



Hacettepe University Graduate School of Social Sciences

Department of English Language and Literature

English Language and Literature Programme

**THE SHIFTING FACES OF EPIC HEROES:  
THE EVOLUTIONARY TRAJECTORY OF HEROIC IDEALS IN  
WILLIAM DAVENANT'S *GONDIBERT* AND JOHN MILTON'S  
*PARADISE LOST***

Hüseyin ALHAS

Ph.D. Dissertation

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Hüseyin ALHAS tarafından hazırlanan “The Shifting Faces of Epic Heroes: The Evolutionary Trajectory of Heroic Ideals in William Davenant’s *Gondibert* and John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*” başlıklı bu çalışma, 18.01.2024 tarihinde yapılan savunma sınavı sonucunda başarılı bulunarak jürimiz tarafından Doktora Tezi olarak kabul edilmiştir.

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## ETİK BEYAN

Bu alıřmadaki bütn bilgi ve belgeleri akademik kurallar erevesinde elde ettiđimi, grsel, iřitsel ve yazılı tm bilgi ve sonuları bilimsel ahlak kurallarına uygun olarak sunduđumu, kullandıđım verilerde herhangi bir tahrifat yapmadıđımı, yararlandıđım kaynaklara bilimsel normlara uygun olarak atıfta bulunduđumu, tezimin kaynak gsterilen durumlar dıřında zgn olduđunu, **Prof. Dr. Hande SEBER** danıřmanlıđında tarafımdan retildeđini ve Hacettepe niversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstits Tez Yazım Ynergesine gre yazıldıđını beyan ederim.

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*For the honour and glory of my ancestors, Pasei Tille and Huseyni Kışke...*

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## ABSTRACT

Alhas, Hüseyin. *The Shifting Faces of Epic Heroes: The Evolutionary Trajectory of Heroic Ideals in William Davenant's Gondibert and John Milton's Paradise Lost*, Ph.D. Dissertation, Ankara, 2024.

This study argues that in the selected works of the seventeenth-century English epics, William Davenant's *Gondibert* (1651) and John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667), the epic heroes are constructed as part of the poets' personal responses to the problems and questions initiated by the profound social, religious, philosophical, and political changes occurring in the seventeenth-century England. Both poets highlight the need for the development of new virtues, behaviours, and ethical standards in response to the dramatic changes at the time. Accordingly, this dissertation hypothesises that the epic heroes in these works are not only used as a vehicle for social and political commentary, but also as blueprints for ethical systems congruent with the needs of the contemporary epoch, thereby fostering the moral progression and advancement of the audience. This leads both poets to significantly deviate from the traditional concept of the epic hero, each reimagining and reshaping conventions in their own distinctive way. The evolution of Davenant's new epic hero is characterised by rhetorical prowess, tempered ambition, reason, openness to new knowledge, and a pro-peace stance, yet is also marked by justified martial prowess due to the realpolitik. Davenant writes for the high strata of the society from both sides of the Civil War, believing that as the "chiefs" of the society they should adapt to contemporary shifts to better fit the offices of government. Milton's redefinition of the epic hero is characterised by innate free will, political responsibility, rhetorical prowess, a worth determined not by lineage but by merit marked by endurance and patience, autonomous obedience to God guided by right reason, and a nuanced view of war that recognises its brutal reality yet also understands the necessity of martial prowess in a politically charged world. By redefining heroism in this manner, Milton shifts its domain from the exclusive preserve of high society to the realm of the everyday Christian, making it accessible and relevant to a broader spectrum of society.

**Keywords:** Heroism, Epic Hero, Heroic Ideal, William Davenant, *Gondibert*, John Milton, *Paradise Lost*

## ÖZET

Alhas, Hüseyin. *Epik Kahramanların Değişen Yüzleri: William Davenant'ın Gondibert ve John Milton'ın Kayıp Cennet'inde Kahramanlık İdeallerinin Evrim Süreçleri*, Doktora Tez, Ankara, 2024.

Bu çalışma, William Davenant'ın *Gondibert* (1651) ve John Milton'un *Kayıp Cennet* (1667) adlı eserlerinde, epik kahramanların on yedinci yüzyıl İngiltere'sinde meydana gelen köklü siyasi, felsefi, dini ve sosyal değişimlerle ortaya çıkan sorunlara şairlerin verdikleri kişisel tepkilerin yansımalarıyla şekillendiklerini ileri sürer. Her iki şair de söz konusu dönemin getirdiği çarpıcı değişikliklere yanıt olarak yeni erdem, davranış ve etik değerlerin geliştirilmesinin gerekliliğine vurgu yapar. Dolayısıyla, bu tez, söz konusu eserlerdeki epik kahramanların yalnızca sosyal ve politik olayları yansıtmada bir araç olarak değil, aynı zamanda o dönemin ihtiyaçlarıyla uyumlu etik sistem kılavuzları olarak kullanıldığını, böylelikle okuyucu kitlenin ahlaki gelişimi ve ilerleyişini teşvik ettiğini iddia etmektedir. Bu durum, şairlerin büyük ölçüde geleneksel epik kahraman kavramından ayrılmasına ve kendilerine özgü biçimde bu kavramı yeniden şekillendirmelerine neden olur. Davenant, epik kahramanını konuşma becerisi, ılımlı hırs, mantık, bilgiye açlık ve barış yanlılığına rağmen realpolitik durumlar nedeniyle savaşma yeteneğine de sahip olacak şekilde yeniden oluşturur. Davenant, bu yeni kahramanlık kavramlarıyla, siyasi görüşlerine bakmaksızın toplumun liderleri olarak gördüğü üst tabakaların toplumu adil yönetebilmek adına kendilerini çağın ihtiyaçları ışığında değiştirmeleri gerektiğini gösterir. Milton ise epik kahramanı, özgür irade, siyasi sorumluluk ve konuşma becerisine sahip bir birey olarak çizer. Soyluluktan ziyade dirayet ve sabrın getirdiği değerle öne çıkan, akıl ve mantığının rehberliğiyle Tanrıya bağlı olan bu kahraman, savaşın acımasız gerçekliğini görmesine rağmen aynı zamanda politik karmaşalarla çalkalanan bir dünyada savaş becerisinin gerekliliğini de anlayan bir kişi olarak nitelenir. Milton, kahramanlığı bu şekilde yeniden tanımlayarak, onu üst tabakaların tekelinden çıkarıp alelade insanların seviyesine indirir ve toplumun daha geniş bir kesimi için erişilebilir kılar.

**Anahtar sözcükler:** Kahramanlık, Epik Kahraman, Kahramanlık İdeali, William Davenant, *Gondibert*, John Milton, *Kayıp Cennet*

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## INTRODUCTION

If we were to be ageless and immortal once we had survived this war, then I should not fight in the fore-front myself, nor should I be sending you into the battle where men win glory. But in fact countless dooms of death surround us, and no mortal can escape or avoid them: so let us go, either to yield victory another or to win it ourselves.

(Homer, *Iliad* xii.320-29)

But what can,  
Of all the gifts that are, be giv'n to man  
More precious than Eternity and Glory,  
Singing their praises in unsilenc'd story?  
Which no black day, no nation, nor no age,  
No change of time or fortune, force nor rage,  
Shall ever rase?

(George Chapman, *Homer's Odysseys* xlvi)

The purpose of this study is to argue that in the selected works of the seventeenth-century English epics — William Davenant's *Gondibert* (1651) and John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667) — the epic heroes are constructed as part of the poets' personal responses to the problems and questions initiated by the complex social, religious, philosophical, and political changes occurring in seventeenth-century England. This dissertation further hypothesises that the epic heroes in these works are not only used as a vehicle for social and political commentary, but also as blueprints for ethical systems congruent with the needs of the contemporary epoch, thereby fostering the moral progression and advancement of the audience.

The mid-seventeenth century in England marked an era of profound and turbulent change, with significant transformations occurring across multiple spheres such as politics, religion, philosophy, and law. Politically, this era was characterised by monumental events: the Civil Wars (1642-1649) that plunged the nation into internal conflict, the Interregnum (1649-1660) that witnessed the temporary establishment of a republic, and the Restoration of the monarchy in 1660, each epoch marking a significant shift in the nation's governance and power structures. In the realm of religion, England was torn apart by intense and deep-rooted conflicts between Catholics and Protestants, accompanied by intense debates on pivotal issues such as the doctrine of free will and sacralisation.



Philosophically, this period saw the flourishing of Enlightenment ideas, challenging age-old doctrines and advocating for more reasoned, secular perspectives. In law, the modern state was emerging, with its claim to a monopoly on violence and the ability to make and enforce laws. These sweeping changes brought about a host of problems and sparked new questions that would shape the historical trajectory of England in subsequent centuries.

William Davenant and John Milton did not merely observe these dramatic changes; they experienced them deeply, with body and soul. Their engagement with the seismic shifts of their time was profound and all-encompassing, intertwining both intellectual insight and lived experience. Davenant and Milton did not merely witness history; they moulded and were moulded by it, embodying the spirit of their age in thought and action. The epics central to this study, Davenant's *Gondibert* and Milton's *Paradise Lost*, have been chosen based on the era of their composition, which roughly spans from the late 1640s to 1667, a time marked by the ongoing Civil War and its subsequent aftermath.<sup>1</sup> This epoch, marked by the chaos of the Civil War and its far-reaching aftermath, served as fertile ground for their literary endeavours. These epics, therefore, stand not only as testaments to the poetic prowess of their poets but also as profound engagements with the socio-political, religious, and philosophical discourses that defined their era.

Davenant's initial support for the Royalist cause extended beyond mere advocacy of their principles to active engagement in the Civil War's battles. Milton's resolute backing of the Parliamentary side was expressed through his forceful promotion of republican ideals in his political tracts, both during the Civil War and throughout the Commonwealth period. Both poets were deeply cognizant of the fundamental shifts transforming their world, a world urgently requiring new virtues, actions, and ethical standards. Consequently, their epics are rich and intricate, interlacing their individual approaches and insights into the requirements of their era's revolutionary changes. Remarkably, their literary contributions and messages transcended the binary constraints of their political

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<sup>1</sup>The precise dates when *Gondibert* and *Paradise Lost* were composed remain a topic of considerable scholarly debate, with various theories proposed. The prevailing view suggests that Davenant began crafting *Gondibert* in the late 1640s during his exile in France, while Milton is thought to have started *Paradise Lost* in the late 1650s, amidst the rumblings of the impending Restoration in England. It is crucial to acknowledge that the potential composition dates of these epic texts hold significant relevance to this study, as they could potentially impact our understanding of the development of the epic heroes within them. Consequently, the relevant sections of this study will delve into these debates surrounding the composition of the epics in detail, exploring how they might influence the overall analysis of the evolution of the epic heroes.

affiliations. Through their daring literary endeavours, Davenant and Milton engaged their audiences in a dialogue that extended beyond mere entertainment, aiming to illuminate and shape the moral compass of their society. In doing so, they firmly established themselves as not only chroniclers of their age but as shapers of thought, guiding their audience through an era of profound uncertainty and change through the evolution of their epic heroes.

Choosing the epic as the genre to teach their audience is deeply connected to the well-established perception of epic as a didactic genre at the time. During the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in England, literary theory underscored the instructive aspect of epic poetry and the pivotal role of epic heroes in fulfilling this educational objective. In his *The Defence of Poesy* (1580/1595), Sir Philip Sidney extolls epic heroes for their capacity to “teach and move to truth, but teacheth and moveth to the most high and excellent truth” (30). Similarly, John Harington, in *A Briefe Apologie of Poetrie* (1591), emphasizes the formative power of epic poetry, asserting, “I beleeeue that the reading of a good Heroicall Poeme may make a man both wiser and honester” (210). Hence, it is visible that the didactic function of epic is firmly established in the late sixteenth-century England.

Prominent seventeenth-century literary critics like John Dennis and John Dryden echo these sentiments. Dennis, in his *Remarks*, argues that epic poetry educates its audience through the exemplars of its heroes (72-74), while Dryden articulates the view that the essence of epic lies in “forming the mind to heroic virtue by example; it is conveyed in verse that it may delight while it instructs” (117). Both Davenant and Milton also recognize the instructional purpose of epic poetry and epic heroes and address it in their writings. In his Preface to *Gondibert*, Davenant argues that religion, army, policy, and law, which he refers to as the chief aides of government fail to shape people; thus, they need a “collaterall [sic] help” from poetry (37). He likens poets to doctors: “Poets the old renown’d Physitians are, / Who for the sickly habits of the minde, / Examples as the ancient cure prepare” (I.iv.6), underlining the function of epic poetry to remedy the afflictions of the mind and improve it through the examples of its heroes. As for Milton, in his *Reason of Church Government* (1642), he explicitly declares that, should he compose an epic, “there ought no regard be sooner had, than to [...] instruction of my

country” (*YP* 1:810), signifying the paramount importance he places on instruction or didacticism.

Consequently, this study centres on how these poets adapt and evolve their epic heroes, with the aim of educating their audiences in accordance with the new values, virtues, actions, and thoughts necessitated by a period of considerable turbulence—an era distinctly marked by substantial social, religious, philosophical, and political changes. However, the concept and evolution of epic heroism and the epic hero as a subject is complex and multifaceted. To thoroughly grasp and appreciate the depth and intricacy of these poets’ approaches, it is essential to first engage with the existing theories on the evolution of epic heroes. This preliminary exploration will provide a foundation for a more comprehensive and insightful analysis of the nuanced and multi-dimensional strategies these poets employ in their didactic endeavours.

According to John Bryan Hainsworth, epic heroes are nothing but “exploratory besides being celebratory; that is, they are concerned with something beyond themselves, with examining heroism as well as exemplifying it” (39). Hainsworth’s remark underlines that the very concept of heroism, which is an ever-changing concept marked by temporal and spatial relativity, is the main dynamic, which ultimately gives momentum to the rise of what appear as epic heroes. The contours of epic heroism are indeed hard to draw. One of the leading scholars of epic studies, Gregory Nagy states that “[t]he words ‘epic’ and ‘hero’ both defy generalization, let alone universalizing definitions” (1). The attempt to define what constitutes an epic hero is indeed problematic in itself. Should an epic hero always

be a king or a demi-god and should his exploits always display his moral excellence? Were the same criteria of moral heroism to be applied to the classical warrior as to the Christian? Or indeed, did the epic hero have to be a warrior at all? And whatever kind of hero he was, should he function simply as a perfect exemplar—a man better than we, a man to be copied? Or should he function rather as an ambivalent portrait of human conduct—a man like ourselves, whose vices were to be shunned as his virtues were to be admired? (Bond 53)

Bond’s questions shed light on the width of the spectrum when examining the epic hero and how transitional the concept of epic heroism has been. Before delving into the seventeenth century epic heroes and heroisms in England, it is of the utmost significance

to first touch upon academic theories regarding the evolution of epic hero and epic heroism.

The study of epic heroes has been a subject of significant scholarly investigation, with researchers grappling with the complexities surrounding their evolution, as well as the difficulties associated with their definition and categorisation. In attempts to comprehend the multifaceted nature of epic heroes, critics have put forth diverse templates and analytical frameworks that aim to elucidate their birth, education, lineage, adventurous exploits, physical and mental attributes, nation-building capabilities, confrontations with adversaries, and their role as instructors to the audience. These scholarly inquiries reflect the recognition that epic heroes embody a range of characteristics and undertake a variety of roles within their respective narratives. However, it is important to note that the diversity and richness of epic heroes, across different cultural traditions and historical periods, present challenges in establishing a unified framework for their analysis. The complexities of their characterisations, the variations in their narratives, and the multitude of factors that shape their roles and actions require a nuanced and contextualised approach to their study. As such, scholars have grappled with the task of developing comprehensive and inclusive analytical models that can accommodate the vast array of epic heroes found in world literature.

There are two dominant hypotheses related to the evolution of epic heroes: the first group argues that epic heroes are ubiquitous, focusing on their similarities across time, and posits that certain variables, which vary depending on the different methodological approaches and theoretical frameworks, lead epic heroes to possess similar characteristic traits, features, and stories. The second group, while acknowledging some generic influences across time, emphasizes the impossibility of the concept of epic heroism having a single, stable, or essentialist universal form.

The first group's scholarly approach to the evolution of epic heroes centres around identifying shared patterns and recurring themes that highlight the pervasive nature of characteristic features and actions exhibited by these heroes across different temporal and spatial contexts. Scholars belonging to this group employ various disciplines such as anthropology, psychology, history, and literature to elucidate the widespread attributes of

epic heroes. Their emphasis on ubiquity, however, gives rise to methodological challenges and biases in data selection, which I refer to as the “ubiquitous fallacy.”

A notable issue within this group is the tendency to selectively choose data that aligns with their predetermined formulas, leading to an incomplete representation of epics and myths. Whether employing anthropological, Jungian, or Freudian approaches, or focusing on generic influences, these studies often suffer from a narrow selection of sources that only serve to reinforce their preconceived notions. As a result, the endeavour to identify universal ubiquity in epic heroes falls short in capturing the full spectrum of these figures and fails to demonstrate their transitional nature, thus resulting in “ubiquitous fallacy.” In essence, while this initial group of scholars seeks to explore the common threads among epic heroes, their approach is limited by the selective nature of their data, hindering a comprehensive understanding of the width and transformative aspects inherent in the concept of the epic hero.

Thomas Carlyle’s *On Heroes and Hero-Worship* (1841) stands as one of the earliest scholarly endeavours to explore the essence and significance of heroes. Originally presented as a series of lectures, Carlyle’s work delves into the nature of heroic figures who have left an indelible mark on history and analyses how they were perceived and revered by society. In his discourse, Carlyle categorises heroes into six distinct types, namely the hero as divinity, prophet, poet, priest, man of letters, and king. Central to his argument is the notion that these heroes possess a remarkable ability to captivate and inspire their audiences, leading to a form of worship. Carlyle posits that such devotion, whether rooted in paganism or Abrahamic religions, has the power to uplift and positively influence individuals (16-17). For Carlyle, heroes occupy a universal role, as he asserts that “hero worship is the source of all religions in the world” (Segal 46).

Significantly, Carlyle highlights the didactic function of heroes by emphasising their transformative impact on human life. He elucidates, “[i]t is to this hour, and at all hours, the vivifying influence [of heroes] in man’s life [...] Hero-worship, heartfelt prostrate admiration, submission, burning, boundless, for a noblest godlike Form of Man” (17). Here, Carlyle asserts that great men should assume positions of leadership, and the masses should revere and emulate them, learning from their actions and teachings. In this regard, Carlyle assigns a social engineering role to these figures, suggesting that they possess the

power to shape society. Another noteworthy aspect of Carlyle's work, as pointed out by Trevor-Roper, is his perception of history as a unified world history. Carlyle embraces the notion that history unfolds as part of a divine plan, with certain pivotal moments requiring the intervention of "great men" to bring about its realisation (229). Although Carlyle does not present a definitive formula for heroism, he hinges on the conceptualisation of heroism as an extraordinary feat, achieved by individuals who thrive in the most comprehensive manner, thereby exerting a profound influence on others and contributing to their improvement. In Carlyle's view, this particular essence represents the unifying element that binds all heroic figures together.

Edward Burnett Tylor's study conducted in the late nineteenth century on epics and hero myths from diverse cultures stands as a significant scholarly contribution of the period. Tylor's investigation aimed to identify a shared pattern in the characteristics and deeds of epic heroes. His findings revealed a recurrent set of attributes, including noble lineage, exposure and subsequent rescue in infancy, acquisition of exceptional education and training, the act of saving their nation, and eventual elevation to the status of a national hero (Tylor 281-82; Meyers 18). While Tylor draws examples from a range of mythological traditions, such as ancient Greek, Roman, Slavonic, Germanic, Spanish, Turkish, and Brazilian contexts, it is crucial to acknowledge that his hypothesis relies on a limited sample size (282). Therefore, it fails to observe the evolution of epic heroes. For instance, noble birth, which Tylor sees as one of the main features of epic heroes, does not necessarily always appear as the main characteristic of epic heroes. An interesting example of this transformation in epic heroes is *El Cid*. The hero of this circa twelfth-century Castilian epic is a bastard who possesses no economic or political power but has a willing heart and courage. His story is that of the "transmutation of courage into economic power, and then of wealth into lineage, the highest in the land" (Elliott 245). His deeds and story are a clear message to the lesser nobles of the time: if a bastard "could lift his kin to the level of royalty [...] through his participation in the Reconquista, then other nobles of his class could legitimately aspire to the same heights of success by invading Arab-controlled lands" (245-56). What is remarkable here is that *basileos*, the royal or high-born lineage and rank, which is considered to be one of the defining characteristics of epic heroism in classical antiquity transforms into the very opposite in the character of El Cid. Hence, the case of El Cid is an indicator of how the narrative

purpose of epics may dramatically alter its epic heroes. Consequently, Tylor's overarching conclusion fails to fully capture the breadth and diversity of epic heroes as seen in the case of El Cid. Tylor's approach exhibits a tendency to selectively highlight characteristics and actions that align with his hypothesis, while potentially overlooking or neglecting other pertinent features of these heroes.

Despite these limitations, Tylor's theories exerted a captivating influence on a cluster of academics in late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century Europe. The allure of his work was such that it sparked an unprecedented surge in the scholarly examination of epic heroes and mythological heroes. Tylor's research acted as a catalyst, stimulating further inquiry and prompting scholars to explore the intricate complexities and variations within hero myths across different cultural contexts and historical periods. While Tylor's conclusions may have been excessively broad, his contributions to the field of epic hero studies cannot be understated.

In the late nineteenth century, a series of studies conducted in Germany held significance not only in their own right but also due to their profound influence on future theories pertaining to epic heroism. The German scholars of the period, although they differed in many areas, underlined the similarities in the heroes of the epics and myths. Adolf Bastian's ideas, which was later also supported by Adolf Bauer, put forth the argument that the similarities observed among heroes could be attributed to the inherent disposition of the human mind, suggesting that these shared traits were intrinsic to human nature, whose manner of "manifestation [is] identical at all times and in all places" (Rank 1-2). The ubiquity of epic heroes, according to Bastian, therefore, was caused by human nature itself. However, no further scientific explanation is provided apart from a showcase of similarities in hero myths (qtd. in Rank 1-2).

Another trend in Germany during this period was "original community" theory, promoted by figures like Theodor Benfey and Rudolf Schubert, who argued that the common attributes of heroes go back to the earliest stages of human culture, proposing that these narratives initially emerged within closely related communities, particularly among Indo-Germanic peoples (Rank 2-4). Over the course of history, hero myths have undergone a process of evolution and expansion, becoming ingrained in cultures worldwide. This phenomenon suggests the notion of a common origin for these myths, which spread across

different regions through migrations. This approach, which was later supported by figures like Julius Braun and Rudolf Shubert, focused on the question of where these myths originated in the first place, rather than how they dispersed and reached specific peoples, as emphasised by Rank (3). However, with the emergence of new archaeological discoveries in Babylonia, the place of origin shifted to Mesopotamia as it was deemed to predate India. This shift highlights the speculative nature of the approach in question, as it appears to be driven by the pursuit of identifying a singular source for these myths without substantial evidence to support such claims.

Moving into the early twentieth century, Otto Rank, a student and colleague of Sigmund Freud, put forth a psychoanalytical interpretation of epic heroes. Rank suggested that these figures were characterised by their unique birth circumstances and the symbolic fulfilment of repressed desires. Furthermore, he posited that their actions were driven by a deep-seated motivation to overthrow the figure of the father (Rank 7-12).<sup>2</sup> In his analysis, Rank compiles a diverse array of hero narratives, encompassing regions such as Babylonia, Persia, ancient Greece and Rome, and mediaeval Europe, effectively identifying shared commonalities among them: The hero typically arises from distinguished parentage, often a king's son, amidst challenging circumstances like continence issues or secret parentage. A prophetic warning precedes or accompanies the pregnancy, cautioning against his birth and posing threats to the father. He is set adrift in a box on water but rescued and nurtured by animals or common people. Upon maturity, he sets out on a diverse journey to find his parents, seeking revenge on his father and gaining recognition, eventually achieving honours (Rank 61). His conviction lies in the belief that these myths represent manifestations of the innate human faculty of imagination (Rank 8). Moreover, he ascribes the prevalence of epic heroes across various epics and myths to the fundamental workings of the human psyche, a perspective largely influenced by Freud's impact on the author during that period.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> For an in-depth analysis of the relations between father and hero please see Rank's *The Myth of the Birth of Hero* (1914), pp. 61-73.

<sup>3</sup> Over the course of his academic journey, Otto Rank's perspectives on the aforementioned matter underwent significant changes. For a comprehensive understanding of these evolving views, please see Nancy Gordon Seif's article titled "Otto Rank: On the Nature of the Hero," published in *American Image*



The aforementioned studies demonstrate the complexities inherent in the analysis of epic heroism. While they offer valuable insights into the underlying patterns and psychological interpretations of hero myths, it is crucial to approach their findings with a critical lens. The tendency to selectively focus on heroes that align with preconceived notions or overarching theories may limit the scope of understanding and hinder a comprehensive examination of the diverse range of hero figures found across different cultural contexts and time periods. Therefore, a balanced and nuanced approach is essential in order to appreciate the multifaceted nature of epic heroism and the intricacies involved in its interpretation.

Among this “ubiquitous fallacy” group, Joseph Campbell’s view of epic hero requires special attention due to its great influence on the studies related to epic heroism both in academic circles and popular culture. In his seminal work, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949), Campbell postulates the existence of a shared pattern in the origins, backgrounds, actions, and journeys of epic heroes across different cultures and time periods. Campbell’s hypothesis of the monomyth stems from the belief that the human desire to create myth is an inherent aspect of human nature, universally present among individuals regardless of their geographic or temporal context (30). To support his theory, Campbell draws upon a wide range of examples from diverse mythological traditions, employing the theories of Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung as analytical frameworks.

The major academic rebuke of Campbell’s formula issues from the way that it is deeply characterised by “a certain kind of universalizing, archetypal comparativism” (Miller 6). Although Campbell uses various examples, his selection method is not all-inclusive; he rather focuses on those aspects of the stories that justify his formula. Huffman further critiques Campbell’s methodology, highlighting its lack of cohesion and all-encompassing scope. According to Huffman, Campbell’s analysis within each specific chapter is too discriminatory and narrowly focused, making it difficult for the individual examples to collectively support his overarching hypothesis (70-72). An illustrative example of this methodological flaw can be found in Campbell’s treatment of the origins of the epic hero and the significance of virgin birth. While Campbell presents various

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in 1984 (Vol. 41, No. 4, pp. 373-384). Seif’s work sheds light on the shifting stances of Rank concerning this particular issue.

examples from different cultural contexts, such as Aztecs, Buddhism, and Roman literature, to emphasise the importance of this motif, he encounters inconsistencies when using Arthurian legends to support another argument. Huffman points out that Campbell's analysis of Arthurian legends contradicts his claims about virgin birth, as Arthur's birth in these legends is not attributed to a virgin mother but rather the result of a union between Uther Pendragon and Igraine, the wife of the Duke of Cornwall (Huffman 71-72). This example demonstrates the failure of Campbell's supposedly comprehensive formula to work consistently even within his own selected samples.

Campbell's approach inadvertently falls into the academic fallacy called cherry-picking, wherein he selectively highlights examples and data that align with his hypothesis while disregarding or overlooking conflicting cases and data. This methodological flaw undermines the comprehensive and inclusive nature of Campbell's formula for heroes, raising doubts about the validity and applicability of his monomyth theory. It underscores the importance of critically evaluating and considering a broad range of evidence and examples in the study of epic heroism to avoid a reductionist and overly simplistic understanding of this complex phenomenon.

Perhaps the most influential of this group is Mikhail Bakhtin. In his *The Dialogic Imagination*, Bakhtin argues that epic is characterised by a national epic past, national tradition—not based on an individual's experiences—and lastly by epic distance, which separates the real world from the heroic epic world (13). He also sees the epic hero as a shadow of his literary ancestors, disconnected from the age in which he is created (Bakhtin 13-14). Therefore, Bakhtin argues that epic heroes share similar characteristics and actions due to their inherent connection to the lineage of their literary ancestors. Haydon argues that Bakhtin's reading of epic genre results from the fact that he sees the epic "as a self-contained mode of writing [...] whose only reference system is a kind of 'golden chain' of great epicists [...] who exist primarily to interact with one another, and therefore outside of their own histories" (15-16). Bakhtin's "creed," as Haydon terms it, caused epic heroes to be analysed primarily in the light of heroic traditions. While it is true that there exists a strong interconnectedness and influential tradition within the genre, it is important to consider the personal intentions of individual poets and the specific socio-cultural and historical contexts in which each epic is created. Understanding the

purpose and significance of the epic heroes depicted in these works requires an appreciation for these broader factors.

