

# John Milton: A Revolutionary Poet

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Please Silence Cell Phones

# Biography 1608-1674

- Cambridge: Classics
- Became a Puritan: opposed Catholics as well as Stuarts
- Latin Secretary to the Commonwealth Government & Protectorate
- Imprisoned during Restoration
- Published *Paradise Lost* 1667



# Classical Epic and Christian Epic

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

# Tradition of Christian Epic

- Romance Epic: Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*—  
Mad Orlando; imaginary Christian and Muslim Knights
- Historical: Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata*—  
Jerusalem Delivered; First Crusade
- Christian Allegory: Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene*; Allegory for Christian Virtues and Queen Elizabeth
- Choosing an Explicitly Biblical topic was risky

# Thematic Overview

- Plot: Based on the Fall of Man in *Genesis*
- Satan is cast into Hell; He continues to disobey and is eternally out cast.
- Adam, though disobedient, after suffering Penance, can be redeemed
- Obedience to the Will of God is the primary value
- How to turn a Tragic Story into an Epic?
- Adam and Eve Redeemed

# Hierarchy and Grace

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

# Satan as Hero

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



# Satan as Classical Hero

“To bow and sue for Grace

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

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

# Satan Glories in Hell

“Hail horrors, hail

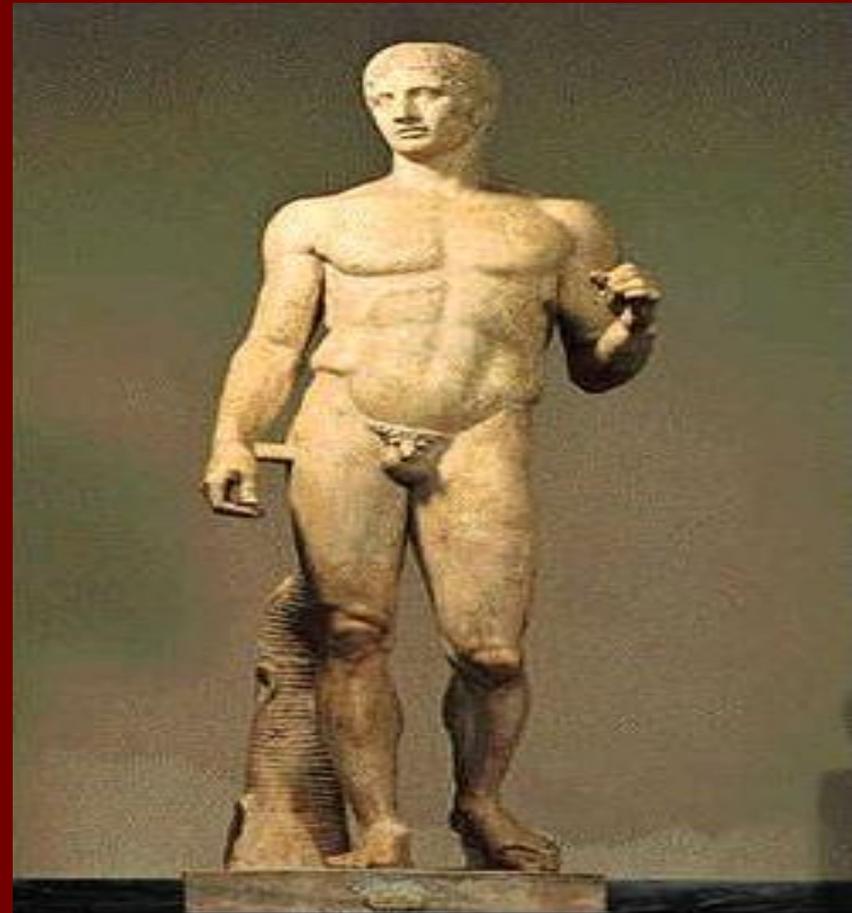
Infernal world, and thou profoundest Hell  
Receive thy new Possessor: One who brings  
A mind not to be chang'd by Place or Time.  
The mind is its own place, and in it self  
Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n...  
Here at least

We shall be free...

Here we may reign secure, and in my choyce  
To reign is worth ambition though in Hell:  
Better to reign in Hell, then serve in Heav'n.” (I.250-  
263)

