

John Milton: A Revolutionary Poet

Dr. Alan Haffa

Please Silence Cell Phones

Biography 1608-1674

- Father was disinherited for Protestantism
- Cambridge, ministry
- Six years of self-study; Languages; Tour of France and Italy
- Became a Puritan: opposed Catholics as well as Stuarts
- Latin Secretary to the Commonwealth Government & Protectorate
- Blind in 1652
- Imprisoned during Restoration
- Published Paradise Lost 1667



Literary Career;

http://www.dartmouth.edu/~milton/reading_room/contents/index.shtml

- Pastoral: L'ALLEGRO, 1632; IL PENSEROSO, 1632
- LYCIDAS, 1637 (Pastoral: Virgil and Spenser)
- Sonnets: 1630-58: political, historical, & religious themes
- Political: AREOPAGITICA, 1644
- Religious Treatises supporting Puritan positions
- Epic: PARADISE LOST, 1667 ; PARADISE REGAINED, 1671

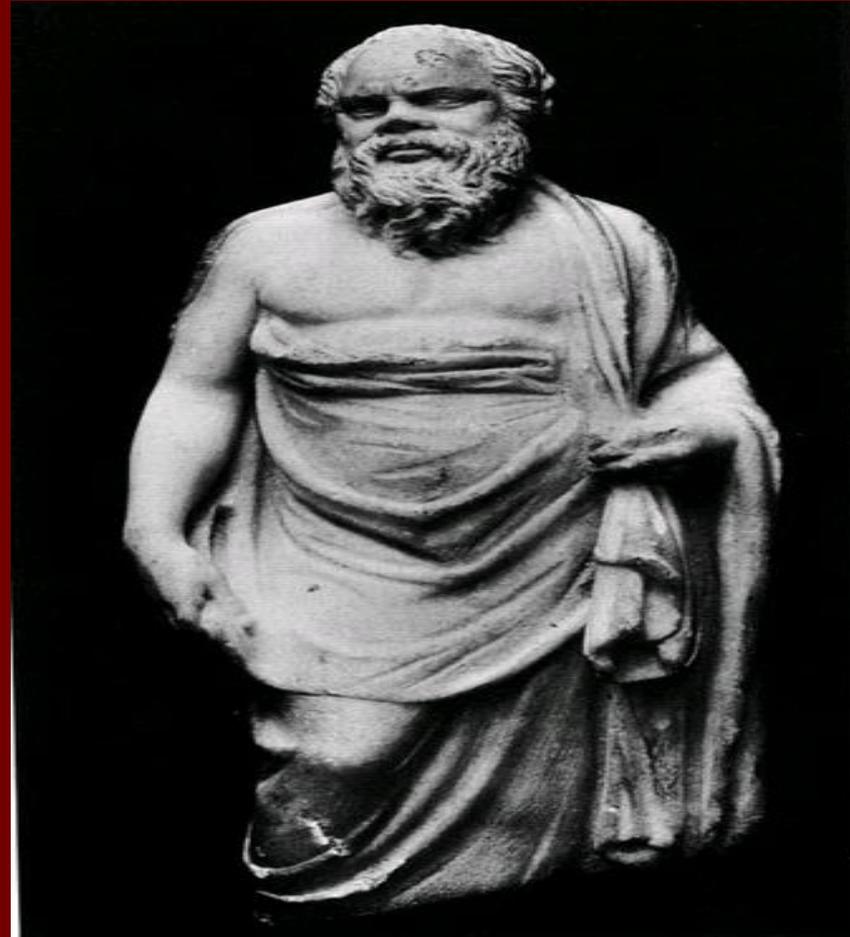
Areopagita:http://www.dartmouth.edu/~milton/reading_room/areopagitica/

- As good almost kill a man as kill a good book; who kills a man kills a reasonable creature, God's image. But he who destroys a good book, kills reason itself, kills the Image of God, as it were, in the eye.



Socrates and Books and Ideas

- For books are not absolutely dead things, but do contain a potency of life to be as active as that soul whose progeny they are...



Lycidas

http://www.dartmouth.edu/~milton/reading_room/lycidas/index.shtml

- He and Chester were like two shepherds
- Now Nature herself is sick with sorrow: "The willows, and the Hazle Copses green, shall now no more be seen... As killing as the Canker to the Rose, or Taint-worm to the weanling Herds that graze, or Frost to Flowers, that their gay wardrope wear, when first the White thorn blows; Such Lycidas, thy loss to Shepherds ear."

Fame as Spur to Poetry

- Alas! What boots it with uncessant care
To tend the homely slighted Shepherds trade,
And strictly meditate the thankless Muse,
Were it not better don as others use,
To sport with Amyrillis in the shade,
Or with the tangles of Neæra's hair?
Fame is the spur that the clear spirit doth raise
(That last infirmity of Noble mind)
To scorn delights, and live laborious dayes;
But the fair Guerdon when we hope to find,
And think to burst out into sudden blaze,
Comes the blind Furty with th' abhorred shears,
And slits the thin spun life.

