one we have to do what we cannot and become what we are not” (101), which is why I think readers fall so easily for Satan's charisma. He represents the person that, in moments of despair or anger, we would want to be: the one who rejects law and order and strikes out
on his own, regardless of the consequences. We tire of doing the right, responsible or noble thing. However, at the same time, Milton also allows us to see how this type of character fails. We understand his faults, and how his ambition will always thwart him. And, more important, we see how the Son, with his love and compassion, is maybe not who we are, but who we would ultimately desire to be. Thus, Milton did not fail to justify the ways of God to man; rather, as imperfect readers, we are embracing his argument as well as our fallen state will allow us.
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