

Milton's Sense Of Guilt

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There are many people who feel that literature is an art form independent, in most cases, of both the historical context within which it was created and the details of its creators' life. Yet no artist, no matter how removed from the activities of the world, can deny that world's effect. No piece of literature, no matter how unbiased in intent, can remain unaffected by the social and political context of the period within which it was created. Nor can art be entirely independent of the author's life. This is not to say that literature, or any art form, cannot stand alone and be appreciated or understood. Yet a greater light is shed upon Picasso's *Guernica* or Eliot's *Waste Land* if we show their origins and allow insight into the allusions they embrace. With this in mind, I turned to *Paradise Lost* by John Milton and was struck by a need to explain to myself the author's use of his antagonist, Satan, as the mouthpiece for many of the author's political beliefs.

Milton called this piece a tragedy, and such a label requires a specific definition prior to analyzing its content. Medieval poetic tragedy, with which Milton was very familiar, typically describes the downfall of a great man and in drama usually depicts a conflict between a protagonist and a superior force, which results in a disastrous or sorrowful conclusion. What are we to infer from this pigeonhole Milton has defined and into which he thrusts his poem? The tragedy is of man's fall from grace in Eden, as well as Satan's fall from heaven, and both events play substantial roles in the poem's overall tale. It is difficult to determine which action takes precedence in Milton's mind. Are we to feel remorse for both events? It is difficult to read Satan's tale and not feel sympathetic and even sorrowful for the great villain, who, unlike Adam or Eve, is not persuaded into his actions, but truly believes in the cause he fights for and acts on his own accord.

As this sympathy for the antagonist is fairly common among the

readers of *Paradise Lost*, it must therefore be concluded that this was the author's intent. If it was not the intention of the author's conscience then it must have been unconscious. What would cause such intent? Who was this John Milton? Where did his religious feelings lie? And what, since *Paradise Lost* is surely an arena for politics, were his politics? Where did all these feelings and beliefs originate? We must turn to history for answers.

John Milton was born a Protestant in London in 1608. His father, a well-off scrivener, had been disinherited by his Roman Catholic father (Richard Milton, an uncommonly successful lawyer) for his religious convictions. This rejection may very well have played a part in strengthening the father's desire that his son John Jr. become a learned and pious member of the Protestant clergy. Pious and learned he would be, but the clergy offered no outlets for the liberal thinker that he would become.

At a very early age Milton learned Greek, Latin, Hebrew, French and Italian; by the time he matriculated at Christ's College, Cambridge in February 1623, the thirteen-year-old boy was fluent in these languages and had translated many of the great writers. These accomplishments did not come without hard work. Milton had often studied late into the night at his father's home on Bread Street (a practice that some suggest caused his blindness later in life). Now he discovered that the Cambridge Dons did not agree with such practices. Young Milton also had a great deal of trouble fitting into his peer group at the university. At home he had been immersed in tutors and professors who along with his brothers and sisters, supplemented his need for friendship, but at Cambridge he was forced to deal primarily with boys his age. These and other shortcomings of the college caused him to rebel. Milton's behavior, combined with a number of disagreements with his tutor William Chappell, resulted in a short term of suspension.

In his work *the life of John Milton*, A.N. Wilson writes that Milton's near disrespectful behavior may have been based upon feelings of stagnation. "Perhaps they taught him a certain amount, but it is hard to imagine that he found any of the dons at Cambridge as distinctively, powerfully clever as Alexander Gil."¹ Gil was the High Master of St. Paul's, which Milton had attended before Christ's College, and a close friend. Gil had been a strong influence on Milton's early years through his humanistic ideals and Latin wit. In contrast to Gil's friendship at St. Paul's, Milton found bitter rebuke

at the University. Many historians claim that his tutor, William Chappell, whipped young Milton. With this in mind, it is not surprising that Milton would forever look upon his University days with contempt and cherish his years at St. Paul's. After his brief absence from the university, however, he returned to Cambridge, graduated with honors and stayed on for a masters degree.