Hence, the “ubiquitous fallacy group” while trying to find a universal mould for epic heroes, fails to capture the wide range of epic heroes and deeper understandings of the poets’ intentions and the nuances of their approaches to the epic hero and heroism. The fundamental problem of this group, as I have already explained, is their methodological approach. Every single study in this group, whether they have anthropological, Jungian or Freudian approaches or focus on generic impacts, is marked by the problem of selective data. Their selection of epics and myths is not all-inclusive since they only use stories that justify their formula. Hence, the attempt to find universal ubiquity in heroes ends in failing to capture the width of the “epic hero” spectrum and to demonstrate how transitional these figures are.

The second group’s approach towards the evolution of epic heroes dramatically differs from the first group. Contrary to the ubiquitous fallacy the first group had, this approach is marked by the desire to differentiate the distinct characteristic features and actions exhibited by epic heroes across different temporal and spatial contexts. In an effort to reflect the transformation and adaptation of epic heroes, various critics in this group have attempted to categorise them based on various models, such as the Homeric, Virgilian, Ovidian, Hagiographical, Patristic, Miles Christi, Christiad, Saints, Knights, Dantesque, Renaissance, Allegorical, and Ordinary Christian. It is worth noting that this list is not exhaustive and could potentially be expanded upon. The categorisation can be based on a variety of generic principles like lineage, *arete* (moment of excellence), physical strength, warrior status, religious traits, apotheosized virtues, nation building, and paragon of virtue status. Additionally, the categorization can be influenced by spatial and temporal factors: specific spaces and times can suggest particular traits that are deemed heroic, hence resulting in spatial and temporal classifications.

This group’s endeavour to differentiate and categorise epic heroes represents a remarkable and insightful undertaking, shedding light on the unique attributes of myths, epics, and the cultural contexts in which they originate, as well as providing valuable insights into the intentions of individual poets. This pursuit holds significant importance in facilitating a deeper understanding of the diversities inherent in epic heroes across

various cultures, geographical regions, historical periods, and even among different poets. By undertaking the task of classification, scholars and critics strive to identify and delineate the varied traits and characteristics exhibited by epic heroes, thus revealing the multifaceted nature of these literary figures. Through this process, a spectrum of heroic attributes emerges, demonstrating the wide-ranging depictions and interpretations of heroism across diverse myths and literary works.

The act of categorising epic heroes also offers a window into the complexities of cultural expressions, as it illuminates how these figures are shaped by the beliefs, values, and norms of the societies in which they originate. This exploration not only enhances our comprehension of the heroes themselves but also provides invaluable insights into the broader cultural landscapes of the respective civilizations. Furthermore, this analytical pursuit enables us to recognize the dynamic nature of epic heroes, as their portrayal and significance undergo transformations since they traverse different cultures, geographic settings, and historical epochs. Each poet's creative vision, artistic choices, and unique perspective contribute to the ever-changing representations of these iconic figures.

The types of epic heroes, however, lead to an illusion that there are concrete and strong lines that separate these types from one another. Marianne Ailes underlines the fluidity in the categorisations of epic heroes and states that "composers of texts play with and exploit the audience's expectations which may be partly defined by the generic markers used in a text" (255). Although each model may appear to have distinct characteristics, the fluidity among these heroic types makes it impossible to draw a strict line between them. Therefore, categorising the epic heroes and creating types and sub-models unintentionally leads to the idea that there are strong lines of connection between models. Weiner argues that the classical epic hero, which is modelled after the Homeric hero, is "distinguished by extraordinary valour and martial achievements; [he is] an illustrious warrior of great descent" (qtd. in Renehan 99). He is a figure who dies "in the pursuit of honour and glory" (Schein 69). However, as Gregory Nagy observes, even Homeric heroes like Achilles, Odysseus, Sarpedon, and Memnon, while having certain common points, dramatically differ from each other in terms of their characteristic traits, actions, and stories. This indicates that even Homer's heroes do not necessarily present a single model. Furthermore, Steadman argues that even in antiquity Homer's oeuvre was reinterpreted

and redesigned; for instance, Neoplatonists, rejecting the violent aspect of previous age, used Homeric songs for the purpose of natural and moral philosophy and further states that “[t]he heroic concept had outgrown the heroic song; the epic itself needed to be transformed from within, reinterpreted and thoroughly moralised in order to accommodate newer and more spiritual ideals” (Steadman 151).

Another hero concept that presents a good example of fluidity is the “Christian warrior,” also known as *miles Christi* (the soldier of Christ). This concept combines military prowess and moral virtues of Christianity with the addition of certain characteristic traits, modesty, devoutness, and asceticism (Iwanczak n.p). However, Elliot draws attention to the colossal changes in the concepts of Christian epic heroes in hagiographical epics and argues, “[q]ualities other than spear-rattling may define heroic action, and wars may be fought on more than one battlefield” (242). Elliot’s remark underlines how the martial prowess, which is considered to be the hallmark of epic heroism of *miles Christi* cease to exist in hagiographical epics which shows a dramatic change. However, it should be noted here that even in some hagiographical epics, the epic heroes are endowed with martial skills. The example of St. George is indicative of this situation. This suggests that there is not a single, uniform concept of the Christian epic hero that can be applied to various genres within the category of Christian epic literature, and that there is even fluidity in the portrayal of epic heroes within sub-genres such as Christian hagiographical epics.

Hence, it is safe to argue that epic heroism indeed covers such a wide spectrum of elements and features that it resists any uniform definition of epic heroism since it is a dynamic concept that is ever changing. The constant evolution of epic heroes gradually gives birth to new heroic versions. Academics try to categorise these versions and create models or types to indicate their differences from the preceding and succeeding models and create referential points. However, the boundaries of these heroic types are often fluid, and these models may not fully capture the complexity and diversity of epic heroisms represented within them.

Before engaging with seventeenth-century English theoretical explorations of epic heroes, it is prudent to first consider the analytical frameworks that can be employed to scrutinize the development of these figures. This preliminary examination raises pertinent questions: What motivates poets to modify their portrayal of epic heroes? What

underlying dynamics spark the emergence of new forms of heroism? In what ways do poets induce these transformations in their epic heroes? To address these queries, numerous scholars have endeavoured to formulate hypotheses and construct analytical models. These models are designed to elucidate the evolution and transition of epic heroes, offering insights into the complex interplay of literary, historical, and cultural influences that shape their portrayal in literature.

Doris Cecilia Werner argues that epic is indeed a vibrant genre and epic heroism does change since “each age defines [it] in accord with its own needs” (11). To support her argument, she draws upon examples from T. Higgin’s *Secular Heroic Epic Poetry of the Caroline Period* (1953), which explores the intricate connections between the politics of the sixteenth century, particularly the Tudor dynasty, and the works of poets such as Spenser, Warner, and Drayton. Werner highlights how these poets depict the House of Tudor as a re-emergence of King Arthur, demonstrating the profound impact of contemporary politics on the epics and their heroes. Additionally, she examines the neoclassical epics of the seventeenth century, illustrating their close integration with the political climate of the time. These epics often present the reigning monarch as the culmination of long-standing legends, as seen in Edward Howard’s *British Princes* (1669) with Charles II and Richard Blackmore’s *Prince Arthur* (1695) with King William (Werner 12).

Werner’s conceptualisation of the evolution of epic heroes holds validity to a certain degree, acknowledging that these figures can indeed be shaped by the political, cultural, religious, economic, and societal norms and demands of their respective eras. However, this perspective is somewhat limited and overly generalized, as it fails to fully recognize that poets are not mere by-products of their times. Werner’s broad approach overlooks the unique qualities inherent in individual texts and the distinct narrative objectives they possess. Each poet questions and revalues the very norms and precepts of the age individually and comes up with different answers to the problems and questions. Hence, Werner’s analysis falls short by neglecting to consider the individual poet’s distinct perspectives and creative intentions because the development of epic heroes results not only from the broader contextual influences but also from the unique artistic contributions

and intellectual nuances of the poets themselves, thereby necessitating a more nuanced understanding of the dynamic nature of epic heroism.

John Steadman's "image and ideal" hypothesis is another important theory that seeks to explain the evolution of epic heroes. Like Werner, Steadman's theory takes into account the emerging norms and precepts of the time period, but also incorporates the influence of the genre's conventions. He argues that the transition of the epic heroes is characterised by the disparity between "the heroic values conventional in the epic tradition and those of the poet's own society" (151). As an example, the conversion of a pagan epic hero<sup>4</sup> into a Christian one may result in a clash between the traditional characteristics of the epic hero, such as martial prowess, boasting, ambition, and the doctrines of Christianity, which emphasise obedience, humility, and submission. This conflict arises because the Christian image of the hero is at odds with the heroic ideals rooted in the generic tradition. Steadman's theory sheds light on the fact that the evolution of epic heroes is a complex and nuanced process that poses challenges for poets. The poet cannot simply add or modify one characteristic of the hero without considering the potential impact of such change on the overall structure of the epic hero.

While Steadman's hypothesis is a widely-used theory for analysing epic heroes and provides valuable insights, it is still too broad and inadequate for fully analysing the complexity of seventeenth-century epic heroes in England. In my opinion, Steadman's hypothesis has three significant shortcomings. The first shortcoming is its emphasis on the overriding influence of the norms and needs of the time period on poets, similar to Werner's perspective. While it is true that poets are influenced by the society in which they live, they cannot be reduced exclusively to the dominant precepts and ideologies of their time. This said, poets may challenge and reevaluate these very norms in their own way. Maurice Bowra touches upon this issue as follows: "The writers of literary epic set themselves a task of uncommon difficulty when they tried to adapt the heroic ideal to unheroic times and to proclaim in poetry a new conception of man's grandeur and

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<sup>4</sup> By "pagan epic heroes," Steadman refers specifically to epic heroes originating from the epic traditions of Ancient Greece and Rome. These include, but are not limited to, characters depicted in works by Homer (such as Achilles, Sarpedon, Glaucus, and Diomedes in the *Iliad* or Odysseus in the *Odyssey*), Apollonius of Rhodes (such as Jason in the *Argonautica*), and Virgil (like Aeneas in the *Aeneid*). Such heroes typically exhibit qualities like martial prowess, boasting, and ambition, which are aligned with the valorised traits of their respective pagan societies.

nobility. Each had his own approach, his own solution, and his own doubts and reservations” (32). This is particularly relevant in seventeenth-century England, a period marked by wars, political, religious, and social conflicts, where there were few common grounds on which people could unite, let alone expect poets to share a similar perception of epic heroes who would demonstrate similar normative values and act as role models for their audiences.

The second shortcoming of Steadman’s theory is its singular focus on the generic conventions of epic heroism. The range of epic heroism throughout the history of epic tradition is so diverse that such heroes may even exhibit conflicting characteristics. Even within the history of the epic genre, there are various traditions that contrast dramatically with each other. In this regard, Steadman falls into the same error as Bakhtin by overly emphasising the generic influences within the borders of epic tradition. It should also be underlined here that the margins of these heroisms are not clear-cut; epic heroisms are transitional and fluid. Hence, the models and traditions that the poets use or react against need to be carefully analysed to truly grasp the innovations that the poets present in their epic heroes. Lastly, one of the limitations of Steadman’s “image and ideal” hypothesis is its lack of consideration for the complexity of the arguments made by poets. For instance, in the realm of seventeenth-century English epics, the epic heroes of William Davenant’s *Gondibert* (1651) and John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* (1667) are both characterised by their martial skills. However, Davenant rationalises this heroic attribute through philosophical and political reasoning, drawing on the arguments of Thomas Hobbes, whereas Milton anchors his justification in the theological discourses of theologian Hugo Grotius. While the poets may have the same surface-level idea of martial prowess, their underlying arguments are based on different foundations. These differences in argument may have varying effects on the transformation of the epic heroes. Therefore, it is important to carefully analyse each epic hero individually, as failing to consider these independent variables that significantly influence the epic heroes can result in oversimplified generalisations that do not fully capture the depth of the ideas behind the creation of new epic heroes.

To more accurately depict the evolution of the epic heroes in this study and how these epic heroes are poets’ personal responses to the changing spirit of the age, it is necessary



to examine the theoretical debates surrounding epic heroism in the literary criticism of the period. By doing so, I aim to establish a context to demonstrate the differences, and occasionally similarities, between the epic heroes in this study and the seventeenth-century English literary criticism scene from which they originated. However, the English critics of the century were “too scattered in subject matter to allow of any logical grouping” (Swedenberg 29),<sup>5</sup> which leads to a vital topic: eclecticism.

Although the seventeenth-century English literary theory is rich when the whole century is taken into consideration, it should be noted here that English literary criticism prior to the 1650s appears to be relatively sparse with regards to epic poetry, let alone epic heroes. However, in spite of the absence of a single treatise that solely concentrates on the critique of epic poetry, various critics, translators, and philosophers, including Thomas Lodge, Richard Stanyhurst, Philip Sidney, George Puttenham, William Webbe, John Harington, George Chapman, Francis Bacon, and Thomas Hobbes, presented their views on epic poetry and heroism in their Prefaces, letters, introduction to translations, philosophical works and works on poesy. Beginning with Davenant’s Preface to *Gondibert* in 1651, which is the first treatise dedicated solely to epic poetry during the period, the literary criticism on epic poetry flourished and not only were there many translations from Italy and France, but also various writers, including John Dennis, Abraham Cowley, John Dryden, and Richard Blackmore wrote works on epic poetry.

Eclecticism is indeed the most defining characteristic feature of the seventeenth century epic criticism and poetry towards epic heroism and epic heroes. The traditions concerning epic heroism and literary heroes were complex by this time and individual critics could relate to many different preceding models while creating and developing new roles and heroic types themselves. The existing traditions of heroism and epic heroes at the critics’ command were composite: both pagan and Christian traditions were varied and mixed. It is worth mentioning that literary criticism on the epic genre and epic heroes was quite extensive both in continental Europe and England. The critics in this study were well-acquainted with previous models of epic heroes through their own readings of literary and critical texts as well as the literary criticisms of late Renaissance Italian criticism and the

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<sup>5</sup> However, Swedenberg adds that the only exception to that is the perception of the epic poet as teacher. Please see, Swedenberg’s first chapter, “Foundations of English Theory,” in *The Theory of the Epic in England 1650-1800*.

seventeenth-century French criticism. In this respect, it can be argued that drawing the contours of epic heroism in seventeenth-century England is quite challenging, since it is immensely wide, fluid, and eclectic.

The letters, non-fiction works, and prefaces of William Davenant and John Milton offer insight into their views on the epic heroes in preceding epics, traditions, and literary criticism. In order to understand the innovations brought by these poets, it is necessary to present their critiques of the heroic figures of the preceding models. However, given the vastness of the topic, providing a detailed survey of epic heroes' evolution is practically impossible. Therefore, the poets' critique of specific literary works and preceding models and their influence on their epic heroes will be discussed in the relevant chapters that follow.

Although the theories on epic and epic heroes in the seventeenth-century English literary scene were marked by eclecticism, it is necessary to touch upon the key discussions surrounding epic heroes and epic heroism to provide a foundation for the chapters of this study and to understand how the poets in this study diverge from the contemporary scene. Additionally, in some cases the poets in this study were influenced by various distinct discussions offered by the late sixteenth-century and seventeenth-century English criticism, French literary criticism and late Renaissance Italian criticism. It is necessary to touch upon these points that reverberated in the poets' epic heroes to avoid repetitions in the forthcoming chapters. Hence, while discussing the nature and characteristics of epic heroes in seventeenth-century England, references to these criticisms will be made only when relevant. However, I would like to underline once again that drawing the contours of epic heroism in seventeenth-century England is quite challenging due to its immense fluidity and eclecticism. Hence, I will solely focus on the most significant discussions extant in the literary theories of the century, those surrounding the instructional role of the epic hero, the epic hero as a paragon of virtue, his lineage, and the problem of Christianising the epic hero. I will leave the specific impacts of the preceding models, traditions, and literary theories on the poets to the relevant chapters.

It would be beneficial to begin the discussion of the contours of epic hero and epic heroism in the seventeenth-century English literary scene with the naming of the genre. Swedenberg asserts that many epic poets and literary theorists in this period used "Heroic

Poem” or “Heroick Poem” to refer to the genre, which demonstrates how essential epic heroes were for the epic genre (165).<sup>6</sup> This can indeed be observed in the various epics and theoretical works of the period: *Gondibert: An Heroick Poem* by William Davenant, *Pharonnida: A Heroick Poem* by William Chamberlayne, and *Prince Arthur: An Heroick Poem* by Richard Blackmore. John Dryden and John Dennis, the leading literary critics of the century also used the term heroick poem. Although there are exceptions, the theoretical scene is indeed marked by the idea that epic should be “unified by the great action of a central hero” (Werner 24).<sup>7</sup> The naming of the genre as “heroick poem” therefore directly displays the centrality of epic heroes and their significance.

One of the few topics on which almost all critics of the age unite is the instructional aspect of the epic and the epic hero, which is also known as its epideictic or didactic function. The overriding perception of the age is that the epic makes its moral points by inspiring the reader to imitate the hero. This perception was fundamentally shaped by the impact of the late Renaissance Italian literary criticism.

It is crucial to first briefly examine the late Renaissance Italian literary criticism before discussing their theories on the instructional function of epic heroes and how it impacted upon the seventeenth-century English literary scene. The Italian influence on the epic genre and its heroes is particularly relevant to this study as it served as a primary foundation for the late sixteenth and seventeenth century literary theories on epic heroes and heroism in England. The leading Italian theorists and epicists of the period, among whom are Marco Girolamo Vida (*Ars Poetica*, 1527), Ludovico Castelvetro, Giovanni Giorgio Trissino, Gherardo Cinthio (*Discorse Intorno al Comporre dei Romanzi*, 1554), Giambattista Pigna (*I Romanzi*, 1554), Bernardino Daniello (*La Poetica*, 1536), and Torquato Tasso (*Discorsi dell' Arte Poetica*, c. 1565), influenced the foundations of European literature and literary theories of the epic through their literary and theoretical works (Spingarn 108-24; Werner 27-33). Specifically, the impact of Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata*, already available in Latin and vernacular translations throughout

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<sup>6</sup> Although I agree with Swedenberg in the argument that the naming of the genre as “Heroick Poem” indicates the centrality and significance of epic heroes in the perception of epics during the period, it should also be noted here that the late seventeenth-century English literary scene also features “Heroic plays,” particularly heroic tragedies; hence, this name is perhaps used as a generic marker to differentiate between these genres.

<sup>7</sup> See Rapin's *Treatise*, page 77.

Continental Europe and England during his lifetime, was huge, deeply influencing both poets and theorists (Welch 42). The translations of famous Italian epics, Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* by Sir John Harington and Torquato Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata* by Edward Fairfax, in the Elizabethan fin-de-siècle introduced the Italian perspective on the epic and the epic hero into the English literary scene especially in the early seventeenth century (Reid 1-3).<sup>8</sup>

In a letter addressed to Walter Raleigh, dated January 23, 1589, Edmund Spenser names Italian epic poets, Ludovico Ariosto and Torquato Tasso, among those who influenced him while composing *The Faerie Queene* (15). It is a good instance to observe how intellectual interaction between England and Italy is vibrant as Torquato Tasso's *La Gerusalemme Liberata* is published in 1581, only nine years before Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*. Spenser's acknowledgement of Tasso therefore indicates his close interest in the continental literary world<sup>9</sup> and the extent of Italian influence. The influence of Tasso can also be traced back to Thomas Nashe's *Teares over Jerusalem* (1593) and Abraham Fraunce's *Arcadian Rhetoricke* (1588) (Brand 206-209).<sup>10</sup> Philip Sidney's *An Apology for Poetry*, also known as *The Defence of Poesy* (1595), is another significant work in terms of witnessing the influence of Italian epic theorists on English writers. William Davenant too acknowledges the Italian influence. Even in his Preface to *Gondibert* (1650), he discusses the innovations proposed by the Italian critics of the late Renaissance and indicates how they depart from the works of the ancient poets (5-6). He accepts Tasso, "who reviv'd the Heroick flame after it was many ages quench'd" (5), as the first of the modern epicists. Scholars have examined the influence of the late Renaissance Italian

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<sup>8</sup> For details on the influence of Italian romance epic tradition on the formation of Englishness, construction of English nationhood and identity, please see Joshua Samuel Reid's PhD dissertation entitled "Englishing the Italian Romance Epic in The Elizabethan Fin-De-Siècle" (2013), College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Kentucky.

<sup>9</sup> Tasso's fame continued to increase throughout Europe. In 1768, Jean-Jacques Rousseau noted: "Let us not forget to note, for the glory of Tasso, that most of the Venetian gondoliers know a large part of his poem, *the Jerusalem Delivered*, by heart; that some of them know the entire thing; that they pass summer nights singing it by turns from boat to boat; [...] that only Homer before him had the honor to be sung in this way; and that no other epic poem has shared that honor since then" (*Epic Poetry and Opera*, Welch 1). Rousseau's remarks indicate the significant impact of Tasso's reception both in Italy and continental Europe.

<sup>10</sup> See, Brand, 206-209. (*Torquato Tasso: A Study of the Poet and of his Contribution to English Literature*, Cambridge UP, 1965)

literature and theory on Milton's understanding of the epic genre.<sup>11</sup> In *The Reason of Church Government* (1642), Milton states that it was Ludovico Ariosto who inspired him to write his epics in English. Milton also cites various Italian poets and literary critics while discussing poetic development, poetry as an educative tool, and the model of the Christian epic in his various letters and non-fiction works, including *Of Education* and *The Reason of Church Government*. It is palpable that the Italian influence on seventeenth century England literary works is great. This is also the case for the literary theorists: John Dryden and John Dennis, the leading literary critics of the age, who also borrow various discussions and commentaries of Italians in their works: Dryden calls the Italian poets "the descendants of Virgil in a right line" (*Discourses* 128). He borrows various ideas, among the most significant in my view, is the notion that Christian heroes do not necessarily need to be portrayed solely as patient, obedient, and submissive; they are equally capable of being active agents in the service of God. (*Discourses* 22-23).

Italian criticism also acknowledges the didactic function of poetry<sup>12</sup> since the Italian approach is heavily influenced by Horatian criticism.<sup>13</sup> In *Ars Poetica*, Horace states that the aim of poetry is "to teach and delight" (333).<sup>14</sup> The primary function of poetry for Horace is moral improvement, an idea which he most probably derived from the practice

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<sup>11</sup> For the impact of late Renaissance literary theory on Milton, please see: Mario Praz, *The Flaming Heart* (Garden City, 1958); J. B. Broadbent, *Some Graver Subject* (London, 1960); C. M. Bowra, *From Virgil to Milton* (London, 1963); Douglas Bush, *John Milton* (New York, 1964); F. T. Prince, *The Italian Element in Milton's Verse* (Oxford, 1954); E. M. W. Tillyard, *The English Epic and Its Background* (New York, 1966), Judith A. Kates's "The Revaluation of the Classical Heroic in Tasso and Milton" (*Comparative Literature*, 1974, 299-317), Judith A. Kates's *Tasso and Milton: The Problem of Christian Epic* (London, 1984), W. S. Howard's "Companions With Time: Milton, Tasso, And Renaissance Dialogue," (*The Comparatist*, 2004, pp. 5-28), Francesco Brenna's "Milton and Italian Early Modern Literary Theory: A Reassessment of the Journey to Italy," *Milton Quarterly*, vol 55. (2021), pages: 185-200.

<sup>12</sup> There are also some other Italian critics, Bernardo Tasso, Castelvetro and Robertelli who either disregard the didactic function or prioritise delight over teaching (Spingarn 55). However, I will not elaborate on their perspective since-seventeenth-century English criticism is deeply influenced by Horace's ideas, which will be discussed in detail in a later section in the Introduction.

<sup>13</sup> The origins of the ideas of didactic function of poetry and the poet as the teacher is a matter of debate. Some argue that the concept of the poet as the educator already existed in Ancient Greece; however, it faded, especially after Plato and Aristophanes, until its rebirth in the Augustan age (Campbell 28-29). Campbell further claims that "Horace's views on literature are derived primarily from himself" (68). Tate, on the other hand, argues that "the Greek traditional view of the function of poetry did not die out," he, thus, sees Horace's views as neither "original [nor] a departure from recent Greek criticism" (65). For detailed discussion of the topic, please see, J. Tate's "Horace and the Moral Function of Poetry," A.Y Campbell's *Horace* (1924), pages: 28-55, 67-70. It should also be noted that the argument related to the didactic function of the poetry is solely based on Horace since Aristotle's *Poetics* attaches no such feature to epic, which indicates the importance of Horace's views to Italian criticism.

<sup>14</sup> The idea of instructional poetry and various arguments that Horace supports this idea can also be found in his *Epistles*; however, I will not go into detail about the arguments in that book since it was not available to Italian criticism at the time; therefore, it did not influence the Italian criticism in question.

of Homer who had been accepted as the educator of Greece (Tate 69).<sup>15</sup> Bernardino Daniello, one of the leading critics of the late Renaissance and translator of Aristotle's *Poetics*, argued that just like a doctor's aim is to cure, a poet's task is to teach, he thus regards teaching as the natural task of a poet; for Girolamo Fracastoro, another significant Italian critic of the period, poetry aims to "describe the essential beauty of things, to aim at the universal and ideal, and to perform this function with every possible accompaniment of beautiful speech, thus affecting the minds of men in the direction of excellence and beauty" (Spingarn 48-49). This rhetoric of didacticism can also be observed in Giraldo Cinthio who asserts that it is the poet's aim to condemn vice and to praise virtue (Spingarn 49). Both Daniello and Fracastoro acknowledge the significance of poetry as an instrument of instruction. Antonio Sebastiano Minturno too accepts Horace's perception of the instructive and delightful characteristic of poetry and further develops it by adding another feature that is "to move" (De Poeta 11; Spingarn 52). In light of this didactic purpose, "Renaissance epics are constructed not so much as "autonomous literary works but as demonstrations of an ethical system" (Vickers 524). Spingarn also argues that the overriding conception of the function of the epic for Italian critics of the sixteenth century was ethical which "was as an effective guide to life [so much so that] even when delight was admitted as an end, it was simply because of its usefulness in effecting the ethical aim" (58). Hence, didacticism appears as the "must have" defining characteristic of the epic for Italian Renaissance criticism.

English literary critics of the late sixteenth century, whose influence continued well into the seventeenth century, also share this didactic perspective: Sidney presents a list of epic heroes, including Achilles, Cyrus, Aeneas, Turnus, and Rinaldo, and states that an epic hero of this kind "doth not only teach and move to truth, but teacheth and moeth to the most high and excellent truth" (30). Hence, he emphasises the instructional feature of epic heroes as moral exemplars. John Harrington's *a Briefe Apologie of Poetrie*<sup>16</sup> also underlines the morally instructional aspect of epic poetry: "I beleue that the reading of a

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<sup>15</sup> The dominant perception of Homer as the chief educator of Greece indicates the gravity of his epics on the Greek people. This perception can be traced back to various authors of antiquity. Please see, W. J. Verdenius's *Homer, The Educator of the Greeks* (1970) for detailed discussion of Homer's educative impact throughout Ancient Greece.