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...

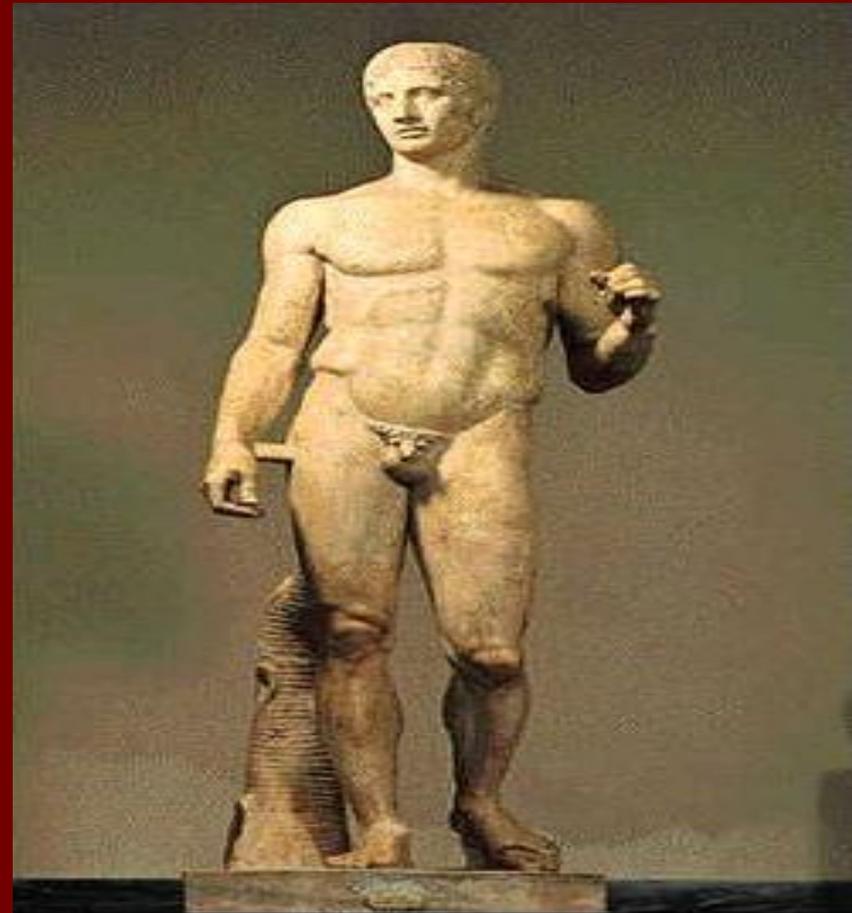
Here at least

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)