Milton's extensive early education, and the self confidence it gave him helped develop his characteristic need to question authority and develop his own conclusions on matters which affected him. This tendency toward reevaluation is the main ingredient of many of the pamphlets he published during and after the English Civil War. But equally important is the manner in which he approached this acquisition of knowledge. Edward Wagenknecht, in his book *The Personality of Milton* writes:

Perhaps the most impressive, or even most useful, part of Milton's education was in those areas where he taught himself. He put himself through extensive systematic courses of reading the British Historians, the medieval and modern history of Europe, theology, the Church Fathers, Renaissance and Rabbinical commentators, and much besides....

...Few men with his appetite for learning can ever have been less of a mental glutton than he was, or more determined to bolt nothing but what he could digest. The poet who wanted poetry to be "simple, sensuous, and passionate" was never in any danger of becoming a metaphysical, and the scholar, who stopped reading the Church Fathers when he found them tedious and trivial, with nothing to contribute to the growth of his mind, was not a pedant. In his view..."any intellectual activity that was not aimed at improving man's condition in the world was a misuse of that capacity which distinguished man from all the rest of creation - a sort of prostitution of his God-given rational faculties." With him it was never a question of "What do we know?" but rather "Is it worth knowing?" and "What can you do with it?"²

Milton's appetite for knowledge may have been selective but it was also voracious and he did not cease to study after gaining his Masters degree at Cambridge (1635). He retired to his parent's country house in Hammersmith (preferred now to the house on Bread street) where he gave himself up "entirely to reading the Greek and Latin writers, occasionally exchanging the country for the town, either for the purchase of books or to learn something new in mathematics or in music, which at the time furnished the sources of [his] amusement."³

This long period of self-education culminated with Milton setting

out to see the continent. This was something common to young men of his day and class who wished to complement their educations. Of those places he visited the most important was probably Italy, where in 1638-1639 he went armed with a number of letters of introduction and stayed primarily in Florence, Rome, and Naples. Throughout his trip Milton and a number of his poems (none of them in English), were warmly accepted by men of letters and government. This gave the young poet an assurance in his work, which had previously only been supported by his confidence in his great store of knowledge and the brief acceptance of his *Masque Comus* (1634). It is important to point out that at home in England he had few literary acquaintances and, outside a small circle, no poetic reputation.

Milton greatly enjoyed this period of recognition, but his journey ended abruptly. While traveling on the continent Milton was informed of the unrest in England and returned home within months; "For I thought it base that I should be traveling at my ease, even for the improvement of my mind abroad, while my fellow citizens were fighting for their liberty at home."⁴ Before leaving, however, he experienced some tense moments in Rome feeling that the English Jesuits "had laid a plot for me because I had spoken too freely on the subject of religion."⁵ Milton had made it a point never to bring up religion in conversation, but when addressed, defended his viewpoints firmly; behavior that gained him many adversaries in the land of papacy, as it would in his homeland. This event seems to give us a good sense of the man's strong will. It is just such a will that would influence Milton to get politically active on returning home.

Milton avoided any Jesuit plot, if in fact there was any, and returned to England in midsummer 1639. He took lodgings in St. Bride's Churchyard, just off Fleet Street. It was here that, with the help of a domestic servant named Jane Yates, he began to take on pupils.⁶ During this period Milton also made frequent visits to his father's home in Horton.⁷ There he would discuss both personal and political topics with his family as well as telling them about his great adventures abroad. Milton, on his visits with his father and

* In Milton's own words, "I took no steps to conceal either my person or my character, and for about the space of two months I again openly defended, as I had done before, the reformed religion in the very metropolis of popery. By the favor of God I got back safe to Florence...." [Hanford, *The Poems of John Milton*, p. xv.]

brother, must have often encountered opposition to his liberal politics. Christopher and John senior were ardent royalists. Although there is no record of their exchanges, we can assume that they did not avoid such conversation in the tense political atmosphere of that year. At the same time, since Milton visited often, it is likely that whatever political differences they had did not interfere with their family relationships. In his fifteen-month absence his only sister, Anne, had died. Her husband, Thomas Agar, sent his two stepsons, John and Edward Phillips, aged eight and nine years old, to Milton to be educated. Milton's dedication to his family and the sons of his late sister was to be a firm and continuing one and is expressed by Wilson.