<sup>16</sup> Here, I would like to touch upon the fact that Harrington's *Apologie* is actually prefixed to his translation of *Orlando Furioso*; hence, it is palpable that his arguments are deeply influenced by a Tassonian touch.

good Heroicall Poeme may make a man both wiser and honest” (210). Swedenberg draws attention to the fact that at the end of each book of *Orlando Furioso in English*, Harington “appends an interpretation of the moral to be found in the book” (40), which emphasises the focus put on the didactic elements found in epic poems. Although neither Puttenham’s *Arte of English Poesie* (1589) nor William Webbe’s *Discourse of English Poetrie* (1586) directly focus on the nature and structure of epic poetry in detail, they “emphasize the didactic purpose of poetry” (Werner 4). Even though Werner asserts that Webbe does not specifically concentrate on the epic genre, Webbe’s analysis of Homer’s epics and their role in literature provides a glimpse into his perspective on the instructional feature of epics:

His [Readers’] mind may be well instructed with knowledge and wisdom [sic] [...] a Prince shall learne not onely courage and valiantnesse, but discretion also and pollicie to counter with his enemies, yea a perfect forme of wyse consultations with his Captaines and exhortations to the people, with infinite commodities. (*Elizabethan* I.234-35)

Hence, Webbe’s remarks indicate the range of ways in which Homer’s oeuvre could offer instruction to a prince. Furthermore, he declares that from “manifold and daungerous aduentures of Vlisses [Odysseus], may a man learne many noble vertues” (235), highlighting once more the significant role epic heroes play in the didactic nature of epics.

Here, special attention should be given to the views of Francis Bacon, an English philosopher and statesman of the seventeenth century, who is widely regarded as one of the founders of the scientific method and an influential figure in the development of modern philosophy. He states that heroic poetry shows people that “there is agreeable to the spirit of man a more ample greatness, a more perfect order, and a more beautiful variety than it can anywhere (since the Fall) find in nature” (Bacon 343), thereby indicating his belief in the ability of poetry to improve humankind. In his *Advancement of Learning* (1605), he furthers this argument by stating that since

the acts or events of true history have not that magnitude which satisfieth the mind of man, poesy feigneth acts and events greater and more heroicall; because true history propoundeth the successes and issues of actions not so agreeable to the merits of virtue and vice, therefore poesy [Heroic poetry] feigns them more just in retribution, and more according to revealed providence; because true history representeth actions and events more ordinary and less interchanged, therefore poesy

endueth them with more rareness, and more unexpected and alternative variations. So as it appeareth that poesy serveth and conferreth to magnanimity, morality, and to delectation. (343)<sup>17</sup>

Bacon's observation highlights the prevalent belief in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century that heroic poetry could be used as a source for moral instruction and improvement. In this case, even a philosopher like Bacon, who recognised the importance of education and its role in personal growth and societal progress, saw value in using heroic poetry for instruction.

This concept of the epic genre as a demonstration of an ethical system extended to seventeenth-century English literary criticism. It is at the core of the discussions and is crucial to understand the period's epics and how its epic heroes evolved, since the ultimate aim of the poets' aesthetic was instruction and promoting certain values through literature. This established idea echoes in the works of two significant literary critics of the century: John Dennis and John Dryden. Dennis argues that precepts are marked by the instruction of philosophical theory and they "were too shocking to be Persuasive: Because they shew us our faults too directly" (4) and furthers his argument that "the best way to teach [is to] convey it by Example; that is, by Action" (6). Dennis also asserts that epic poetry teaches its audience through the example of epic heroes: "That the Action is only fram'd for the Instruction; and that it is design'd for a proof of the Moral; that every part of that Action ought to be a gradual Progress in the proof" (*Remarks on Prince Arthur* 8). Accordingly, it can be argued that Dennis perceives the educational imperative of epic poetry as being principally conveyed via epic heroes, which subsequently underscores the paramount importance of these characters within the respective genre.

Dryden also argues, "[a]n heroic poem (truly such) is undoubtedly the greatest work which the soul of man is capable to perform. The design of it is to form the mind to heroic virtue by example; it is conveyed in verse that it may delight while it instructs" (117). Dryden's comment reveals his emphasis on the didactic goal of epic poetry, which should not be defined by precepts but rather by the heroes' actions and traits as exemplars of virtue. To fulfil this aim, he stresses the importance of entertainment while targeting

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<sup>17</sup> It is worth mentioning that Bacon expressed scepticism towards the notion of hidden meanings within Homer's poetry. Please see *Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century*, Chapter I, pages: 8-9. Cf. Swedenberg, pages: 30, 40.



educational objectives. In the preface to his translation of *The art of painting* from Italian, Dryden expresses that “the *Moral* (as *Bossu* observes) is the first business of the *Poet*, as being the ground-work of his Instruction” (xix). His claim underscores how didacticism recurs in his works, underlying the great significance the critic gave to the topic. In the Preface of the translator to Monsieur Bossu’s *Treatise of the Epick Poem*, W.J states that “[t]he Epick Poet, to back all, makes use of frequent Examples, the strongest Arguments to perswade Men to be Vertuous” (Preface n.p). Therefore, the concept of didacticism was firmly rooted in the epic theory of that era.

Both William Davenant and John Milton also emphasise the instructive purpose of epic poetry. In the subsequent chapters, I will further delve into their perspectives on this subject and its impact on the evolution of their epic heroes. It is thus a reasonable assertion that the instructional function of epic poetry had gained a strong foothold in sixteenth-century England, a notion that would persist and evolve within English literary theory of the seventeenth century. Consequently, it becomes clear that didacticism is a defining feature of seventeenth-century English literary criticism on epic poetry, with epic heroes acting as conduits to fulfil this didactic aim.

The general perception of the epic in the seventeenth-century England was that the epic conveys its moral messages by encouraging the reader to emulate the epic hero. This didactic feature attributed to epics is significant in terms of delving to the roots of the epic heroes as paragons of virtues since at the foundation of their evolution lies the desire to teach what is right through their characteristics and actions. In this respect, the epic hero is altered into an exemplary figure marked by paragon of ideals because “[i]f the purpose of the epic was to teach by example, the poem’s excellence would depend on the excellence of its exemplary hero” (Bond 43). The poet would “inspire a greater improvement in the moral character of his readers if he presented them with a paragon of wisdom, virtue, and bravery” (Bond 60). The hero envisaged was to excel in every specific feature attributed to him, which ultimately served the didactic function of epic poetry.

The concept of the “paragon” epic hero blossomed in Italian criticism and influenced English literary thinking. This idea can well be found in *Ragionamento sopra le Cose*

*pertinenti alla Poetica*<sup>18</sup> in which Agnolo Segni, a lecturer at the Florentine Academy, declares that “true poets include universals and in the things that they invent they include their excellence and the perfect example” (qtd. in Bond 61). Cinthio states that the “actions of the hero set out to imitate [...] the idea perfect” (176). Various other Renaissance critics and poets, including Tasso, Paolo Beni, Ludovico Dolce, Trissino, and Jason Denores, reflect this prevailing consensus of the age that the hero should be an epitome of virtue (Vickers 521). They argued that literature, as opposed to history was not restricted by facts which ultimately gave the poet the “liberty to idealize his characters and their achievements for the sake of entertainment and instruction” (Bond 60).

Although the primary objective of the epic is rooted in the principles espoused by Horace, the approach to achieving this objective, namely the idealisation of the hero, draws heavily upon Aristotle’s delineation of the disparity between history and poetry. Aristotle, in his *Poetics*, contends that “the poet’s task is not to relate what actually occurred, but rather what could occur—that is to say, what is feasible in terms of probability and necessity” (1451b). This fundamental tenet forms the cornerstone of the Italian argument concerning the portrayal of perfect epic heroes: given its fictional nature, poetry liberates the poet from the constraints of reality. Numerous Italian critics, including Daniello, Segni, and Tasso, align themselves with Aristotle’s assertion that there exists a “clear distinction between history, which presents events as they unfold, and poetry, which presents them as they might or should unfold” (Vickers 512). Consequently, poets are not shackled by the factual representations of heroes or occurrences, thereby affording them the latitude to elevate their heroes as paragons of virtue and excellence.

However, French epic theorists, specifically Rene Le Bossu, the leading French critic on epic poetry in the seventeenth century, provide an alternative to the concept of perfect epic heroes. Before delving into the French criticism’s approach towards “paragon” heroes, it would be beneficial to briefly touch upon the influence of French criticism on English epic poetry. Various English epic poets and critics, including William Davenant, Thomas Hobbes, and Abraham Cowley, were influenced by French criticism during their days in exile in France (Swedenberg 15). Le Bossu’s impact was especially significant

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<sup>18</sup> This critical work, composed in 1576 as a revision of lectures given in 1573, was published posthumously in 1581, following the death of its author, Segni (Weinberg 31, 309). It offers valuable insights into contemporary debates and issues surrounding the aim of poetics.

due to his “moderate tone, more judicious than judicial, [which] appealed to the scientific temper of his age” (Sambrook 75). His *Traitédu Poème Epique* (1675) was welcomed and embraced by the English poets and critics so warmly that its dramatic influence continued till the early eighteenth century which can be observed from the newspapers of the period. In *The Post Boy* (London, England), dated 05 February 1718, it is stated:

A Second Edition of Monsier Bossu’s *Treatise of the Epic Poem*; containing curious Reflections, very useful and necessary for the right Understanding and Judging of the Excellencies of Homer and Virgil: Done from the French, with a Preface upon the same Subject. (2)

It is significant that public interest in the work continued till the middle of the eighteenth century, as new editions of the work continued to be printed. The translator<sup>19</sup> of *Traitédu Poème Epique* comments on Bossu’s approach as follows:

What he takes from Aristotle and Horace he explains, improves and refines: What is his own, though never so judicious and rational, he lays down not in a dogmatical, magisterial way, but by way of problem; and what he asserts with an air of confidence, though not his masters’ thoughts, yet seem to be natural deductions from what they have wrote about it. (qtd. in Clark 250)

Hence, it can be clearly established that Bossu was an influential figure in the seventeenth-century English literary scene.

Bossu differs from the Italian critics on the point of “paragon” heroes. He opposes the idea of “paragon” epic heroes on the grounds that readers may indeed learn from negative examples, from evil, flaws, and failures, as well as the good (Swedenberg 24). Bossu bases his arguments on the practice of Homer and Virgil, “neither the Ancient Poets, nor the Masters of this Art ever thought of placing their Heroes in so high a Sphere” (173), arguing that even these figures did not make their heroes perfect figures. He further lists a number of heroes from *Iliad* and *Aeneid* and underlines that the flaws in their characters and actions provide readers with examples from which they may learn the bitter consequences of such misdirected action. Bossu stresses that “a Hero, should be neither *good* nor *bad*. But he [Aristotle] would have him be between both, neither advanced

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<sup>19</sup> The identity of the translator is unknown except the initials of the name: W. J.

above the rest of Mankind by his Vertue, and his Justice, nor sunk below them by his Vices and Wickedness” (175).

It is remarkable that both Italian criticism and Le Bossu use the theories of Aristotle and yet end up with two different sides of the same coin: the Italians base their perception of the epic hero as a paragon of virtue based on Aristotle’s differentiation between history and poetry, while Bossu draws his view of the flawed epic hero from Aristotle’s perception of the hero as a man with both good and bad qualities.

However, it should be noted here that Bossu’s approach is not shared by all the French critics of the age. Rene Rapin and Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux, leading critics like Bossu, share the Italian perception of a perfect hero. Rapin states that the epic “sets before them [the audience] / the Idea of a virtue much more perfect / than History can do” (75) and further comments on this issue as follows: “All [action] must go in a direct line to establish the merit of the Hero, and to distinguish him from all others: as the figures in a Table ought to have nothing so shining either by the colours, or by the lights that may divert the eyes from the principal figure” (76-77). Rapin’s remarks highlight the importance of the epic hero as central to the epic and how the unfolding action should reveal the characteristic traits of the hero, showing him to be a perfect and exemplary figure to the audience. In the same vein, Boileau exhorts: “Choose some great Hero, fit to be admir’d, / In Courage signal, and in Virtue bright” (43). These debates have a significant impact on William Davenant, and an in-depth analysis of the poet’s personal critiques will be explored in the corresponding chapter.

The seventeenth-century English critics also touch upon this issue. One of the leading figures of the period, Sir John Denham, defends the use of exemplary figures in epics. In his “To the Honourable Edward Howard Esq. upon his Poem of *The British Princes*,” which was first published in Edward Howard’s *The British Princes* (1669), he comments as follows:

When Poesie, joyns profit, with delight,  
Her Images, should be most exquisite,  
Since man to that perfection cannot rise,  
Of alwayes virtuous, fortunate, and wise:  
Therefore, the patterns man should imitate,  
Above the life our Masters should create. (9-14)

According to Werner, here Denham indicates that the ethical value of an epic poem lies in the portrayal of the epic hero as possessing virtues superior to those of real people. He also implies that it is the poet's responsibility to present these characters as moral role models superior to people in real life rather than realistically. In other words, the moral benefit of an epic poem is embodied in its depiction of virtuous heroes (Werner 145). In his *Anacrisis: or, A Censure of some Poets Ancient and Modern* (c. 1635), Sir William Alexander, First Earl of Stirling, boldly defends perfect heroes: "[W]here-the Praise of an *Epick* Poem is to feign a Person exceeding Nature, not such as all ordinarily be, but with all the Perfections whereof a Man can be capable; every Deficiency in that imaginary Man being really the Author's own" (qtd. in Spingarn's *Critical* 184). Alexander's striking remark indicates that in his view any imperfection in the epic hero is a reflection of the poet's deficient skill.

Dryden admits that there are certain modern critics who contend that an epic hero need not be entirely virtuous, and to some degree, he is also incongruous in his stance on this subject, as he presents different opinions in his diverse works that may seem conflicting. In his "Of Heroique Playes," Preface to the *The Conquest of Granada* (1672), he states that Homer and Tasso, whom he accepts as the fountains of epic poetry, "made their Hero's men of honour; but so, as not to divest them quite of humane passions, and frailties" (25) while in his dedication to Aeneas in his translation of *The Works Of Virgil* (1697), Dryden states he personally believes that "where a character of perfect virtue is set before us, it is more lovely; for there the whole hero is to be imitated" (viii). Dryden's latter statement suggests that a role model epic hero is more appealing to the reader, making it better suited to meet the educational purpose of epic poetry. In the Dedication, "To the Most Honourable John, Lord Marquis of Normandy, Early of Mulgrave," in his translation, *The Works of Virgil* (1697), he furthers his argument: "The shining quality of an epic hero, his magnanimity, his constancy, his patience, his piety, or whatever characteristical virtue his poet gives him, raises first our admiration. We are naturally prone to imitate what we admire" (vii). As a critic who values the instructional value of epic poetry, Dryden's later views therefore indicate that a perfect hero is the ideal fit for the didactic aim. Hence, although there are some exceptions, the general tendency of the epic criticism of the period was the epic hero to excel in every attribute assigned to them, which ultimately contributed to the educational purpose of epic poetry.

Another significant theoretical discussion of the period was on the lineage of epic heroes, with their ancestry and stature being deemed crucial. Criticism of the late sixteenth century, which was still influential in the following century, promoted high-born heroes: in *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589), George Puttenham states that epic heroes should be kings and great princes (40); in *The Defence of Poesy*,<sup>20</sup> Philip Sidney does not specifically focus on the lineage of an epic hero; however, he does underline the importance of ancestry and nobility in determining the worth and heroic qualities of characters in general (7-9). Bernadino Daniello also states that epic should deal with the “illustrious deeds of emperors and other men magnanimous and valorous in arms” (qtd. in Vickers 518). This idea of a hero’s lineage, according to Vickers, is taken from Horace’s famous statement that epic is about “the deeds of kings and captains and the sorrows of war” (518). Hence epic heroes should possess high rank and great importance, as a prince or a distinguished commander. This stance was entirely reasonable since the major classical and Renaissance epic works featured such heroes, and additionally, as it was believed that the action of an epic should revolve around a significant and compelling event, it was only fitting for the main character to be proportionate in status to the action that they carried out (Swedenberg 306). On the other hand, Michael West argues that the issue of noble birth is quite ambiguous for Spenser, since the poet acknowledges the significance of lineage, yet firmly insists that “breeding is more a matter of manners than of blood” (1014) and puts emphasis “on the qualities of behaviour as the surest index to breeding” (1015).<sup>21</sup> Bossu follows the ideas of Horace on the lineage of an epic hero by arguing that he should be high-born: “a man of high rank and lofty importance, usually a prince or a great military leader” (2). Dryden also shared the same view and argued it would be appropriate for an epic hero to be a magistrate, general or king (22). Blackmore also states that “[t]he Action must be Illustrious and Important; Illustrious in respect of the Person, who is the Author of it, who is always some Valiant, or Wise, or Pious Prince or great Commander” (8). Accordingly, the predominant view in such theoretical

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<sup>20</sup> Although generally accepted as the epitome of Renaissance literary criticism, *Apology for Poetry* does not elaborate on the nature and structure of epic poetry in detail.

<sup>21</sup> For example, in *The Fairie Queen*, the character Calepine challenges the conventional wisdom of “blood will out” by convincing Matilde, a woman without children, to adopt an orphan, highlighting the importance of education in forming one’s character (VI.iv.35). For an in-depth discussion of the supremacy of nurture over lineage in Spenser’s work, please refer to Michael West’s article titled “Spenser and the Renaissance Ideal of Christian Heroism,” pages: 1014-16.

discussions in the seventeenth-century English criticism was that epic heroes should be of noble or royal birth, possessing a high rank and great importance, as a prince or distinguished commander.

Another important debate surrounding epic heroes during this period was particularly challenging: the religion of epic heroes. The central question in these discussions was whether or not epic heroes should be Christianised, and, if so, how this should be achieved. Another important question posed was whether or not Christianity itself should be heroized. Examining these questions in depth requires a nuanced analysis of the various understandings and interpretations of heroism within the Christian doctrine and discourse, which vary and even contradict one another. The intersection of Christianity and heroism has also a long and multifaceted history in literature, as exemplified by sub-genres such as hagiographical epics, patristic epics, Christiads, saints' lives, and chronicle histories. The merging of Christianity and heroism in these sub-genres resulted in the emergence of different traits for heroes. Hence, the nuanced interplay between these two subjects poses a challenge when considering the concept of epic heroism within a Christian context in the literature of seventeenth-century England.

The theoretical consideration of Christianising the epic hero in literary theory began in Renaissance Italy and later spread to seventeenth-century France. Michael West states that at the heart of this desire lay the aspiration “to create an ideal figure, reminiscent of both the chivalric knight and the Christian Everyman, who might fit into a heroic poem that should at the same time rival and eclipse the epics of classical antiquity” (1013). This aspiration resulted from the idea that “Christianity provides material for poetry that is vastly superior because it is more ‘true’ than even the most profound thoughts of pagan antiquity” (Werner 55).

In this context, a pivotal influence on the English literary landscape of this period is the renowned Italian epic poet and critic, Torquato Tasso. Tasso argues that epic poem “must deal with the history, not of a false religion, but of the true one, Christianity” (qtd. in Spingarn 120). Tasso projects an idea of epic and the epic hero, revised in the light of the modern Christian world. In this respect, although the influence of Homer and Virgil and their heroes on Tasso is great, the epic hero, for him, should also be adapted to the Christian world. In his *Discorsi dell'arte poetica* (1587), he notes:

I do not know why whoever wishes to invest the idea of the perfect knight with form—as some modern writers seem to have intended—should deny him praise for piety and religion and figure him as impious and idolatrous. If the zeal of the true religion cannot, without manifest incongruence, be attributed to Theseus or Jason or others like them, abandon Theseus and Jason and the others and choose, instead, Charlemagne, Arthur, and their like. (qtd. in Bond 65)

Tasso grounds his argument on the idea that the best way to teach Christian ethics in Christian Italy is to have a Christian hero. He justifies the necessity of a Christian epic hero by arguing that they are more suited to be exemplary figures for a Christian audience since “when the pupils are Christian princes, what better hero for them to learn from than the perfection of Christian leadership?” (Bond 66). Tasso’s theoretical arguments on the Christian epic hero can be found in practice in his work, *La Gerusalemme liberata* (1581).<sup>22</sup> The widespread success of his magnum opus throughout Europe demonstrates that the public embraced this concept, leading English poets to be well aware of the feasibility of Christianising the epic hero.

Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux, a prominent French critic during the seventeenth century, offered a different perspective on this topic in his renowned work *L’Art Poétique* (1674).<sup>23</sup> Despite being written in the second half of the century, Boileau’s critical work reflects the ideas of French criticism dominant in the early part of the century. In this work, he opposes the fusion of the characteristics of pagan and Christian epic heroes (Huntley 114-15). He contends that the greatest literary excellence had been achieved by Greek and Latin authors. As such, he believed that later writers should imitate the content and style of ancient masterpieces, which were rooted in the pagan world. Therefore, he argues that replacing the heroes of classical antiquity with Christianity is wrong:

Our pious Fathers, in their Priest-rid Age,  
As Impious, and Prophane, abhorr’d the Stage:

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<sup>22</sup> Certain characteristics like impiety and idolatry are omitted in this hero. For instance, Tasso’s hero Goffredo—unlike Homer’s Odysseus, who yields to both Calypso and Circe, or Virgil’s Aeneas who falls in love with Dido – never succumbs to the seduction of the heretic sorceress Armida (Bond, 2013, p.67). Hence, what differentiates Goffredo from the pagan Odysseus and Aeneas, who stray from their path due to seduction is his Christian faith. In this respect, obeying the ethics of Christianity is presented as the fundamental impetus that makes Goffredo superior to pagan heroes. However, it should be noted that Tasso’s heroes are not static but change within the frame of the action. Please see Mario D’Alessandro’s dissertation, “The Evolution of the concept the hero in the epic poetry of Torquato Tasso,” for a detailed analysis of change in Tasso’s epic heroes.

<sup>23</sup> It was translated into English by Dryden himself. Dryden makes lots of references to Boileau in his works on epic criticism, which again indicates Boileau’s impact.



A Troop of silly Pilgrims, as 'tis said,  
 Foolishly zealous, scandalously Play'd  
 (Instead of Heroes, and of Love's complaints)  
 The Angels, God, the Virgin, and the Saints.  
 At last, right Reason did his Laws reveal  
 And show'd the Folly of their ill-plac'd Zeal. (III, ll. 79–86).

According to Habib, Boileau's point here is that "religious zeal is misplaced in substituting angels, virgins, and saints for classical heroes" (282) and Boileau further "countenances even those aspects of classical paganism that directly contradict Christian teaching" (282). Boileau is against the fusion of Christian elements into epic because he believes "for the Christian God to remain pure and true, his domain of portrayal must be restricted to the gospels and theology; he must not be allowed access to the province of poetry" (282-83). Boileau holds the belief that poetry and Christianity occupy separate domains and should not overlap. According to M. Elizabeth Anthony, Boileau's stance stems from his belief that Christianity is not strong enough to support epic poetry as effectively as the ancient pagan religions did (93). This viewpoint is based on the idea that the ideals promoted by Christianity, which prioritise obedience, humility, and submission, are qualities that directly contrast with the active heroism displayed by epic heroes in the Greek and Roman literary traditions, which Boileau considers to be the greatest literary traditions.

In *Discourses on Satire and Epic Poetry* (1667), Dryden directly challenges Boileau's approach and asserts that the problem does not lie in the teachings of Christianity, but rather in the writers who are unable to effectively incorporate Christian elements into epic poetry: "Christian poets have not hitherto been acquainted with their own strength. If they had searched the Old Testament as they ought, they might there have found machines which are proper for their work; and those more certain in their effect, than it may be the New Testament is, in the rules sufficient for salvation" (*Discourses* 34). In Dryden's view, it is not Christianity as a whole, but rather the limited understanding of Christian writers that has hindered the realisation of the rich potential within their religion for inspiring epic poetry and heroic figures. He later elaborates on the problem of a lack of traditional forms of heroism inherent in Christianity posed by Boileau:

[I]t is true that [...] the fortitude of a Christian consists in patience, and suffering for the love of God whatever hardships can befall in the world—not in any great attempt, or in performance of those enterprises which the poets call heroic, and which are commonly the effects of interest, ostentation, pride, and worldly honour; that humility and resignation are our prime virtues; and that these include no action but that of the soul, [...] on the contrary, an heroic poem requires to its necessary design [...] some great action of war, the accomplishment of some extraordinary undertaking, which requires the strength and vigour of the body, [...] in short, as much or more of the active virtue than the suffering. [...] God has placed us in our several stations; the virtues of a private Christian are patience, obedience, submission, and the like; but those of [...] a general or a king are prudence, counsel, active fortitude, coercive power[...] as well as justice. (20-21)

Dryden's answer to Boileau here is highly significant in terms of shedding light on the debates surrounding the problem of Christianising the epic hero or heroizing Christianity at this time. He agrees that the fortitude of a Christian is demonstrated through the ability to endure hardships and suffering out of love for God and that humility and resignation, which he sees as the core values of Christianity, and which, while appropriate for the private sphere, are not fit for the more public concerns of the epic. He tries to justify the adaptability of Christianity for epic heroism on the grounds that God placed people in different "stations" and that, unlike an ordinary Christian, the position of a Christian leader requires active character traits. Dryden adduces examples from Tasso's use of active Christian heroism in his epic to demonstrate that Christianity is compatible with epic heroism (23-25). It is clear, then, that Dryden did not consider the passive traits expected from an ordinary Christian suitable for an epic poem. Instead, he attempted to find compatibility between the traditional characteristics of an epic hero and those found within Christianity, seeking to Christianise the epic hero rather than to heroize the ordinary Christian. This viewpoint was also the dominant perspective in the literary criticism of the seventeenth century.

Hence, it becomes apparent that eclecticism is indeed the defining characteristic of the seventeenth-century English literary criticism's approach towards epic heroes, which makes drawing the contours of the epic genre immensely challenging. However, a close reading of the literary criticism of the period, as presented above, indicates a surprising degree of consensus on certain features of epic poetry, which I believe to stem from the influence of common sources in the works of late Renaissance Italian and French critical writings. Accordingly, although there are surely some deviations, the prevailing

consensus in seventeenth-century English literary criticism was that epic poetry should serve a didactic purpose, aimed at shaping the thought and behaviour of people, particularly the elite, through emulation of the actions and characteristics of a central epic hero, which was fundamentally an idea borrowed from the Late Italian Renaissance literary criticism. Ideal settings for an epic were considered to be either entirely fictional or, if historical, presented with sufficient aesthetic distance.<sup>24</sup> Additionally, epic poetry was expected to take place in either a Christian world or a setting where Christian values could be adopted and hold enough sway to resonate with readers. Regarded as the highest form of art attainable by humankind, epic was expected to possess a verse structure characterised by the utmost narrative quality.

In the light of all the discussions above, while acknowledging that there are various contrasting ideas, it becomes clear that an in-depth exploration of the discourse surrounding the epic hero culminates in a broad understanding of this concept. This epic hero concept in the seventeenth-century English literature may be broadly defined as a perfect<sup>25</sup> figure with high-born lineage,<sup>26</sup> often holding a distinguished rank as a prince or commander, whose actions and characteristics are deeply influenced by Christianity.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Davenant stands as the preeminent literary theorist in this area of study. To avoid repetitions, I have deliberately consolidated the relevant discussions on this matter within the first chapter of this study. For an in-depth examination of the interplay between setting, verisimilitude, and credibility, particularly in their capacity to serve a didactic objective, please consult the section entitled “Merging Epic with Dramatic Theory,” located in the first chapter.

<sup>25</sup> For treatises that promote the concept of the “perfect” epic hero, please see Sir William Alexander’s *Anacrisis: or, A Censure of some Poets Ancient and Modern* (c. 1635, p. 208), Davenant’s *Discourse Upon Gondibert* (1650, p. 53), Sir John Denham’s “To the Honourable Edward Howard Esq. upon his Poem of *The British Princes*” (1669, lines 9-14), Dryden’s dedication to Aeneas in his translation of *The Works Of Virgil* (1697, p. 122). Cf. for opposing views: Dryden’s “Of Heroique Playes,” preface to the *The Conquest of Granada*, and Blackmore’s *Preface to Prince Arthur* (1695, sig.b). Towards the end of the eighteenth century, the notion of an ideal epic hero gradually faded away. To explore the shifting concept of the perfect epic hero during this time, please refer to Swedenberg’s presentation of a wide range of literary treatises from the period (316-33).

<sup>26</sup> For works that defend high-born epic heroes, please see Puttenham’s *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589, p. 40), Sidney’s *Apology for Poetry* (1595, pp. 7-9), Davenant’s *Discourse Upon Gondibert* (1650, p.43), Dryden’s *Discourses on Satire and on Epic Poetry* (1692, p. 22), the Preface to the translation of Rene Le Bossu’s *Treatise of the Epick Poem* (1695, p. 2), Blackmore’s *Preface to Prince Arthur* (1695).