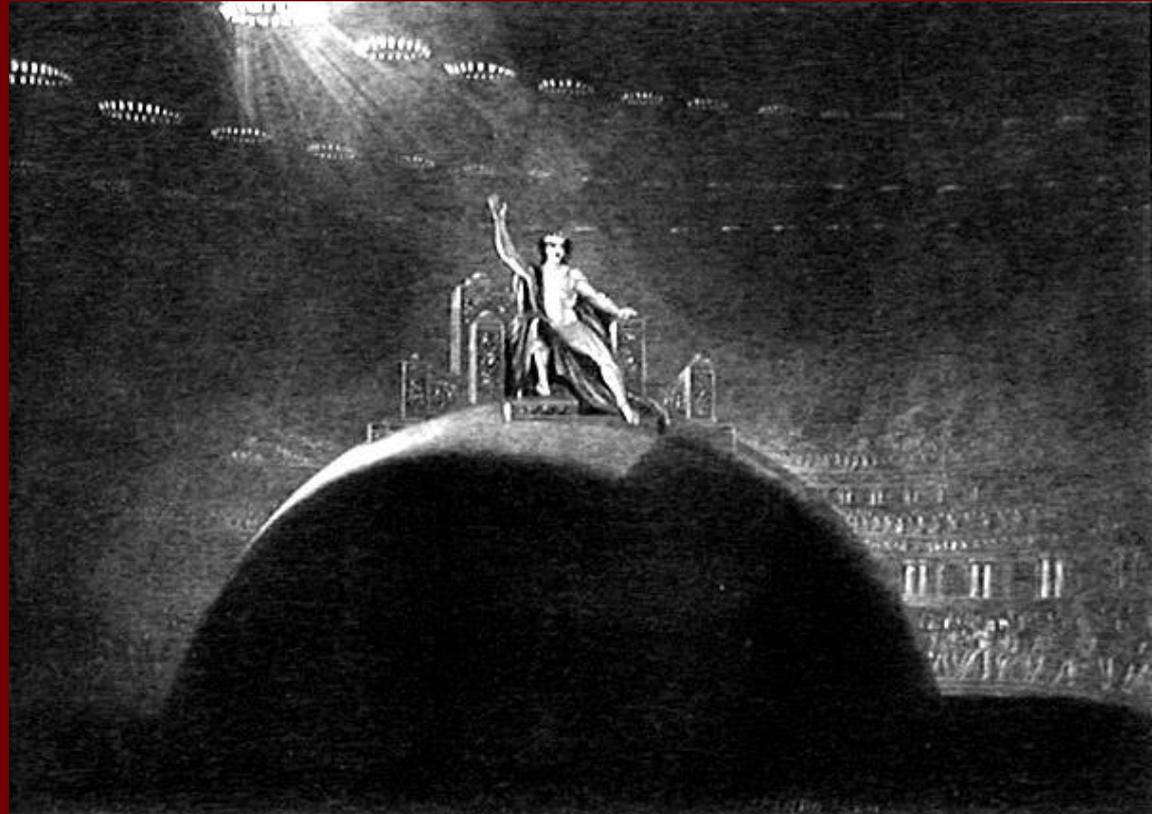
Comments on Satan's speech

- ❖ 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

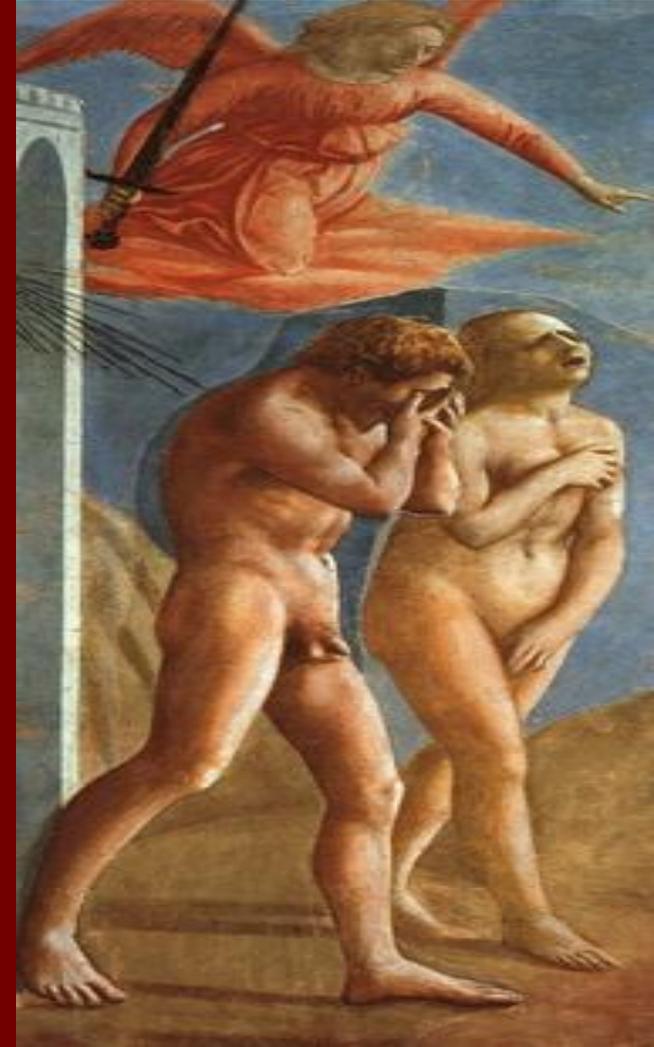
- Satan: "So farewell Hope, and with Hope farewell Fear, Farewell Remorse: all Good to me is lost; Evil be thou my Good; by thee at least Divided Empire with Heav'ns King I hold By thee, and more then half perhaps will reigne; As Man ere long, and this new World shall know."

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)

- Luke's Temptation of Jesus
- God sends Christ; Satan tempts him in the desert:
 - first, forty days of hunger and thirst
 - Intellectual Temptation: Rule Secular World
 - Spiritual Temptation: Throw himself off temple

Paradise Regained, 1671



Second Temptation: Intellectual

- And all thy heart is set on high designs,
High actions; but wherewith to be achieved?
Great acts require great means of enterprise,
Thou art unknown, unfriended, low of birth,
A carpenter thy father known, thyself
Bred up in poverty and straits at home
Lost in a desert here and hunger-bit:
Which way or from what hope dost thou aspire
To greatness? Whence authority deriv'st
What followers, what retinue canst thou gain,
Or at thy heels the dizzy multitude,
Longer than thou canst feed them on thy cost?
Money brings honour, friends, conquest, and realms
(II. 410-422).

Conclusions

- Milton was an important political and religious writer
- *Lycidas* is an ode for a dead friend but also announces his poetic ambition via Pastoral
- In *Paradise Lost*, Satan is the Classical Hero; Adam the Christian Anti-Hero
- Milton reveals a compassion for Rebels, but without endorsing Rebellion itself; Christian's must be obedient to God
- Milton's Optimism despite Fallen Man
- *Paradise Regained*: Milton's Christ rejects deceptive, worldly temptation—Puritans rejecting the temptation of secular Ambition