...It seems to have been concern for her [Anne's] children that took Milton to London, rather than share the comfortable Buckinghamshire retreat of his father. Perhaps, too, after so long away, he could not countenance the idea of being anywhere but London.... Johnson mocks famously at the man 'who hastens home because his countrymen are contending for their liberty, and when he reaches the scene of action, vapors away his patriotism in a private boarding school'. The facts of the case are less absurd. Milton, it is true, was to take in other pupils.... [But] the initial impulse was one of simple devotion to his family. There is no evidence, of course, that this piece of kindness deflected him from his purpose, which was nothing less than wage war on the bench of bishops and the whole idea of episcopacy.⁹

However, it was not dedication to his family alone that made him take on pupils, for he believed very strongly that education was the first step toward a better England. He believed his homeland, and the world to be "sinking further and further into stagnation and senility."¹⁰ Although he tended to focus his attention on the traditional social elite, as we see in his tractate *Of Education* (1644), he also supported the idea of universal (state supported) education of the whole population.¹¹ He must have felt the tutoring of his nephews, and other students he took on in the years to come, was something of a political obligation.

Yet Wilson makes a very strong point that this did not detract from his other obligations, namely his pamphleteering. He regarded his teaching as part of his contribution to the cause of liberty.¹² It was his poetry that suffered most from his teaching and political duties, for though he certainly was writing poetry, he made no attempt to publish any of these poems for nearly seven years. Keith Stavelly, in the introduction of his work *The Politics of Milton's Prose*

Style writes:

"[Milton] says in the autobiographical sections of the antiprelatical tracts that the established order has made it difficult, if not impossible, for him to write the kind of deeply principled and heroic poetry he wishes to write. A reformed social order, Milton maintains, will be an imaginative social order, which is to say it will encourage true poets such as he hopes to become. Milton therefore finds himself obliged more perhaps than most other men to participate directly in the movement for social change, and for him this can only mean writing political pamphlets.¹³

Milton's focus on pamphleteering began in response to *An Answer to An Humble Remonstrance* by Joseph Hall published in March 1641 and attributed to Smectymnuus (a name composed of the initials of the authors: Stephen Marshall, Edmund Calamy, Thomas Young, Matthew Newcomen and William Spurstowe).¹⁴ As Thomas Young was a close friend of Milton's who had been an early tutor as well as a strong influence, this anti-Episcopal work and the controversy it produced caused the young poet to turn from the development of his dream epic (the fall of Adam had come to mind as early as 1640 according to Merrit Hughes) to continue the pamphlet's ideas, emphasizing the cultural and moral consequences of episcopacy. Writing later of the motives that impelled him to enter the conflict, Milton explains his attention to the issue.

I saw that a way was opening for the establishment of real liberty, that a function was laying for the deliverance of man from the yoke of slavery and superstition,... and as I had from my youth studied the distinctions between religious and civil rights, I perceived that if ever I wished to be of use, I ought to at least not be wanting to my country, to the church, and to so many of my fellow Christians, in a crisis of so much danger; I therefore determined to relinquish the other pursuits in which I was engaged and to transfer the whole force of my talents and my industry to this one important object.¹⁵

The five resulting works were *Of Reformation Touching Church Discipline in England* (1641), *Of Prelatical Episcopacy, Animadversions upon The Remonstrants Defence against Smectymnuus* (both published within the year), *The Reason of Church Government* (Feb. 1642), and *An Apology Against a Pamphlet call'd A Modest Confutation of the Animadversions* (the following April). It is important to note that many of Milton's modern critics believe that he wrote his pamphlets in response to personal dilemmas he experienced. His later tracts upon divorce

during his separation from his first wife, and upon publishing laws when he was unable to have some of his ideas printed, seem to be the main examples they use. This is an unmerited generalization, since it is clear that his first five pamphlets dealt with the ideas of a nation not just the circumstances of his life.

