

# Satan as the Mythopoetic Creation in Milton's "Paradise Lost"

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UNIVERSITY OF RIJEKA  
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**Satan as the mythopoetic creation in John Milton's *Paradise Lost***

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## **Abstract**

The following paper tackles John Milton and his Post-Renaissance epic poem *Paradise Lost* with the intention of foregrounding the character of Satan as the epic hero of the poem. Aligned with the classic epic feats of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* and Virgil's *Aeneid*, Milton's mythopoetic composition of *Paradise Lost* would be regarded as the last genuine epic poem.

In this paper I will propound an insight into the innovativeness and semantic complexity of *Paradise Lost*. A variety of both literary and mythological connections and comparisons will be displayed to sustain Milton's poetic creation of Satan.

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## Introduction

*Paradise Lost* is an epic poem written by the English poet John Milton in 1667 and reissued in 1674, with the latter version being rearranged into twelve books from the original ten. It falls into the category of both a theological and a historical epic, dealing with the truths of Christianity. The poem was written during the period of Restoration, the period in which Charles II. took over the reign of the English monarchy. The reestablishment of the monarchy was impactful on the literary world, as it has provided inspiration for authors and poets who produced works either in praise or critique of their new king, a feature present in *Paradise Lost* itself.

The poem introduces readers with the events preceding creation of man and clashes humans with the divine and super-human. (Peck 256) *Paradise Lost* is considered as one of the greatest epics, not only in English literature, but in literary history. The reasons for such a statement are numerous, from the fact that Milton was completely blind while composing an epic consisting of ten thousand lines, up to the controversial religious topic it revolves around. In his work *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, William Blake notes to himself the following: *The reason Milton wrote in fetters when he wrote of Angels and God, and at liberty when of Devils and Hell, is because he was a true Poet and of the Devil's party without knowing it.* (Blake 5)

The paper concerning this epic work will be divided into four chapters. I will first convey varied outlooks on the epic and also emphasize the relevance of Milton's knowledge that would intertwine both historical and mythological references in creating his *Paradise Lost*.

The second chapter focuses on the invocation as one of the constituents of epic poetry. In this section, I will be comparing *Paradise Lost's* invocation to those of *Iliad*,

*Odyssey and Aeneid*, where the hero could be detected in the inceptive lines. Furthermore, I will present the three invocations from books I, III and VII of *Paradise Lost* where, instead of giving the answer, Milton uses the invocations to praise the Holy Trinity from which he draws inspiration.

The third chapter evokes the main section of *Paradise Lost* and provides poetic evidence for representing Satan the epic hero of *Paradise Lost*. I elicit the requirements for the characterization of the epic hero. Next, I focus on the heroic perspective comparing Satan with the epic heroes and mythological creatures. Milton's poetic design of Satan's lineaments, aptitudes and objectives is further employed.

The fourth and last chapter deals with Milton's personal life. Delving into his political pursuits and theological heterodoxy, I draw upon Milton's belief in deliverance from monarchical reign, which allows for the poet's motivation to attribute a heroic role to his creation of Satan.

## 1. Milton's perspective

H. W. Peck identifies three ways critics can observe and interpret *Paradise Lost*. The first is to understand it as a theological and historical epic. From this perspective, the characters found in the epic are the actual humans, angels, demons and gods that have existed possibly ever still. The argument concerning the truth of his words lies in the fact that a serious writer such as Milton would not have spent so much thought and time into an imaginary world. (Peck 257) The second perspective provides a more fictional point of view where the Biblical accounts should be taken only as symbolic and not realistic accounts. This opens the doors for different interpretations, such as having Satan as the hero, with his rebellion and fight for freedom being the central idea of the epic. The third perspective focuses on the political, social and religious conditions which were current in his time. In this theory, Satan is the representation of the Roman Catholic Church, Michael stands for Cromwell, the Protestant Church is seen through the creation of Adam and Eve and their blissful life in the garden is a depiction of the ideal Puritan combination of the Church and State. (Peck 257, 258, 259)

Peck also divides the history of myths into three stages. According to his essay *The Theme of Paradise Lost*, in the first stage, the myths are believed undoubtedly. The second stage arises later on when people begin to form opinions and start to question the credibility of the sources, resulting in myths having to be explained to be believed. The third and last stage has evolved with the evolution of philosophy and fortification of scientific methods of research where myths become either discarded and deemed untrue or considered as an artistic or allegorical representation of historical facts. Peck believes Milton's age was in a transitional period between the first two stages of trust and doubt. (Peck 262) The relevancy of the stated lies in the need to divide the biblical and historical references, so one might understand how the two actually complement each other in Milton's vision.

