

MILTON, *PARADISE LOST*, AND THE QUESTION OF KINGSHIP

Jarrold Brown

John Milton, despite picturing God as an absolute monarch in heaven, was strongly opposed to human, absolutist rule on earth. Milton was in favor of what was considered to be a mostly radical democratic model of church government. Because he intensely believed that all men should be free both politically and theologically, he supported the removal of tyrants from power. For Milton specifically, this meant the removal of Charles I from his position as king of England. In addition to the freedom of men, he also valued the use of reason as a source of ultimate fulfillment of man. Tyranny, political or ecclesiastical, does not allow for this freedom to exercise human reason. Milton's democratic dispositions produced ambivalent relations with Oliver Cromwell, the leader and supposed hero of the Puritan revolution of the seventeenth century. Milton delivered congratulations to Cromwell for the man's efforts of ridding England of Charles I and his royalist supporters, but he was against his movement to amass more powers for himself rather than for the English people as a whole. Milton also was in opposition to Cromwell's suppression of religious thought contrary to his own beliefs. Essentially, Cromwell was seen as good insofar as he removed the threat of tyrannical powers that would create a tighter seal on the suppression of active thought in the country. Cromwell was seen as bad in

that he begins to replicate the tyranny of Charles I. *Paradise Lost* provides an example of Milton's own comments on monarchy and rule both in heaven and on earth after Cromwell has come and gone. In the poem, God is portrayed as a monarch, yet he is portrayed as good. Milton's Latin political tracts *Defensio pro Populo Anglicano* and *Defensio Secundo*, as well as his sonnet "To the Lord General Cromwell," each provide opportunities to understand his political and theological beliefs concerning absolute rulers during the English revolution against Charles I. *Paradise Lost* offers insight into these beliefs through the constructions and relationships of its characters. Examining the relationships between rulers in this work as well as his political writings will help to define Milton's own theological and political beliefs.

Milton's Conditional Endorsement of Cromwell

One major issue that Milton finds with Oliver Cromwell in his rise to power is that he essentially becomes something of a king, or at least has strong monarchical power in the commonwealth, and later the Protectorate, of England as he becomes the Lord Protector. In many instances, he replaces Charles I as ruler of the land, even passing on his position of power to his son. With this in mind, such a question can be raised: Does Milton really agree with Cromwell post-execution? Cromwell becomes a tyrant in a different way, but he has many of the same religious and political values as

Jarrold Brown, of Bolivar, Ohio, is a 2013 graduate of the Ashbrook Scholar Program having majored in English.

Milton. In order to begin our inquiry into Milton's view of Cromwell in the wake of Charles I's execution, I will look into the two Defenses he wrote against criticisms of the actions taken by the Parliamentary party as well as a poem which expresses his thoughts about Cromwell in 1652, a year before the man would take the title of Protector as ruler over England.

Defensio pro Populo Anglicano

Milton wrote *Defensio pro Populo Anglicano* and published it in 1651 with the commission of Parliament. At that point, Cromwell was the general of the New Model Army and leading them in his Irish and Scottish campaigns during the years of 1650 and 1651. The *Defense* was written as a rebuttal against the *Defensio Regia pro Carolo I* of Claude De Saumaise. Salmasius defended Charles I and condemned the execution of the king as regicide. In his work, he called for European rulers to unite against the English Commonwealth and place Charles II on the throne. He called the execution of the king an act "committed by a nefarious conspiracy of impious men," and believed wholeheartedly in the divine right of the king, who "has supreme power over his subjects, which is answerable to no other power except divine" (Salmasius). Milton attempts to refute the claims of Salmasius through his work in the *First Defense*. His rebuttal comes as Cromwell is gaining political power through his victories in battle.

First, a look into the specific passages referring to Cromwell is important to understand Milton's views of the man over the time of his rule. Somewhat surprisingly, Cromwell is mentioned by name only once in Milton's *First Defense*. The purpose of the work is not specifically to defend Cromwell. In fact, very little attention is given to the general. Milton shows clear respect for Cromwell, but he does not give his support without restraint:

And now I am glad to understand,
that they of your party envy Cromwell,
that most valiant general of our
army, for undertaking that expedition
in Ireland, (so acceptable to Almighty
God,) surrounded with a joyful crowd
of his friends, and prosecuted with
the well-wishes of the people, and the
prayers of all good men. (First Defense)

Milton points out that even members of his enemy's side actually envy Cromwell's military victories and his competence in battle. His success in Ireland against the royalists has brought glory to his name as he gains political power and personal respect of the people in the Commonwealth. Besides calling him a "valiant general," the praise and support Cromwell receives originates from the people who already love him or who rely on him for direction. He specifically mentions the support Cromwell has from his "friends," who already give him unwavering defense. He also highlights the "well-wishes of the people." Cromwell's military victories over the royalists have essentially won him the greater approval of the supporters of the commonwealth, those who violently disagree with loyalists to the king. Milton points out the importance of prayer for the general lifted by "all good men" to establish the divine assistance that the man must have in his leadership position. His beliefs coincide with the Protector's in that Cromwell is doing God's will and has the full support of Heaven in his pursuits. However, Milton is careful with how easily he accepts the many stories of military victories of Cromwell. His praise is subdued and referential rather than explicit. Just as later in his writings, Milton is restrained in his own praise of the man who will become the Protector of the Commonwealth. He supports the complete removal of Charles I from the kingship of England. Milton defends and backs Crom-

well as the remover of Charles I rather than simply a replacement. He does not support what Cromwell stands for politically and theologically. The *Defense* is meant to defend the English people in their decision, led by Cromwell, to execute Charles I, not as affirmation or an endorsement of Cromwell's ideals for the nation.

While Milton only mentions Cromwell's name specifically once, the work is important because it identifies what Milton believes a monarch, if even one exists, should and should not be. For example, Milton argues strongly against the formerly accepted, traditional belief in the divine right of kings. Charles I adamantly used this belief as his argument for his own right to rule the people of England, as well over Scotland and Ireland. He rejects the argument that kings deserve fealty in the way a father deserves respect from his children: "Our fathers begot us, but our kings did not, and it is we rather who created the king. It is nature which gave the people fathers, and the people who gave themselves a king; the people therefore do not exist for the king, but the king for the people" (First Defense). He uses the argument that if a father is a tyrant who murders his own son, then he is hanged for his crimes. In the same way, if the king is a tyrant who murders the people, he should also be punished. Milton points out that a child has no say in his own creation, and that he is born under the rule of his father naturally. No contract is necessary to bind him to his father. The relationship between the king and the people is different, however, because it is the people, not the king, who establish the position of power. In this way, Milton despises Charles I because he does not agree that the people give him his power. Instead of the king being responsible to the people, Charles I only saw the people as responsible to himself. Milton argues that the people had chosen to give up some of their own power to the king so that

he could rule them, but because now he abused those powers, the people maintained the right to put Charles I on trial and even execute him if found guilty.