In June of 1642, several months before the outbreak of the Civil War, Milton expanded the population of his household by marrying Mary Powell, the daughter of a royalist squire in Oxfordshire who owed money to his father. Even without the harshness of life in wartime, let alone Civil war time, success was hardly in the cards for the marriage of a meticulous scholar and poet of 33 to an uneducated girl who was half his age and had been raised in a large, relaxed household. Indeed, within two months Mary Powell Milton went to visit her family and refused to return. At first she cited the danger of traveling in time of unrest, but then simply refused any communications from Milton. Wilson states that Mary's mother actually supported the separation of her daughter from her son-in-law.¹⁶ In a day and age when such behavior was unacceptable to most upper-class families, the Powell household defended Mary's actions and let her stay. This was probably due to Milton's liberal religious and political attitudes, which to Mary's family must have seemed very close to heresy and even treason. It is also possible that their debt to their son-in-law's family played a part in their supporting Mary's actions. It is often easier to avoid a creditor who is distant than one in the family.

Prompted by her desertion, Milton turned his mind as well as his pen toward divorce. The following summer he wrote several pamphlets on the issue, which gained him notoriety, since his ideas were both original as well as controversial. The most quoted pamphlet was titled *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* (1643), which argued that the sole cause then admitted for divorce - adultery, might be less valid than incompatibility. Milton suggested that being forced to bear with a marriage without love was a crime against human dignity. In an era where procreation was thought of as the main purpose of marriage, Milton considered it only as an ingredient along with conversation, civility, and domestic peace. As Christ had looked upon divorce as forbidden, and such was the consensus in seventeenth century England, Milton's ingenuity at persuasion surfaces here since in the face of such opposition he gained a good deal of recognition as well as some support.

Although Milton's personal dilemma may have sparked his interest in the subject it is apparent that Milton did not confine himself to his personal experiences, because, as Wilson notes, Milton does not cite desertion as a plausible cause for divorce. Perhaps he did not find this a reasonable cause, or perhaps he considered that his own case fell within the more general level of incompatibility.¹⁷ No matter what his initial incentive, Milton felt that it was a social issue necessary to address.

When, therefore, I perceived that there were three species of liberty which are essential to the happiness of social life - religious, domestic, and civil; and as I had already written concerning the first [*Of Reformation in England 1641*, and *Of Prelatical Episcopacy 1641*], and the magistrates were strenuously active in the third, I determined to turn my attention to the second, or domestic species.¹⁸

During this era of English history religious, philosophical and cultural traditions (including the inferior education usually given to girls) most often kept women subservient to men. Milton, without denying that view, upheld a personal and Puritan ideal of marriage as an active bond of mutual love and mental companionship, an ideal that placed women far above the level they held, say, in medieval poetry. We see here a prominent characteristic of Milton. He would often challenge the conventional on behalf of his beliefs, and it is such behavior, which would make him many enemies. In the case of his treatises on divorce, however, he was attacked by both Royalists and Presbyterians as a libertine.¹⁹ In the sense that he was unrestrained by convention, this view is to a degree quite appropriate of Milton's character. He would never adhere to social attitudes, as indicated in most of his pamphlets, especially *The Ready and Easy Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth* (1660) that speaks out against allowing the Stuarts to return. Milton was prompted to write more by his conscience than by his purse. In terms of morality Milton, although liberal, was certainly no libertine. He had very strong morals to which he remained dedicated, even though he often demonstrated or explained them through unconventional means. We will see an example of such an unconventional approach later in *Paradise Lost*.

Meanwhile, in the summer of 1645, Mary returned to her husband and the following years were marked by the births of two baby girls (Anne in 1646, and Mary in 1648), and a son (John in

1651). During his wife's absence he had composed two of his most famous non-political tracts. The first, *On Education*, states his ideal of training England's youth into responsible and cultivated leaders. This was followed by *Aeropagitica*, which addressed the need for freedom of the press and stated that only through the freedom of "inquiry and discussion" could truth be reached. The first of these two pamphlets seems to have been received well, but not without a touch of jeering from those who believed Milton to be proposing a method of producing more men like himself.²⁰ The second, it seems, gained him little note, while the first helped to gain him a greater audience.²¹ But the seed had been set in Milton; he had found his place in the world.