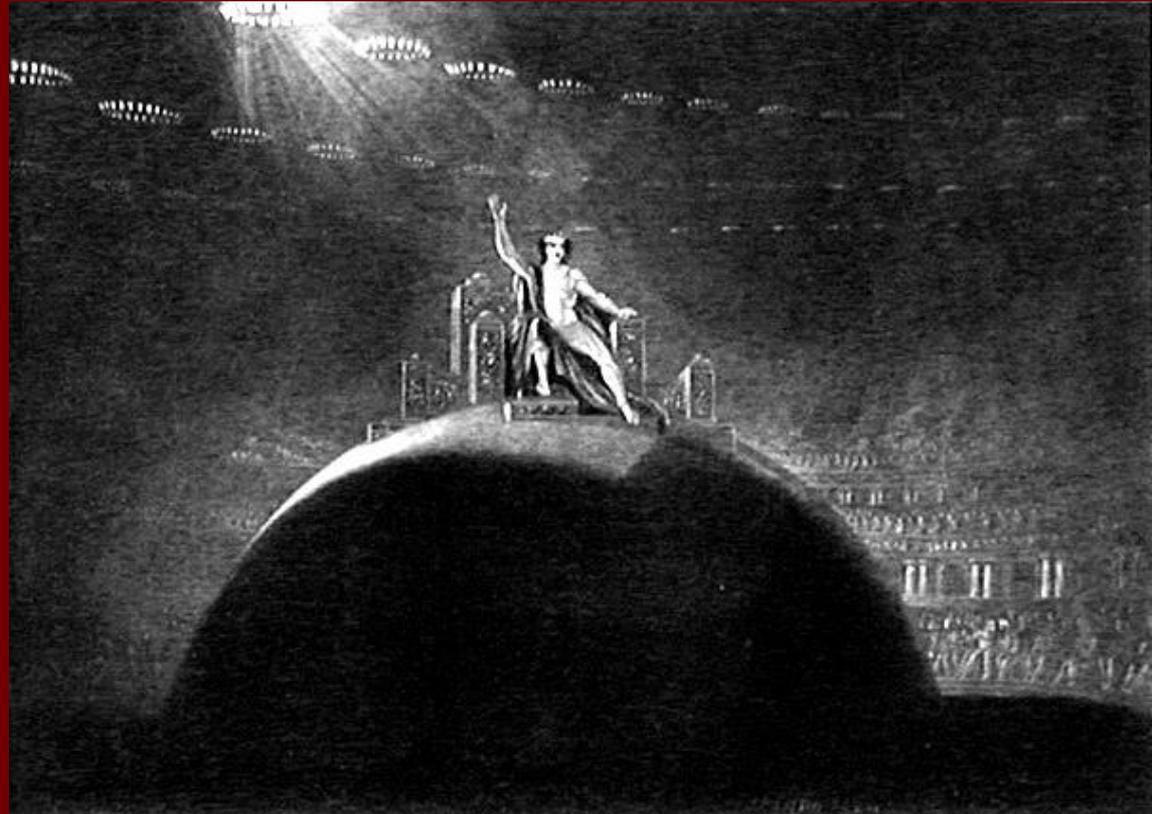
# Comments on Satan's speech

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



# The Assembly: Free Debate of Fallen Angels

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



# Resolution of Rebellion

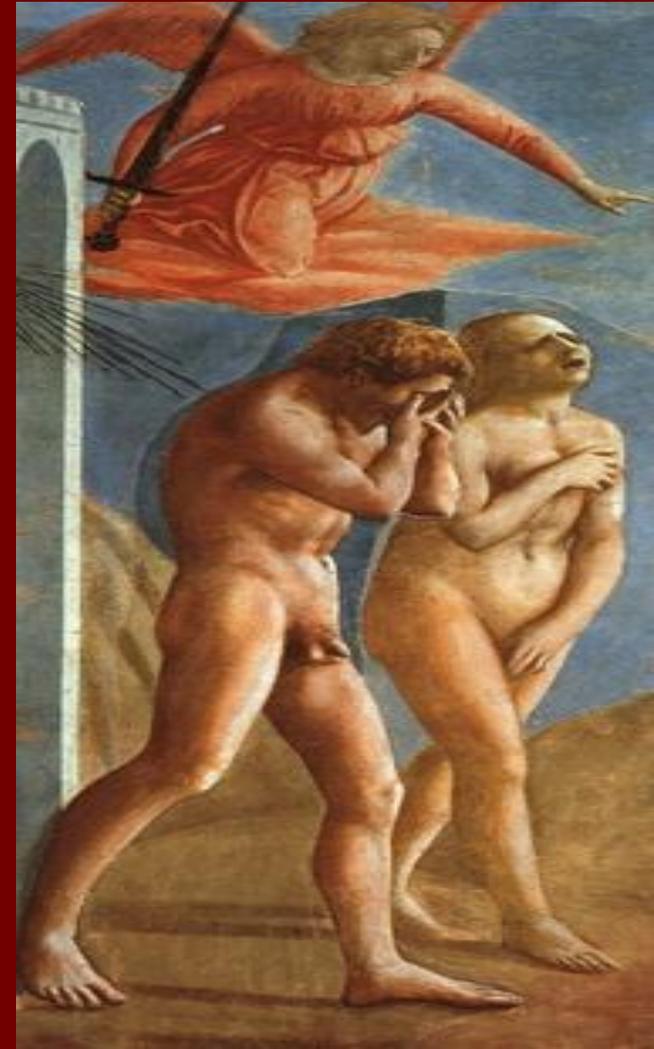
- Satan: "So farewell Hope, and with Hope farewell Fear, Farewell Remorse: all Good to me is lost; Evil be thou my Good; by thee at least Divided Empire with Heav'ns King I hold By thee, and more than half perhaps will reigne; As Man ere long, and this new World shall know."

# Gender and Paradise Lost

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

# Adam and Eve's Supplicatons

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



# Optimistic End: Epic Resolution

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

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

# Conclusions

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