To have the understanding of what Milton wanted to achieve with his epic, one needs to inspect what the epic meant to the poet. Milton in his essay on *Christian Doctrine* introduced the theological concepts abstractly, which he then further developed in a more concrete nature with *Paradise Lost*. The fundamental factor in determining his point of view is his vision of the Christian teachings of his time, which he adopted not only on a spiritual, but also a historical level. (Peck 260) The stories found in the Bible have been perceived as revealed truth by Milton and his contemporaries, thus we can conclude that Milton, to an extent, believed his epic to be constructed upon historic facts. (Peck 265)

However, Milton did not occupy himself only with studies of the Christian world, but was an extremely educated and well-read man. His knowledge included the works of great writers ranging all the way from classical era and Hebrew mythology to his Renaissance contemporaries. (Gilbert "*Milton and mysteries*" 147)

The writings of *Paradise Lost* are shaped in that supernatural way so as to preserve the originality of Biblical references attached to it. Regardless of the allegorical symbolism, one does not need to accept nor negate its belief in God or Satan's rebellion. One does however need to change its perspective from understanding the topic on a material level to a spiritual one. The story of Satan's rebellion is a supernatural event adapted, or possibly simplified, to the human realm of understanding. (Peck 263)

He first came under criticism already during Restoration, with John Dryden finding "*the disproportion between the divine and human personages, and other technical shortcomings, a violation of epic principles*". (Hanford 129)

The future critics however, did not agree with Dryden, as his poeticism had been lauded by such as Addison as innovative genius and compared him to Shakespeare in terms of his irregularity and rejection of poetic rules. Others compared his work to Homer and Virgil,



whereas some, such as Warburton, believed his epic poem is even deserving of having a category of his own, in value equal to the previously stated ancient poets. (Hanford 129)

Dryden has soon changed his mind, and paid respects to Milton in his short, but clear

*Epigram on Milton:*

*THREE poets, in three distant ages born,*

*Greece, Italy and England did adorn.*

*The first in loftiness of thought surpassed;*

*The next in majesty; in both the last.*

*The force of nature could no further go;*

*To make a third, she joined the former two.*

Dryden with this epigram pays respect to whom he believed to be the three greatest epic poets. The first mentioned poet is Homer, the second is Virgil, and the third one from England is Milton. Maintained by Dryden, Homer's loftiness of thought and Virgil's majesty, are the two utmost heights of grandeur. Accordingly, the only option left to further evolve is to have both characteristics combined into a third poet, in which Milton has managed to succeed, producing this epic poem which will remain in literary history as one of the greatest.

The goal of this paper is to delineate Milton's Satan as the heroic character of a literary world. In order to attain it, one needs to explore the intertwining of the worlds biblical and historical, spiritual and material and connect them into a whole. The intertwining starts from the beginning of Book I, so the interpretation will begin with the invocation of *Paradise Lost*.

## 2. Hero of the invocation

One of the first and main components of epics, found in the opening lines, is the invocation, which Oxford Learner's Dictionaries describes as "*the act of asking for help, from a god or from a person in authority; the act of referring to something or of calling for something to appear.*" The epic genre employs this convention to anticipate the poem's main subject and protagonists.

Milton follows the "Of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_ sing heavenly Muse!" formula used in classic epics which serves the purpose of announcing the hero and the subject of the epic. However, with the way he formulated the invocation, by not introducing any name of a potential hero, and inserting the act of disobedience instead, he actually raised the question of the hero's identity from the very outset.