<sup>27</sup> The Christianisation of the epic hero was a topic of intense scholarly discussion. Some critics contended that incorporating Christian beliefs into the existing active traits of the pagan hero was a satisfactory means of conversion, whereas others objected to this approach, asserting that the passive qualities emphasised in Christianity should also be valorised in the depiction of the hero. For a comprehensive analysis of these divergent viewpoints, please refer to the section that discusses “The Problem of Christianising the Epic Hero” in the Introduction.

These gallant men<sup>28</sup> are at the core of the epic, embodying the didactic moral that the poet intends to convey. Epic heroes therefore fulfil a pivotal role in the poets' personal moral instruction by serving as the embodiment of an ethical blueprint and guiding the audience towards adopting new ideals that are reflective of the changing times. However, beyond merely providing a model of moral conduct, these heroes exemplify virtuous characteristics and actions that are consonant with the evolving ideals in the light of social, religious, philosophical, and political changes. Therefore, the poets' endeavour to encourage the adoption of new ethical values that they believe align with the demands of the current era, thus promoting moral development and progress among the audience. As such, the epic hero is a paragon of virtue and serves as an exemplar of moral principles, representing the very heart of the narrative.

However, it is crucial to reiterate that this definition of epic hero concept still represents a generalised interpretation in light of the vast diversity and fragmentation that characterizes English literary criticism of the era. The literary landscape of the seventeenth century, rich in its plurality of perspectives, defies a singular, confined interpretation of the epic hero. This diversity is the very essence that adds depth and vibrancy to the study of the period's literature, presenting a multifaceted lens through which the epic hero can be understood and appreciated. In focusing specifically on the perspectives of both William Davenant and John Milton, this study will delve deeper into the theoretical discourse surrounding the epic hero. It will explore the unique contexts and discussions that shaped each poet's approach, offering a more detailed examination of how their individual perspectives and the broader literary debates of their time influenced their portrayal of epic heroes. By situating their works within the intricate web of seventeenth-century thought, this exploration aims to shed light on the subtle nuances and specific factors that informed their creative processes, thereby offering a more contextualized and in-depth understanding of their contributions to the evolution of the epic hero.

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<sup>28</sup> The present dissertation does not delve into the subject of gender in relation to epic heroes, as it falls outside the scope of the research question. It is imperative, however, to acknowledge that there exist numerous critical approaches regarding this topic. Please see Sir William Alexander's *Anacrisis: or, A Censure of some Poets Ancient and Modern* (c. 1635, 187) and Swedenberg's *The Theory of the Epic in England 1650-1800* (23) for the discussion of the seventeenth century female epic heroines. Kindly refer to Alison Goddard Elliot's "The Myth of the Hero: Classical and Medieval Epic A Report on a Conference," *Olifant*: 7, No. 3 (Spring 1980), 235-247 for a general discussion on epic heroines.

Accordingly, in the first chapter, it is indicated that the widely accepted hypothesis surrounding William Davenant's monumental epic *Gondibert* is that it serves as an allegory for the Civil War, aimed at legitimising the Royalist perspective, commenting on contemporary events as a continuation of the ongoing Civil War debates, and underlining the legitimacy of Charles II. This chapter challenges this assumption, arguing that the epic is a work of reconciliation intended for the post-Civil War period. Although the epic acknowledges and addresses the events and debates intrinsic to the era, it consciously refrains from endorsing a single political ideology. Instead, it adopts a conciliatory stance, endeavouring to bridge divides and propagate the new ideals necessitated by the post-war period. It is indicated that Davenant envisages this period as a distinctive and transitional stage, teeming with intricate transformations across social, philosophical, and political spectra which demands new virtues, behaviours, and ethical values. Utilising his epic hero, Gondibert, Davenant endeavours to illuminate these newly necessary attributes to his audience. This leads Davenant to dramatically alter the concept of epic hero to such an extent that his epic hero evolves into a figure with a pro-peace stance yet is also marked by great martial prowess due to the realpolitik, rhetorical prowess, tempered ambition (which Davenant terms "warm" ambition), reason, and openness to new knowledge. This chapter further hypothesises that these characteristic traits are significantly influenced by Davenant's experiences of the Civil War, Hobbesian political theory, and the emerging scientific and philosophical ideas of the time.

In the second chapter, it is argued that *Paradise Lost* signifies a departure from the deep-rooted seventeenth-century convention in epics revolving around a singular, perfect epic hero. In this vein, I assert that Milton's profound instructive goals drive him to utilise four epic heroes: the Son, as the sole perfect hero, and three others—Satan, Adam, and Eve—who exhibit various flaws and failures. Milton skilfully crafts each epic hero to represent distinct forms of heroism that resonate with the evolving requirements of this transformative era. While articulating these novel virtues, whether through positive or negative examples, Milton engages with various layers of social, theological, philosophical, and political context through each epic hero. In this vein, while acknowledging that different epic heroes may manifest diverse new heroic virtues, or similar virtues in different contexts, I contend that Milton redefines the epic hero concept. This new hero is characterised by innate free will, political responsibility, rhetorical

prohess, a worth determined not by lineage but by merit marked by endurance and patience, autonomous obedience to God guided by right reason, and a nuanced view of war that recognises its brutal reality yet also understands the necessity of martial prowess in a politically charged world. Furthermore, I hypothesise that this radical reconceptualization of epic heroes in Milton's magnum opus serves to democratise the notion of heroism itself. By redefining heroism in this manner, Milton shifts its domain from the exclusive preserve of high society to the realm of the everyday Christian, making it accessible and relevant to a broader spectrum of society.

## CHAPTER 1: VENTURING INTO “UNTRY’D SEAS”

For many now [...] forsake  
 In their pursuit of flying Fame, their breath;  
 And through the world their valor currant make,  
 By giving it the ancient stamp of Death.

(*Gondibert* I.iv.32)

The widely accepted hypothesis surrounding William Davenant’s monumental epic *Gondibert* (1651) is that it serves as an allegory for the Civil War, aimed at legitimising the Royalist perspective, commenting on contemporary events as a continuation of the ongoing Civil War debates, and underlining the legitimacy of Charles II. This chapter challenges and reframes this interpretation, suggesting that *Gondibert* is not merely a political propaganda but rather a didactic work oriented towards reconciliation, specifically crafted for the post-Civil War era. The epic, while acknowledging and engaging with the critical events and discussions of its time, deliberately refrains from endorsing a single political perspective. I argue that the defining characteristic of this epic is its didactic purpose, achieved through remoulding its epic hero in light of the demands of the new age, thereby enabling the hero to serve as an exemplary figure for the audience.

This era, as delineated by Davenant, is marked by a period of significant transition, characterised by extensive and multifaceted shifts across social, theological, philosophical, and political spheres. Davenant highlights the need for the development of new virtues, behaviours, and ethical standards in response to these changes. In alignment with this, Davenant evolves his epic hero, Gondibert, with a didactic intent, to reflect new forms of heroism that resonate with the unique demands of this transformative period. This development leads Davenant to dramatically alter and redefine the concept of the epic hero. In this respect, I hypothesize that this new epic hero is characterised by rhetorical prowess, tempered ambition (which Davenant terms “warm” ambition), reason, openness to new knowledge, and a pro-peace stance, yet is also marked by justified martial prowess due to the realpolitik of the era. Furthermore, I contend that these evolved

traits of *Gondibert* are deeply influenced by the Civil War's impact, Hobbesian political theory, and the scientific and philosophical ideas of the period.

William Davenant was a significant figure of the Caroline court as he was the Poet Laureate (after the death of Ben Jonson in 1637), a committed political supporter of Charles I against the Parliament before the war, a veteran knighted by the King during the war, later a privateer on the sea and a man in exile serving the executed King's son Charles II after the war (Harbage 75-82). Although this short biography may appear to indicate the extent of his sheer resolve and dedication to the Royalist cause, his days in exile, when Davenant started to compose *Gondibert*, were anything but pleasant for him.

## 1.1 POLITICS OF DAVENANT

The examination of Davenant's ideological inclinations and political loyalties during his exile in the late 1640s—a critical period when he commenced the composition of his epic—is paramount for explaining the underlying political schema of his epic and comprehending the metamorphosis of his epic hero. Determining whether or not his epic hero is imbued with the Royalist ideology is crucial in decoding the character attributes and actions of the epic hero and understanding his transformation within the shifting milieu of a new epoch. Consequently, a comprehensive analysis necessitates an initial exploration of the prevailing conjectures regarding Davenant's political affiliations, with a particular emphasis on their influence on the interpretation of the epic hero.

### 1.1.1 *Gondibert* as a Royalist Epic and *Gondibert* as a Royalist Epic Hero

The widely accepted hypothesis surrounding Davenant's allegiance is that he remained a staunch defender of the Royalist cause during his period of exile. This perspective is echoed in renowned biographies of Davenant authored by esteemed scholars such as Nethercot, Harbage, and Edmond.<sup>29</sup> In light of this perspective, Davenant's epic *Gondibert* is broadly recognized as a literary endeavour conceived to substantiate and endorse the Royalist perspective through its narrative framework.

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<sup>29</sup> For detailed analyses of *Gondibert* as a Royalist epic, please see Arthur Nethercot's *Sir William Davenant: Poet Laureate and Playwright-Manager* (1938), pp. 200-34; Alfred Harbage's *Sir William Davenant: Poet Venturer* (1971), pp. 102-39; and Mary Edmond's *Rare Sir William Davenant* (1987), pp. 63-103.



The epic is perceived to provide a commentary on contemporary events as a continuation of the ongoing Civil War debates, reinforcing the legitimacy of Charles II. From a Royalist perspective, Gladish notably argues the potential allegorical component of the epic, proposing that certain characters are emblematic of key figures from the Civil War era. He asserts, “[t]he princess Rhodalind suggests Henrietta Maria, Gondibert the younger Buckingham or Charles II, and the crafty counsellor Hermegild Sir Edward Nicholas, Secretary of State to both Charleses. Astragon the scientist seems patterned after Bacon or William Gilbert” (Gladish xiv-xv). Gladish extends his allegorical interpretation to the scene of the stag hunt, where the stag king’s execution by hunters is likened to the beheading of Charles I (xv). Gladish substantiates his argument with references to political ties and, more crucially, a poem published concurrently with *Gondibert* in 1685. He contends that Charles Cotton the younger’s poem, in which Cotton notes his father’s presence among the epic’s heroes, provides evidence of the poem’s historical-allegorical aspect. In his poem, Cotton does indeed allude to his father’s presence in the epic: “Blest be my Father, who has found his Name /Among the Heroes, by your Pen reviv’d” (17-18). However, Gladish’s interpretation is an academic overstatement. It should be noted here that the title of Cotton the younger’s poem is “TO Sir WILLIAM DAVENANT, IN ANSWER TO THE Seventh Canto OF THE THIRD BOOK OF HIS GONDIBERT, Dedicated to my Father.” This poem is actually a response to William Davenant’s dedication of the seventh canto of the third book to Charles Cotton. Therefore, Cotton the younger’s remark does not necessarily mean that his father is one of the heroes of the poem. As such, the reference made by Cotton the younger should be understood as an acknowledgment of this dedication, rather than an assertion that his father is a character within the epic itself. Any further interpretation is an overstatement since there are no archival documents to prove such a claim. In his critique, Kevin Sharpe also addresses this contentious point, acknowledging Gladish’s assertions concerning the allegorical characters and events in the poem. Sharpe cites the example of the stag hunt and the allegorical allusion to the persecution of Charles I. He concludes, however, by stating that “[s]uggestions of this sort are undoubtedly convincing in general, even if they do not seem to work out so well in particular” (Sharpe 102).

Gladish’s argument here is problematic on various grounds. First and foremost, the portrayal of Sir Edward Nicholas, a steadfast defender of the Royalist cause, who served

both Charles I and Charles II, is incongruent in the poem. In Davenant's narrative, Nicholas emerges as a malevolent politician working against Gondibert, who Gladish equates to Charles II. This portrayal is inconsistent with historical records, creating an interpretive incongruity. The depiction of the stag king's execution also poses interpretive challenges. Gladish asserts that the stag king "seems the figure of nobility, and Davenant persistently impresses us with the injustice of his being pestered by lesser creatures, hounded to exhaustion, and, finally, slaughtered mercilessly and triumphantly, deserted by his subjects. His fate certainly suggests that of Charles I" (xv). However, Gladish's interpretation fails to acknowledge that the stag king is hunted by none other than Gondibert, the poem's idealised epic hero, along with his virtuous young warriors. These are not "lesser creatures," but noble figures themselves. The assertion by Gladish is misleading, as Gondibert is depicted as a paragon from the commencement to the conclusion of the narrative. Additionally, it is noted in the poem that the stag king had ruled the herd for "Sixty Sommers" (I.ii.55),<sup>30</sup> while Charles I reigned for a span of twenty-four years (1625-1649). This discrepancy further undermines the proposed allegorical link. Consequently, it can be posited that Gladish's interpretation, which views the epic and its characters exclusively through a Royalist lens, leads him to overlook narrative consistency within the epic. Therefore, Gladish's claim that the stag "certainly suggests that of Charles I" (xv) is disputable. Additionally, Sharpe's argument that the Royalist interpretation of the epic heroes is "convincing" does not hold any substantial credence.

Similarly, reading the epic solely from a Royalist standpoint, several critics have contended that "defeated royalists fled England for safer shores, the argument goes, epic poetry slunk away from political engagement to more private fictions" (Welch 571). This perspective suggests that after facing a resounding defeat in the Civil War, Royalist epics shifted their narrative focus towards escapist romances, serving as a consolation mechanism. Such an approach negates the potential for interpreting Davenant's epic hero within the context of the evolving socio-political landscape, scientific advancements, and

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<sup>30</sup> All the references from *Gondibert* and its Preface, including the correspondence between Davenant and Hobbes, have been drawn from David F. Gladish's *Sir William Davenant's Gondibert* (1971), unless expressly stated otherwise. The referencing format for the epic follows a sequence presented by Davenant himself, encompassing the Book, canto, and stanza number.

philosophical discourse of the era. This is primarily due to the initial presumption that the heroes are inherently passive, construed as symbols of consolatory retreat.

For example, Colin Burrow, while being one of the few critics to recognise the emergence of a “new kind of hero” in *Gondibert*, dismisses the political dimensions of the epic and its civic epic heroes. He contends that *Gondibert* “labours to make the main subject of epic to be only manners” (241), thereby neglecting the poem’s socio-political undercurrents. While Burrow’s observation is accurate to the extent that Davenant does aim to modify his audience’s manners, his argument overlooks a number of critical aspects. First, Davenant’s objective is multi-dimensional. He strives not only to influence manners but also to present an idealisation of virtue, action, and ideas through his epic hero. Secondly, Davenant’s intent is firmly rooted in the socio-political context. His projections of new ideals are shaped in response to the exigencies of a transformative era marked by shifts in politics, philosophy, and science. Consequently, Davenant seeks to acclimatise his elite audience to the realities and ambiance of the post-war period, causing the epic and its heroes to become intimately intertwined with the political milieu of his era. The amalgamation of the epic narrative with contemporary politics is further evidenced by Davenant’s recurrent use of Thomas Hobbes’s political philosophy while crafting his epic hero. It indicates that the epic narrative and its heroes are deeply embedded within the socio-political realities of Davenant’s time and the emergent ideas of political philosophy during that period.

Kevin Sharpe acknowledges that *Gondibert* is marked by “ethical, political, aesthetic philosophy through a love story involving the conflict of love and honour in *Gondibert* [who] offers didactic counsel in a seemingly conventional story of duty and honour, love and passion” (102). However, Sharpe, as Allsopp also observes, puts too much emphasis on Davenant’s focus on passions, arguing, they “subvert man himself when they are ungoverned” and the epic is about disciplining “the licence of the passions” (103). Sharpe’s analysis sees only one aspect of Davenant’s epic hero, and therefore fails to grasp him in the light of new age. Moreover, Allsopp refutes the proposition that *Gondibert* serves as a representation of the Royalist epic of retreat. He asserts in the Preface that it considerably advocates for political activism and ambition. Davenant, from Allsopp’s perspective, was engaged in an attempt to harmonize his Hobbesian inclination

towards restlessness with the more traditional civic humanist laudation of an active lifestyle (96).

Gath also adopts a Royalist perspective when analysing the epic and its heroes. He contends that the text's objective in cultivating individual reform through poetry—a tool in service to the state—signifies pleasure as an indispensable facet of a moral, law-abiding, and ultimately contented life, which presumably would engender a citizenry less prone to seditious activities (116). Gath's assertion is anchored in the influence of Hobbes on Davenant, given Hobbes's attribution of the Civil War's genesis, in part, to seditious leaders, resulting in a perceived erosion of loyalty within England. Consequently, according to Gath, Davenant's objective is to dissuade the populace from sedition, thereby fostering support for the Monarchy and its associated ideology. Another notable critic who aligns with this perspective is Berensmeyer, who comments, “[t]he legitimation gap between the ‘usefulness’ of heroic poetry for inculcating obedience to the sovereign in the upper strata of society and its ineffectuality for the common masses remains unaddressed in Davenant's exposition” (41). Echoing Gath's sentiment, Berensmeyer emphasizes that Davenant's didactic ambition is underscored by an intent to instil obedience to the monarchy.

The interpretations put forward by Gath and Berensmeyer serve as archetypal examples of the issues stemming from viewing Davenant's work solely as a vehicle for Royalist propaganda. The depiction of the work and its epic hero as a medium for instilling loyalty towards the Royalist king in the audience is reflective of this viewpoint. However, I oppose this argument. It should be noted here that Gondibert, the epic hero and a nearly perfect figure, is portrayed as rebelling against his own king, Aribert, choosing instead to follow his personal affection for Birtha. This act of defiance presents a narrative inconsistency for an epic ostensibly crafted to promote obedience.

The Royalist interpretations of the epic's content and its use of epic heroes, as discussed above, are fundamentally predicated on the belief that Davenant retained his unwavering commitment and allegiance to the Royalist cause during his exile in France. This has led such critics to interpret the epic heroes through a purely Royalist political lens, viewing them either as allegorical figures of the Civil War, meant to defend and advocate the Royalist cause, or as passive figures of romance, due to the consolatory retreat of Royalist

poets following their defeat in the Civil War. However, recent scholarship offers an alternative to these prevailing theories, suggesting that Davenant's standing at the court was far from secure and that he was increasingly falling out of royal favour. This alternate view necessitates a reconsideration of the role and portrayal of the epic hero within Davenant's works.

### 1.1.2 Falling out of Royal Favour

In mid 1640s, Davenant's career faced a significant challenge when he participated in a delegation designed to convince Charles I to solidify an Anglican-Presbyterian alliance through the Solemn League and Covenant. Despite the plan's apparent improbability, Davenant was blamed for its failure. Hyde recounts that Charles I reacted vehemently when Davenant seemingly dismissed the Church (Allsopp 29, Watkins 13).<sup>31</sup> This episode exemplifies the divergent paths of Davenant and the Royal court in religious and political arenas, a rift evident well before the ascension of Charles II. Moreover, this historical account suggests that Davenant's presence in the Royal court was marked by a mix of success and appreciation, as well as turbulent cases, indicating that his experience in the court was not always smooth sailing.

Furthermore, Davenant was subjected to derision within the court, particularly by those adhering steadfastly to the royalist ideology. These individuals derogatorily referred to him as "the nose"<sup>32</sup> even from the very early days beginning from the mid-1640s during his exile days. It should be noted here that when the news that Davenant had started to compose an epic was heard in the halls of Louvre, some welcomed it; however, "[t]he majority of the wits, to admit the sad truth, ranged themselves posthaste into a booning chorus and began to attack of the most scurrilous, offensive, and underhand nature" (Nethercot 243). The fact that Davenant was now an outcast in the court was most visible later upon the publication of his Preface which was openly met with severe criticism and ridicule by the very court to which he once belonged.<sup>33</sup> One of the main reasons for the

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<sup>31</sup> Davenant demonstrated a growing consonance with the Independents, which was in conflict with the Presbyterian stance. Meanwhile, the prince exhibited a readiness to concede to the Presbyterians in his pursuit of power, as, being in exile, he sought any feasible means to regain authority in England.

<sup>32</sup> He was aptly nicknamed "Nose" as his nose bore the harrowing marks of syphilis, leaving it severely disfigured and impossible to ignore by anyone who laid eyes upon him.

<sup>33</sup> For an in-depth scholarly exploration of Davenant's derision at the hands of the Caroline court, kindly refer to Arthur H. Nethercot's *Sir William Davenant: Poet Laureate and Playwright-Manager*, pp. 243-50,

animosity Davenant faced, according to Nethercot, was due to the clash between the two factions in the royal court in exile, Queen Henrietta Maria's faction against her son, Prince Charles's faction (245-46). As one of the main favourites of the Queen,<sup>34</sup> Davenant was indeed the main target of the faction of the exiled prince.

On January 30, 1649, a pivotal change occurred in the life of Davenant, a man of many talents: diplomat, general, and Poet Laureate. This change was marked by the chilling scene of an anonymous executioner beheading the king whom Davenant had served loyally. This tragic event symbolised not only the end of an era but also the beginning of an uncertain future for Davenant. This turn of events brought Charles II to power, a development that worsened Davenant's circumstances. Charles II, young and unpredictable, was surrounded by advisors and court members who had held long-standing resentment towards Davenant. As a result, Davenant found himself painfully aware that his once esteemed position and influence in the royal court were significantly diminished. To make matters worse, Sharpe notes, "a few months after the execution of his monarch, Davenant lost to death, by natural causes, his long-standing patron and friend, Endymion Porter" (101). Accordingly, he was hit by the bitter news of two important figures in his life that gave him security and patronage.

Things did not get better with the new the king. After the execution of Charles I, his heir, Charles II, contrarily to his father's approach, endeavoured to form an alliance with the Presbyterian Scots. This strategy was pursued while he was exiled in France, aiming to challenge the influence of the Independents and Republicans in Westminster. To do this, he made considerable compromises in church and military governance, a move that went against the policies endorsed by Hobbes and Davenant, who showed increasing alignment with the Independents both politically and theologically (Allsopp 79-80). This resulted in the recently crowned prince displacing Davenant by delegating him to the American colonies as a lieutenant governor. Accordingly, Davenant's journey to the New World should be perceived as a demotion rather than a promotion or a personal choice. It warrants mention that Davenant's intended destination was itself riddled with crises,

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Marcus Nevitt's "The Insults of Defeat: Royalist Responses to Sir William Davenant's *Gondibert* (1651)" and, R.A. Anselment's *The Realms of Apollo*, p. 109.

<sup>34</sup> It has been argued that it was Henrietta Maria who made Davenant poet-laureate in 1638 (White 19).

given the extent to which the tumult of the Civil War had permeated even such remote locations. This is evidenced in the archival document titled “A True Copy of a Commission, from the late King’s eldest Sonne, to Mr William Davenant, concerning Maryland, the Original whereof remains with the Council of State,” dating back to 1653. As per this replicated document, which purports to be an accurate facsimile of the original, it is discernible that Maryland, the location to which Davenant was commissioned, is deeply embroiled in turmoil, significantly influenced by the repercussions of the Civil War. It is difficult to envisage that such a place would be sought voluntarily; hence, this commission should not be regarded as a promotion.<sup>35</sup> Davenant’s relocation therefore serves as an indication of Davenant’s diminished standing in royal esteem and courtly favour.<sup>36</sup> Allsopp astutely brings to light Waller’s dedicatory verse in *Gondibert*, in which Davenant is depicted akin to Ovid, the politically “banished” poet. The utilisation of the verb “to banish” suggests that Davenant’s contemporaries shared this understanding of his journey as a form of exile too (80).

Given his prolonged estrangement from courtly favour, it seems plausible to suggest that Davenant had doubts concerning the royalist cause when authoring *Gondibert*’s Preface and its first two books. Each day in court seemed to bring more difficulties than the prior day, though these challenges were still less severe than those that would greet him the next day. Such were the circumstances under which he composed these works before embarking on a voyage to America. The Preface was published ahead of his departure, underscoring his commitment to his work despite the tumultuous backdrop. Prior to his journey, he confided in his friend Hobbes about his intention to complete the epic *en route*. However, this endeavour was abruptly curtailed, a development Davenant evocatively describes as being “interrupted by so great an experiment as Dying” (250). This phrase is an allusion to his traumatic experience of being captured by pirates, only

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<sup>35</sup> “A True Copy of a Commission, from the late King’s eldest Sonne, to Mr William Davenant, concerning Maryland, the Original whereof remains with the Council of State” (1653), Beinecke Collection, Yale.

<sup>36</sup> Edmond, contrarily, posits that it was Henrietta Maria who orchestrated Davenant’s expedition to America as a gesture of goodwill (103-104). Nethercot states that the Stuarts had debts to Davenant from the Civil War and “perhaps in compensation for his inability to pay over the counter [...] Charles in the same month issued a commission planned to take Davenant part way round the globe and to transfer him from the conflicts of the Old World to the bickerings of the New” (252). However, my stance aligns with Allsopp, who interprets Davenant’s relocation within the context of historical events and views it as a demotion.

to later find himself transferred into the custody of Parliamentary forces.<sup>37</sup> Harbage elucidates that Davenant persistently worked on his epic, crafting the initial segment of the third book within the confines of Cowes Castle on the Isle of Wight. During his period of incarceration in the Tower, while awaiting trial, the poet managed to publish his poem in London in 1651 (Harbage 180). Unfortunately, Davenant did not complete his epic, a work he fondly labelled as a “Mon’ment of my Minde<sup>38</sup>” (III.iii.11).

Dixon posits that as a detainee in Cowes Castle, staring down the spectre of death, Davenant “had no heart to proceed [with the epic]” and continues that “[w]hen released, Davenant was apparently no longer in the vein to finish his undertaking” (233). The foundation of Dixon’s stance is predicated on the belief that *Gondibert* represents an epic steeped in Royalist ideology, endorsing the Royalist cause; therefore, with Davenant under the control of the Parliamentary forces, there seemed to be no incentive for him to persist in developing this epic. However, I diverge from Dixon’s interpretation. As delineated earlier, Davenant’s crafting of the epic aligned with a period of increasing disfavour in the court. Consequently, there appeared to be little rationale for him to persist in advocating the Royalist cause, as, in his eyes, it was a battle already lost. Furthermore, it is essential to highlight that recent scholarly research has unearthed evidence offering room for alternative readings of *Gondibert*.

### 1.1.3 Puritans Reaching Out to Davenant

Stephan Watkins argues that despite traditionally being viewed as a royalist writer opposed to Cromwell’s authority, Davenant was among those the early Protectorate government attempted to reconcile to create a culture that could rival the defeated royalists (17). Watkins bases his arguments on McDowell’s remarks who draws attention to the fact that following the regicide, the country aimed to reinvent itself as a Republic,

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<sup>37</sup> The Parliament exhibited significant financial generosity, conferred titles, and even issued letters of marque to Captain John Green for the capture and delivery of William Davenant (Nethercot 265). This allocation of substantial resources and rewards underscores the degree of importance attributed to Davenant by the Parliamentary forces.

<sup>38</sup> The task of elucidating the transformation of epic heroes within an incomplete epic presents a considerable challenge. Nevertheless, it is crucial to highlight that Davenant’s epic hero emerges as an exemplary figure who demonstrates excellence in nearly all domains. Unlike a romance hero who undergoes evolution as the narrative unfolds, Davenant’s hero retains his essence from inception. Consequently, I posit that despite the epic’s unfinished state, Davenant furnishes sufficient narrative content and scenarios that permit analysis. These elements are indicative of Davenant’s intent and shed light on the reformed attributes of his epic hero Gondibert in response to the demands of the emerging age.



requiring a new unifying culture. In the 1640s and early 1650s, royalists were seen to monopolize culture, a grip that needed to be broken for the republicans to maintain legitimacy (53-60). The Republic then began to court writers and artists to serve the new state. Authors like John Hall, Thomas Urquhart, Andrew Marvell, and Marchamont Nedham, patronized by the Commonwealth and Protectorate, started projects to reconcile former royalists and quasi-republicans (Watkins 17). Despite the absence of archival evidence prior to 1650 that proves the Republic reached out to Davenant, Watkin's proposition aligns coherently with the context of Davenant's prison pardon and his sustained literary contribution under the Puritan regime.