As a youth, intelligent as he was, he had been unable to chart his future with any certainty. By the time he had traveled abroad he knew poetry to be his love, yet even at that point in time poetry did not provide a consistent income. Now as a teacher and an activist pamphleteer he had gained little income, but a great deal of attention for himself. For a man who had grown up within a small circle of friends, this widespread recognition was a new and stimulating experience. Through his pen he had begun making an impression. Yet he knew poetry to be his true gift, and was conscious that he was delaying himself from its pursuit. This was not uncommon in this period of unrest. David Masson in his introduction to *The Poetical Works of John Milton* writes that during the period of the civil war there was "very little literature produced in England that was not polemical in its tenor. There were," he continues, "controversial treatises and pamphlets in abundance; there were also satires and songs for political purposes, and full of political allusions; but of pure history, pure philosophical writing, or pure poetry, there was little."²² Actually, Milton did take advantage of his fame as a pamphleteer and published a collected book of poems entitled *Poems of Mr. John Milton* (Jan. 2, 1646). Unfortunately, as Wilson states, "the poems excited far less attention than the pamphlets had done. John Milton, oh, the divorcer. They [the general public] had no interest in his versifying."²³

The political and religious tensions which had inspired Milton's pamphlets developed further in the spring of 1646 and seemed to beckon the poet away from his poetry once again, but not away from his family. In May of the same year, with the Parliamentary army surrounding Oxford and in the process seizing the royalist

lands around it, Milton showed his true quality as a husband. The "divorcer" accepted his wife's family into his meager household with no apparent hesitation. "He had no reason to be grateful to the Powell's, who had stolen away his wife, written him abusive letters, and failed to repay their still considerable debts to him."²⁴ Surely he could have claimed "no vacancy" for already in the household were his ill father, his pupils, and Mary, pregnant with their first daughter Anne. His generosity at this time, often unnoticed by modern critics and biographers alike, sheds a great light upon the more amiable aspects of the poet's character.

Nevertheless, generous as he was in taking in his royalist relatives, he did not cease to express his roundhead beliefs. Two weeks after Charles I was executed, on February 13, 1649, Milton's first political pamphlet, *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*, was published. In it he writes:

...the power of kings and magistrates is nothing else but what is only derivative, transferred, and committed to them in trust from the people to the common good of them all, and in whom the power yet remains fundamentally and cannot be taken from them without a violation of their natural birthright, and seeing that from hence, Aristotle, and the best of political writers, have defined a king, him who governs to the good and profit of his people, and not for his own ends - it follows from necessary causes that the titles of sovereign lord, natural lord, and the like, are either arrogancies or flatteries, not admitted by emperors or kings of best note, and disliked by the church both of Jews (Isa. XXVI, 13) and ancient Christians...

Secondly, that to say, as is usual, the king hath as good right to his crown and dignity as any man to his inheritance, is to make the subject no better than the king's slave, his chattel, or his possession that may be bought and sold.... But suppose it to be right hereditary, what can be more just and legal, if a subject for certain crimes be to forfeit by law from himself and posterity all his inheritance to the king, for crimes proportional, should forfeit all his title and inheritance to the people? Unless the people must be thought created all for him, and they all in one body inferior to him single; which were a kind of treason against the dignity of mankind.²⁵

A month later he began his political career when he was invited by the Council of State "by means of a private acquaintance" to become Secretary for Foreign Languages.²⁶ The position offered a salary of nearly £300 a year.

Milton's position gave him no hand in the development of state policy, but instead the foreign correspondence of such

developments, as he was well qualified to translate into Latin his nation's policies. As he had often spoken out for the cause he was also expected to defend the Council and Parliament from the mounting anti-regicide sentiment in and outside England. This experience was an invigorating one for Milton, as it offered him the chance to work among men who seemed, at least, to share his ideals.