By observing the first lines of invocations by the three most famous epics –Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* and Virgil's *Aeneid* , one might recollect the classical formula:

*Sing, O goddess, the anger of Achilles son of Peleus, that brought countless ills upon the Achaeans.*(Homer 2)

*Tell me, O Muse, of that ingenious hero who travelled far and wide after he had sacked the famous town of Troy.* (Homer 13)

*I sing of arms and the man, he who, exiled by fate, first came from the coast of Troy to Italy, and to Lavinian shores.* (Virgil 12)

The opening lines of *Paradise Lost* are the following:

*Of Mans First Disobedience, and the Fruit*

*Of that Forbidden Tree, whose mortal tast*

*Brought Death into the World, and all our woe,*

*With loss of EDEN, till one greater Man*

*Restore us, and regain the blissful Seat.* (Milton 1)

The first three epics all introduce the hero of their poems in the very first lines. However, that is not the case with *Paradise Lost*. The poet pleads the muse to inspire him to sing about an event, without a hero being introduced. What is interesting in this invocation, is the appearance of a character, noted here as “one greater Man”. The mysterious character noted in the previous lines is the Son of God, who is foretold to be the future saviour of the humankind and the heir to the heavenly throne. Nevertheless, that is only announced in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and it does not happen until the poet's next work entitled *Paradise Regained*.

In *Paradise Lost* Milton composed three invocations, found in books I, III and VII. In them, one can observe how Milton invokes the Holy Trinity, listing them in a structural formation of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. (Davies and Hunter 96)

In Book I, the lines 6-10 of invocation immediately bring forth Milton's appeal to the Muse to inspire him:

*Sing Heav'nly Muse, that on the secret top  
Of OREB, or of SINAI, didst inspire  
That Shepherd, who first taught the chosen Seed,  
In the Beginning how the Heav'ns and Earth  
Rose out of CHAOS*(Milton 1)

The first book addresses God to inspire Milton as muse in his mission to *justify the wayes of God to men*(Milton 1). God can be identified in these lines as the one who appeared to Moses, the shepherd who wrote the Ten Commandments (also known as *Decalogue*) and gave it to Hebrew people. He appeared at Mount Sinai, also known as Horeb, and later on Moses would be identified as the author of *Pentateuch* or *Torah*, literally translated into “teaching”, the

first five books of Hebrew Bible. The first book of *Torah* deals with the topic of Genesis, which explains how God created the world, and is also Milton's main reference for writing *Paradise Lost*, as Milton has taken upon himself to educate people about God's ways like Moses did. (Davies and Hunter 97)

The second, from Book III, calls upon the Son of God to emit light upon the darkness of the underworld found in the first two books:

*Hail holy light, offspring of Heav'n first-born,  
Or of th' Eternal Coeternal beam  
May I express thee unblam'd? since God is light,  
And never but in unapproached light Dwelt from Eternitie, dwelt then in thee,  
Bright effluence of bright essence increate. (Milton 45)*

The second reason why Milton invokes light is to illuminate him and show him the way in his pursuit of writing the poem, mentioned earlier in the first invocation with the line *What in me is dark Illumine* (Milton 1). (Davies and Hunter 95)

The third invocation, found in Book VII, introduces the name of Urania, the pagan muse of astronomy:

*Descend from Heav'n URANIA, by that name  
If rightly thou art call'd, whose Voice divine  
Following, above th' OLYMPIAN Hill I soare  
Above the flight of PEGASEAN wing.  
The meaning, not the Name I call. (Milton 130)*

What is interesting in this invocation is the line *The meaning, not the Name I call* (Milton 130). It is not uncommon that epic writers use female muses as inspiration, however in this

case, Milton invokes the Holy Spirit with whom Urania is equated in Christian poetry. (Davies and Hunter 96) Peck agrees upon equating Urania to the Holy Spirit and adds that Milton believed the poetic inspiration is one of the gifts that the Holy Spirit offers. (Peck 265, 266)

With the invocation focusing on drawing inspiration from different members of the Holy Trinity, the question of the hero still remains unanswered. A clear name of the hero does not exist in the initial invocation, where it is found by usual standards. In the next section, I will set forth Milton's character of Satan to reflect upon his heroic status.