Interpreting *Gondibert* in relation to the changing allegiance of Davenant, Watkins postulates that Davenant "wanted to share his services as a writer with the new regime—and thus save his neck—and recognised the important role that literature might play in creating a common culture based on shared ideals and values" (26-27). Accordingly, for him, *Gondibert* is marked by the desire to reconcile with the new regime in England that had a firm grip on power and aimed to create a common culture for the audience. He further argues that "Davenant translates the image-making potential of drama onto the heroic poem for political ends. By effectively smuggling dramatic material into the Commonwealth under the very noses of those who have prohibited it" (27). Given that the theatre was banned, Watkins claims that the reformed structure of his epic is another indicator of an attempted rapprochement by Davenant with the Puritans and show them that he was a "literary talent worthy of the emerging Commonwealth's attention and support" (28). Thus, though he acknowledges that the work is marked by the desire to be instructive to all political sensibilities, whether royalist or not, Watkin's arguments tend to indicate that a switch in allegiance is the more plausible explanation for *Gondibert*. Although I agree with Watkins in the image-making intentions of the epic, I disagree with his remarks on the target audience and the reasons beneath the revolutionary structure of the epic. As later in this chapter discussed in detail under the section "Target Audience," Davenant's avowed intention, in his own words, is his literary works would cater to the societal elite rather than to the populace at large. The impetus for transmuting the structure of the epic into a more theatrical form is motivated by his intent to amplify its didactic potential. According to Davenant, this dramatic adaptation of the epic represents an effective and superior pedagogical platform to educate his chosen audience. It is also

important to underline that while there is no documented evidence delineating the precise date of Davenant's epic composition, prevailing scholarship, as proposed by Edmond (100-101) and Harbage (244), suggests that the process likely began in the early part of 1648. This chronology precedes the execution of Charles I and the demise of Davenant's patron. Therefore, I posit that the notion of Davenant severing all connections with the court during this particular period seems implausible.

Pursuing a similar critical vein is Marcus Newitt, who interprets *Gondibert* within the context of shifting political allegiances. Newitt posits that *Gondibert* "could be interpreted as the calling card of a well-connected mind for hire, who is ready (out of necessity rather than conviction) to be put into the service of the newly modelled state" (292). Newitt subsequently draws parallels between the ideas encapsulated in *Gondibert* and those espoused in *A Proposition for the Advancement of Moralitie* (1653). The latter is a work penned by Davenant during his overt period of service to the Commonwealth, in which he elucidated the role of literature in the education of the general populace and in the maintenance of societal order. Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that such concepts are not discernible either in the Preface or in the body of the epic itself. That being said, it is also important to acknowledge that both Watkins's and Newitt's interpretations possess some truth when the events following the imprisonment of Davenant in the Tower are taken into consideration.

#### **1.1.4 *Gondibert* Aimed at Both Royalists and Parliamentarians**

In the aftermath of Davenant's confinement within the Tower, it is noteworthy that he disseminated multiple signed copies of *Gondibert* to prominent Parliamentarians. These included John Selden, a preeminent intellectual of the Republic, and Major John Wildman, a Leveller who had lately severed ties with his extremist associates and acclimatised himself to the Republic. Furthermore, two additional signed copies were directed towards esteemed figures, Henry Marten and Bulstrode Whitelocke, who were primarily accountable for facilitating Davenant's liberation from the prison (Allsopp 82-83). In this context, one might conjecture that Davenant, facing potential execution, aimed to use these missives as leverage as part of a strategy for securing his release; a bid to curry favour with powerful individuals capable of ensuring his liberation. This act however also provides profound insights into the political underpinnings of *Gondibert*.

It is crucial to acknowledge that Davenant's attempt to save himself through signed copies indirectly indicate the fact that he perceived the narrative of his epic as something that could be savoured and esteemed, even by the Puritans. I believe this suggests that Davenant did not consider his epic merely as a conduit for disseminating Royalist propaganda.<sup>39</sup> This episode, thus, illuminates the intricate political intricacies embedded within the epic, indicative of its composition for a new era.

Among critics, David Norbrook emerges as the lone scholar who neither perceives *Gondibert* as a vehicle for Royalist propaganda nor as a symbol of a potential shift in Davenant's allegiance towards the Puritans. Instead, Norbrook argues for the dual-targeted nature of *Gondibert*, characterising it as “[a]n ambitious attempt at formulating a new royalist poetics for the changed political circumstances” (Norbrook 277). He suggests that Davenant's theoretical exposition in the Preface is of such a nature that it “could be used to legitimize any established regime” (278).

Norbrook's argument is grounded in the belief that *Gondibert* is primarily marked by the “manipulative image-making which would quell popular disorder by the pleasure it offered” (277). He further asserts, unequivocally, that the work is defined by its propensity for “offering placatory images” (Norbrook 278). In the context of Hobbesian philosophy, Davenant's epic emerges, for Norbrook, as an instrument aiding the government in maintaining societal order. The crux of Norbrook's perspective lies in the belief that Davenant's work, given its capacity to suppress chaos or sedition in society, can serve both the Royalist regime and the emergent regime in England, thus rendering it advantageous to both factions. Consequently, Norbrook's remarks are primarily framed by the political dimensions of the epic. However, I find myself diverging from Norbrook's conclusions. Although he acknowledges a contextual shift within Davenant's epic, he concentrates exclusively on its political implications, thereby, in my view, failing to fully comprehend the profound depth of the epic.

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<sup>39</sup> For the discussions surrounding Davenant's politics and Royalist ideology in his dramatics works please refer to Susan Wiseman's “National identity, topic and genre in Davenant's Protectorate opera” in *Drama and Politics*, Christopher Hill's *God's Englishman*, p. 190, and Stefan Watkins's unpublished PhD dissertation *The Revolutionary Theatres of Sir William Davenant, 1650–1667*, pp. 17-22.

As stated above, *Gondibert* cannot be narrowly defined as a work exclusively dedicated to the Royalist cause, as suggested by several scholars, nor does it predominantly bear the markings of a desire to shift political allegiance, as posited by Watkins and Newitt. Instead, *Gondibert* appears to be a work penned with both parties in mind, but not exclusively for the political motivations outlined by Norbrook. Indeed, I concede that in the wake of losing his king, his literary patron, and falling out of favour in the court, Davenant may have sought to ingratiate himself with the Commonwealth in the hopes of securing patronage. However, it bears highlighting that Davenant embarked on the composition of *Gondibert* prior to the execution of the King and his subsequent displacement to America. The royal court, undeniably, presented a more viable sanctuary for him, particularly given the continued existence of Henrietta, his long-standing patroness. Consequently, one might conjecture that Davenant aimed to resurrect his former esteemed position within the court through the production of this epic. Nevertheless, this does not conclusively suggest that the work was crafted with the sole purpose of serving as a Royalist propaganda. Importantly, Davenant's literary style and narrative approach in *Gondibert* demonstrate a universal appeal that transcends political affiliations, making the work appreciable by both Royalists and Republicans alike. Moreover, I resolutely posit that the comprehension of *Gondibert* as an epic, cannot be bound strictly within the confines of political associations or solitary political analysis since the epic hero's evolution is also deeply marked by the philosophical and scientific debates of the time.

The Preface signals that Davenant was acutely aware that he was on the brink of a new era, marked by seismic shifts in politics, religion, philosophy, and social life. He was cognizant of the ascendancy of Enlightenment and scientific ideas, which posed challenges to the traditional modes of thought and laid the groundwork for more rational and secular approaches. Consequently, Davenant envisaged the period as the dawn of a new epoch, one that necessitated innovative virtues and actions in response to the emerging changes within the epoch. Even Nethercot, who interprets *Gondibert* through a Royalist lens, acknowledges this intention: "The poem would be full of lessons about probity and valor, chastity and lust; it would contain examples and advice for the statesman, the churchman, the general, the teacher, the philosopher, and the scientist" (240).

Davenant believed that the page that once held the principles, realities, and values of the past had been long turned, leaving a fresh, unwritten page, waiting to be inscribed with the new virtues and skills demanded by the emerging age. The fundamental reason that led Davenant to undertake the daring epic, which he refers to as “Mon’ment of my Minde” (III.iii.11), was to teach his audience the demands of this new age. The way to achieve this, I argue, was through remoulding his epic hero that will serve as an exemplary figure to the audience. Although the work remained unfinished, Davenant’s reformed epic illuminates the poet’s perception of the revolutionary spirit of the age marked by sheer change.

Davenant’s awareness of a new era arising in the aftermath of the Civil War is evident in his Preface to *Gondibert* where he presents ground-breaking suggestions for both the epic genre, characterised by its instructional nature, and for civic life, incorporating new virtues and ideals through the examples of epic heroes. These suggestions are revolutionary in nature and signify the changing demands of the times, particularly in relation to advancing the moral progression and societal advancement of the audience.

## **1.2 THE PREFACE OF *GONDIBERT* AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE**

The Preface to *Gondibert* is a landmark in the history of English literary criticism particularly in relation to the epic genre as this is the first critical treatise devoted exclusively to this genre. The Preface had a substantial impact on subsequent theoretical treatises and epic poetry. Connell draws attention to its gravity as follows: “Rarely, indeed, has prefatory matter so completely overshadowed the reputation of the work it was intended to dignify” (64). In his analysis of the Preface, Swedenberg characterizes it as “a curious amalgam of established theory and freedom of thought” (43). Although Swedenberg’s assessment of Davenant’s Preface to *Gondibert* initially appears to emphasize the synthesis of established critical frameworks with new and innovative ideas, his commentary actually prioritizes the presentation of established frameworks over the introduction of novel concepts in the Preface. For Swedenberg, the greatness of the Preface lies in its ability to consolidate and synthesize ideas that had previously been scattered across both continental and English criticism: “It holds this high position, not because Davenant embarked on unknown seas of criticism, but rather because he brought together ideas that had appeared on the Continent and, in scattered fragments, in English

criticism prior to his time” (43). In contrast to Swedenberg’s view, Harbage contends that the true value of Davenant’s Preface is its intent to break free from the confines of established theory as it aims “to shatter the gyves of epic tradition and lead the way to a new poetic ideal” (109). I am inclined to favour Harbage’s viewpoint over Swedenberg’s as it better encapsulates Davenant’s intention. While the Preface is indeed notable for its compilation and commentary on the continental influences of the time, including sixteenth-century Italian Renaissance and French criticism, and its treatment of literary luminaries of antiquity, such as Homer, Virgil, Petronius, Lucan, Horace, and Aristotle, Swedenberg’s perspective underscores the significance of the Preface’s role in pioneering new ideas. Davenant’s initial remarks in the Preface indeed pay homage to the influence of Homer and the epic tradition; however, he places greater emphasis on the significance and necessity of new ideas:

[S]ome (sharply observing how his [Homer’s] successors have proceeded no farther than a perfection of imitating him) say, that as Sea-markes are chiefly usefull to Coasters, and serve not those who have the ambition of Discoverers, that love to sayle *in untry’d Seas*<sup>40</sup>; so he hath rather prov’d a Guide for those, whose satisfy’d witt will not venture beyond the track of others, then to them, who affect a new and remote way of thinking; who esteem it a deficiency and meanesse of minde, to stay and depend upon the authority of example. (3, lines: 16-24)

It is demonstrable that this argument, which is located at the very beginning of the work, aims to justify the innovation he is to suggest in the later phases of the Preface and later in his epic. His purpose is to sail the “untry’d Seas,” a metaphor for the revolutionary innovations in epic genre. It is clear that Davenant’s main aim is not to imitate the previous examples of epic but rather create a work, which is to engage with the science and philosophy of the new age (22). Furthermore, in my view, Swedenberg does not fully appreciate the magnitude and importance of the work’s ground-breaking contributions to the genre in the light of the multifaceted social, religious, philosophical, and political transformations taking place in seventeenth-century England. Despite its debatable level of success and impact, this treatise marks a notable milestone not only in the history of English literary criticism but also in the global tradition of epic criticism for several

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<sup>40</sup> William Davenant’s frequent and remarkable use of naval imagery and marital metaphors throughout his works, whether fictional or non-fictional, is a noteworthy characteristic that deserves a research solely dedicated to examining this feature in detail.

reasons: (1) It offers and marks a radical shift from the epic tradition; (2) it is not only an analytical and prescriptive statement of rules for the construction of a heroic poem but also a product of literature, of politics and of philosophy, which can be observed and traced with the letter correspondence between Hobbes and Davenant<sup>41</sup> (3), it is the first literary critical work that incorporates the theories of the modern state, especially through Hobbesian theories, into epic theory, as I discuss below. Thus, while its triumph may be shrouded in oblivion, the Preface stands as a bold endeavour to reform the very essence of epic poetry—a courageous quest to reshape the very fabric of epic heroes themselves.

### 1.3 DIDACTICISM

The didacticism of epic poetry is indeed central in the theoretical debates in the Preface. The thread of correspondence between Davenant and Hobbes indicates that their views are in line with the established perception that epic heroes and poems should serve a didactic purpose, aimed at shaping the manners of people. The speaker of the epic, presented in the poem as the Lombard poet, recognises this parallel and draws a comparison between poets and physicians: “Poets the old renown’d Physitians [sic] are, / Who for the sickly habits of the minde, / Examples as the ancient cure prepare” (I.iv.6). Within this context, it is apparent that the comparison being made is between poets and physicians, with the distinction being that poets seek to remedy the afflictions of the mind and improve it, rather than treating physical ailments. Therefore, the poet can be regarded as a mental healer for Davenant.<sup>42</sup> Dowlin argues that the instructional aim is so central to Davenant’s Preface that his “theory can be reduced to the simplest terms: Moral improvement is the goal of poetry” (17). Notably, Davenant contends in the Preface that religion, army, policy, and law, which he refers to as the chief aids of government, fail to shape the people; thus, they need a “collaterall [sic] help” from poetry (37). Edward

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<sup>41</sup> The Preface harbours the letter correspondence between Davenant and Thomas Hobbes, a leading political theorist of the period. Nethercot also argues that even Hobbes gave daily examination to the writings of Davenant while they were in Paris (241). Davenant sent his theoretical Preface and drafts of the poem to him and asked him about his opinion. Hobbes’s commentary on the drafts and opinions on the heroic ideals and purpose of epic in the Preface, which according to some critics anticipate his seminal work *Leviathan* that was to be published two months after *Gondibert* (1651), are highly significant to observe the text’s relation to the politics and philosophy of the period.

<sup>42</sup> Daniello had already drawn a comparison between a poet and a physician, emphasising the physician’s goal of curing and the poet’s responsibility of teaching, thereby considering teaching as an inherent function of poetry (Spingarn 48). This perspective predates Davenant’s, highlighting Daniello’s possible influence.

Schiffer argues that Davenant's emphasis on the assistive of role of poetry results from the fact that he believes "each of these groups [of Government] is likely to distrust the others" (566). As many scholars indicate Davenant's daring remark truly sheds light on the gravity of his didactic intent in his epic poetics and how he desires to engineer society. (Margaret J. M. Ezell 13, Gath 116, Harbage 188). This is so central to Davenant that his "style, themes, and narrative are direct consequences of his attempt to produce a work that will operate 'for the honor and benefit' of his nation" (McDayter 43). Hobbes's response to Davenant provides insight into his emphasis on the pedagogical significance of epic poetry. He asserts, "Precepts of true Philosophy [...] fayle, as they have hitherto fayled in the doctrine of Morall vertue, there the Architect (Fancy) must take the Philosophers parte upon herself" (49-50). Furthermore, Hobbes posits that anyone who "undertakes an Heroique Poeme (which is to exhibite a venerable and amiable Image of Heroique vertue) must not onely be the Poet, to place and connect, but also the Philosopher" (50). This observation highlights the dual nature of epic poetry, encompassing both a work of art and an embodiment of civil engineering philosophy.

### 1.3.1 Target Audience

An important sub-topic in the discussions of didacticism is who is the target audience? Davenant openly states that common people is not his target audience: "The common Crowd (of whom wee are hopelesse) wee desert; being rather to be corrected by lawes (where precept is accompany'd with punishment) then to be taught by Poesy" (13). It is palpable that for Davenant, the power of poetics as a means to instruction is not fit for the common people, as they "need to be morally educated by law, rather than poetry, because law combines reinforcement with moral lessons" (Nicosia n.p).<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, he explains why he targets an elite audience in the lines that follow:

Nor is it needfull that Heroique Poesy should be levell'd to the reach of Common men; for if the examples it presents prevaile upon their Chiefs, the delight of Imitation (which wee hope wee have prov'd to be as effectuall to good as to evill) will rectify by the rules, which those Chiefs establish of their owne lives, the lives

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<sup>43</sup> Davenant's perception of poetry not being suitable for educating common people significantly underwent significant revision over time. This can be seen in his tract titled *A Proposition for the Advancement of Mortalitie, By a new way of Entertainment of the People* wherein he states that theater, spectacle, and painting can shock, awe, and impress the common citizen to a higher moral calibre. (Nicosia n.p, Ezell p. 52, Gath p. 125, McDayter p. 45). It should be noted here that when he wrote this second work, he was under the service of the Commonwealth in England.



of all that behold them; for the example of life, doth as much surpass the force of precept, as Life doth exceed Death. (13)

Davenant asserts in his discourse that “Heroique Poesy” should not be intended for the general public but rather serve as a source of inspiration and guidance for individuals in positions of power and authority, referred to as “Chiefs.” It serves “as an exemplary medium, and thus as a kind of *speculum principum*,<sup>44</sup> a mirror for princes, or at least ‘the most necessary men’” (Connell 65). Davenant contends that epic literature and its heroes possess the potential to be a formidable force for good by providing exemplary models for leaders to emulate. This can lead to the establishment of just rules and the cultivation of virtuous lives. Furthermore, Davenant believes that if these examples succeed in inspiring leaders, those who look up to them will naturally follow suit, resulting in a more virtuous society. Ultimately, for Davenant, the true value of an epic lies in its instructional power and power to alter society for the better; and he believes this can be achieved through promoting virtuous behaviour among leaders, and that the examples set by these leaders can positively influence society as a whole. His hero, therefore, is specifically designed by the author to teach the leaders of society. Hence, Davenant presents a hero, who is based on the new heroic ideals that are the results of the socio-political events of the seventeenth century and the newly emerging ideas in philosophy. As he articulates in his Preface, he aims to show his aristocratic audience that the new age demands new ideals (43-44).

It is important to recognise that Davenant’s insights into audience engagement are significantly shaped by Hobbes’s political theories, particularly regarding the question of sovereign authority. Hobbes posited that individuals are innately self-interested, often at the expense of the common welfare. This inherent self-centeredness, he argued, poses a serious threat to political stability and social harmony, as elucidated in his work *De Cive* (34). Hobbes, therefore, advocated for the concentration of power in the hands of those

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<sup>44</sup> The genre of *speculum principum*, originating in ancient Greece, enjoyed popularity from the early Medieval Period through the Renaissance. Characterised by a didactic purpose, it aimed to present an ideal model for princes to follow.

capable of imposing order and preventing a widespread conflict, a concept he famously referred to as a “war against all” (*Leviathan* 113).<sup>45</sup>

Davenant, drawing inspiration from Hobbes, suggests that societal betterment is most effectively achieved by influencing the ethical framework and decision-making processes of its leaders. In his perspective, societal reformation begins at the top, with leaders who are expected to model behaviours and values for the rest of the populace to emulate. This approach reflects the idea that the moral and ethical behaviour of leaders can gradually influence the rest of society. Essentially, it suggests that if those in power adopt better values and decisions, these positive changes will eventually spread across all levels of the community.

Davenant also presents his critique on the contemporary literary scene’s ignoring of the didactic purpose of epic poetry. The speaker in the epic states that modern poets have neglected their instructional role and they seem to think that virtue is no longer curable through verse: “Poets [...] now think vertue sick, past cure of verse” (I.iv.8). As I have demonstrated in the Introduction, the instructional aim of epic poetry was a well-established concept in seventeenth-century English literary criticism to such an extent that it was the sole topic on which there was consensus. However, Davenant refers here not to the theory but the practice of poetry in the seventeenth century England. Davenant then boldly claims that he has taken up this neglected task of epic poets just like a physician who seeks cure for a desperate illness: “Yet to this desp’rate cure I will proceed, / Such patterns shew as shall not fail to move; / Shall teach the valiant patience when they bleed” (I.iv.9). Through his speaker, Davenant openly indicates that his epic is a work mainly dedicated to instructing the people.

### 1.3.2 Instructional Aim of the Epic Hero

The most pertinent inquiry then arises: how can epic poetry accomplish its didactic objectives? Davenant posits an answer to this, suggesting that poets have historically achieved their didactic goals through the depiction of “Heroes vertues in Heroick Song”

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<sup>45</sup> For an in-depth examination of Hobbes’s perspectives on politics, particularly the notion that individuals exist in a perpetual state of warfare for survival, please see the section titled “The Leviathan Incarnate.” It is also imperative to highlight that Hobbes’s theories do not inherently favour monarchy over democracy. Instead, Hobbes advocates for any authority capable of successfully monopolising force to prevent people descending into “the war of all against all,” a fundamental concept in his political philosophy.

(I.iv.8). This statement by Davenant acknowledges a deep-rooted tradition in which poets present models of heroic virtues within their epic narratives. Such a portrayal is accomplished by vividly illustrating the unique characteristics and actions of epic heroes, thereby implying that Davenant perceives the didactic aim of epic poetry as being realised through these central figures.

Davenant's insights are of significant relevance to this analysis, as they not only affirm his endorsement of didacticism as a core attribute of epic poetry but also highlight his conviction that this educational purpose is primarily achieved through the depiction of epic heroes. This understanding sheds light on why Davenant undertakes a significant reimagining of his epic hero, evolving it to suit the demands of a changing era. He underscores the crucial role these protagonists play in accomplishing the instructive function of epic poetry, thereby elevating their importance within the epic narrative.

Moreover, it is noteworthy that Thomas Hobbes echoes Davenant's viewpoint. In his "Answer" to Davenant, Hobbes asserts that the essence of epic poetry lies in its endeavour to "exhibite a venerable and amiable Image of Heroique virtue" (50). This statement further highlights the fundamental role that epic heroes play in achieving the didactic objectives of epic poetry. Consequently, one may deduce that Davenant and Hobbes share a common understanding regarding the essential role of epic heroes in the educational aspect of epic poetry. Their agreement on this matter underscores the critical nature of these figures in the transmission of moral and virtuous lessons through the epic form.

It should also be noted here that, as indicated in the Introduction, under the section "Didactic Aim of Epic and the Epic Hero as a Teacher," there is an emphasis on the prevailing notion of the era that epic poetry imparts moral lessons by encouraging readers to emulate the exemplary hero. This concept, deeply influenced by the critical perspectives of Late Renaissance Italian literary criticism, positions the epic hero as the epitome of virtue, a model for imitation.

Central to Davenant's approach in his epic is this very principle derived from Late Renaissance Italian literary criticism. It venerates the central hero as not just a character, but as the personification of moral excellence. This method pivots around the idea that the educational and moral value of the epic is intrinsically linked to the central epic hero's

exemplarity. It posits that by imitating these idealised figures, the audience can derive instructional worth.

As further explored later in this chapter, Davenant's crafting of the epic hero in *Gondibert* resonates with this concept. His hero is portrayed as an impeccable figure, a beacon of virtues meant for emulation. Davenant's thematic messages are intricately woven through the experiences, speeches, virtues, and deeds of *Gondibert*, the central, singular epic hero. This strategy underscores the hero's role as not just a character in a narrative, but as a conduit for the moral and didactic objectives of the epic.

#### **1.4 MERGING EPIC WITH DRAMA: DAVENANT'S THEORY OF EPIC POETRY**

Davenant also departs from its contemporary scene and classical tradition in terms of his innovative suggestions to change the structure of the epic and merge it with the structure of drama. In the Preface, he argues that no “[n]ation hath in representment of great actions (either by *Heroicks* or *Dramaticks*) digested Story into so pleasant and instructive a method as the English by their Drama” (15). Hence, Davenant proposes to adopt a dramatic structure, featuring five parts that correspond to the five acts of a play. The poem is further divided into smaller units called cantos, which are akin to scenes in a play. The allocation of cantos is dictated by the narrative demands of the poem (15-17). Additionally, the poem incorporates sub-plots, mirroring a common element found in dramatic literature.<sup>46</sup> It should be underlined here that the driving force behind Davenant's radical innovation, as he himself explains, is to turn the epic genre into a more “pleasant and instructive” (15) form. This alone indicates the gravity of didactic intent in Davenant's poetics.

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<sup>46</sup> Some scholars suggest that the use of the five-act structure in non-dramatic literary works predates *Gondibert*. Examples include Thomas May's *The Reign of King Henry the Second* (1633) and William Prynne's *Histriomastix* (1633), and Sir Francis Kynaston's *Leoline and Sydanis* (1642). While some argue that Davenant may have been influenced by these works, there is no direct evidence to support this claim. It is worth noting that Davenant himself was the first to theorise the application of the dramatic structure to the epic genre. To narrow the scope of this discussion, further elaboration on this topic will not be provided here. For more detail, please see Dowlin p. 72, Swedenberg pp. 43-44, Harbage p. 189, and Gladish pp. 290-91.

The versification of an epic poem also holds considerable significance in terms of its intended didactic impact and reception. In his Preface, Davenant elucidates his preference for quatrains over heroic couplets, arguing that the latter “runs [readers] out of breaths” (17). Moreover, he asserts that his chosen stanza form is well-suited for the “composing of Musick; and the brevity of the Stanza renders it lesse subtle to the Composer, and more easy to the Singer” (17). It becomes apparent that Davenant intended his epic to be not only read but also heard aloud, evoking the performances of ancient rhapsodes, and thus appealing to a broader audience. The selection of the rhyming quatrain to facilitate singing indirectly signifies Davenant’s aspiration to enable the epic to reach wider audiences, which further supports his didactic intent. This, in my view, can be construed as an indication that even Davenant’s choice of stanzaic form is imbued with didactic intent.

In terms of content of the epic, it could be argued that one single idea that dominates Davenant’s perception of epic is verisimilitude. Davenant rejects incorporation of supernatural elements and gods or goddesses, as they cross with human reasoning and rationality. He argues that the reason Homer and Virgil used these elements was because it was a natural outcome of their own pagan religion. Davenant sees the use of the supernatural and the improbable as a defect as he believes the story becomes less pleasant and less instructive. He is also against allegory because hidden meanings cross with the instructional aim of the epic.<sup>47</sup> At the heart of Davenant’s approach, according to Dowlin, lies the belief that “poetry becomes most instructive when it is true to nature and to probability” (17).

Consequently, the centrality of verisimilitude in Davenant’s epic theory can be attributed to his conviction that it serves as an optimal instructional tool. In his response to Davenant, Hobbes explicitly asserts, “[r]esemblance of truth is the utmost limit of Poeticall Liberty” (24). This statement demonstrates Hobbes’s shared belief in the critical importance of verisimilitude for the didactic purpose of epic poetry, signifying a

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<sup>47</sup> Although there have been some debates about the presence of an allegory in the epic, Dowlin made a humorous comment that has been hard to discount. He pointed out that Georg Gronauer, who wrote a dissertation on *Gondibert* Munich back in 1911, was unable to find any allegory. And if a German scholar like him could not find one, then it probably does not exist! (Dowlin 42). I cannot help but chuckle at Dowlin’s humorous remark.

consensus between these two authors on this matter. Aikin nicely observes the correspondence between these writers and its practice in the epic *Gondibert*, noting that “[h]uman agency is employed to achieve human objectives” (149). This notion implies that rationality, rather than dependence on Christian or Pagan deities or the involvement of supernatural entities such as gods and angels, is the ultimate solution to human dilemmas. This idea is manifested in *Gondibert*, in which the rational capacity of humanity is accentuated, obviating the need for assistance from supernatural forces. The presence of this characteristic in the epic exemplifies its congruence with the evolving ethos of the period, as it advocates for the employment of reason. This new age is marked by reason and reason alone; therefore, the customs and practices of the old world have no place in the composition of the epic. Hence, to achieve the instructional aim and teach the new virtue, the epic theory of Davenant is loyal to the spirit of this age. Davenant also promotes choosing a fictional or distant time period as the setting for a story to avoid being constrained by the need for historical accuracy. Selecting a historical subject that is too close in time can diminish the allure of imaginative embellishments, as people may already be familiar with the events. This can make it more difficult for the author to fulfil their primary responsibility of creating a compelling and instructive narrative.