Milton's Sonnet, "To the Lord General Cromwell"

"To the Lord General Cromwell" was written by Milton in May of 1652, a year before the man would take the position as Lord Protector over the commonwealth of England. Cromwell had recently returned from Ireland and Scotland, attempting to put to rest threats of royalism to the country. The poem is as follows:

Cromwell, our chief of men, who through a cloud,
Not of war only, but detractions rude,
Guided by faith and matchless fortitude,
To peace and truth thy glorious way hast ploughed,
And on the neck of crownèd Fortune proud
Hast reared God's trophies, and His work pursued,
While Darwen stream, with blood of Scots imbrued,
And Dunbar field, resounds thy praises loud,
And Worchester's laureate wreath: yet much remains
To conquer still; peace hath her victories
No less renowned than war: new foes arise,
Threatening to bind our souls with secular chains.
Help us to save free conscience from the paw
Of hireling wolves, whose gospel is their maw.
(Hughes 160)

Milton remains supportive of the republic even up to the restoration; *The Readie and Easie Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth* was published a few months before. In this poem, Milton honors Cromwell for his resoluteness through conflict and evil. He sees the man as guided by God through faith and praises the man's personal strength through overwhelming opposition. The poem is seemingly straightforward and expresses his feelings openly. Milton admits that the way to peace and restructuring has been difficult through the word "plough." This specific word expresses difficulty,

opposition, and hard work. It stresses the physical exertion and work required to lead such an expedition. Milton also expresses his belief that up to this point Cromwell's work has been the work of God. The man has "rear'd God's trophies, and his work pursued." Milton acknowledges the divine intervention in the struggle to overthrow the king, and this admission reveals Milton's belief that it was God's work to execute the king. Milton also speaks of much work to come in the process of protecting what is sacred. Milton specifically hoped that Cromwell would maintain his fight against royalists and supporters of the monarchy. The sacred aspects of the commonwealth, the freedom from theological, ecclesiastical, and political tyranny, needed someone to fight enemies for them. Milton saw Cromwell as the defender of an establishment that promotes the freedoms necessary to operate human reason. Subsequently his main expression is for Cromwell to help "save free conscience" from tyranny. However, the true feelings behind the sonnet are better understood with more historical context.

A deeper truth about this sonnet is revealed when context surrounding when Milton penned the words is explored. First, the sonnet was not printed or published at the time that it was written. It was dictated to an amanuensis, as Milton was officially blind by this time. A copy was found years later after it was written and was preserved. The full title given to the sonnet is "To the Lord General Cromwell, May 1652. On the proposals of certain ministers at the Committee for Propagation of the Gospel." Because it was written in 1652, the poem as a whole records Cromwell's greatest military victories of Preston, Dunbar, and Worcester during the years 1649-1651. These battles "completed the conquest over royalism in the three kingdoms" and "transformed the political situation in England" (Worden 244). Through these military victories, Cromwell was able to further

secure the establishment of the Commonwealth by subduing the most important adversaries in close proximity to England. Royalism, the enemy of the new Commonwealth, now mostly subdued presented a much reduced threat to Cromwell's move towards new government. The victories served as silencers to more vocal critics of Cromwell, and quieted more secret supporters of Charles I that remained in the country. Within these three years, Cromwell was extraordinarily busy in his military conquests. Up to that point, he had helped to establish the New Model Army and was given the position of second in command as Lieutenant-General of cavalry. The Second English Civil War began in 1648 when the King attempted to regain power through force of arms. Much of Cromwell's initial popularity and fame came from his military victories against royalist armies. These victories caused Cromwell to believe in the providential support of the trial and execution of Charles. On January 30, 1649 this idea became a reality. Cromwell was the third individual to sign the death warrant for the King. After the King's execution, the Commonwealth of England was declared, and the Rump Parliament exercised executive and legislative powers. Cromwell attempted to unite a small group of Royal Independents, but he failed in convincing them to become members of Parliament. Instead, the men fled to Ireland and signed a treaty with the Irish Confederate Catholics. Cromwell was chosen to lead a campaign against Ireland, and this lasted from 1649 to 1650. The alliance between the Royal Independents and Irish Confederates was considered to be the largest threat that the new Commonwealth faced. However, Cromwell and the Parliamentary Army swept through the countryside. He returned to England nine months later when Charles II landed in Scotland and was crowned king by the Scots. Some of the greatest battles of the war were fought in this conflict with

Scotland. Cromwell pleaded for Scotland to reconsider, but his appeals were rejected. At first the invasion of Scotland went poorly. However the Battle of Dunbar in 1650 was a serious victory for Cromwell and caused the campaign to improve. In 1651, the battle of Worcester was fought as Charles II and his allies had made an attempt to capture London. It was at this point that the last major force of Scottish Royalists was defeated. Charles II barely escaped and fled to France until 1660. Milton saw Cromwell's attempt to keep the commonwealth together and applauded his work in securing the commonwealth from royalist enemies.

While Milton seems to give overwhelming support to Cromwell in all facets of his duties as the leader of the army and in battle, the deepest sense of his admiration in the sonnet actually comes in the form of praising his work in fighting through difficulties in the religious structuring of the commonwealth. For Milton, this was the most important work that Cromwell did in his struggles as the Puritan leader of the army, and later of the nation, through his rise to the title of Protector. Freedom of conscience was what Cromwell protected most during his career and was his greatest goal both politically and theologically. Specifically, Cromwell supported the theology of the sainthood of all believers and the right to interpret scripture as an individual. He promoted church government that decentralized power from bishops and gave it to a group of elders. Though a Puritan, Cromwell was willing to compromise in matters of worship and church government with supporters of more traditional ecclesiastical structures. This compromise led to discarding a complete separation of church and state and actually promoted influence in the church by state officials that served as a sort of father figure that continued surveillance of sound doctrine over the people. Worden suggests that by

clinging to this principle of free conscience above all, Cromwell "sacrificed the possibility of doable Puritan rule" (Worden 246). While he was willing to allow diversity in both worship and church government, his toleration of different views of doctrine and faith were much more limited. He believed it was the obligation of the magistrate to protect any truths which could be held in conscience and would not put in danger the believer's salvation. Essentially, Worden believes that this stance on church doctrine and faith was a stumbling block for establishing a government that was feasible and lasting because it was too intolerant of doctrines, politically and theologically, to be successful. This strong connection between church and state reveals their importance in the affairs of both Milton and Cromwell. Cromwell strongly supported freedom in methods of worship and church structure while limiting the acceptable doctrine of the Commonwealth. Milton considered his work to be valuable to the country because it provided stability and progress towards a nation of free individuals with the opportunity to safely use reason in the process of establishing a better understanding of God and man. He valued debate of all kinds, and Cromwell made it possible to have these debates, political and theological, without fear of being injured by the king. Milton's own doctrine is quite radical compared to Cromwell's, and consequently he did not appreciate the narrowness that the Protector upheld in this area. But more important than personal doctrinal beliefs of either man, at this point in the youth of the commonwealth Milton understood how crucial it was to provide the necessary supports for the church. Milton praises Cromwell in the sonnet for his tireless efforts to actually work through the discord of ideas and opinions of men in the new commonwealth rather than to stand by idle. However, Milton sees that there is still much to do in

the effort of restructuring the religious aspects of the nation.

Though the two aspects go hand in hand, the most important aspect of Cromwell's conflict, for Milton, was in religious establishment of Puritanical beliefs and church infrastructure. During the English Civil War, there was rising political controversy on the role of bishops in the established church. On one new, challenging side, Puritans supported the idea of Presbyterianism as formulated by John Calvin. This doctrine suggested that church government be made up of councils with elders and deacons, which had a strong voice, rather than retaining the position of bishop with an enforced, and structured hierarchy of rule. Presbyterianism also rejects the doctrine of apostolic succession, the consecration of new bishops by established bishops, in addition to the rejection of the established hierarchy. The form of Presbyterianism was a sort of democracy in church government. The Puritans valued this partial democracy, which mirrored their struggles against the king. They longed to reform the established church to follow this model of democratic church government. Certainly it did model the political struggles of the time, but it dealt essentially with the concept of the priesthood of the saints, which was a core belief of the Puritans. The idea that each individual was responsible for his own salvation and had the right to read the Bible and interpret it for himself was key in the push for Presbyterianism. This very doctrine is democratic in nature, and it called for a more democratic way of establishing church government for the established Church of England. In fact, at the height of the Commonwealth Presbyterianism did become the official structure of church government, but it was removed at the point of the Restoration in 1660.