He "felt the invigoration of being a partner in a great and dangerous enterprise,"²⁷ and in such an environment, his pamphleteering thrived. His most prominent works on behalf of this cause were *Eikonoklasts* (Oct. 1649), and the *Defense of the People of England* (Feb. 1651). The first work was an attempt to refute the martyr image of Charles I constructed in John Gauden's *Eikon Basilike*, a work that the king's chaplain had supposedly edited from the late monarch's papers. The result was powerful propaganda, which many commentators see as the strongest piece of propaganda England had yet been exposed to, and even Milton could not successfully undermine the anti-regicide sentiment it produced. The second work, *Defence of the People of England*, was a reply to an arraignment of the regicides by Claudius Salmasius (Claude Saumaise), called *Defensio Regia pro Carolo I.* Charles II had hired the classical scholar to write this work and the pamphlet was read widely in both England as well as in the continent. Salmasius's extremely well constructed legal argument compelled Milton to attack the writer himself rather than the work and its points. This was not out of character for Milton, who "tended to see opponents as monstrous enemies of a sacred cause who must be destroyed by any means."²⁸

This piece of prose gave him the fame he had longed for. Wagenknecht writes; "It was the attack on Salmasius and its sequelae which caused his name to ring through Europe and won him the admiration of Queen Christina of Sweden, so that continental visitors to England wanted to see first Cromwell and then him."²⁹

The following winter of 1652, the blindness Milton had begun to notice years before was complete. The poet mourned the loss of his sight bitterly but continued working for the Council of State translating and composing letters with the aid of secretaries. Salmasius and many of his opponents harped on the loss. Salmasius called him a "puppy, once my pretty little man, now bleary-eyed, or rather a blindling, having never had any mental vision, he has now lost his bodily sight; a silly coxcomb, fancying himself a beauty; an

unclean beast, with nothing more human about him than guttering eyelids...."³⁰ Others claimed his eyes had been struck out by God. His blindness was surely seen as an act of God by Milton, but perhaps not as a punishment. The Lord may have been directing him toward his inward sight, or poetry. Such a justification would inspire him to slowly return to his poetry,

The year would only get worse, however. On May 2nd, his third daughter was born, a cold reminder of his blindness, as he would never see her. Three days later, Mary died from complications resulting from her daughter's birth. On June 16, Milton also lost his one-year-old baby son John, who had been sickly from birth. This onslaught of devastating personal loss must have greatly affected the poet. The year of blindness and death spurned lamenting poetry, which took the place of any political treatises for more than two years.

For the next few years, Milton continued working for the Council but assumed less and less responsibility as time passed. In May of 1654, he completed a second defense of the people entitled *Defensio Secunda pro populo Anglicano*, and a year later *Pro Se Defensio*. It is generally accepted that Milton began composing *Paradise Lost* by mid summer 1654, if not earlier, although the completion of the work did not come until 1667. He regained his footing as an artist, and there in found a new lease on life. While he had lost his wife and son, his three daughters still remained, and rather than give them up and live a life of solitude Milton began seeking a companion with whom to share the remainder of his years. He married twice more the first time to Katherine Woodcock (Nov. 12, 1656), who died before their second anniversary, and the second time to Elizabeth Minshul (Feb. 24, 1663) who would outlive him.

In the years between 1654 and 1667, Milton witnessed the crumbling of the cause to which he had dedicated a great deal of his life. He certainly felt that he had given his sight to the republic,³¹ as well as time and energy that he could have dedicated to his poetry. Milton had hoped to write an epic poem on the Arthurian legend, and though he chose the fall of man, it cannot be assumed that he had dropped the other idea completely. Milton's sacrifices to Cromwell's protectorate had made no difference in the end, as Charles II was welcomed back to London, with restrictions, but still wearing the crown. And the religious Milton, who had to face the occasional ridicule of a royalist family, must have felt some sense of

But what if better counsels might erect	785
Our minds and teach us to cast off this Yoke?	
Will ye submit your necks, and choose to bend	
The supple knee? ye will not, if I trust	
To know ye right, or if ye know yourselves	
Natives and Sons of Heav'n possess before	790
By none, and if not equal all, yet free,	
Equally free; for Orders and Degrees	
Jar not with liberty, but well consist.	
Who can in reason then or right assume	
Monarchy over such as live by right	795
His equals, if in power and splendor less,	
In freedom equal? or can introduce	
Law and Edict on us, who without law	
Err not? much less for this to be our Lord,	
And look for adoration to th' abuse	800
Of this Imperial Titles which assert	
Our being ordain'd to govern, not to serve?	