Davenant maintains that the thematic content of epics should incorporate Christian elements. In this regard, it might seem as though Davenant aligns with the prevailing epic theories of his period, which similarly assert that epics should contain Christian materials. However, Davenant argues that while all religions strive for virtue, he selected Christianity as the focal point because his intended audience is predominantly Christian, and they would be more open to lessons from their own faith (9). He later briefly declares that Christianity is indeed the truest religion. However, Dowlin argues that “Davenant’s choice is strictly utilitarian; he will use the religion of the people he is trying to persuade, and anyway the Christian religion is the best” (25). This insight is crucial in discerning Davenant’s overarching ambition to attain the didactic objective of his poem, where even the inclusion of Christian elements serves this purpose. Consequently, while it may initially appear that Davenant adheres to the tenets of epic theory during his era, the reason beneath his choice sets him apart in that he employs religion as a means to facilitate the virtues he wishes to teach, thereby employing it as a means to achieve a didactic objective.

## 1.5 EPIC HERO THEORISED

The epic hero is the ethical guide through which the epic poet presents his views. Therefore, the construction of his characteristic features and actions marks the instructional aim of the poet. As Davenant's target audience is the "chiefs" of the society, the epic hero in *Gondibert* is from high lineage and status. It is noteworthy to reiterate that Gondibert holds the title of Duke, while Oswald<sup>48</sup> is identified as a Prince, emphasising the high lineage and distinguished social standing of these central characters.<sup>49</sup> The portrayal of characters with similar status and lineage to the audience serves to enhance the potential for emulation, as it enables the audience to draw from relatable examples. Consequently, the epic heroes' actions and thoughts contribute to a sense of realism. Dowlin aptly encapsulates this notion, stating, "[t]he people to be persuaded are to be courtly and martial; hence the material is to be courtly and martial" (18). Indeed, the protagonists exhibit exceptional martial prowess, with such martial aptitude emerging as a defining characteristic feature of epic heroes. Davenant also portrays Gondibert, the epic hero, as a Christian, considering that his intended audience primarily consisted of Christians who, in his estimation, would be more amenable to

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<sup>48</sup> Davenant also highlights Oswald's royal ancestry and status by portraying him with a "purple Banner" (I.ii.65). The connotation of the colour purple with regal position can be historically traced back to the Homer's *Iliad* (IV.141-45) and further extended to the ancient Hellenistic and Roman civilizations, as well as the mediaeval Byzantine era (Jensen 104). This relationship stems from the employment of the extremely rare Tyrian purple dye, extracted from marine snails that were indigenous to the ancient Phoenician city of Tyre. The scarcity of this dye conferred upon it a value that exceeded that of gold. For a detailed discussion of the venture of purple as the colour of regency, please see Jensen, Lloyd B. "Royal Purple of Tyre." *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, vol. 22, no. 2, 1963, pp. 104–18. *JSTOR* and Charlene Elliott's "Purple Past: Color Codification in the Ancient World." *Law & Social Inquiry*, vol. 33, no. 1, 2008, pp. 173–94. *JSTOR*.

<sup>49</sup> In the scene introducing Gondibert's warriors prior to their engagement in the hunt, the text emphasises the noble ancestry of each individual within Gondibert's entourage, asserting that their forefathers similarly partook in esteemed hunting pursuits (I.ii.5). This observation suggests that the epic hero's companions possess distinguished lineages, a trait consistently reinforced through the application of various epithets and adjectives. For instance, Hurgonil, a Gondibertian warrior, is designated as "count," and his initial portrayal is described as "a youth of high descent" (I.ii.6). I shall underline here that I do not specifically focus on the subject of lineage as a separate title within the present chapter, in contrast to the dedicated examination of this theme in relation to Milton's epic heroes in the second chapter. The rationale for this distinction stems from the innovative approach Milton adopts in his epics, where he places a notable emphasis on the concept of merit superseding noble lineage. This perspective is pivotal in understanding the evolution of Milton's epic heroes and represents a significant deviation from traditional epic norms. Conversely, Davenant's treatment of his epic hero, Gondibert, does not markedly diverge from the established epic conventions of his time, concerning the issue of lineage. The evolution of Gondibert as an epic hero does not reflect a distinct departure from the era's typical emphasis on noble ancestry. Consequently, a separate exploration of the theme of high lineage in the context of Davenant's work is not undertaken in this chapter, considering its relative conformity with the prevailing epic traditions.

moral teachings emanating from their own faith (9). Lastly, within the words of Harbage, the epic hero of Davenant is “the unclouded mirror of all perfection” (180), which indicates he is a paragon of virtue.

Consequently, it can be posited that Davenant adheres to the prevailing seventeenth-century English theories, which emphasise aspects such as lineage, status, exemplary nature, and religion of the epic hero. Furthermore, he agrees that the epic serves to impart moral lessons by inspiring readers to emulate the perfect epic hero’s actions and virtues. In this respect, he appears to follow the Late Italian Renaissance literary theory that championed the notion of exemplary epic heroes, as it contended that the instructional objectives of epics could be accomplished through perfect heroic figures.

Here, I must address a significant aspect: the portrayal of the adversaries in *Gondibert*. Some may argue that Davenant crafted these antagonists in alignment with seventeenth-century French critical thought, which challenged the traditional concept of “paragon” epic heroes. This school of thought posits that readers gain insight not only from virtuous actions but also from witnessing negative instances, evil deeds, flaws, and failures. The characters Oswald, Borgio, Vasco, and Hermegild, with their errors and failures, can be considered as narrative tools for educating the audience. However, I take a contrary stance. As I have previously explained, Davenant’s approach is heavily influenced by Late Renaissance Italian literary criticism, which venerates the portrayal of impeccable, singular epic heroes. In my opinion, these antagonistic figures in *Gondibert* are not depicted as epic heroes. Instead, their actions, thoughts, and speeches are strategically used to highlight the importance and relevance of Gondibert’s traits as an ideal epic hero, responding to the evolving demands of the era. It is crucial to note that these figures do not exist in isolation when it comes to imparting lessons. Their relevance and instructional value are only appreciable in relation to Gondibert. Davenant skilfully establishes a stark contrast by introducing a malevolent adversary who embodies the complete opposite of such virtuous traits. This contrast does not just deepen the audience’s understanding of the value of each virtue but also sheds light on the reasons behind the era’s call for such virtues. This juxtaposition between Gondibert and his adversaries serves to reinforce the attributes of an ideal hero in a changing world, emphasizing that the significance of these adversaries is intrinsically tied to their relationship with Gondibert.



Prior to delving further into the development of the epic hero in *Gondibert*, it is pertinent to offer a concise overview of the epic, particularly given the relative difficulty in accessing the text. King Aribert, the esteemed ruler of Lombardy, acclaimed for his accomplishments in both peace and war, wishes for his only child, Princess Rhodalind, to wed a suitable candidate who will succeed him on the throne. Two noble individuals, the ambitious Prince Oswald and the virtuous Duke Gondibert, emerge as potential suitors for her hand and the crown. Both have led triumphant armies for Lombardy, with Oswald commanding a force of veterans at Brescia and Gondibert leading an assembly of valiant youths at Bergamo. Although Gondibert is the preferred candidate in the eyes of Rhodalind and her father, he remains oblivious to their interest. Oswald, recognising Gondibert as his primary obstacle, orchestrates an ambush while Gondibert returns from a stag hunt with a small group of followers. After Gondibert fails to persuade Oswald that he harbours no desire for the throne, they concur to resolve the matter through single combat, culminating in Oswald's demise. Gondibert, injured but victorious, is conveyed to the palace of Astragon, a philosopher who has established a temple-like sanctuary dedicated to the pursuit of science and philosophy for the betterment of humanity. There, Gondibert heals under the care of Astragon's daughter, Birtha. Gondibert falls in love with Birtha, and they exchange vows. However, complications emerge when King Aribert declares Gondibert as his heir and Rhodalind's future spouse. Gondibert, now conflicted between loyalty to the King and his love for Birtha, faces a challenging predicament. Simultaneously, Oswald's sister, Gartha, vows vengeance for her brother's death and instigates further strife, resulting in a tense and precarious state of affairs in Lombardy. Gondibert approaches the palace to disclose the truth to the King, asserting that he is an ambitious individual and the princess merits a more suitable prince. Nevertheless, in an ironic twist, by renouncing the throne, Gondibert inadvertently reinforces the King's belief that he is the ideal match for Rhodalind, as the King perceives Gondibert's actions as an exhibition of humility and wisdom. Gondibert's endeavour to deter the King by portraying himself as an ambitious man seeking power ultimately backfires, as the King interprets his refusal as proof of the contrary—a prince who is not motivated by selfish ambition but by a genuine concern for Rhodalind's welfare and the prosperity of the kingdom.

## 1.6 THE LEVIATHAN INCARNATE: DAVENANT'S HOBBSIAN VISION OF THE EPIC HERO

Before examining the development of Davenant's epic hero, it is crucial to initially address Davenant's perspective on human nature and power dynamics. A comprehensive understanding of these concepts is essential in order to discern the motivations and rationale behind the transformations he implements in his epic hero. In Davenant's magnum opus, the notion of power occupies a prominent position and emerges as a multifaceted and intricate notion. Davenant explores this concept through the portrayal of Gondibert, bringing his experiences up to date by incorporating newly developed perspectives. Notably, Davenant's understanding of power is profoundly shaped by the ideas of Thomas Hobbes, who posited that the pursuit of power constitutes a fundamental aspect of human nature.

### 1.6.1 *Homo homini lupus* (Man is wolf to man)

"Man is wolf to man" is not only the most famous line from Hobbes's Epistle to *De Cive* but also remains "one of the most-well known dicta in the tradition of political theory"<sup>50</sup> (Rossello 255). Hobbes's statement that "[m]an to Man is an arrant Wolfe" (24) indicates his belief of humans being innately at war with each other in state of nature. He further states that this bitter reality leads good people to defend themselves by taking sanctuary in "[d]eceipt and [v]iolence, that is in plaine terms a meer [sic] brutal Rapacity" (24), leading the society into a chaotic state where even good people turn into beasts to survive. Therefore, he sees the state of people in nature as violent and calls it "hatefull condition" (*De Cive* 34). This very perception of natural state of human is significant in terms of understanding state theory and people seeking power.

Hobbes argues that there exists "a general inclination of all mankind, a perpetual and restless desire of power after power, that ceaseth only in death" (*Leviathan* 66). This excerpt elucidates his hypothesis concerning the unceasing and insatiable quest for power he deems intrinsic to human nature. Hobbes contends that individuals are perpetually impelled to amass greater power, and this impulse terminates solely upon their death. The

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<sup>50</sup> Although attributed to Hobbes, the first appearance of this striking proverbial expression is in Plautus's play *Asinaria* (c. 200 BC.)

impetus for power is not invariably grounded in the pursuit of heightened pleasure or an incapacity for satisfaction with a modest degree of authority. Rather, Hobbes maintains that individuals aspire to accumulate more power due to the uncertainty regarding whether their extant power and resources will suffice to ensure a prosperous existence (66). Hence, an individual's solution to this very natural state is seeking power.

To elaborate on this matter's relation to state theory, it would be better to touch upon one of the most famous exhortations of Hobbes: "[T]he state of men without civill society (which state we may properly call the state of nature) is nothing else but a meere warre of all against all<sup>51</sup>" (*De Cive* 34). This necessitates the establishment of a central state power to maintain order and provide for the protection of the citizens. When this remark from *De Cive* is read together with *Leviathan*, where Hobbes touches upon various historical events at the time, there can be no doubt that the acceptance of chaos as the natural condition of man was partly influenced by the Civil War. Nicholas William argues that Hobbes observed that individuals who had lived peacefully alongside each other for years were suddenly capable of committing acts of extreme violence, leading him to conclude that this was the most catastrophic state that any society could experience (n.p). In other words, the experience of the Civil War was an indicator of the fact that the lack of a secure and stable state leads to a state of nature where every individual is a potential enemy to his/her fellow.

### **1.6.2 The Hobbesian Wolf-men Society in *Gondibert***

The repercussions of Hobbesian political theory of the wolfish state of human nature can be observed in *Gondibert* in many instances. For instance, Gondibert's remark on human nature, "Men are Wolves, [and they] must civilize" (III.iv.34), is a clear indicator of Davenant's acknowledgement of Hobbesian claims about the natural state of humanity where men devour one another. The best example, however, is given right in the beginning of the epic when King Aribert's leadership and reign is praised. It is indicated that he was fit for both offices of war and peace, possessing necessary traits of a warrior

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<sup>51</sup> This assertion by Hobbes can be encountered in his other works, where it is expressed as "there is always war of every one against every one."

and a good ruler; therefore, he “best seem’d to fill the Throne / And bred most bus’nesse for Heroick Song” (I.i.1). Then the speaker explains why mastery of war is necessary:

To conquer Tumult, Nature’s sodain force,  
 War, Arts delib’rate strength, was first devis’d;  
 Cruel to those whose rage has no remorse,  
 Least civil pow’r should be by Throngs surpris’d. (I.i.4)

Here “Nature” can be interpreted as human nature which possesses an inherent tendency to initiate chaos. Therefore, the art of war is necessary to overcome the tumults that arise from human nature. Here one may speculate that the use of violence, that is the art of war, to suppress the tumults is not a solution but rather a continuation of the Hobbesian perception that man is wolf to wolf since the act of violence is a wolfish act. However, it should be noted that here war serves to end the chaos caused by human nature. Therefore, it is not part of the tumult but rather its solution.

The second concept presented as a way to solve this tumult is law: “Yet since on all War never needful was, / Wise Aribert did keep the People sure / By Laws from little dangers” (I.i.6). In this respect, law appears as another method to maintain order and harmony within a nation. This is followed by a significant remark that law protects “[t]hem [people/citizens] from themselves” (I.i.6). This remark holds crucial significance as it is an indicator of Davenant’s acknowledgement of Hobbesian perception that man is wolf to man. Law needs to protect people from each other because they pose a threat to their fellows. In this respect, the image of tumult as a product of human nature is further reinforced.

The depiction of King Aribert as an accomplished ruler is associated with his expertise in the art of war and the implementation of law to establish order: “Prais’d was this King for war, the Laws broad shield; And for acknowledg’d Laws, the art of Peace” (I.i.8). It is worth mentioning that the text does not explicitly state the reason for Aribert’s decision to abdicate and seek a successor, but it does suggest that he was in the later years of his life, as he was “(in the winter of his age) / Was like that stormy season froward grown” (I.i.14) and lacked a “male [heir] to give a lasting name, / Sprung from his bed” (I.i.9). Furthermore, the text highlights that the deterioration of a monarch’s power can result in a malady that may have repercussions for the nation: “Til pow’rs decay, the Thrones worst

sickness” (I.i.15). In this context, “pow’rs decay” refers to the weakening of a ruler’s strength and authority due to aging, which can potentially cause instability within the realm. The expression “the Throne’s worst sickness” implies that this decline in power is a considerable issue that afflicts nations. Although Princess Rhodalind is recognised as a suitable heir (I.i.16-18), the quest for an appropriate match worthy of Rhodalind’s hand indirectly emphasises the need to find a new successor who possesses the art of war and law to maintain order in a manner similar to Aribert. Consequently, in alignment with Hobbesian political theory, Davenant perceives the indispensability of a centralised authority who monopolises power to uphold order and ensure the security of its subjects from the dangers within themselves.

Accordingly, it is safe to argue that Davenant envisages a society where Hobbesian wolfish state of nature is evident and where man is against one another. This observation bears considerable importance in understanding the development of Davenant’s Gondibert as an epic hero and his new characteristic features and actions. This wolfish social environment in which he is expected to live and lead forces him to harbour certain features as seen in the case of Aribert. In this respect, it is safe to argue that Hobbesian perception of social and state theory has direct impact on Davenant.

### **1.6.3 Unleashing the Wolf Within: Humanity’s Relentless Pursuit of Power**

Another important influence of Hobbes’s thinking on Davenant and his reformed epic hero Gondibert is related to the pursuit of power. As we have seen, Hobbes argued that there existed “a general inclination of all mankind, a perpetual and restless desire of power after power, that ceaseth only in death” (*Leviathan* 66). This pronouncement elucidates his hypothesis concerning the unceasing and insatiable quest for power he deems intrinsic to the human condition. Hobbes contends that individuals are perpetually impelled to amass greater power, and this impulse terminates solely upon their demise. The impetus for power is not invariably grounded in the pursuit of heightened pleasure or an incapacity for satisfaction with a modest degree of authority, rather, Hobbes maintains that individuals, regardless of how much power they have or from what class they come, aspire to accumulate more power due to the uncertainty regarding whether their extant power and resources will suffice to ensure a prosperous existence (*Leviathan* 66). In the following section of chapter xi, “Of the Difference of Manner,” Hobbes further states that

“[c]ompetition of riches, honour, command, or other power, inclineth to contention, enmity, and war: because the way of one competitor, to the attaining of his desire, is to kill, subdue, supplant, or repel the other” (*Leviathan* 66). Hobbes’s reflections on human nature here presents a rather dark and pessimistic portrayal. By emphasizing the inherent self-interest and competitive instincts of individuals, he constructs a vision of humanity that is intrinsically intertwined with darker impulses and motivations.

#### **1.6.4 Pursuit of Power in *Gondibert***

The portrayal of the quest for power as a corrupting influence within the epic narrative holds substantial importance in comprehending the development of the epic hero’s virtues, especially when considering the theme of ambition. In the epic, Gondibert exhorts: “Man still is Sick for pow’r, yet that disease / Nature (whose Law is temp’rance) ne’r inspires” (II.viii.30). While the persistent human desire for power is widely recognised, it is not regarded as an innate aspect of human nature. Instead, it is presented as a choice that individuals make to pursue power and control over others. He further draws attention to the impact of lust for power not only on the individual but also on the nation: “And as in persons, so in publick States, / The lust of Pow’r provokes to cruel Warre; / For wisest Senates it intoxicates” (II.viii.31). Gondibert’s observations in this context elucidate two salient dimensions of the power concept. Primarily, it demonstrates that even the most judicious and wise leaders occupying positions of political authority are susceptible to the corrupting influence of power-seeking desires. This implies that the quest for power transcends socio-economic strata, permeating individuals from all segments of society. Secondly, given the capacity of powerful individuals to shape public affairs and exert considerable influence over national trajectories, their insatiable appetite for power poses heightened risks, potentially instigating conflicts that jeopardize entire nations. Consequently, the ramifications of power-lust in influential figures are distinctly more perilous than those in other members of society. Given these perspectives, Davenant profoundly reshapes his epic protagonist, Gondibert. The theme of ambition is employed to discuss the aspect of power in his epic narrative. The prominence of this theme within Davenant’s epic and its hero signifies the considerable weight he assigns to the discourse on power.

## 1.7 AMBITION AS A HEROIC VIRTUE/VICE

### 1.7.1 Hobbes's Conceptualisation of Ambition

Understanding the concept of ambition and its portrayal as a heroic virtue in Davenant's epic is crucial for comprehending how he evolves his epic hero in response to the contemporary historical events and philosophical developments. Davenant's treatment of ambition is significantly influenced by Hobbes's political theory, which identifies ambition as one of the principal causes of the rebellion leading up to the Civil Wars.<sup>52</sup> Hobbes's extensive engagement with the concept of ambition is evident throughout his career, particularly in his works on political philosophy— *Elements of Law, Natural and Politic* (1640), *De Cive* (1642), *Leviathan* (1651), and *Behemoth* (1681)— which are developed in the context of the violent historical events and philosophical debates of seventeenth-century England.

Hobbes's earliest views on ambition within the contours of political philosophy are found in *Elements of Law Natural and Politic*, written in 1640 but published in an authorized version in 1650. It should be noted, of course, that here in the book he discusses the term philosophically, as the book's composition date was before the bloody events of the Civil War. Therefore, he does not conceptualise the term within its historical and political context of the Civil War. In this work, he argues that one of the issues that leads to instability in government is the concept of ambition. In Chapter VIII, part 3, he states that the principal source of "discontent which troubleth the mind of them [people in general] who otherwise live at ease [...] ariseth only from a sense of their want of that power, and that honour and testimony thereof, which they think is due unto them" (*Elements* 134). Here, the term "ambition" is particularly relevant in the context of discontent and the desire for power and recognition. People who believe they are more virtuous or capable than those in power can be aggrieved by their lower status, which in turn can cause discontent. This discontent is rooted in their ambition to achieve a higher position in

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<sup>52</sup> The epistolary exchange between Davenant and Hobbes proved to be a notable and fruitful endeavour for both authors. Despite Hobbes's acknowledged influence on Davenant, it is important to acknowledge that Davenant also exerted an influential impact on Hobbes. Indeed, Hobbes's seminal work, *Leviathan*, bears testament to Davenant's contributions: in its literary style, topics of political authority and the problem of obedience. Those seeking further elucidation on Davenant's impact on Hobbes are encouraged to consult Philip Connell's scholarly chapter entitled "Hobbes and Davenant: Poetry as Civil Science," which is featured in *Poetic Enlightenment* (Routledge 2013).

society, stemming from the belief that they deserve more. Hobbes further argues that these individuals “take it ill, and be grieved with the state, as find themselves postponed to those in honour, whom they think they excel in virtue and ability to govern” (*Elements* 134). This observation accentuates the significance of ambition in engendering dissatisfaction, as people who regard themselves as more deserving of honour and power grapple with their inferior positions in society.

It is crucial to recognise that Hobbes’s preference for monarchy over democracy is deeply intertwined with his discourse on ambition. He contends that the optimal environment for individuals to fulfil their ambitions is within a democratic system, where ample opportunities for participation in governance are available: “Amongst all those that pretend to, or are ambitious of such honour, a few only can be served, unless it be in a democracy; the rest therefore must be discontent” (*Elements* 135). In this context, ambition emerges as a primary factor influencing the predilection for democratic systems, as they provide increased prospects for recognition and the realization of personal aspirations. While a twenty-first century reader might perceive the opportunity to fulfil individual ambitions as a positive development, Hobbes regards it as a menace to the stability and order of the commonwealth. He believes that democracy cannot work effectively because it requires people to make decisions collectively, and this is impossible due to the inherent selfishness and competitiveness of human nature. According to Hobbes, people are naturally self-interested and will always act in their own interests, even if it means ignoring the common good. Therefore, a democratic system, which relies on people making decisions for the benefit of the community, is bound to fail and may even “disposeth to rebellion” (135).

Hobbes further problematises the term ambition in his *De Cive*.<sup>53</sup> In Chapter XIII, Hobbes discusses the trouble of mind that arises from ambition and how it can negatively affect public peace. The focus on ambition is evident when he mentions individuals who believe themselves to be wiser and more capable than those currently in power: “For there are some who seeming to themselves to be wiser than others, and more sufficient for the

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<sup>53</sup> *De Cive (Concerning the Citizen / On the Citizen)* is regarded as one of the first significant philosophical works to challenge the authority of the ancients. It was originally published in Latin in 1642 during Hobbes’s early years in exile in France. In this work, Hobbes posits the controversial notion that humans naturally degrade and compete with one another.



managing of affairs then they who at present do govern” (162). These ambitious individuals, seeking to demonstrate their abilities, may harm the commonwealth as a means to show their potential value: “[W]hen they can no otherwise declare how profitable their virtue would prove to the Common-weale, they show it, by harming it” (162). This harmful behaviour, driven by ambition is detrimental to public peace. What is quite significant here is the fact that Hobbes sees ambition as an innate feature of people and that it “cannot be rooted out of the minds of men” (162-63). Therefore, he suggests the rulers should “manage it through the use of rewards and punishments” (163).

Hobbes’s philosophical conceptualisation of ambition meets his interpretation of historical and political events, the Civil War to be exact, in *Leviathan*. Published in 1651, the magnum opus in Hobbes’s oeuvre for most scholars, *Leviathan* marks Hobbes’s application of political theory to historical events. At this point, ambition as a vice was no longer a topic of philosophy but rather an actual historical fact before him. He believed that one of the driving forces that propelled the Parliamentarian forces to wage war against the monarchy, thereby jeopardizing political stability and social harmony, was the ambitious leaders of the Roundheads for they “think themselves wiser, and abler to govern the public, better than the rest; and these strive to reform and innovate, one this way, another that way; and thereby bring it into distraction and civil war” (113). Hence it is palpable that one of the dynamics that give momentum to the rise of sedition, for Hobbes, was people devoured by ambition. Mary Dietz comments on Hobbes’s take on the role of ambition in English politics as follows: “[A]tribution of the Civil War to ambitious Parliamentarians and ministers does not merely represent, as might be thought, an arbitrary political judgment [...] It encapsulates a larger empirical analysis of the malignancy of ambition in politics” (85). In this respect, it is safe to argue that for Hobbes ambition as a characteristic trait played an instrumental role in the course of historical events in England in the seventeenth century.

### **1.7.2 Davenant’s Theorisation of Ambition as a Heroic Virtue/Vice**

While *Gondibert* does not contain an invocation of the muse or a traditional prologue that presents the specific theme to be explored in the epic, it is no doubt that ambition would be a primary focus if such an introduction were included. In William Davenant’s *Gondibert*, the concept of “ambition” serves as the equivalent to Homer’s “rage or anger”

in the *Iliad*. The salience of this theme is such that it determines the sequence of events in the entirety of *Gondibert*, dictating the actions and motivations of two important figures, Duke Gondibert and Prince Oswald. In this respect, the evolution of Gondibert is deeply characterised by the problem of ambition. This theme is extensively discussed in the Preface, which serves to highlight its crucial importance to Davenant as subject matter:<sup>54</sup>

Ambition (if the vulgar acception of the Word were corrected) would signifie no more then an extraordinary lifting of the feet in the rough ways of Honor, over the impediments of Fortune; and hath a warmth (till it be chaf'd into a Feaver) which is necessary for every vertuous breast: for good men are guilty of too little appetite to greatnesse, [which results] from some melancholy precept of the Cloyster; where they would make life (for which the world was only made) more unpleasant then Death; as if Nature, the Vicegerent of God (who in providing delightfull varietyes, which vertuous greatnesse can best possesse, or assure peaceably to others, implicitly commanded the use of them) should in the necessaries of life (life being her chiefe businesse) though in her whole reigne she never committed one error, need the councill of Fryars; whose solitude makes them no more fitt for such direction, then Prisoners long fetter'd are for a race. (Preface 13-14)

Davenant's interpretation of ambition elucidates the multifaceted nature of the concept, delineating two distinct dimensions: one characterised by "fever" and the other by "warmth." In this respect, Davenant actually does not necessarily present ambition as an innate feature or a devilish vice altogether. The "feverish" level of ambition indeed poses a threat to both individuals and societies at large. This concept is deeply marked by the Hobbesian conceptualisation of ambition as a vice driven by the feeling of discontent and desire for power, honour, and recognition. This drive propels individuals to battle for their self-interest, which can endanger not only their personal lives but also the political equilibrium and social harmony of the nation. Owing to its historical and political relevance tied to the events of the Civil War, and Hobbes's commentary on it, Davenant could readily connect with this feverish ambition.

However, Davenant diverges from Hobbes in this regard as he does not see ambition exclusively as a vice, positing that it is not an inherent trait but rather determined by the

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<sup>54</sup> The theme of ambition is touched upon in several works by Davenant, including "The Cruel Brother" (1627), "Macbeth" (adapted in 1674), and "Poem on His Sacred Majestie's Most Happy Return to His Dominions" (1660), indicating the significance of this theme in the literary life of the author (Gladish 290).

personal decisions made by individuals. In this respect, he offers a unique type of ambition that is “warm.” He posits that the “warm” aspect of ambition is indispensable for virtuous individuals, as it facilitates the realisation of their potential and the attainment of greatness in life. It is worth noting that Davenant disputes the portrayal of ambition in specifically religious tenets, which he refers to as the “precept of the Cloyster.” In these teachings, monks and other religious figures renounce worldly pleasures and adopt a lifestyle of asceticism removed from life. Davenant contends that such religious doctrines contravene the natural order of things, as nature offers a delightful diversity that virtuous individuals can appreciate and use for self-improvement. He asserts that the pursuit of pleasure and the quest for greatness are implicitly sanctioned by “Nature, the Vicegerent of God.” Moreover, he believes that “Fryars” who reside in seclusion should not be granted authority to advise on this matter, as their monastic or cloistered existence precludes them from experiencing worldly enjoyments. In this respect, he justifies “warm” ambition both through reason and on religious grounds.