Puritan members of Parliament strongly hoped that the revolution would "Puritanise" the commonwealth. Instead, the

revolution created the equivalent of ecclesiastical and doctrinal anarchy. Milton recognized the conflict of his country. Anarchy in church doctrine was prevalent. As Worden says:

In the proliferation of sectarian heresies, most MPs saw an affront to God and a threat to the social order. After the king's execution, heresies became ever more shocking in content and more strident in presentation. So did anticlericalism. The very existence of the established ministry and of the parish system was denounced as Antichristian. The maintenance of the clergy by the levy of tithes came under attacks of mounting ferocity. So did the bond between church and state. (Worden 245)

With a much loosened established church government, the doctrinal differences between individuals, and even Puritans, became more evident. Each individual was responsible for his own understanding of scripture, and with that, no single authority had the power to establish a single dominant doctrine. This fragmentation characterized the situation that Milton found Cromwell attempting to battle. While it was the view of some rather extremist individuals to desire complete separation of church and state, Cromwell often stepped away from his most conservative followers and attempted to find common ground between radicals and conservatives. In his attempts to create harmony between two such different sides, outcomes varied. Two specific examples of his work were the establishment of legally supported, though mostly considered weak, religious toleration as well as a less "inequitable system of clerical maintenance" than tithes. Before the execution of Charles I, the Church of England was the only church supported by the government and the king. While Cromwell did not open the country to

all religion, he certainly prescribed to the idea of free conscience, his staunchest belief. Essentially, if it were not possible for unity between all Christians, then at least a unity in the freedom of conscience would be preferred. While he supported this doctrine, he was not willing to allow freedom to the extent that it infringed upon the rights of individual believers. Overall, Cromwell had an unwavering faith in the Holy Spirit's ability to bring Christians of different views together into a single body of believers. Secondly, Cromwell led the reform movement of church tithes. While Puritans wished the system of state-controlled and mandated tithes to be completely removed, most members of Parliament believed that if tithes were abolished as a system to support the clergy then another system supported by the state would be established in its place. Up to this point, officially mandated tithes had been the accepted way to support the church clergy of the Church of England. With the ideas of decentralizing power in government, as well as church government, radicals wished the tithe to be abolished and for clergy to support themselves professionally rather than by the state. While Cromwell wished for some sort of compromise, Parliament could come to no conclusion on the matter and dismissed itself. This helped pave the way for Cromwell to establish the protectorate, as stability and decision was necessary for the young commonwealth. While this anarchy that Worden speaks of came mostly in the form of more theological, doctrinal anarchy rather than political, it was certainly an important issue for Milton and certainly Cromwell as the two worked through the unrest and attempted to work with the more democratized church. With this short-lived Presbyterianism, the different beliefs and ideas of the individuals were able to be expressed more freely than ever, and clergy with both extremely conservative and radical views were able to

flourish for a handful of years without the forced doctrine of the established church. However, the overall stability of the church at this time was not strong, and the Puritans were let down in their hopes for a more Puritan Church of England.

At the same time, Milton does not completely accept Cromwell's other actions in this piece, and it can be inferred that his praise of the man is limited strictly to the acts of defeating royalism and attempting to reform the religious problems the commonwealth faced. Certainly, many threats to the newly formed Commonwealth made themselves known, and they consisted of royalists in both Ireland and Scotland as stated above. Cromwell was under attack by such Royalists for his entire rule, and eventually the Commonwealth succumbed to them at the restoration. Milton feared these individuals for the same reasons that he opposed the monarchy at the time of the execution of Charles I. Even though Cromwell crushed his enemies in battle, the threat of royalists permeated the time of his rule. Both political and religious rule caused the most strife for Cromwell, and Milton most admired the man for both his struggles to reform church hierarchy as well as to completely destroy the royalist threats. His praise is limited by these two aspects; Milton does not seem to endorse every aspect of the man. While Milton admires his strengths of leadership and military prowess, he does not completely accept all of his beliefs. Specifically, theological issues such as the amount of power a bishop should maintain in the church or the level of individual church autonomy were two on which Milton did not quite agree with Cromwell. Also, Milton did not endorse the man's advances in power through these popular victories. Two specific examples of Cromwell's work were the establishment of legally supported, though mostly considered weak, religious toleration as well as a less "inequitable system of cleri-

cal maintenance” than tithes. The language of the sonnet may suggest grandeur and excellence, but the poet restrains himself from accepting Cromwell in his entirety.

Defensio Secunda

If Milton does not completely accept Cromwell in 1652, his support remains the same by the end of 1654 when he publishes *Defensio Secunda*, the “Second Defense on the Behalf of the English People.” His first defense was published three years earlier. That work defended the act of regicide from the attacks of Salmasius, and Milton’s second defense continued the work. It was intended for both audiences of the continent as well as the English people themselves. The *Defensio Secunda*, however, received a much cooler welcome by the government than his first. Scholar Austin Woolrych calls Milton’s extended passage that gives praise to Cromwell “a tremendous panegyric.” On the other hand, however, Worden understands it in a different light and characterizes it as so:

It casts Cromwell in epic terms, lauding his military exploits, his fortitude, his fitness to govern. Milton is as awed by Cromwell, and as admiring of him, in 1654 as in 1652. But the tribute of 1654, perhaps even more so than that of 1652, carries warnings. The sonnet told Cromwell that ‘much remains’ for him to accomplish: *Defensio Secunda* urges him to ‘go on’ to further exploits. As in 1652, so in 1654, the policies Milton commends are not Cromwell’s. (Worden 252-253)

Worden suggests that Milton’s support for Cromwell’s rise in the protectorate in 1653 seems rather surprising because many of the opponents to Cromwell were Milton’s friends who had very similar ideals to the

writer and poet (Worden 253). Milton seemingly would have sided with the radical idealists in parliament who wanted a complete separation between the church and state, which Cromwell specifically had feelings against. Milton’s political friends in the Parliament, who Milton most often sided with on such issues, supported a much more radical change than the one Cromwell began to put in motion. These individuals did not care for the growing power that the Protector gathered for himself. Specifically, these friends were also against Cromwell’s ideas of church and state, and they supported a complete removal of any tithe system put in place by the government and enforced on the people.