### **3. Satan as the epic hero**

Since one cannot find the answer in the invocation, one of the oldest questions concerning *Paradise Lost*, that of Milton's Satan as the hero, remains yet to be solved. (Steadman "*Satan as the hero*" 253) It is not difficult to understand why *Paradise Lost* does not have a clearly specified heroic character. In spite of modern critics identifying heroes in epics dating all the way to the ancient times, neither Greek nor Latin languages do not have a distinct literary term for a hero and it has not been introduced in English language until 1673, when the first edition of *Paradise Lost* had already been published. (Feeney 138)

To determine the epic hero of the poem, it is important to present what an epic hero is. He is the driver of the action and directs the reader's attention towards the topic. If he is not clearly distinguishable, both the readers and critics will find different candidates they can identify as the one. (Feeney 137) An epic hero is usually a fierce warrior, who is above average mortal men in regards to his virtues and qualities. His bravery is uneven, his strength is superb and their will is unbreakable. Even though he might be self-centered at times, in the end the actions he undertakes are intended for a greater good, not only for himself. Unfortunately, having these remarkable qualities comes with a cost, so the hero is usually

faced with challenges provided by destiny and is ultimately given suffering instead of being rewarded for his deeds. (Di Cesare 62)

Just as the previous chapter explains the existence of several perspectives on *Paradise Lost* as a whole, in the same way, several schools of thought about what Satan's character represents in the epic have appeared through time. The historical ones note how Satan bears similarities with historical characters such as Xerxes, king of the First Persian empire, Charles I, king of Scotland, England and Ireland or Oliver Cromwell, English general and Lord Protector of the Commonwealth. The military-historical school believes the flying devils are associated with the battle plans of the period. The literary-historical school of thought points out the resemblance with Aeschylus' Prometheus or Homer's Achilles and Odysseus, which are some of the most famous heroes of epic literature. The biographical one describes Satan as the representation of the poet himself. (Steadman "*Satan as the hero*" 254)

The analysis is based upon the third perspective, putting Satan in the same category as the other famous heroes. Upon inspecting Book I and Book II, it is possible to grasp the understanding of why one would consider the greatest antagonist of the religious world to be the heroic figure in this literary work. Satan gains an enormous role by having his story written in the very opening lines of the first book. The whole focus is centred upon his character, as he is in fact, the driver of the plot.

At the very beginning of the poem, in line 34, Milton introduces *Th' infernal Serpent* (Milton 1), better known to the readers as Satan, amidst the fall from Heaven. He is blamed as the one *Who first seduc'd them to that fowl revolt* (Milton 1), i.e. offering the fruit of knowledge to Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden. Immediately, a hint of his importance as the driver of the story is given to the reader. Likewise, throughout the first three books, the storyline is almost completely revolving around observing the fallen angels, following the aftermath of the divine battle. The narrative commences "in medias res", as Milton pictures

an image of Satan lying on a fiery lake with a group of his followers, consisting of numerous fallen angels and demons, along with thousands of other infernal creatures.

*Him the Almighty Power*

*Hurl'd headlong flaming from th' Ethereal Skie*

*With hideous ruine and combustion down*

*To bottomless perdition, there to dwell*

*In Adamantine Chains and penal Fire,*

*Who durst defie th' Omnipotent to Arms.*

*Nine times the Space that measures Day and Night*

*To mortal men, he with his horrid crew*

*Lay vanquisht, rowling in the fiery Gulfe*

*Confounded though immortal (Milton 2)*

The depths of “bottomless perdition” is the lowest point Satan is seen at. The depth is both literal: *As far remov'd from God and light of Heav'n As from the Center thrice to th' utmost Pole* (Milton 2) and figurative, as he had lost the divine battle and has become Heaven's pariah.

The thoughts one might have when a character is cast from Heaven to Hell does not correlate with what actually happens. It is expected for the character to be described as the one who had just lost an important battle, impotent, desperate and defeated. The three books proceed to paint a far different picture of Satan. Dwelling in the depths of Hell, he is seen as a giant, powerful being, whose goal is to free the angels, the servants of God, from his shackles of tyranny.

Milton describes Satan lying on the fiery lake as:

*extended long and large*

*Lay floating many a rood, in bulk as huge  
As whom the Fables name of monstrous size,  
TITANIAN, or EARTH-BORN, that  
warr'd on JOVE,  
BRIARIOS or TYPHON, whom the Den  
By ancient TARSUS held, or that Sea-beast  
LEVIATHAN, which God of all his works  
Created hugest that swim th' Ocean stream (Milton 5)*

Although this poem tells a Biblical story based upon the book of *Genesis* and is written by a Puritan, throughout the poem Milton uses motifs and characters from several other mythologies, incorporating them all as a part of Christian doctrine. He uses the three monsters, Briareos, Typhoon and Leviathan to describe the bulkness that no man or a regular God-like figure can possess. According to Hesiod's *Theogony*, Briareos was one of the three Hecatoncheires, sons of Uranus and Gaia. He was an enormous primordial giant with hundred hands and fifty heads from which he could spit fire, who lived under the sea with the daughter of Poseidon. Hesiod notes Typhoon also as one of Gaia's sons, but his father in this case being Tartarus. He was a giant serpent, fighting Zeus for the right to rule the Cosmos, ending in Zeus' victory, after which he cast Typhon into the dungeon of Tartarus.