Davenant suggests that when ambition is directed towards noble goals, it can inspire individuals to actualise their potential and fulfil their aspirations. However, when it manifests as an uncontrolled obsession, it morphs into a peril for both the individual and society. Thus, in Davenant’s view, ambition is not inherently good or bad - its classification as a vice or virtue is determined by its intensity within individuals. Consequently, it falls to the individual to regulate whether ambition serves as a gentle motivator or a raging fever.

### **1.7.3 Exploring Ambition as a Heroic Virtue/Vice in *Gondibert***

In *Gondibert*, the theme of ambition, as both a heroic virtue and a vice, occupies a prominent position, which is evidenced by its frequent recurrence throughout the text. The term “ambition” and its related adjectival and adverbial forms appear forty-nine times

throughout the poem,<sup>55</sup> indicating the importance Davenant ascribes to this concept.<sup>56</sup> In the preface, he engages in theoretical discussions of ambition and subsequently applies these ideas in various contexts and dimensions within the epic, encompassing its positive and negative effects on personal lives, military, political, and social spheres. The duality of ambition as a “virtue” is examined through the characters of Gondibert as the central epic hero and his adversary Oswald, the principal warriors in their respective armies, as well as political figures such as Hermegild. By delving into the complex nature of ambition, Davenant is able to explore its multifaceted role in the development of the narrative and the intricate relationships between the characters.

In the poem, ambition as a vice is portrayed especially through Oswald whose eyes are “dark with ambitious care” (I.i.29). Despite his early demise in the poem, his faction is emblematic of ambition portrayed as a negative trait, specifically as a characteristic of the hero’s adversaries (Gladish 294). When he ambushes Gondibert, Oswald sees him from far away and realises that the one he is about to engage is not an ordinary man but a remarkably strong warrior famous for “[v]ertue’s known Image” (I.iii.5), which forces him to “check his purpos’d deed” (I.iii.6), which indicates that he fears to face Gondibert; yet his ambition keeps him steady. This is significant in terms of indicating how feverish ambition can result in individuals taking up positions that endanger their lives. Subsequently, Oswald’s ambition propels him forward; nonetheless, he is acutely

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<sup>55</sup> The employment of the term “ambition” and its associated adjectival and adverbial forms in the *Gondibert* is presented, through a structured sequence of Book, Canto, and stanza, as follows: I.i.29, I.i.33, I.i.36, I.i.39, I.i.40, I.i.45, I.i.54, I.i.66, I.i.79, I.ii.71, I.iii.7, I.iii.21, I.iii.22, I.iii.27, I.iii.32, I.iii.33, I.iv.21, I.iv.75, I.iv.76, II.ii.21, II.ii.21, II.ii.62, II.ii.73, II.iii.34, II.iii.51, II.iv.13, II.iv.14, II.iv.25, II.iv.27, II.iv.40, II.viii.21, II.viii.26, II.viii.28, II.viii.43, II.viii.52, II.viii.87, III.i.57, III.i.57, III.ii.75, III.ii.95, III.iv.27, III.v.26, III.v.37, III.vi.64, III.vii.10, III.vii.24, III.vii.53, III.vii.82, III.vii.97. Davenant therefore touches upon the theme of ambition 49 times in 47 separate stanzas. Considering the total number of stanzas in the epic is 1615, it becomes apparent that the concept of ambition is discussed in nearly everyone of the 34 stanzas, highlighting its central importance in the work.

<sup>56</sup> In a copy of the 1651 edition of Sir William Davenant’s *Gondibert* held at the Folger Shakespeare Library (D325 Copy 1) an intriguing annotation can be found. This is a sketch of a hand pointing towards the word “ambition,” which is further underscored by the word “ambition” written directly beneath it on page 19. I contend that this annotation demonstrates the reader’s awareness of the importance of the theme of ambition in this epic, hence acknowledging Davenant’s stress on this motif. It is worth noting that this is the only textual annotation found throughout the entire book. I wish to express my gratitude to Professor Nicosia, whose generosity made it possible for me to access this archival material, as well as the Folger Shakespeare Library. Please refer to C. The first edition of Sir William Davenant’s *Gondibert* (1651) held at the Folger Shakespeare Library (D325 Copy 1) for an illustration of the annotated page under discussion.

cognizant of the possibility that the confrontation with Gondibert's forces may lead to the demise of his young soldiers, thus experiencing remorse on their behalf:

And though Ambition did his rage renew;  
 Yet much he griev'd (mov'd with the Youthful 'Brain)  
 That Plants which so much promis'd as they grew,  
 Should in the Bud be ere performance slain. (I.iii.7)

Here Oswald is represented as a figure who is not entirely unsympathetic since he exhibits concern for his soldiers rather than solely prioritising his own interests. It is worth noting that Oswald was "[h]onor's publick pattern was, / Till vain ambition led his heart aside" (I.iii.32), which indicates that Oswald was once a public exemplar of honour until his ambition led him astray, reflecting the grave impact of ambition when it is a vice. It is evident here that being consumed by the inferno of feverish ambition leads Oswald not only to endanger himself but also those following him.

The ambition of Oswald is in line with the Hobbesian conceptualisation of the term in *Elements* in which he underlines that ambition is marked by "want of that power, and that honour and testimony thereof, which they think is due unto them" (134). With a lineage of a "conqu'ring father" and with the skill of great mastery of "Warr's high art" (I.i.27), Oswald is a skilful prince who "[o]utshin'd bright Fav'rites" (I.i.29) and thinks that he himself is the worthiest contender for the throne. He further justifies his conduct as follows: "Since the Worlds safety we in greatness finde / And pow'r divided is from greatness gone" (I.iii.36). Oswald's belief that the world's safety can only be ensured by uniting power under him reveals his sense of superiority over others. Allsopp comments on Oswald as follows: "Oswald's problem is not that he has an 'appetite to greatnesse,' it is that he is not good" (42). In my opinion, rather than his characteristic trait is being bad, the true problem is the fact that he is consumed by a feverish ambition. As indicated above, Oswald was once known to be "Honor's publick pattern [...] Till vain ambition led his heart aside" (I.iii.32), which indicates that Oswald is not an evil figure from the beginning. Contrary to Allsopp's assertion, Davenant does not unequivocally label Oswald as malevolent. Instead, he suggests that the issue lies not in ambition itself, but in its excess within an individual. Oswald was once a well-respected figure cherished by his people. However, his ambition, having escalated into a feverish intensity, consumed him. This detrimental impact of uncontrolled ambition transformed him into a nefarious

figure that instigates chaos and discord within his nation, aligning with Hobbes's depiction in *Elements*.

Oswald's primary driving force can be attributed to his self-interest, which becomes evident during his encounter with Gondibert. Oswald candidly articulates his rationale for the ambush: "I have this Ambush laid; / Since you (my Rival) wronged me by surprise" (I.iii.15). He accuses Gondibert of swaying both the King and the princess: "The Crown he with his Daughter has designed; / His favor (which to me does frozen prove) / Grows warm to you as the eyes of Rhodalind" (I.iii.13). It is apparent that Oswald knows the King's intention to bestow the throne upon Gondibert, who has also won Rhodalind's affection.

Significantly, Oswald perceives Gondibert to be the mastermind behind these developments, as he "usurps thus, and [his] claim [to the throne] derides" (I.iii.16). Although Oswald attempts to justify his ambush as a natural response to Gondibert's perceived betrayal and treachery, what drives his actions is his desire to get rid of a potential rival to the throne. Notably, Oswald makes no mention of his love for Rhodalind, as she merely serves as a means to secure the throne in his eyes. This insight underscores the fact that Oswald's actions are propelled by his ambition for the throne rather than any genuine affection for Rhodalind, which indicates that his actions are motivated by seeking power.

It should be noted here that Oswald's army supports their leader's claim to the throne, as they hope to ascend higher themselves through his success: "Oswald's Faction urg'd him to aspire / That by his height they higher might ascend" (I.i.76). Their support is marked by their own interest; thus, they too are motivated by ambition. Furthermore, the first thing said in the introduction of Hubert, Oswald's brother, is that he is a figure committed "[t]o the ambitions which his Soule did wed" (I.ii.71). In this respect, it is visible that not only Oswald but also his whole faction is characterised by the feverish ambition. Oswald's actions and his army's support for him are characterised by their self-interest. This is in line with Hobbes's assertion that individuals are innately self-interested and will consistently act in their own interests, even at the expense of the common good (*Elements* 165).

Gondibert endeavours to temper the intensity of Oswald's ambition by addressing his allegations and intimidations with logical reasoning and tranquillity, aiming to prevent any ensuing bloodshed:

The King's objected love is but your dreame,  
As false as that I strive for Rhodalind  
As Valor's hyre; these sickly visions seeme  
Which in Ambitions Feaver vex your minde. (I.iii.22)

Gondibert dismisses Oswald's claim that the King favours him and that he is striving for Rhodalind as a false and sickly vision born out of Oswald's overwhelming ambition. He states that he has no desire for the throne: "My small ambition hardly worth your care" (I.iii.21). Gondibert tries to avoid the war that may devour the lives of many warriors in both armies; yet fails. Here, Gondibert's specific use of terminology in this context is crucial. Gondibert refers to Oswald's ambition as a "Fever," a state which clouds his judgment and obscures the boundary between reality and his fantasies. Thus, Gondibert, as the epic hero, demonstrates a keen awareness of the extent to which Oswald has been consumed by his feverish ambition.

Oswald's "feverish" ambition leads to war between two factions which results in with the death of Oswald himself, his kin, the almost total annihilation of his army, and later political chaos in the nation because his followers desire to avenge their leader. Davenant's aim here, in my opinion, is to convey to his audience that even a distinguished and admired figure, exemplified by Oswald, can fall prey to the malady of feverish ambition, resulting in catastrophic consequences for both the individual and the nation as a whole. His army who supported Oswald's ambition for their own interest also perished and further contributed to the chaos. Through the tragic end of Oswald and his army and the political chaos following their death, Davenant indicates how individuals with feverish ambition brings calamities to themselves and their nations just as Hobbes had presented the dire effects of self-interest in his works.

Consequently, one can assert that Davenant's depiction of unbridled ambition as a defining vice represents a synthesis of Hobbes's conception of the term, characterized by the pursuit of self-interest at the expense of the common good and even the demise of others, as well as a trait with the capacity to disrupt a nation's order and harmony as

demonstrated in his works. Davenant's instructional purpose with the portrayal and consequences of feverish ambition gains more significance when historical background is taken into consideration. The portrayal of Oswald's unrestrained ambition in Davenant's narrative bears a striking resemblance to Hobbes's commentary on the Civil War instigated by ambitious leaders; in a similar fashion, Oswald's ambition precipitates a Civil War, undermining the political stability and social equilibrium, ultimately culminating in numerous fatalities. However, Davenant diverges from Hobbes in his approach to ambition, positing that it is not an inherent trait but rather determined by the personal decisions of individuals. This enables Davenant to create a uniquely positive version of ambition, "warm ambition," as a heroic virtue and presents the great consequences that result from possessing it.

In the epic, Gondibert appears as the embodiment of warm ambition. As previously discussed, deeply influenced by the ideas of Hobbes, Davenant saw ambition as one of the main reasons that initiated the Civil War that caused such devastation to the nation. In the light of this view, Harbage argues "Duke Gondibert [to be] the unclouded mirror of all perfection. Untouched even by such a noble stain as ambition" (Harbage 180). Harbage's comment is marked by the notion that Davenant employs Hobbesian ideas, framing ambition as a vice. Indeed, Davenant does address the concept of "feverish" ambition; however, Harbage overlooks Davenant's introduction of "warm" ambition, a concept that signifies the realisation of one's potential. In this context, I challenge Harbage's perspective, contending that he recognises merely one dimension of the theme, while neglecting the second aspect, the "warm ambition." It is in this latter layer, I believe, that Davenant's true originality resides.

This subject is not only presented theoretically in the Preface but also displayed in the epic in the person of the reformed epic hero Gondibert himself. He expounds upon the nature of ambition, which can serve as a catalyst for self-improvement and elevation of one's social standing, or conversely, if left unchecked, can precipitate the destruction of an individual's life:

Tis she who taught you to increase renown,  
By sowing Honor's field with noble deeds,  
Which yields [sic] no harvest when 'tis over-grown  
With wilde Ambition, the most rank of weeds. (I.iii.27)



Gondibert's pronouncement here summarises the dual state of ambition, "warm" ambition and "feverish" ambition, that we have been analysing here. Gondibert's remarks indicate that right level of ambition is good since it enables one to "sow the field of honor with such deeds" and so is ultimately valuable for the individual in terms of enhancing their reputation and increasing their standing in society. Therefore, Gondibert posits that the "warm" aspect of ambition is indispensable for virtuous individuals, as it facilitates the realization of their potential and the attainment of greatness in life. He even explicitly acknowledges that he himself has "small ambition" (I.iii.21). In the same stanza, Gondibert also cautions against the dangers of excessive ambition, feverish ambition, which the speaker describes as "the most rank of weeds." This metaphor highlights the negative consequences of unbridled ambition, which can consume and choke out the good deeds and noble intentions that were originally intended to bring honour and renown. Accordingly, Harbage's assertion that Gondibert is unaffected by ambition may stem from a failure to fully comprehend Davenant's nuanced perspective on the concept of ambition. While ambition can serve as a potent impetus to good, it can, if unregulated, paradoxically undermine the very achievements it was intended to bolster.

Another important scene in which Gondibert's warm ambition is indicated is the section dedicated to the House of Astragon. Following the battle, the epic hero Gondibert sustains injuries and is subsequently taken to Astragon's palace, a sanctuary reminiscent of a temple, which is devoted to the study of science and philosophy for the betterment of humanity. Gondibert receives medical attention from Astragon's daughter, Birtha, and the two develop a romantic relationship instantaneously. However, Astragon harbours reservations regarding Gondibert's character, as he fears that his ambitions may compel him to discard Birtha for a more promising suitor. Given this concern, Astragon questions Gondibert about his sincerity in loving Birtha, with the objective of determining whether he is excessively ambitious (II.viii.18-23) and likely to abandon her. Gondibert refutes this notion, stating that his desire for conquest is not driven by ambition, but rather by the prudent teachings of his forefathers: "Ambition kindled not this Victor's heat, / But 'tis a warmth my Fathers prudence bred" (II.viii.28). In his capacity as a warrior and general, he had been engaged in numerous conflicts, emerging victorious ultimately. However, he emphasises that these wars were not instigated by personal feverish ambition but were instead a consequence of the doctrines imparted by his predecessors. This suggests that

while he actualized his potential as a general, his actions were not motivated by a desire for personal power.

Furthermore, Gondibert professes his intention to retire from a martial life and lead a tranquil existence with Birtha, exploring the wonders of nature: “Here all reward of conquest I would finde; / Leave shining Thrones for Birtha in a shade; / With Nature’s quiet wonders fill my minde” (II). Astragon is eventually convinced of Gondibert’s sincerity and endorses his suitability as a partner for Birtha. The approval of Astragon holds considerable weight as he is depicted as a philosopher imbued with scientific reasoning and rationality. Consequently, his endorsement of Gondibert’s character, driven by tempered ambition, signifies that warm ambition as a heroic virtue has passed the scientific test. Significantly, this episode illustrates that Gondibert’s moderate ambition enables him to achieve his romantic aspirations, underscoring the value of tempered ambition.

Another important instance in which the rewards of warm ambition are presented is when Gondibert approaches King Aribert to settle the central problem of ascendancy to the throne with the king who wants him to be his heir. He feigns disinterest, asserting that he is driven by destructive ambition and that the princess deserves a more befitting prince. This, of course, is a ruse, as he is deeply in love with Birtha, and to accept Princess Rhodalind’s hand in marriage, thus ascending the throne, would indirectly require relinquishing his love for Birtha. In his interaction with the king, he insincerely confesses, “[f]orgive me that I am not what I seem; / But falsly have dissembled an excess / Of all such vertues as you most esteem” (III.iv.26). Furthering his deceit, he declares his ambitious nature: “Farr in Ambition’s Feaver am I gon! [...] / Like flame destructive too, and like the Sun” (III.iv.27). Gondibert’s confession that his ambition is like a destructive sun should clearly be interpreted according to Davenant’s metaphor for negative ambition, that is “feverish” ambition. Gondibert later states that Rhodalind deserves a better prince than him and that he is not worthy of her or the throne. Allsopp interprets Gondibert’s comments here literally, contending that “Gondibert admits to Aribert that he has become guilty of the very passion he has railed against throughout the poem: [Fever ambition]. His love for Birtha [...] has turned into a form of vainglory” (112). The basis of Allsopp’s observation lies in his belief that “Gondibert has the capacity to resolve

the Lombard civil war by accepting Aribert's adoption" (112), yet opts for personal love over national peace. This decision, in turn, culminates in pervasive chaos.

It should be noted that Gondibert never truly holds the capacity to resolve this issue and prevent the civil war. When he informs Oswald that he does not covet the throne and that Oswald may claim it if he so desires, Oswald counters by asserting that even if Gondibert relinquishes his claim, he will remain a viable candidate. Consequently, to secure the throne, Oswald must remove Gondibert from contention. Additionally, it bears mentioning that Gondibert's earnest attempts to dissuade Hubert from seeking vengeance following his brother Oswald's death prove fruitless. It is later revealed that Gartha, the only sister of deceased Oswald, seeks revenge while Hubert, with Hermegild's assistance, aspires to seize the throne for himself. Thus, it becomes evident that despite numerous attempts to mediate, Gondibert lacks the means to rectify the situation. Even if he were to accept King Aribert's proposition to become his heir, Hubert and Gartha's pursuit of revenge and the throne would continue unabated. Consequently, it is not possible for Gondibert to prevent the civil war. This is a crucial detail that Allsopp appears to overlook.

Secondly, and of even greater significance, Allsopp appears to misunderstand Davenant's objective in this scene: Davenant aims to illustrate, for his audience, the beneficial outcomes that arise from maintaining "warm ambition" which is evident in the King's reaction and reply to Gondibert's false confession:

The King (secure in offer'd Empire) takes  
This forc'd excuse, as troubled bashfulness,  
And a disguise which sodain passion makes,  
To hide more joy then prudence should express. (III.iv.37)

The King perceives Gondibert's refusal of Rhodalind's hand and, consequently, the throne as an indication that Gondibert is, in fact, not ambitious. This ironic turn of events serves to further solidify the King's decision to marry his daughter to Gondibert, as the duke's apparent lack of ambition is viewed as a desirable quality, setting him apart from other power-hungry suitors. Davenant comments on this as the paradoxical nature of the unfolding events with the observation, "honor so refus'd, more honor gaines" (III.iv.73). Hence, by rejecting the throne, Gondibert inadvertently strengthens the King's conviction

that he is the right match for Rhodalind, as the King perceives Gondibert's actions as a demonstration of humility, selflessness, and prudence. Gondibert's attempt to dissuade the King by portraying himself as an ambitious man seeking power therefore backfires, as the King sees his refusal as evidence of the opposite – a prince who is not driven by feverish ambition but by a genuine concern for Rhodalind's well-being and the good of the kingdom.

King Aribert's reply, I believe, carries particular importance for comprehending the substantial weight of ambition within the sphere of political and aristocratic life. For the monarch, an absence of feverish ambition serves as the ultimate testament to Gondibert's worthiness for the throne. This notion acts as a poignant reminder for the sophisticated aristocratic audience whom Davenant seeks to engage, emphasizing that tempered ambition should be a valued virtue in the realm of politics. This quality signifies that those who prioritize the interests of the kingdom and its subjects above their own personal aspirations are highly valued in the realm of politics. The instructional aim of Davenant here is visible: tempered ambition is a new feature demanded by this new age following the Civil War. The didactic intent communicated through the epic hero Gondibert is direct here: Those who possess tempered ambition will rise in politics while those who are fired by feverish ambition, the Hobbesian ambition, will not only perish themselves but also bring destruction further to their people and nation.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Although Davenant's epic remains unfinished, my contention is that if it were completed, Gondibert would have ascended to the throne without forfeiting his love for Birtha. William Thomson, in his 1751 play *Gondibert and Birtha*, brings closure to this unresolved narrative. He addresses the love triangle between Gondibert, Birtha, and Rhodalind by designating Gondibert and Birtha as King Aribert's heirs following Rhodalind's demise. I posit that Thomson's narrative resolution aligns with Davenant's intended trajectory for his epic. Davenant's aim was to demonstrate the virtues and beneficial outcomes of maintaining "warm ambition" to his audience, through his reformed epic hero, Gondibert. By enabling Gondibert to claim the throne while simultaneously maintaining his love for Birtha, I believe Thomson has accurately captured and preserved the essence of Davenant's political didacticism.

## 1.8 PACIFICISM AND JUSTIFIED MARTIAL PROWESS

Another significant characteristic feature that Davenant gives to his epic hero in the light of the demands of the new age is pacificism. However, Davenant's distinct approach that reveals the multifaceted nature of the necessary virtues is also evident here. Davenant's epic hero is marked by pacificism; however, he acknowledges that martial skills are also required for a leader. Harbage finds this duality quite dazzling: "The poet was a soldier by class and political affiliations, but a pacifist by instinct" and argues that in the poem, war is sometimes glorified and sometimes criticised, which he explains as "Davenant, like his age, was often self-contradictory" (195). Harbage reads the poem only from a historical perspective and fails to grasp the Hobbesian impact on Davenant. Davenant's multi-faceted conceptualization of pacifism and violence is mainly characterised by a Hobbesian perspective on the dynamic violence-power relationship and partly by the socio-political events of the period. Davenant's dual approach is not the result of a contradiction as Harbage argues, but rather his attempt to unite his views on war as violence and his conceptualisation of martial prowess as a demand of the realpolitik of the emerging age.

### 1.8.1 War as Violence and Not Something to be Glorified

Davenant's perception of war as violence is strongly evident in his epic and his evolved epic hero Gondibert. In the Preface, he associates violence with "beasts" and animalistic behaviour and argues that people "must side with Reason" not violence (36). Davenant's condemnation of war can easily be analysed in the light of the Royalist defeat in the Civil Wars. He is well aware of the consequences of war as he has seen how his country suffered at the hands of violent warfare that long devoured his country's lands and people. This does not necessarily mean that Davenant actively engaged in battles. He served in many different areas throughout the war, including being a messenger, organiser, handling military stores and material, using a pigeon service to keep the Queen informed; and, he rose in the ranks quite quickly (to the rank of lieutenant-general of the ordnance<sup>58</sup>). However, his rise, along with the titles and distinctions he garnered, can be attributed to

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<sup>58</sup> The ascension of Davenant during the Civil War was multifaceted, characterised not solely by his advancement in military rank, but also by his receipt of the title of Knight bestowed upon him by Charles I. The trajectory of Davenant's status during this period is notably striking he transitioned from a man of modest beginnings, known as the tavern-born Davenant, to the esteemed Sir William Davenant.

his close relationship with the Queen and the financial investments he made in the army<sup>59</sup> (Nethercot 201-2).

Despite not taking an active role in the field, he nonetheless served during the protracted wars and experienced their devastating consequences first-hand. Davenant's letter to Edward, Viscount Conway, dated 24 August 1640, offers a detailed glimpse into his war-related duties, specifically his role in managing the transportation of artillery.<sup>60</sup> In the letter, Davenant addresses a directive concerning the movement of artillery using horses to Hull, emphasizing the logistical challenges involved in such operations. Davenant states:

I finde a commade sent hither to despatch from hence three hundred and 50 horse for draught of the artillery towards Hull, and with all possible hast; but unlesse your Lo send money (according to your owne computation) for their charges thither, and money for more iron to shoe them, and a warrant for their weekly pay who attend them, it is impossible to sett them forward. [...] Legge tells me is of great importance, and would faine have your Lo opinion how it may be sent without feare of being interrupted. (n.p)

The significance of this letter extends beyond its operational content, shedding light on the broader aspects of warfare that include logistics, supply, and finance. Davenant's candid discussion of the practical needs for successful artillery transportation underlines the fact that warfare is not solely about combat but also heavily relies on the effective management of resources and logistics.

Furthermore, the fact that Davenant sent this letter from Newcastle, Northumbria, underscores his active involvement in the Civil War. His engagement in various aspects of the war, from managing logistics to moving between different locations, reveals a deeper understanding of the war's complexities. Davenant's experiences, as depicted in this letter, offer a comprehensive view of the Civil War, highlighting the critical role of support systems and resource management in the overall war effort.

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<sup>59</sup> "Upon Fighting Will," a poem purportedly written by John Denham, a contemporary Royalist courtier and writer of William Davenant's era, provides satirical commentary on Davenant's receipt of military honours without his active participation in combat. For a detailed reference of this poem, consult Gladish, pp. 277-78.

<sup>60</sup> Please see "Sir William Davenant, Reputed Son of Shakespeare, Autograph Letter Signed to Lord Conway, August 24, 1640" (Osborn fb219).

This would have undoubtedly left an imprint on his understanding of the wars' savage nature. It should also be noted that in the aftermath of a gruelling Civil War, a veritable winter of conflict that gnawed at his people's very core, Davenant ardently envisaged a resurgence. A much-desired spring of peace was his aspiration for this battle-scarred nation; a period of tranquillity that was not merely desirable, but a most deserved right. Davenant's vision was of a future where the scars of war healed, yielding to a dawn of hope and reconciliation, underscoring the resiliency and indomitable spirit of his people.

Within the purview of historical analysis, it is important to underscore Davenant's consistently pacifist perspective on war. This stance is eloquently elucidated by Harbage, who posits that Davenant's *Salmacida Spolia* (1640), the final masque performed at the English Court prior to the eruption of the English Civil War, serves as an emblem of "pacifist propaganda" (78). Moreover, further evidence of Davenant's desire for peace manifests in his poignant poetic epistle "To the Queen," penned in the aftermath of the Second Bishops War, an early conflict in the series that precipitated the horrific Civil War. In this elegy, Davenant pleads with Queen Henrietta to use her influence over King Charles to end the violent clashes, evoking the imagery of tears and blood to stress the profound cost of war. The poignant phrase "gain [persuasion] with Tears, cost others Blood" (qtd. in Harbage in 79) captures this sentiment effectively. In this regard, it becomes evident that Davenant stood resolutely for peace even during the initial stages of the conflict. He was acutely aware that, without a firm commitment to peace, the price would be steep—the inevitable bloodshed of countless individuals. Davenant's predictions were not without merit. The discord that he had foreseen escalated into a full-scale war, a devastating conflict that laid siege to the country for an extended period. His foresight, unfortunately, was validated by the annals of history, as the nation endured a long, protracted war, just as Davenant had feared.

His commentary on war as violence in the epic covers many aspects of war: its ritual preparation, its societal glorification, and its atrocious reality that only those who become part of this violence can see. For instance, before the duels begin in the epic, the speaker comments:

But vain, though wond'rous, seems the short event  
Of what with pomp and Noise we long prepare:

One hour of battail oft that force hath spent,  
Which Kings whole lives have gather'd for war. (II.iv.13)

In this passage, the speaker presents a critique of the grandeur and spectacle often associated with warfare. Gath argues that Davenant here indicates the preparation for war, filled with pomp and noise, as futile in contrast to the brutal and fleeting nature of combat (123). Gath further points out Davenant's use of caesura, a pause in a line of poetry, which is present in the first line, causing the reader to reflect on the seemingly "wondrous" nature of war. However, in the subsequent lines, the absence of caesura speeds up the pace of reading, mimicking the swift and chaotic nature of battle. This poetic device effectively highlights the incongruity between the long, ceremonial preparations for war and its short, harsh reality (Gath 123). In this respect, Davenant actually draws attention to the societal perception of war through ceremonial preparations characterised by the glorification of martial warfare and the chaotic reality of the horrors of war as they actually happen so unlike the formality presented in the theatrical ceremonies.