The attack on imperialism and the injustice he associated with it seems very appropriate to the poet's political practices. But this is no hero speaking; this is the voice of Satan. Why would the writer place his political voice in the mouth of literature's greatest villain? Why would a devout Anglican declare his anti-imperialist views in the words of the Antichrist? I would like to propose that Milton was re-evaluating his standpoint in the wake of a political reassessment by England with which he did not agree. This reassessment was the decision to restore the Stuart monarchy. I believe Milton felt that he had misused, to some extent, his talents as a poet in his pamphleteering and political activities. In placing his arguments in the words of his poem's most punished character he is looking back on how God has tested him, and perhaps even punished him by the events which transpired in his life after the trial and execution of King Charles I. His political ideals had not withstood the test of time. The Cromwell he had served so devoutly had died as much a totalitarian as Charles. The political ideals in which Milton had invested so much of his efforts had made no lasting impression. In the end, Cromwell had been dug from his grave and hung, and England had turned to the son of the King it had so recently deposed and executed.

Milton spent the last years of his life primarily on the composition of three poems, the epic *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained* (1670), and *Samson Agonistes* (1670). These focus upon man's actions and the will of God, as if Milton were attempting to

encourage hope in his contemporaries. Yet even with this in mind it is difficult not to wonder about Milton's undoubted brushes with his conscience, which must surely have occurred due to his predominantly Royalist household, and the apparent loss of God's favor; for God had not only blinded the poet, but had apparently turned his back on his chosen people as well.

In his *History of Britain* (1670), he expresses disillusionment with the English people and their fickle behavior in reaccepting the very political ideals they had fought so hard to reform. In original drafts, he expresses his hostility toward the Presbyterians and their involvement in the Long Parliament, but even Milton censored his beliefs, as he "cut out the anti-Presbyterian references, 'out of tenderness to a party'."³³ Milton would continue to produce political tracts, but evidently felt a need to curb his expression to some degree. Perhaps this was due to his brief taste of imprisonment, or to the decreasing number of vocal revolutionaries. In his *History of Britain*, Milton "observed that love of the public good was rarer in England than love of money or vain honor: he was already prepared for the time when men would prostitute liberty to the illusion that kingship would restore trade."³⁴

Doesn't it seem odd that a man of such high moral standing would be so hypocritical as to do just what he chastised those around him for doing? Perhaps, ultimately, part of Milton felt that he had betrayed the God he had tried so hard to serve. This might explain part of the reasoning behind God's seemingly cruel nature in *Paradise Lost*.

Living with a royalist family must have also given him a sense of guilt - a constant reminder of the death of his cause. No matter how restrained a family is at avoiding seeds of contempt in conversation, they were sowed, and must often have blossomed into disagreement. I feel it is human nature to doubt one's self and the actions one takes, and Milton was every bit as human as you or I. That Milton would question his behavior, and even express it subconsciously is not, then, an inappropriate argument. His love for England as well as for his family never ceased. Nor did his love of God. His family certainly accepted Milton despite their differences, but the poet had to look inward to be redeemed to his God and himself. And for Milton, his Satan's words are just such a prayer for redemption.

Endnotes

- 1 A.N. Wilson, *The Life of John Milton* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), p.18.
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- 3 John S. Diekhoff, ed. *Milton on Himself* (New York: Humanities Press, 1965), p.18.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p.20.
- 5 *Ibid.*
- 6 James Holly Hanford, *John Milton, Englishman* (Crown Publishers, New York, 1949), p. 102.
- 7 Wilson, p. 94.
- 8 *Ibid.* p. 95.
- 9 *Ibid.*
- 10 James Holly Hanford, *The Poems of John Milton* (The Ronald Press Company, New York, 1936), p. xi.
- 11 Wagenknecht, P. 41.
- 12 Hanford, J.M., *Englishman*, p. 102.
- 13 Keith W. Stavely, *The politics of Milton's Prose Style* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1975), p.1.
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- 15 Hanford, *The Poems of...*, p. xvii.
- 16 Wilson, p.118.
- 17 *Ibid.*
- 18 Hanford, J.M., *Englishman*, p.115.
- 19 *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 1987 ed., s.v. "Milton"
- 20 Wagenknecht, p.41.
- 21 *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 1987 ed., s.v. "Milton"
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