Leviathan is also a sea serpent that surrounds the Earth. Found in the Book of Job from the Hebrew Bible, Leviathan is a representation of an earlier primordial sea-creature Lotan. Just as the previous example, the storm god Baal Hadad had defeated this sea-creature, who posed a threat to humanity.

Jonathan H. Collett made an interesting remark regarding the order in which Milton listed the creaturesto whom he was comparing Satan. Comparing Satan to the said creatures,



while listing them in this specific order, allows Milton to sneak in the rendition of the transformation from a Titan to a serpent. (Collett 90) In Collett's interpretation, it is possible to notice the hidden indications of decline Milton incorporated into the praise of Satan's size. Starting the comparison with the great Titans, who also lost the war with the new generation of gods, to a less-powerful giant that lives in the sea, over to a sea serpent who fought to be the ruler of gods and lost, up to an enormous sea serpent which was a threat to humanity, but was eventually slain. The same principle applies the story of Satan's decay. He was one of the first and exceedingly powerful divine creatures, who was banished into the underworld after the battle with the sky God, and eventually turned into a serpent.

In regards to the mythological connections stated above, Milton in *Paradise Lost* offers an interesting explanation of the origins of other beliefs and different god-worships. In the first book, he proposes the theory of fallen angels, that is demons, eventually becoming worshipped as deities by men:

*Nor had they yet among the Sons of EVE  
Got them new Names, till wandring ore the Earth,  
Through Gods high sufferance for the tryal of man,  
By falsities and lyes the greatest part  
Of Mankind they corrupted to forsake  
God their Creator, and th' invisible  
Glory of him, that made them, to transform  
Oft to the Image of a Brute, adorn'd  
With gay Religions full of Pomp and Gold,  
And Devils to adore for Deities:  
Then were they known to men by various Names,*

*And various Idols through the Heathen World. (Milton 9)*

In the previous lines, Milton ingeniously offers the explanation for having one creator in the form of the Christian God, living simultaneously with all the other pagan gods of the “heathen world”, as he calls it. The direct credit, according to Milton’s epic, can be given to Satan, as he is the one who initiated the rebellion. Had he not been the one to trigger the mutiny, which resulted in War for Heaven, the religious and even historical world might have taken a different turn. With his interference in the balance of power, held completely by an absolutist that is God, he opened the doors not only to himself, but to his loyal followers, who will through time gain a high status of their own. The world that we all live in has been under the influence of the religious world for several millennia, causing political disagreements and warfare. The famous quote extracted from Satan’s speech, *Better to reign in Hell, then serve in Heav’n* (Milton 7), meant freedom for his troops. However, little did he know that many of them will become the rulers on Earth themselves, gaining power and glory in the human world.

Allegorically describing the fall of Satan, Milton makes a great effort to elevate his status of a fallen angel. From a Titan, his downfall leads him to a mere serpent, however not for long. He was supposed to brook the heaviest punishment of them all, to be in pain and misery for all eternities. The light he once witnessed has been utterly darkened and the hellish fire will burn him for all eternities. In spite the horrific damnation cast upon him, the rebellious soul of Satan chose to rise above all the tribulation. After giving the first of many inspiring speeches to his companions, his unbreakable will resuscitates and he arises from the fiery grasp of his powerlessness.