Additionally, the situation of Milton’s reservations about Cromwell becomes more interesting as sequential historical events unfolded. “Amidst the radical excitement of 1653 the very existence of the established ministry had seemed in peril... Yet the early months of the protectorate, and the signals they provided of the moderation of the new government’s purposes, gave fresh heart to the ministry and the universities alike” (Worden 255). The new government was not willing to side with radicals in an abolition of state-supported clergy and universities. With this movement, Cromwell welcomed Presbyterians back into the fold of religious institutions in the Commonwealth. Originally a supporter of the Presbyterian theology, Milton’s doctrinal views had changed dramatically in the years leading up to Charles I’s execution. He no longer found himself a supporter of the Presbyterians and their form of church hierarchy and construction because he felt that their form of church government was not democratic enough and still reserved too much power in the position of the bishop. Milton began to support more radical ideals. Instead of more traditional ideas, he called for the complete abolishment of the episcopal form and favored a more sectarian

construction with high individual autonomy of each church. Certainly Presbyterianism was a step towards a more democratic form over episcopacy, but Milton reveals his own dread of the consequences of a return to general parliamentary elections lead by Cromwell that were dominated by Presbyterians in the later 1640s. These elections would not make decisions radical enough to satisfy Milton's longing for church autonomy. Even though he understood that the elections would not go far enough, and while he personally maintained some major theological differences from the man, Milton showed his support for Cromwell in an attempt to diffuse theological and political confusion in the commonwealth. However, it is important to note one major reason that Milton's incomplete endorsement of Cromwell was overshadowed: powerful conservative members of Parliament accepted Cromwell's role in solidifying Puritanical values. These factors point to why Milton would align himself with Cromwell in his *Defensio Secundo*. Milton sees the man as the only hope for the commonwealth to survive and succeed: "Cromwell, we are deserted; you alone remain" (*Defensio Secunda*). For Milton, he is the best and only choice for fighting the battles, physical, theological, and political, for the new commonwealth. No other man in the nation had the support and power to make decisions that would be accepted by the people and that would be profitable for England. Milton, however, had reservations. He feared that Cromwell would not go far enough in providing freedoms to the people as well as in the church. He supported spreading the power among churches rather than the government having the responsibility and power of supporting it. Milton felt that Cromwell had the dangerous opportunity to gather power for himself rather than to give it to the individuals of the commonwealth. The dangers of a single man

taking responsibility of the country were exactly what Milton fought against in both of his defenses. As Cromwell's popularity and power increased, the more dangerous he could become to the nation. In Milton's eyes, the opportunity of tyranny loomed over Cromwell's Protectorate. He urged the man to continue his struggles to establish England as a commonwealth of the people. His praise mingled with reservations at a crucial point in history where either tyranny or freedom could flourish.

Milton is not equating Satan with Cromwell in *Paradise Lost* because Satan is not a hero for Milton. There may be very close ties between the two, but the reverence that Milton shows towards the Puritan military leader rejects this idea. In his *Second Defense of the English People* Milton strongly praises the characteristics of the man who leads the Puritan cause both militarily and spiritually. He praises Cromwell's ability to lead due to his military genius as well as his spiritual austerity and power:

It is not possible for me in the narrow limits in which I circumscribe myself on this occasion to enumerate the many towns which he has taken, the many battles which he has won. The whole surface of the British empire has been the scene of his exploits and the theater of his triumphs, which alone would furnish ample materials for a history and want of copiousness of narration not inferior to the magnitude and diversity of the transactions. This alone seems to be a sufficient proof of his extraordinary and almost supernatural virtue, that by the vigor of his genius, or the excellence of his discipline, adapted not more to the necessities of war than to the precepts of Christianity, the good and the and the brave were from all quarters

attracted to his camp, not only as to the best school of military talents, but of piety and virtue; and that during the whole war and the occasional intervals of peace, amid so many vicissitudes of faction and of events, he retained and still retains the obedience of his troops, not by largesses or indulgence, but by his sole authority and the regularity of his pay. (Hughes 832-833)

To solidify Milton's trust in the man, he verbally accepts his political actions: "In this state of desolation to which we were reduced you, O Cromwell, alone remained to conduct the government, and to save the country. We all willingly yield the palm of sovereignty to your unrivalled ability and virtue" (Hughes 834).

These specific words describing the loyalty of Milton to Cromwell certainly are important to understanding their relationship before Cromwell's death, but the lack of any published works by Milton about his friend after Cromwell's death is interesting. Such absence of words is shocking in light of the complete devotion Milton shows for the man. Worden says it well when he discusses the amount of doubt that shows in Milton's writings, even in his *Defensio Secundo*:

If fears of Presbyterians and of royalists may help to explain Milton's decision to adhere to Cromwell in 1654, he may nonetheless have been troubled by Cromwell's elevation. He may have seen in it, and in the nation's acceptance of it, evidence that the reformation of the land might be long postponed. Alongside the triumphalism that characterizes the successive celebrations of the English people in Milton's writings, there runs a doubt. In 1654 as at other times he asks whether the English will be 'fit' for the tasks of

virtue with which God has entrusted them. (Milton 256)

In addressing Cromwell in this work, Milton acknowledges England's dependence on "you alone," "the only hope of your country," to whose "invincible virtue we all give place" (CM, VIII, 223-25). In this defense, Milton did not express or promote the protectorate as a lasting, or even ideal, solution to the reformation. In truth, Milton's praise never can be taken as proof for complete unqualified admiration. He had at times said that a kingship can be the best form of government as long as the leader was best and deserving to reign, but at the same time he points out that a monarchy is the easiest way for this type of ruler to become the worst kind of tyrant.

Milton's hopes in Cromwell seem to have come to an end, at least mostly, by about 1654 when the protector "forcibly expelled the commonwealthmen from parliament, declared his resolve to suppress heresies and blasphemies, and publicly scorned critics of the established ministry" (Worden, 261). Though Milton remained at his post and produced state papers at the government's command, this was not a stamp of approval or an expression of enthusiasm. The likelihood of this enthusiasm was reduced as the failures of the Protector became more visible. While Milton called for the end of press censorship, Cromwell reinforced it a year later. While Milton warned against accepting wealth and power, Cromwell embraced it. While Milton was unsympathetic to hereditary rule, Cromwell established it in the regime. The failings seen in Cromwell by Milton slowly built up over time, and while he did not take drastic action or move from his post in the state, Milton maintained these feelings until the death of the protector. Milton took a seemingly tolerant position towards Cromwell's failures and mistakes. However, upon the man's death in 1658, Milton republished

his first *Defensio*. Worden suggests that: “Passages of that work which had been aimed at Charles I would now have read as comparisons between Cromwell and the usurpers who had ended the Roman republic, or as invitations to the English to exercise their right to depose their new ruler” (Worden, 263). The dislike he voiced against Cromwell’s regime would not be terribly surprising when that same year in an address to the Long Parliament, Milton described the protectorate as a ‘scandalous night of interruption’ (Worden 263). This referred specifically to the six-year period that the Rump Parliament was dismissed forcibly by Cromwell just before the establishment of the protectorate. Cromwell had just returned to England from his great military campaign against the royalists, and Parliament could not come to a conclusive decision on the establishment of a new government. Cromwell infamously marched into Parliament with forty armed men and forced them to leave the building. Rump Parliament was not in session again for six years as the protectorate was established and Cromwell was made Lord Protector. Milton saw this period as a time when the freedoms of democratic rule were suspended by a single man. The republishing of the first *Defensio* marked the first public attack, though a subtle one, of Cromwell’s rule by Milton. It was around 1657 that Milton, who had put aside his major poetic ambitions for almost two decades, began to compose *Paradise Lost*. This is where the connection of Cromwell to Satan in the poem come closest. Both have failed in their tasks and have deceived many in the process of elevating themselves.

Analyzing the Text in Light of Historical Context Jesus Christ, the “Vicegerent Son”

Instead of looking to scripture as a literal resource to reveal how God recommends one to deal with a worldly issue, such as divorce, Milton uses a free interpretation of scripture using reason to come to his own conclusions in his writings. One of the most interesting parts of *Paradise Lost* is his construction of the Christ. Christ is the most important individual or entity of the Christian faith, so the way Milton portrays this character in his story is central to understanding both his theological and his political beliefs. In the story he has free reign to build Jesus Christ in any way he chooses, but Milton decides to portray him in a non-monarchical way that sheds light on Milton’s political views and expresses his opinions on the hierarchy of earthly kingdoms.