*Forthwith upright he rears from off the Pool*

*His mighty Stature; on each hand the flames*

*Drivn backward slope their pointing spires, and rowld*

*In billows, leave i'th' midst a horrid Vale.*

*Then with expanded wings he steers his flight*

*Aloft, incumbent on the dusky Air*

*That felt unusual weight, till on dry Land*

*He lights, if it were Land that ever burn'd*

*With solid, as the Lake with liquid fire; (Milton 6)*

The quote gloriously depicts Satan's ascension, leaving the despair behind. Not only did he lift himself up physically, but his spirit was also uplifted. Milton could have written that Satan swam or floated to the shore, yet he went for a more powerful choice, leaving space for metaphorical interpretation of him regaining power. Subsequently, with a great speech Satan inspired the army of devils to do the same as he did and soon enough they started plotting revenge against their progenitor. By releasing himself from the shackles of defeat, Satan reestablishes the title of the leader, regaining trust of his loyal followers, who promptly emulate the action of the archfiend and rise to the shore of fiery lake.

Upon the ascension and uplift of his demons' spirits, Satan tries to reestablish his troops. He animates his followers up to a point of restarting the war, however, this time having a better idea. With a devious plan in mind, he took upon himself the troubles and dangers that accompany the journey through Chaos, that is the space between Heaven and Hell, where Earth is located. Satan in these books demonstrates a wide variety of heroic features. His desposal towards danger, physical and spiritual perseverance and cautiousness as both leader and an adventurer are nothing but admirable.

After the rise, another testimony of his epic greatness lies in the description of his weapons. The shield attached to the back is often compared to Achilles' shield, which also resembles a full moon. (Dobranski 491)

*his ponderous shield*

*Ethereal temper, massy, large and round,*

*Behind him cast; the broad circumference*

*Hung on his shoulders like the Moon (Milton 7)*

Accordingly, the spear Satan possesses is also of size hardly comprehensible to men. Milton as an example mentions the highest tree in the Northern woods, which is only used as a scale to measure something so large, as that tallest tree would seem to be only a wand compared to his enormous spear. The spear however, does not serve him as a weapon, but rather as crutches to support his massive body. (Dobranski 490)

*His Spear, to equal which the tallest Pine*

*Hewn on NORWEGIAN hills, to be the Mast*

*Of some great Ammiral, were but a wand,*

*He walkt with to support uneasie steps (Milton 7)*

Heroic characters of Satan (or Lucifer) in epics are depicted in one of two ways - either a beautiful angel whose ambition led him into aiming too high and brought him to his doom, or the warrior hero whose actions are lauded in spite of the mistakes in judgement he had made. (Revard 95) In *Paradise Lost*, Satan is somewhere in between the two categories. Milton does not focus on his beauty, apart from Raphael proclaiming that while in Heaven, Lucifer was the brightest of the stars in Book 7:

*Know then, that after LUCIFER from Heav'n / (So call him, brighter once amidst the Host /Of Angels, then that Starr the Starrs among).* (Milton 133) Other than that instance, Milton is more focused on providing readers with evidence of his power and glory, along with obedience of his demon companions, characteristics which are more important than beauty to a warrior hero. (Revard 96) As seen, Satan's potency is well described in terms of physical attributes and warfare strategies. However, there is more to power than physical superiority. A great amount of Satan's power comes from his speech, a characteristic of a hero which no epic author can neglect. Indeed, Satan was thus proficient in both dialogues and monologues, with Milton describing his speech with epithets such as having "bold words" and "speedy words". In Book I, Satan, lying on the fiery lake, began the first speech, aimed towards Beelzebub and the rest of the troops. The speech creates an extreme contrast to the lines by the narrator. Returning again to the lines from the beginning of the poem, the words used by the narrator to describe the fall of our hero are extremely powerful:

*Him the Almighty Power  
Hurl'd headlong flaming from th' Ethereal Skie  
With hideous ruine and combustion down  
To bottomless perdition, there to dwell  
In Adamantine Chains and penal Fire,  
Who durst defie th' Omnipotent to Arms* (Milton 2)

The lines above introduce the reader with the occasion, set amidst the expulsion from Heaven after the rebellion. The next lines, describing the fallen angels lying on the lake:

*he with his horrid crew /Lay vanquisht, rowling in the fiery Gulfe / Confounded though immortal* (Milton 2) and even more impactful description of Hell:

*A Dungeon horrible, on all sides round*  
*As one great Furnace flam'd, yet from those flames*  
*No light, but rather darkness visible*  
*Serv'd only to discover sights of woe,*  
*Regions of sorrow, doleful shades, where peace*  
*And rest can never dwell, hope never comes*  
*That comes to all; but torture without end*  
*Still urges (Milton 2)*

set a shocking and ghastly ambience. Satan, feeling all the woe and despair that was cast upon them, still managed to “vaunt aloud”. Seeing Beelzebub, his loyal companion, on his side, Satan regains his composure and commences the motivating speech. By finding equality with his friend who as he had *equal hope, / And hazard in the Glorious Enterprize* (Milton 3) and has *Joynd with me once, now misery hath joynd / In equal ruin* (Milton 3), Satan proceeds to completely change the tone of the poem. First he compliments Beelzebub as the one angel who *with transcendent brightnes didst outshine / Myriads though bright* (Milton 3), gaining sort of a dreamlike vision of who they once were before the war. (Foley 48, 49)

The light Satan brought to the speech foretells his transcendence above the obstacles that have been put in front of him. Comparing the lines *into what Pit thou seest / From what highth fal'n* (Milton 3) with lines *Hurl'd headlong flaming from th' Ethereal Skie and To bottomless perdition* (Milton 2), there is a huge change in the perspective between Satan's speech and the narrator's account. The downfall is nowhere near horrible as it was in the beginning. Hell in which they are found is now described only as a pit, instead of a fiery circle, while the fall is also not as aggressive as it is expected to be. (Foley 49) He does not *Lay vanquisht* (Milton 2) any more, the *Almighty power* (Milton 2) is now only a *Potent*

*Victor*(Milton 3) and he can now speak of the fall as solely a physical fall, as he does not see a substantial defeat. (Foley 49)

In his eyes, Hell has become only a place that is not pleasant in the physical realm of pain. The pit is referred to as such only as a filthy place at which he looks with disgust, not as a condition he is put in. God in this context, once known by the name of *Almighty power* (Milton 2), is now referred to as *Potent Victor* (Milton 3) and *He with his Thunder* (Milton 3), admitting his victory and superior strength, but in general significantly diminishing the power that holds the throne. (Foley 50) Satan tells everyone that nothing is lost, unconquerable will, and courage are still present and the only thing lost is the place where they once resided, finishing his speech with the immediate beginning of plotting revenge to their foe.

Foley compares Satan and God with the story of Ulysses and Cyclops. According to him, the conflict can be seen as a clash between two men (or creatures), one is stronger and god-like, while the other is more clever and more focused on using intellect instead of force. (Foley 50) The reason why we can make such comparisons is that Milton did something quite extraordinary. In *A defence of poetry and other essays*, Shelley argues he violated the general dogma of God being morally superior to a devil. (Shelley 58 ) Milton ingeniously made no such remarks, but on occasion even depicted God as a merciless tyrant.

Steadman notes that both Satan and Beelzebub suggest fraud as the key to their revenge, instead of initiating a new war against Heavens. They choose not to attack the angelic forces with their armed forces, but instead they chose the newest creation of God as their target, which is still weak and does not possess the knowledge of the events and evil that is about to tempt them. (*"Satan's Metamorphoses"* 82) Similar to the way Odysseus masked as a beggar unnoticed entered his palace, and later Troy, Satan uses the tactic of disguise several times to sneak into Eden. (*"Satan's Metamorphoses"* 83) Considering there are only two human creatures in the world, each time he takes the form of either an animal or an angel. When

speaking with Uriel, Satan pretends to be a Cherub, while in Eden, he takes the form of a cormorant, a toad or a snake.

The interpretation of Satan will end with the question of evil surrounding Satan so one might understand how an evil character could also be a heroic one. The vision of Satan by the eighteenth-century critics was the one of a sublime human. In that period, designating him as a hero was a brave move which not many dared to take. Dryden had already done that previously, but later on they personified Satan not only as an immortal creature, but also as a glorious human. Hugh Blair focuses on his superior nature, the rise in spite of the fall. He notes ambition as the primary motive for rebellion rather than malice (Shock 452) Peck would disagree with the statement, saying that the ones who studied Satan's character through the Middle Ages are used to a devil who is the origin of evil forces, a shape-shifting commander of infernal army. According to him, the tendencies to his sublime Majesty to a mere human form through personification is nothing but an insult to his greatness. (Peck 264) Deceit and the following actions proved to be a fruitful tactic, however, one might see the action on either end of the moral spectre - and thus the actions can be applied with both good or bad intentions. (Steadman "*Satan as the hero*" 255)