One of the most important passages that reveals the nature of the character of Jesus is when God the Father describes the Son in His selection of a savior for Earth:

[Thou] has been found
By merit more than birthright Son of God,
Found worthiest to be so by being good,
Far more than great or high.” (3:308-11)

Why does God present Christ as something other than a heir as a divine division of the Trinity as it is commonly understood by Christians? At this point in the poem, God is in the process of selecting the Christ, the being who will sacrifice himself to save mankind from evil and death. This presentation is already contrary to the view found in the Gospel of John because, according to that Gospel, Christ was not chosen out of a selection of created beings. Rather, He existed before time with the Father and is in fact the same being as God in a divine trinity: three in one. Instead, Milton decides to

install a “vicegerent Son,” as Annabel Patterson would describe Him, rather than having the Son inherit the title (Patterson 126). Instead of being an equal to God, or even being part of the triune God, Jesus is more of a deputy to the Ruler of Creation. For Milton, this is much more of a political decision than a theological one for his story. He chooses to establish Christ in this position in order to be certain not to present the idea that kingship on earth resembles or is sanctioned by kingship in Heaven. The only exception to this rule is God the Father, the only rightful king and ruler of all of existence. His perfect and benevolent rule is everything the rule of a single man on earth is not. He has perfect justice, extends mercy appropriately, and is the source of all wisdom. Through this contrast, Milton establishes a clear divide between the Heavenly kingdom and the earthly kingdom. He distances the two because he does not want monarchical principles of human government to appear to be approved by God in any way. Allowing this would injure his political disagreement with the past ruler. The Son’s merit comes directly from his offer to die for mankind and his natural supremacy over the other created beings. When God the Father says “merit,” this suggests a fraternal or communal organization of His creation. He seems to bring Himself closer to His created subjects by choosing one of them as His Son instead of already having a form of Himself take the role. “The angels are ‘forever happy’ to be led and united by the best created being, whom the angel Abdiel calls ‘one of our numbers’” (Patterson 127). At this point in the poem, God the Father asks the creatures of Heaven who will sacrifice himself for the good of mankind. The Son is the only one to respond, and the Father chooses to accept His bid due to His supreme excellence. The Father says the Son is the only creature who “merits” the sacrificial position. The extensive goodness of Christ is what causes him

to be selected as the sacrifice for mankind rather than any type of inheritance of title. Because he is good enough, Christ is able to be chosen by the Father. Upon examination, He fulfills the requirements of a perfect sacrifice for the decisions of mankind and is chosen above the host of other heavenly beings. The angels admit that Christ is actually one of the created beings of Heaven rather than part of the Father: “Thee next they sang of all creation first, / Begotten Son, divine similitude” (3:383-384). They accept the Christ because he is from their ranks and is chosen because he deserves the position. Instead of feeling jealous of God’s decision to perform the act of love for man Himself, the angels feel comforted that a being from their midst is chosen. For Milton, this passage is not metaphorical as it would be for adherers of the orthodox belief in the divine trinity because he saw the Christ as a separate being.

Milton’s construction of the Christ in this way has two main purposes for the poem. First, it establishes a meritocracy that loosens God’s empire and strengthens the bonds of His creatures. Secondly, God’s relinquishment of power promotes unity and happiness through His completely reasonable decision. The “merit” that Christ shows is important because it suggests that all of God’s created beings had the same opportunity to become the chosen Son of God. By offering a system that rewards merit, God is able to instill a connection between His creatures to reach higher in their stations. It encourages greatness by rewarding the great fairly. Because God the Father is loosening some of His seemingly tight control over His Heavenly empire, He is essentially increasing the freedoms of His creatures and suggesting a common bond between them as His subjects. God increases the freedom of His subjects by allowing them to flourish or fall by their own merits. The supreme example God provides is His selection of Jesus. He gives the heavenly beings the

freedom to succeed if they are good enough, but they also have the freedom to fail as evidenced by the fall of Satan and his many followers. The Christ is the ultimate example of God's gift of freedom because the creature with the most merit is raised to the highest place above other creatures. He is given the most responsibility as well, but his example reveals to all of creation the loosening of God's power. Such a gift of power shows that God does not have such a tight grip on His creation that He will not relinquish a portion of His influence. At the same time, it suggests that God is secure in His decision. If the decision seems to be uncharacteristic of a supreme being because it appears that He is giving up the rule of his most sacred and honorable place, the solidity of God's judgment secures any doubt that He is handing over power to the wrong creature. The meritocracy is bound to succeed because of God's all-knowing power to choose the right creature to serve as the fulfillment of the sacrifice necessary for the just redemption of mankind. The sameness that His creatures feel when part of the meritocracy bring them together and closer, and this strengthens the Kingdom through a strong sense of community and oneness of purpose. Instead of ruling by absolute decree in this instance, God promotes happiness through His decision to let go of some of His power in such a reasonable decision. Moderation even in God's power draws positive effects towards His people because it exalts the creation and proves the security of God's will despite loosening basic power over them.

Patterson argues that Milton's creation of God's meritocracy endorses hierarchy and degree: "What is distinctive about Milton's hierarchy, however – its individualistic, voluntaristic, and meritocratic basis – is equally what makes his concept of covenant distinctively nonbiblical or, as Milton would prefer no doubt, Gospel rather than

Old Testament" (Patterson 127). Patterson argues that the hierarchy that Milton constructs is the basis for political relationships on earth. The political relationship between God and man comes in the form of a covenant. This promise, or contract, in the Old Testament is an "external arrangement made by God according to His will, unmerited by human beings, unproposed by the human will, and tribal as often as individual" (Patterson 127). The Old Testament understanding of "covenant" is the Mosaic Law that men are held to by God. Milton breaks from this type of covenant between man and God in *Paradise Lost* to favor the New Testament covenant of Christian liberty. Christ frees man from being held to the standards of the law by fulfilling the law Himself. Instead of man agreeing to live by a certain set of rules from God, he is able to accept Christ and exercise his Christian freedom in his free will. Political relationships on earth, according to Milton, are all based on some type of covenant or promise. However, the freedoms that men exercise on earth allow for different levels of merit according to each person's strengths and weaknesses. The meritocracy in God's kingdom of the poem echoes His gift of freedom to men.

The hierarchy and degree of God's meritocracy associate themselves with the degrees of liberty Christians that are given by God. According to scripture, there are different levels of faith given to each believer, and according to their faith, their freedom as Christians is varied and measured. At the same time, this brings together the church on earth. This church is made up of voluntary Protestants who are equally saints. Milton stresses his beliefs in the priesthood of the saints in his attack on the Church of England in his essay *The Reason of Church-Government Urged against Prelaty*. This essay focuses on a Presbyterian approach to church government over an episcopal one.

In 1642 when this piece was presented to the public, Milton still supported the Presbyterian form of church government. It was not until several years later that he began to embrace more sectarian views. Over time, Milton's ecclesiastical beliefs moved towards the left as he became more frustrated with the established Church of England. Soon he believed that Presbyterianism did not go far enough in removing power from the bishops. He preferred a much more complete break from traditional ideas of church government that centered on more autonomous congregations with comparatively weak ties to a national church. Both the Presbyterian and sectarian lines of thought actually mirror Milton's God giving up some of His power for his meritocracy in *Paradise Lost*. The fact that the form of government in Heaven works suggests his trust in the Presbyterian approach to the church government of that day. Both God and this ecclesiastical view support decentralizing power from a single position and democratize it by making it available to others. The idea of church elders taking an increased role in church government correlates to the meritocracy that God institutes in *Paradise Lost* in that the elders are considered the best and strongest of the believers in the body of the church. At the time of writing the epic poem, Milton would have moved even past this form and pressed for even more democracy in church government. The most important aspect of this connection, however, is the simple fact that power is being distributed to believers other than those of the highest rank.

This ecclesiastical argument of depending more on a group of individuals rather than a single political head also relates to Milton's belief in the importance of human influence in religious life: "If religious matters were not under our control, or to some extent within our power and choice, God could not enter into covenant with us, and we could not keep it, let alone

swear to keep it" (Christian Doctrine 6:389). Milton argues that men have a sort of control over their own religious matters because that is fundamental for the definition of a covenant. If one side cannot even attempt to fulfill their obligations under the contract, then Milton believes that God could not even begin to set up a covenant between the two. Milton is completely supportive of increasing the power of the individual believer in church government, just as he argues for the importance of the individual believer in his own salvation. Individualistic tendencies are present here and in the meritocracy of God in *Paradise Lost*.

Throughout all of Milton's works, a sense of the value of the individual and his freedom is evident, and this has a major effect on how man interacts with other men in the world. Milton elevates the individual. This sort of theology certainly extends Christian freedom, but it also diminishes the power and importance of God in creation. A smaller view of God in reality actually correlates with *Paradise Lost* as God is loosening His empire in choosing Christ out of a pool of the created beings. Milton's view of God is proportionally smaller when compared to his view of the importance of the individual, which increases throughout his writings and especially in this poem. The Christian liberty that comes with the hierarchy of God's meritocracy is actually the basis, Milton believes, of political process and improvement of human communication. Always a believer in the human ability to use reason to solve problems, Milton suggests that the freedom given to believers, and all men to the extent of their free will, is an opportunity for the use of creating better social constructions that handle and remedy the problems of flawed and imperfect men. He suggests that throughout history, this freedom has provided the possibility of such upward, constantly improving movement of human

interaction that allows for and encourages better theological as well as political associations. According to Patterson, this liberty is “the element in which progressive, independent, and free civil contracts are made” (Patterson 127). The voluntary basis of the position of Christ mirrors Milton’s understanding of human contracts, both social and political. The sufficiency of Christ as the best created subject suggests that Milton sees human contracts only binding as they can be reasonably fulfilled for the reasons they were established. Christ was the best created being, and He was completely able to fulfill His obligations as part of the covenant. Milton does not see the same fulfillment of contracts by men in his own experience of the world. This applies to contracts between both men and men as well as between men and God. He understands that earthly contracts are often destined for failure because of human flaws brought on by the fall, but Milton seems to believe that the course of history offers a way for men to improve on their mistakes. He believes that history presents the opportunity for men to properly fulfill their contracts accordingly after taking a reasoned look at their past mistakes and problems. In his life, Milton sees the contract between the people and their king as one that is destined to fail. In the most basic sense, this was because Charles I was seen as a tyrant. He made a secret agreement with the Scots in 1647 and afterwards was considered to be a traitor by Parliament. After this act, he was tried and executed. After this final act of treason, Milton fully supported the execution. Milton understood that the system, or contract, within the confines of the monarchy of Charles I did not fulfill its purpose any longer. Instead of serving the people as ruler, Charles I placed his own security and agenda first. Making such a pact with the royalist Scots was in direct violation of the social contract that the people have with

their king. When the king ceases to have the interests of the people as his main priority, then he also ceases fulfilling the contract. The authority of the king on earth has no divine backing, according to Milton, because if the king does not fulfill his duties to the people, he believes that his law of rule is no longer binding to them and the people have the right to change their leader. Milton does not support the idea of divine right. Because of this, there is also no religious obligation to follow the king even when he does not have the interests of the people in mind. The people must no longer give their allegiance to the king because Milton believes that the man who abuses what he has been given no longer serves the people as initially promised. The citizens have the responsibility to end the contract and create a new one either with a new king or by establishing a completely new type of government. Their accountability to the contract between ruler and ruled is null. Similar to his views on the definition of marriage, Milton supports a reasonable agreement between men about who should rule. Milton would agree with such a contract that was well thought-out, and the people would have to be physically able to abide by it for it to have any sort of binding effect. Milton believes that marriage should have the option of divorce in case one spouse does not fulfill the duties of that contract. In the same way, the relationship between the ruler and the ruled can be ended if either party refuses to or cannot complete the requirements of that contract. In fact, as soon as one of the conditions is not met, the contract’s relevance to both parties ceases to exist. This connection actually returns to his views on church government. His support of the Presbyterian form of church government over an episcopal one corresponds to his support of Christian freedom. All of these views support the same system of individualistic meritocracy of the God of *Paradise*

Lost. Each depends on the ability of the members to be able to fulfill their social contracts or covenants with each other, and each relies on the individual's own ability to do so.

Christ and God the Father

The idea of God's kingship and his choice of Christ in *Paradise Lost* reveals why Milton was critical not only of Charles I but also of Cromwell, and it also points to his changing views of Cromwell. John Milton began to write *Paradise Lost* around 1658, the same year that Oliver Cromwell died from malaria. God and Christ are two important characters of the poem to examine because their constructions offer a look into the political views of Milton.

Just as there is a divide between God and Man and God and Satan, for Milton there is a divide between God and Christ. His view of the trinity in *Paradise Lost* is dramatically different than the traditional and orthodox equality of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. In the poem, Milton separates the three, with the seemingly biggest divide between the Father and Christ the Son. The meritocracy that God creates in Heaven is the biggest indicator of this divide. Because Christ is designated as a created being rather than an inherent and equal part of a triune God, there is a natural and expected space between the two characters. Christ is not considered to be the equivalent to an angel, but he certainly is a heavenly being created by God for a purpose.

Satan is the first character to comment on the vicegerent. In fact, his description in Book II focuses on merit:

High on a throne of royal state, which far
Outshone the wealth of Ormus and of Ind,
Or where the gorgeous East with richest hand
Show'rs on her kings barbaric pearl and gold,
Satan exalted sat, by merit raised
To that bad eminence. (2:1-6)

Satan attempts to create a similar position of power to God in his dominion over Hell. The wealth and opulence of Satan's throne show his attempt to mirror the throne of God and bring himself to the same position of Jesus Christ. Milton chooses to portray him as reaching his position of power by merit. Each come to their position as hero through their own virtues. Satan constructs the situation in Hell to be almost identical to the mission of Jesus Christ. Both beings volunteer to take the sacrificial journey to bring about the end of their divine missions: Satan to destroy God's good design and Christ to further it. Certainly, Satan volunteered to venture into the unknown to find Earth and attempt to injure God's plan for humanity. In that essence, he was the only creature strong enough to be able to accomplish such a task. He reasons that he is the strongest of the fallen angels, and by his own understanding of merit he deserves to rule over his weaker fallen angels in Hell. Instead of overwhelming goodness at the center of his merit, Satan is characterized here by overwhelming strength. From his position as ruler over Hell, he installs what resembles a meritocracy. As the strongest of the creatures in Hell, and seemingly the most cunning, he is able to raise himself up to the highest position because he presents himself as most able to lead. Originally in Heaven he led his own angelic troops into battle with God, but now he rules his dominion in a frozen, false meritocracy that allows no one to rise. While it appears to the other demonic creatures in Hell that Satan has established a form of government that supports freedom and reward of merit, Satan has actually put in place a system that only allows himself to succeed. However, instead of choosing the best of the demons in Hell to have control over his mission to produce evil, and thus releasing some of his power as God does in choosing Christ, Satan chooses himself. This solidifies power in his own hands and also gives the false appearance of

some type of democratic rule. Essentially, what Satan has established in Hell is a tyranny. Satan comes directly from the same group of angels that lost in their attempts to overthrow God and will not give up some of his own power to another to rule in his place. He does not see the possibility of one of his fellow creatures of Hell being as powerful as himself. Consequently, his meritocracy is set so that no one may rise above himself. The meritocracy that appears to be modeled after God's turns out to be a false, frozen one.