One cannot be sure whether it was Milton's intention to have readers interpret it as his evil traits are carried over to humans after the tragic fall, or if he made Satan similar to humans for the reader to be able to identify with. Gilbert explains the debate by offering the theory how Milton created Satan as the personification of the existing evil in the world. According to his essay *The Problem of Evil in Paradise Lost*, he is the allegorical representation of evil, not its root. (Gilbert "*The Problem of Evil*" 177) His character is such a complex one, as the actions he subsequently undertakes are all equally good and bad, depending on which side the reader's point of view is and so the judgement can often be very subjective. Satan's sacrifice is rooted in wicked grounds, yet the sacrifice's intentions are



intertwined with a higher purpose and it gives off a specific energy because the risk he is taking on himself is real. Having in mind that third of Heaven's angels stand by his side in the war, the evil behind his reasoning can actually be overlooked. (Di Cesare 62)

#### **4. Milton and Satan**

During John Milton's life, a number of political changes occurred. The most significant one was the fall of Charles I of England's monarchy, establishment of Cromwell's republic, and restoration of the monarchy by Charles II of England. Milton was not inclined towards the monarchy, and was a strong supporter of Cromwell's republic. He wrote in defence of the republican structure and the principles they represented. His political works included topics such as people's right to hold their leader accountable, destruction of divine rights of kings and praise of Lord Cromwell.

After Cromwell's death in 1658, the republic crumbled and in 1660 Charles II took over the reign and reestablished the monarchy of his father.

Meanwhile, Milton wrote *A Letter to a Friend, Concerning the Ruptures of the Commonwealth* and *Proposals of certain expedients for the preventing of a civil war now feared* in 1659 and *The Ready and Easy Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth* in 1660, all of them containing propositions of having a non-monarchical government. Thanks to the bold and unyielding statements, Milton's life came to be in danger. He went into hiding, and re-appeared after the *Indemnity and Oblivion Act*, a 1660 act of English Parliament stating a general pardon to any person who committed a crime during the Civil Wars and Interregnum (the period between the two monarchies from 1649 to 1660). In spite of the pardon, he was

still arrested and imprisoned. He managed to be released due to his influential friends, after which he married again and spent the rest of his life in London.

Having his political life in mind, it is possible to see the connection with his Satan on a personal level. Satan has been seen as the representation of liberty from the sovereign rule in the form of one true God. Milton, by the means of pen and paper, took the same task upon himself as Satan did. To educate people of the freedom a republic offers, while pointing out the constraints a monarchy sets was his mission. Satan in *Paradise Lost* does not have to be evil, he can be seen as an idol or a personification of freedom instead. He can still be seen as Lucifer, the lightbringer, at his highest self and utmost freedom.

Once the connection is made, it is not as difficult to accept Milton's introduction of Satan as the hero. Milton as a firm Puritan is dedicated to his God and does not worship Satan in any way. However, rejecting the idea of Milton's admiration and respect towards his Satan would be completely absurd.

## Conclusion

Through the character of Satan, this paper propounds the problem of the epic hero in John Milton's epic poem *Paradise Lost*. To understand the hero of this poem, many different interpretive perspectives must be taken into account.

The interpretation begins in the second chapter, where the problem of invocation is tackled, the segment in which the hero is invariably detected. By method of comparison with the invocations of the three most famous epics, *Iliad*, *Odyssey* and *Aeneid*, the question of the hero arises, as there is none singled out as one. The key chapter is the third one, where the premise of the thesis, Satan being the epic hero, finds its arguments. Martial prowess, god-like features, great strength and unbreakable will are all the features Satan possesses. Apart from those, Satan after his fall rises back up spiritually stronger and uses his intellectual power instead of physical to achieve his goals, a virtue shared between the famous epic heroes. The concept of a dangerous adventure is also introduced, with Satan's journey through Chaos to find Earth and humans. In the end, all his efforts, although successful, end up in his suffering, being turned into a snake, instead of glory. Relating all of the above to Milton's life story, from living in the monarchy, to the republic and back to the monarchy, one can observe the similarity between Satan's and Milton's political rise and fall, inserting a piece of his personality rather than simply writing a poem.

By pointing out the features of an epic hero and juxtaposing them with Satan's traits and Milton's life, one might conclude that Satan is, in fact, the epic hero of *Paradise Lost*.

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