The First Kingship on Earth: Adam's Dominion Over the Birds and Beasts

The first completely earthly kingship presented in *Paradise Lost* comes in Book 8. It involves Adam and his sort of kingship over the animals of the earth:

Each bird and beast behold
After their kinds; I bring them to receive
From thee their names, and pay thee fealty
With low subjection. (8:342-345)

In this passage, God gives the animals of the earth over to Adam to rule. The Biblical understanding of this act is that man is meant to lord over the creatures that God has placed under him. In the perfect theater of Eden, the relationship between Adam and the animals is exactly as God intended it to be. Before the fall of Adam there are no barriers to this rule, and Adam's judgment is not changed by sin. However, more important in this passage is the political aspect of Milton's text, gained through an examination of how Adam's relationship with the animals is portrayed. Milton uses the creatures of Eden and Adam to reveal more about the relationship between God and man. The passage illustrates a larger picture of God over men: Adam serves as a

God, or king, over the lowly animals. Specifically describing the subjection as "low" brings the animals closer to the ground and physically beneath Adam, their ruler. In the same way man is of the earth, while God rules from the highest of thrones in Heaven. Physical relations between the two symbolize a more complete subjection of the entire being beneath Him.

The construction of the relationship between man and beast mirrors the one between God and man. The inherent supremacy of one over the other is also evident in the way the creatures interact:

Thou in the secrecy although alone,
Best with thyself accompanied, seekest not
Social communication, yet so pleased
Canst raise thy Creature to what height thou wilt
Of union or communion, deified;
I by conversing cannot these erect. (8:427-432)

Adam believes that no matter how much time he spends communicating with the animals he rules over, they will never be raised to the same level of value to God as him. The inherent nature of the animals will always be lower than man's. This relationship is natural. Adam does not question it; he only wishes that there were a better communicator to share his life with. Regardless of his desires, the animals can do nothing to raise themselves to a higher position. Neither do they understand the position they are in. Milton connects this relationship between two types of earthly creatures to the one between God and man. He suggests, as Patterson says, that man's lack of ability to attain God's greatness "negates any claim that man does well to imitate God's ways, political or other, for he cannot" (Patterson 129). Man is different from animals because he knows that he wants to raise himself up, but any attempts are futile. Milton sees such a large divide between man and God that this sentiment can be seen in his own philosophies. This is important for the politi-

cal aspects of *Paradise Lost* because it separates the construction of the kingdom of God from the realities of political rule on earth. The two are forever to be separated. What applies to one does not apply to the other.

Milton sees that man cannot imitate the monarchy that God has in Heaven, and that it is impossible, and even possibly dangerous, for man to exercise the same on Earth. At first it may seem proper to mirror God's way to rule in the way men rule in the world. However, Milton aims to reveal that the fallen state of man does not allow for rule modeled from the kingship of God to exist without major negative consequences. Essentially, to rely on someone other than a perfect being to rule in the capacity that God rules is folly. By the end of the scene, Adam wishes for a mate of his own standing, and God agrees. Adam's only outlet for "social communication" is within the confines of human communication of this passage, and essentially through marriage. Even at this point, the political relations between human beings are stressed to be "wise institutions after a session of educative reasoning" (Patterson 129). This idea comes directly from his strong beliefs about using reason and discussion to come to the best conclusion. In the same way that he appreciates different sects of Protestantism, he finds great value in the way individuals interact and communicate with each other to come to a mutual decision. Conversation requires defending a point, critically attacking someone else's, and having a secure understanding of one's own beliefs. With a spouse, Adam is finally able to communicate and strengthen his own understandings of God and the world around him. Connected is Milton's idea of government that moves away from that of monarchy and favors instead a government created by individuals who have discussed it and considered exactly what they are doing. Milton chooses reasonableness as the most important factor of all of his human interactions

and contracts. This can be seen more clearly when Milton defends the execution of Charles I, because he asserts that the men in charge of the trial and execution of the king relied on their faculties of reason rather than passion. Because Cromwell's position as Protector becomes even more similar to that of a tyrannical ruler as the commonwealth ages, this aspect of *Paradise Lost* can be understood as a critique not only of Charles I, but also of Cromwell's rule as Lord Protector. As Cromwell becomes increasingly more like a tyrannical monarch, Milton's support of him changes. From the initial, strong support, Milton moves to a more cautious approach. In the *Defensio Secundo* we see Milton still in awe of Cromwell, but unwilling to give his full approval to the man. He appears to be subtly questioning the man and pushing for his continued work in the commonwealth.

Nimrod

Milton dedicates the final two books of *Paradise Lost* to biblically historical kingship through Adam. Adam expresses disappointment about the tyranny of Nimrod when compared to the leadership of equality provided by Noah:

O execrable son so to aspire
Above his brethren, to himself assuming
Authority usurped, from God not given;
He gave us only over beast, fish, fowl
Dominion absolute; that right we hold
By his donation; but man over man
He made not lord; such title to himself
Reserving, human left from human free.
(12:64-71)

In this passage, Milton expresses his beliefs regarding the authority of man over other men. Adam speaks of Nimrod's ambition to rule over other men, which Milton sees as transgressing the boundaries that God gave to men in regard to power. He attempts to

rule over his “brethren” with a power not given to him. He has taken what is not his own. Adam asserts that authority is given freely by God to men over animals only, and this power is completely absolute. Finally, Adam reveals that God’s authority is left to Himself when referring to the power over man. Milton, through this sort of history told through Adam, believes that it is not in man’s authority to rule over another human being. This stresses his political views against the monarchy. Once again the disconnection between earthly and heavenly rule is highlighted in order to put forward Milton’s anti-monarchical sentiments of Charles I.

God and Satan

The character Satan seemingly works for some similar things that the Puritans were after during Milton’s life. Satan begins his existence in heaven under the rule of God, and he wishes to overthrow God as supreme monarch. He wants his own freedom to do what he wishes. This connects with the Puritans in a sense because the Puritans of Milton’s time longed for freedom to worship as they pleased. They believed in a God-given right to rule themselves if the monarch abused his power as king. To explore this idea, an examination of the important relationship in the story between God and Satan is helpful. In the first few stanzas of the story, the struggle between Satan and God is briefly explained up until the point of Satan’s placement in Hell. From this point on, God and Satan are separated even though they still have interactions. Satan speaks of God without attempting to talk to Him directly. Instead, he refers to God as “Heav’n’s perpetual King” (1:130); “Sole reigning [He] holds the tyranny of Heav’n” (1:124). From this point, we see Satan in an emotional state. He has just been defeated in a battle with God’s

forces which he believed he could win. He finds himself thrown from the magnificence of Heaven and placed in a torturous world filled with pain and despair. Satan, though defeated with his angelic form tarnished, promises to always resist God and pervert God’s plan through evil. Through his entire journey from becoming the leader of Hell to his flight to Earth, Satan is still separated from God. Satan’s argument for why he initially rebelled against God is based on his own view of himself.

Satan’s self-image is revealed in the way he reacts to God’s pronouncement of the Christ in Heaven. In Book V, God calls together an assembly of the heavenly beings in order to announce his decision to appoint Jesus as the ruler over them. “To Him shall bow / All knees in Heav’n” (5:607-608) suggests that Jesus’ role is equal to God’s and that he is more powerful than the rest of the created beings. This connects to the meritocracy that God the Father establishes in Heaven because Jesus is chosen due to his supreme nature. Satan rejects his rule because he believes himself to be equal or even superior in rank to the Son. He objects to the exultation of the Son because he sees it as unjust. Satan refuses to surrender himself in submission to the Son. He sees Jesus’ rule as illegitimate, and he will not submit himself to such a kingdom that is established illegitimately. This connects to Milton’s personal political views of the kingship he initially lived under. He believed that Charles I no longer had the right to rule the people. Instead, he valued a certain kind of Puritan republicanism. His own thoughts about the monarchy correlate specifically with some of the thoughts of Satan and his disdain for God’s decision to choose the Son to rule heaven. In rebellion and frustration Satan even suggests to the other angels of heaven to deny Jesus’ rule:

Will ye submit your necks and choose to bend
The supple knee? Ye will not...if ye know
yourselves
Natives and sons of Heav'n possessed before
By none. (5:787-791)

As evidenced by this passage, Satan does not only reject the Son's rule. He is either convinced himself that he was not under any such power in his position below the Father, or he uses false words with his fellow angels to suggest that the Son's rule will be more oppressive than the Father's. However, Satan seems to rationalize his own decisions because he sees them as completely just. He believes that he was disregarded as a candidate for ruling Heaven and he sees the Son's rule as unjust. In his view, he is making the best decision by rebelling against an oppressive and unfair ruler. His promise to continue his battle in hell shows his dedication to his cause. Satan believes that "Here at last [in Hell] / We shall be free (1:258-259) rather than under some oppression in Heaven. In fact, he believes that it is "Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven" (1:263). Satan desires more than anything to be out from under the yoke of perceived oppression and be free. His position in Hell is specifically designed to prevent freedom because he is held against his will. He sees his continued resistance against God's will as righteous and worthwhile. All of Satan's dialogue when referring to God has specific words that speak of bondage, oppression, and heavy rule. Satan attempts to portray God as something that is unjust.

Satan: Tragic Hero or Poisonous Villain?

The main difference between Satan's rebellion against God and the rebellion and execution of Charles I is found in the interpretation of Satan as either the tragic

hero or villain. Endless debate is possible over the interpretation of this single issue, and it is arguably the biggest issue in the poem that scholars discuss. However, Milton's political views are mostly evidenced in the latter of the two interpretations. Satan may seem like the hero who rebels against a tyrannical power, but in actuality he attempts something completely foolish. He attempts to remove himself from and defeat the one being that gives him power in the first place. He is created by an all-powerful God, and his strength is only what God allows. Satan understands that God created him, and he finds in his attempt at destroying God that he is not nearly as powerful as he believed. His revolt against God as the source of his power is also a revolt against his own ability to revolt. Stanley Fish describes it as this: "[Satan] is trying to bootstrap himself [...] to deity. [...] His failure is [the failure] to understand [that] deity is an order of being that is fundamentally different from, and infinitely superior to, one's own — a source not a rival" (How Milton Works, 99). Milton uses Satan to tempt the reader into feeling sorry for the fallen creature, but it is essentially a test to recognize the deceiving rhetoric of Satan. Satan's character is a fool who cannot understand the reality of his position under God the Father. Because God's wisdom does not line up with Satan's, the fallen angel convinces himself that God is wrong and that he himself is more powerful.

There is a connection between *The Reason of Church Government Against the Prelaty* and Satan's rule in Hell in *Paradise Lost*. The prose tract speaks of Milton's belief in forms of truth and their divine nature: "And certainly discipline is not the only removal of disorder; but if any visible shape can be given to divine things, [discipline is] the very visible shape and image of vertue, whereby she is not only seen in the regular gestures and motions of her heavenly paces as she walkes, but also

makes the harmony of her voice audible to mortal eares” (The Reason of Church Government). The “shape” of certain virtues, like discipline, is able to be recognized by human beings bit by bit, but the important part is that the forms can be recognized at all by men in order to improve themselves. Milton believes that God created the world with certain truths that make themselves recognizable to men. This is why he sees the belief in human ability to make out and discuss these forms as important. Discussing the truths of the world, as Milton understands, helps human beings to correct their mistakes from the past and make better decisions in the future. One way for men to do this healthily is through religious sects. Milton sees these sects or branches as more of reformers rather than rebels. This is why he views the Puritan cause as so important in the struggle against the king and the established church. He believes that he is using his reason and perception of the forms of truth to reform the church rather than destroy it. Milton would much rather have the entire Church of England become reformed than have to forcefully remove himself from it. The importance of discussion and reform is great, but first Milton must attempt to defend his freedom to do so. The forms of truth also translate to the political realm for Milton. He believes in the freedoms of the human being such as the right to not be ruled by a tyrant, self-government, and other, more basic ideas of freedom. These ideas tie directly into his beliefs about Christian freedom. They are his fundamental forms of truth about the freedom of man under God. In *Paradise Lost*, Satan maintains a belief that seems very close to Milton’s. He longs for freedom from God’s absolute reign in Heaven and His decision to choose the Son over Satan. He also believes in his right to act in order to attempt to change his position, and he does act. Ultimately he fails, but Satan never stops

believing that his actions against God are for his own personal freedom and are righteous.

John Milton’s opposition to the idea of an absolute rule on earth is separated from his understanding of God as the supreme king of heaven by an understanding of flawed humanity. In fact, Milton supported a democratic form of church government over any hierarchical construction that placed power in the hands of a single man. Because of his strong, democratic mindset centered on the political and theological freedoms of individual men, Milton supported efforts to remove tyrants from power that oppressed or took away these freedoms. This specifically meant that Milton supported Parliament in its efforts to remove Charles I from power and eventually to execute him. This assault on tyranny was in defense of, besides such freedoms, the freedom to exercise human reason. This particular aspect of humanity, for Milton, spells out the ultimate fulfillment of man. He considered the use of reason to progress in human development and to solve human problems for the betterment of generations to come to be considered one of the chief ends to mankind. Because of the democratic leanings that Milton exemplifies in his entire sphere of life, he maintains an ambivalent relationship with the symbol of the Puritan revolution Oliver Cromwell. While Milton offered compliments to Cromwell for his military victories and for removing the royalist threats from the Commonwealth, he hesitated to offer commendation to the man as Cromwell consolidated power in his own hands. As he took the title of Lord Protector he also suppressed religious thought outside of his own beliefs, which Milton opposed. Fundamentally, Cromwell was good in that he removed the tyrant of Charles I from power and rid England of its royalist supporters, establishing an environment friendly to democratic rule. On the other hand, Cromwell is seen as bad because he

essentially takes the place of Charles I; he does not have the title of king, but functionally he serves as an absolute monarch. Milton's epic poem *Paradise Lost*

serves as a showcase of his understandings of monarchy and tyranny both in heaven and on earth, written after Cromwell is deceased and no longer in power.

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