### **1.8.2 Horrors of War**

The portrayal of war is significant in terms of perceiving Davenant's approach towards war, violence and martial prowess. Throughout the poem, contrary to the remarks of Harbage, Davenant portrays war not in glorious terms but in its atrocious and calamitous terms. Davenant describes the warriors' witnessing of the maimed and mutilated bodies of their fallen comrades: "[...] such death and want of limbs they finde, / As each were lately call'd out of his Tombe [...] Or came when born abortive from the Wombe" (I.vi.15). The soldiers are struck by the gruesome nature of these wounds, which suggest that some soldiers were literally torn apart in battle. The poet highlights the graphic nature of these injuries by suggesting that the soldiers look as though they have been recently pulled from their tombs or born abortive. Furthermore, it is indicated that "defect of Legs, or Arms, or Hands," (I.vi.16) initially did not disturb the valour of soldiers "[b]ut the uncomely absence of an Eye, / And larger wants [of limbs]" turned their valour into horror (I.vi.15). Davenant's pictorial capture of horrors and atrocities in battle is remarkable to



such an extent that he almost resembles many of the World War I war-poets, whose poetry is deeply rooted in their first-hand experience of battles in the war.<sup>61</sup>

### 1.8.3 Gondibert as a Pacifist Epic Hero

It merits recognition on my part that Doris Cecilia Werner is the sole academic who has discerned the pacifist disposition of Davenant's epic hero. However, it is regrettable that her examination of this subject is confined to a solitary sentence: "The epic is unified by the actions of the peace-loving hero, who fights only for defense" (102), without any further elaboration on the matter.

Gondibert's pacificism is most evident in his interaction with Oswald. After failing to persuade Oswald that he neither aims to sit on the throne nor desires the hand of the princess Rhodalind, Gondibert realises that it is not possible to quench the flames of ambition ablaze in Oswald's heart. He then offers to settle their dispute through a duel by arguing that it is him not his army who is the target for Oswald's revenge:

If I am vallew'd as th'impediment  
Which hinders your adoption to the Crown;  
Let your revenge onely on me be spent,  
And hazard not my Party, nor your own. (I.iii.31)

As a man aware of atrocities and the violence of war, he attempts to limit the number of deaths from both sides of the conflict to either Oswald or himself: "And hazard not my Party, nor your own." Aware of not being able to stop the ambitions of Oswald, Gondibert asks Oswald to at least prevent the offering of "whole offenceless Herds [armies] for sacrifice" (I.iii.32). This is of great significance as it shows Gondibert's utter respect and

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<sup>61</sup> Davenant's first-hand involvement in the Civil War provides a potential basis for his depiction of the battlefield's calamities. Yet, as suggested by Harbage (195), Davenant is largely considered a soldier more by social status than by natural inclination or actual experience. Additionally, it is worth mentioning that Davenant's early military advancement was facilitated, in part, by influential individuals seeking to repay Davenant's favour, further evidencing the notion of his soldiering being rooted in class rather than experience (Harbage 40). Nonetheless, it is important to recognise that, while Davenant may not have engaged in frontline combat, he did visit numerous war zones and took on significant military duties, such as overseeing the army's mobility, as evidenced in the letter included in "Sir William Davenant, Reputed Son of Shakespeare, Autograph Letter Signed to Lord Conway, August 24, 1640" (Osborn fb219). Consequently, it can be argued that his journeys afforded him ample opportunity to witness the horrors of war firsthand.

care for human life and no tolerance for pointless deaths, regardless of whether they are from his faction or the enemy's.

It should be noted here that Gondibert's desire to solve the problem through dialogue, though a failure, is an indicator of Gondibert's pacifist attitude. It is noteworthy to observe that within the epic, only seven quatrains are devoted to the battle between Gondibert and Oswald, which is considered the paramount martial action throughout the narrative.<sup>62</sup> Aikin, one of the earliest commentators on *Gondibert*, sees this as a defect in the poem, arguing that epic tradition since the days of Homer is marked by the vivid capture of battles and "combats by every possible variation of weapon, posture, and wound [...] Davenant has drawn little from them [the ancient epic poets]" (167). He further argues that this is one of the reasons that this epic failed. However, Aikin seems to overlook Davenant's deliberate intention to challenge and redefine the epic tradition, rather than merely adhering to its established tropes. His assessment fails to acknowledge Davenant's nuanced and complex approach to themes of war and martial heroism, which seeks to transcend the conventional glorification of battle and explore deeper, more philosophical aspects of human conflict and resolution.

I contend that one of Davenant's most striking challenges to the epic tradition is in relation to war. Davenant's decision not to give many lines over combat scenes is particularly significant in comprehending the shift from martial heroism, which is typified by physical combat, to intellectual heroism, characterised by rational discourse. Comparatively, the total number of quatrains that focus exclusively on the dialogue between Gondibert and Oswald amounts to thirty, which is more than three times the number of quatrains dedicated to martial scenes.<sup>63</sup> The numbers here clearly indicate that the clash between Gondibert and Oswald is not only through martial combat but perhaps more importantly through rhetorical fight of dialogue, which shows the shift in the combative styles in the modern world. However, it does not necessarily mean that *Gondibert* is a pacifist epic

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<sup>62</sup> For the martial scenes portraying the physical combat between Gondibert and Oswald, please refer to I.iv.38, I.iv.39, I.iv.40, I.iv.42, I.iv.47, I.iv.49, and I.iv.50.

<sup>63</sup> For the speeches of Oswald, please refer to I.iii.9-17 and I.iii.28, as well as I.iii.34-40. For Gondibert's speeches, kindly see I.iii.18-27 and I.iii.30-32.

hero that renounces martial prowess altogether; on the contrary, Gondibert is also marked by having great martial prowess.

#### 1.8.4 A Necessary Evil: Justified Martial Prowess

Davenant's perception of martial prowess as a necessary evil for a leader is rooted in two considerations: the events of the seventeenth century which was marked by constant wars and the Hobbesian perception of human nature. As previously discussed, the Hobbesian idea that the state of nature for man is marked by the fact that "there is always war of everyone against every one"<sup>64</sup> (*Leviathan* 84) is evident in Davenant's work and is tellingly expressed in Oswald's speech:

I wish it were not needful to be great;  
That Heav'ns unenvy'd pow'r might Men so awe  
As we should need no Armies for defeat,  
Nor for protection be at charge of Law. (I.iii.34)

Here Oswald expresses a wish that people did not need to be powerful and that their ambitions could be contained by the divine authority of Heaven. If this were the case, there would be no need for armies or laws to protect people from harm. Here, Oswald's words echo Hobbesian perception of "the brutish, anarchical condition of man in the nature state" (255). In the poem, the necessity of warfare and martial prowess as a skill is justified as follows: To conquer Tumult [...] War, Arts delib'rate strength, was first devis'd" (I.i.4).<sup>65</sup> Here, war is portrayed as a deliberate and calculated response to natural, uncontrolled chaos. It is a cruel but necessary act to prevent anarchy and maintain civil authority. Furthermore, it is indicated that law alone cannot maintain order and peace: "The feeble Law rescues but doubtfully [...] / Till to its pow'r the wise war's help apply" (I.i.6). It is indicated that laws alone cannot protect people from oppression. The wise

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<sup>64</sup> For detailed analyses of Hobbes's views on this issue, please see the sections titled "Unleashing the Wolf Within: Humanity's Relentless Pursuit of Power," "The Hobbesian Wolf-men society in Gondibert," and *Homo homini lupus* (Man is wolf to man) under the heading "The Leviathan Incarnate: Davenant's Hobbesian Vision of the Epic Hero" in this chapter.

<sup>65</sup> In this passage, Davenant's message, albeit somewhat unsettling, is notably direct, a trait I attribute to the influence of Hobbes. Reflecting on Hobbes's intellectual style, Bertrand Russell eloquently observes: "He is impatient of subtleties, and too much inclined to cut the Gordian knot [...] He is vigorous, but crude; he wields the battle-axe better than the rapier" (546). I contend that a similar characterisation is applicable to Davenant as well, particularly in his portrayal of justified martial prowess

application of war is needed to support the law. Hence, war appears as an apparatus of the state to maintain order and peace in a nation.

Moreover, Davenant underlines that by showing that you have the capacity to implement violence also acts as an impetus for keeping harmony. Ulfin, a remarkable warrior in Gondibert's army known for his wisdom and reason, advises his son Ulfinore on the significance of having martial power: "Thy greatness be in Armes! who else are great, / Move but like Pageants in the People's view; / And in foul weather make a scorn'd retreat" (III.vi.9). Ulfin here emphasises the importance of military prowess in establishing control over people. He asserts that those who are skilled in arms are truly great, while others who are admired for their wealth, power, or status are just like pageants (i.e. extravagant displays) that are put on for the entertainment of the people. In times of adversity, these other forms of greatness often crumble and retreat, while warriors stand firm and fight on. He further adds that "[t]he Greeks, their painted Gods in Armor drew!" (III.vi.9). The reference to gods wearing armours also strengthens the idea that the gods recognised the importance of military prowess and the valour of the warrior.

Apart from this, as Connell aptly observes, Davenant knew that "[b]ehind the power of kings, states and husbands [...] lies brute 'Force,' however nobly instantiated" (67). Oswald's struggle to take the throne by brute force despite King Aribert's desire to put Gondibert onto the throne is indicative of this. Furthermore, the realpolitik of the seventeenth century, in which Davenant boldly took part, had taught him that although law and dialogue are important ways to solve problems, brute force is also necessary. The case of Gondibert and Oswald is indicative of the reality that there are cases where reconciliation through dialogue is not an option, martial prowess is needed to solve the problem.

An additional noteworthy dimension of martial prowess is its capacity to act as a deterrent, functioning as a means to dissuade individuals from perpetrating violations. This is exemplified in the epic, particularly when Hubert contemplates proceeding to the territories of the King and Gondibert with a view to exacting vengeance for his brother's death. Hermegild dissuades him, highlighting the potent military capabilities of the enemy: "Your army will [...] / But a small Party to Verona seem; / Which yearly to such Numbers yields [sic] a Grave" (II.iv.34). This particular discourse suggests that Hubert,

in the context of martial capabilities, remains at a disadvantage compared to the crown. Subsequently, Hermegild cautions Hubert against pursuing an aggressive course of action, considering its lack of feasibility. It is in this scenario that the military power's function as a deterrent to a nation's potential adversaries becomes clear. In light of this, it can be convincingly argued that the possession of brute force or martial prowess, construed as a heroic virtue, is indispensable for a leader. This notion is exemplified in Gondibert's numerous encounters where martial prowess and brute force emerge as the sole strategy for survival. In short, martial power functions as an instrumental deterrent, offering a strategic advantage to a nation.

However, it should be noted here that Gondibert's martial prowess does not change his attitude towards violence. What distinguishes Gondibert from the classical "martial hero" type is that he sees violence as the last resort and whenever he draws his sword and harms someone, it is instantly followed by the poet's commentary that justifies his actions by pointing out that he had no other choice (*Gondibert*; I.i.2, I.iii.34-40, II.i.73-4, II.viii.26). The attempt to justify Gondibert's violent actions sheds light on how Davenant actually views military victory-violence as the last resort and not something to be glorified; yet he still sees it as a necessary aspect of a hero. In this respect, although Gondibert is a highly skilled warrior, he is by no means a violent figure.

I should also underline here that in Davenant's epic, the intricate portrayal of pacificism and justified martial prowess as heroic virtues constructs a narrative with a universal appeal, resonating profoundly with both Royalists and Parliamentarians. The theme of pacificism, emphasised through the portrayal of the futility of bloodshed and the valorisation of peace, strikes a chord with both factions, deeply scarred by the horrors and tragedies of the Civil Wars. This post-Civil War era, significantly shaped by a collective yearning across diverse factions for resolution through dialogue and political means rather than armed conflict, is a testament to a shared desire for a departure from the violence of the past. Davenant, profoundly aware of the devastating impact of prolonged conflict on his country's land and people, advocates for a political approach prioritising peace and dialogue. He subsequently underscores the necessity for a shift in the national

psyche towards favouring a peaceful stance, capturing the spirit of the post-Civil War England wearied by relentless strife.<sup>66</sup>

Simultaneously, Davenant's portrayal of justified martial prowess reflects a realistic and pragmatic understanding of political dynamics. He acknowledges that dialogue, though preferable and ideal, may not always yield successful resolutions in the complex realm of politics. By imbuing his narrative with this aspect of martial prowess, Davenant addresses the harsh realities of governance and leadership. He suggests that those tasked with governing the nation, whether royalist or parliamentarian, must be cognizant of the limitations of dialogue alone. Davenant's narrative thus serves a dual purpose: it imparts to his audience an acute awareness of the brutal realities of war, while also emphasising the unavoidable necessity of martial strength and readiness in a politically volatile world. In essence, Davenant's work emerges as a profound commentary, urging recognition of the importance of peace and dialogue, yet simultaneously preparing the audience for the inevitability of martial engagement in the pursuit of national stability and governance. This dual emphasis not only reflects the complex political landscape of the time but also offers a visionary approach to understanding and navigating the intricacies of leadership and governance in a post-conflict society.

Hence, Gondibert's peaceful attitude and martial prowess, used only as a last resort, marks the departure from classical hero who reaches glory through the martial prowess. In this respect, it is safe to argue that the pacifist attitude of Gondibert is a new characteristic trait that Davenant deems necessary for the post-Civil War period, using his personal experiences in wars and Hobbes's theories. Although he underlines the necessity of martial prowess in the light of *realpolitik*, it is, as a heroic virtue, a reformed version of classical heroism as Davenant does not glorify it and sees as the last resort in

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<sup>66</sup> It is not mere coincidence that, as thoroughly examined in chapter II, Milton similarly adopts and advocates for a pacifist stance in the evolution of his epic heroes. While the underpinnings of their respective endorsements of pacificism diverge—Davenant's rationale rooted in the political theories of Hobbes, as elucidated in this chapter, and Milton's arguments anchored in the theological teachings of Grotius, as will be expounded upon in the second chapter—the emphasis on peace and pacificism remains a prominent theme in both epics. This shared focus not only highlights a common thematic thread but also reflects the prevailing ethos of the era. The convergence of these two great poets on the principle of pacificism, despite their differing philosophical and political foundations, underscores a broader cultural and societal inclination towards peace in the aftermath of profound conflict. This alignment illustrates the significant shift in the intellectual and moral landscape of the time, marking a collective movement towards prioritising peace and dialogue over conflict and strife.

the cases of survival. In this respect, in order to mark the difference of martial prowess of Gondibert, I suggest calling it “justified” martial prowess to indicate its difference from the “glorified” martial heroism of the past. Furthermore, in order to truly grasp how Davenant’s martial heroism diverges from classical heroism and how reformed epic hero Gondibert’s peaceful attitude and justified martial prowess marks a shift in the tradition of the epic hero, it is a must to further elaborate on the concept of κλέος or pursuit of glory and its representative figures in the epic who present stark contrast with Gondibert.

### 1.9 “ANCIENT STAMP OF DEATH”: *KLEOS APHTHITON*

*Kleos apthiton* —undying glory<sup>67</sup>— is another significant motif in the epic that opens the discussions of the concept of gaining eternal glory through martial prowess in classical epics. As Schein has emphasised, one of the most defining characteristics of the classical hero is that he “dies in the pursuit of honour and glory” (69). The relation between martial prowess, or even death, and honour in epic heroes is also one of the most intensively studied and debated topics in the study of classical epic. In the literary tradition, it has been universally accepted as one of the defining features of the epic hero.

Davenant focuses on this issue as he has touched upon other heroic attributes: through presenting Gondibert as a reformed figure and while arrayed against him are antagonistic figures who are the opposite of Gondibert in the specific virtue under analysis. In the case of this archaic topic, the pursuit of glory through martial heroism, against the reformed Gondibert, who embodies a new virtue of pacifism and justified martial prowess, Davenant poses the figures of “bloody” Borgio and “sullen” Vasco (I.ii.77) who represent the ancient world’s pursuit of glory on the battlefield. The use of the adjectives “bloody” and “sullen” to describe Borgio and Vasco, respectively – provides valuable insight into their malevolent characteristic traits. The narrator gives further information about them, which explains the reasons beneath their characteristic traits:

Warr, the worlds Art, Nature to them became;  
In Camps begot, born, and in anger bred;  
The living vex’d till Death, and then their Fame;

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<sup>67</sup> In the context of the epic, the terms “glory” and “fame” are employed interchangeably. Additionally, it is noteworthy to observe that the Ancient Greek term “kleos” is frequently translated into English as both “glory” and “fame” by various scholars.

Because even Fame some life is to the Dead. (I.ii.75)

It is stated that they were “begot, born [and] bred” in military camps, which, in my opinion, shows that their cruelty was created and fostered through the military culture. The speaker further states that this culture regards military death as glory and a way to achieve fame. What is described here through these characters is the classical epic heroism in which martial prowess is glorified and the concept of *kleos apthiton* (undying glory) is achieved through death, thus the concept is apotheosised. This idea is further indicated by the speaker’s remark, “Death’s the Parent made of noble Fame” (I.v.31), which further underlines the idea that classical heroism is marked by the prospect of fame acquired on the battlefield, attained through acts of bravery and heroism that endanger one’s life.

Davenant presents a deep critique of this concept of fame achieved through martial heroism that may result in death. Gondibert attempts to use his speech and eloquence to demonstrate the misguided nature of engaging in combat solely for the sake of personal ambition and glory. However, as discussed in detail in the section on ambition, his words are not heeded, and as a result, a conflict ensues, leading to the destruction and loss of many.<sup>68</sup> The speaker comments on the war and contends that such fame is ultimately hollow, as it comes at the cost of human life. The speaker elaborates on this issue as follows:

For many now (belov’d by both) forsake  
 In their pursuit of flying Fame, their breath;  
 And through the world their valor currant make,  
 By giving it the ancient stamp of Death. (I.iv.32)

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<sup>68</sup> In the context of the war, there is a scene where Gondibert addresses Hurgonil, his sister’s lover, asserting that he should not feel dishonoured by his wounds inflicted in the battle: “They Age will kiss those wounds thy Youth may loath” (I.v.35). One might suggest Gondibert is glorifying martial prowess here. However, a closer reading reveals a different narrative. Gondibert’s subsequent remark, “Be not dismay’d to think thy beauty gone” (I.v.35), is an attempt to reassure Hurgonil, who fears that his disfigurement from the wounds may cost him the affection of Gondibert’s sister. Therefore, Gondibert is not praising the glory of war, but rather acknowledges the wounds as symbols of courage and bravery. Thus, the underlying sentiment of his comments is to comfort Hurgonil, rather than glorifying warfare. In another scene, prior to the duels, Gondibert urges his young warriors: “Think now your valor enters on the Stage / Think Fame th’eternal *Chorus* to declare” (I.V.19). However, these exhortations are voiced to rally and encourage his young inexperienced warriors. In this respect, both scenes should be read as indicators of Gondibert’s strategic manoeuvres rather than glorifying the concept of glory through death.



The present discourse here recognises the inspirational effect that the courageous acts of gallant warriors on the battlefield may have on others. However, it is emphasized that the warriors' pursuit of fame may demand a substantial personal cost, often at the expense of their own lives, effectively risking their very "breaths." This is also important in terms of seeing how the initial arguments of Gondibert related to peace were right. He knew the potential outcome of the conflict and the misguidedness of pursuing glory on the battlefield before the clashes begin; and the outcome confirms Gondibert's stance to have been right. The expression "ancient stamp of Death" is particularly notable in this context, as it operates as a metaphor utilised by Davenant to convey the idea of death serving as a portal to fame and glory, it is a concept that can be traced back to antiquity, and thus to classical epic. In this way, Davenant offers a critique of classical epic's apotheosis of glory gained through death, which supposedly enables epic heroes to transcend the contours of mortality.

Astragon's interaction with Gondibert and his observations on the concept of glory gained from war initiates a broader debate. Before knowing who Gondibert is and what his new virtues are, Astragon checks whether he is worthy of loving his daughter Birtha. He observes to Gondibert that "War, when urg'd for glory, more then right, / Shews Victors but authentick Murd'ers are" (III.i.23); this pronouncement reflects his perspective on the nature of war. He notes that those who fight for glory, as opposed to a just cause, are in reality committing acts of murder, and not heroic deeds. This highlights the corrupting influence of war on the human spirit when waged for the sake of self-glorification. Pursuing glory, in this respect, cannot be considered a valid justification for war. In the context of seventeenth-century English intellectual thought, which is marked by a shift towards reason and rationality, the pursuit of glory, a concept that was revered in the ancient world and remained a key feature of the epic tradition, no longer holds the same significance. Astragon's comments, as the representative of this intellectual milieu, demonstrate the evolving expectations and demands placed upon the leader of the society in the modern era. Gondibert, in agreement with Astragon's statements, proclaims that despite his successful military career and status as a triumphant general, he does not crave for glory that is rooted in warfare (II.viii.26-27). This sentiment is reflected in his notable personal victories, including those against the formidable "Hunns," which are not driven by the pursuit of fame or ambition (II.viii.28). His recognition and acceptance of

Astragon's views demonstrate that he aligns with the contemporary ethos, which is characterised by reason. Accordingly, Gondibert and Astragon's exchange sheds light on the ways in which heroic figures must adapt to the changing times and abandon outdated notions of glory-seeking martial heroism that are extant in classical epic heroes in order to align with the new values and principles of the age.

### 1.10 REASON AND OPENNESS TO KNOWLEDGE

As one of the principles of the age, scientific temper was another factor to contribute to the evolution of epic hero since a defining characteristic feature of Gondibert as an epic hero is his acknowledgement of science and philosophy. Davenant himself indicates in the Preface that he heeded the science<sup>69</sup> of his period: "Nor have I refrayn'd to be oblig'd to men of any science, as well as mechanicall, as liberal" (22). Rosenberg astutely comments on the analogy between Davenant's poetic practice in *Gondibert* and contemporary scientific method: "Davenant [...] in the spirit of inquiry and innovation, experimented with, and strove to reform, the epic poem. [His] reforming mission and self-conscious innovations are in many ways analogous to the experimental science of their day" (12).<sup>70</sup> Accordingly, the impact of science of the day is visible not only in terms of content but also in the methodical approach of Davenant's epic.

Many critics, leaning towards a Royalist interpretation in the epic, have interpreted the entirety of Canto V and Canto VI in Book II, notably the House of Astragon section where many aspects of science are discussed in detail, as a manifestation of the premise that when "defeated royalists fled England for safer shores [...] epic poetry slunk away from political engagement to more private fictions" (Welch 571). This perspective, as previously discussed, purports that after experiencing resounding defeat in the Civil War,

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<sup>69</sup> It should be noted, as underscored by various academics, that science has a considerable correlation with deism during this historical period. However, to confine the scope of this discourse to the transformative virtues of epic heroes and their implications for societal progress, my concentration is solely on the influence of science and its role in fostering an openness to new knowledge as a heroic virtue in the epic hero. For an exploration of the link between deism and science within Davenant's work, please see Rosenberg, p. 15.

<sup>70</sup> Achsah Guibbory draws attention to the fact that the spirit of the age, marked by daring innovations, is mirrored in Davenant's Preface, echoing the ideas of Francis Bacon. Guibbory cites Bacon's frequent insistence that he was not "going the same road as the ancients" and his ambition "to open a new way for the understanding, a way by them untried and unknown" (qtd. in Guibbory 111). She observes that this conceptualization of a new path, contrasting the old, appears in Davenant's Preface (Guibbory 111). This insight particularly resonates when considering Davenant's argument in the Preface about his intent not to follow the Ancients, but rather to navigate the "untry'd Seas."

Royalist epics transitioned towards a comforting escapism in the form of romances. This interpretation gains some initial credibility when considering Gondibert's retreat to this pastoral refuge (Astragon's House) following his severe injury on the battlefield, an incident reminiscent of the Royalists' predicament during the Civil War. Furthermore, Gondibert's ensuing romance with Birtha in Astragon's House is construed as a flight from the political realities of the world. Accordingly, in the light of reading Gondibert solely as a Royalist narrative of political withdrawal, these critics assess the House of Astragon episode through the lens of Gondibert's disengagement from tangible political scenarios, focusing instead on his intimate relationship with Birtha. This approach, therefore, overlooks the significant scientific temperament of the age imbued within this portion of the epic.

I diverge significantly from this viewpoint. I contend that such a perspective stems from a narrow interpretation, focusing exclusively on reading the epic within the contours of a political Royalist perspective. This approach overlooks its complex and multifaceted elements, including the infusion of the prevalent scientific spirit of the era. In stark contrast, I propose that this section of the poem does not represent an escape from reality but offers a profound exploration into one of its most salient aspects: science and its impact on epic heroes. I contend that this portion of the narrative serves to illustrate Davenant's intent to present his elite readership with two scientific truths of the emerging age, as revealed through the interactions between his epic protagonist, Gondibert, and Astragon as discussed thoroughly in the next section. Davenant aims to convey to his aristocratic audience that they inhabit a world governed not by fantastical constructs but by natural laws, liberal philosophies, and a scientific outlook. Moreover, he insinuates that aspiring leaders must heed the wisdom of scientists and philosophers for successful governance. Openness to embrace new knowledge is showcased as a pivotal trait of Gondibert in his role as a reformed epic hero, thereby signifying a virtue demanded by the new period. This attribute of the hero assumes even greater importance when viewed in the context of the defining characteristics of the seventeenth century—a period marked by revolutionary scientific advancements<sup>71</sup>, the inception of novel political and

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<sup>71</sup> The notable scientific progressions during the seventeenth century encompass a diverse array of discoveries and innovations, among which are Johannes Kepler's groundbreaking determination of the elliptical paths traversed by celestial bodies, Galileo Galilei's seminal observations concerning the

philosophical paradigms, and historically significant events that forever altered the course of history in England.

Astragon and his palace echo the ideas and knowledge of contemporary scientists and philosophers (Gladish xi). Among them, Bacon appears the most influential figure not only because of his scientific aspect but also because of the literary influence of Salomon's House in *New Atlantis*<sup>72</sup> (Harbage 186). What's more, it is emphasised that Astragon is not a "dull Moralist, who give[s] / Counsell [...] in publick" (II.v.58), but rather a man with a "[h]igh skill [in] Ethicks [...] / To make the People wise" (II.v.60). He is like the embodiment of the scientific spirit of the seventeenth century who serves to teach Gondibert about the significance of science and being open to new knowledge.

The entirety of Canto V and Canto VI in Book II is dedicated to Astragon and his students' scientific investigations of the sea, planets, natural life (including flora and fauna), archaeological relics, meteorology, astronomy, metallurgy, chemistry, and history. Each of these scientific disciplines is given a distinct gallery dedicated to scientific research focused solely on that discipline. Dixon asserts that the distinguished realm of Astragon in the narrative mirrors the prevalent scientific mindset of the seventeenth century, incorporating the breadth of contemporary scientific exploration across different disciplines in England during this time (233-34). As Gondibert tours these specific galleries, he witnesses the mechanisms and explanations behind the secrets of nature and the world and learns of the scientific explanations behind these miracles. In this section, through Gondibert's encounter with scientific discoveries in these galleries, it is indicated that the laws of nature can only be understood through reason, not fantasy since "(Reason, not Shape gives us so great degree / Above our Subjects, Beasts)" (III.v.34, parenthesis

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planetary motions and foundational contributions to the mechanics of motion, Francis Bacon's formulation of a systematic scientific approach rooted in empirical observation and inductive reasoning, the advent of microscopes facilitating the exploration of minute structures, advancements in optics enhancing the understanding of light and vision, Evangelista Torricelli's invention of the barometer enabling the measurement of atmospheric pressure, and the development of the pendulum clock, marking a significant stride in timekeeping accuracy and precision. These pivotal advancements collectively heralded a new era of scientific inquiry and laid the groundwork for subsequent scientific revolutions.

<sup>72</sup> Rosenberg argues that "Davenant's collaborative community of scientific researchers at the House of Astragon [...] looks forward to the ideals of the historical Royal Society established in the decade following the publication of *Gondibert*" (14). This viewpoint, in my opinion, carries significant implications, as it illustrates Davenant's awareness of the onset of a new era, suggesting his advanced understanding relative to his contemporaries. I interpret this example as evidence of Davenant's primary motive: to signal to his audience that they are at the doors of a new age demanding the cultivation of new virtues.

in the original). Accordingly, the scientific inquiry through human rationality is presented as the key pathway to reach truth.

Furthermore, Astragon's students, "wise observers" (II.v.10), "learn and teach truth based on empirical knowledge" (Rosenberg 14). There are constant references to the idea of gaining knowledge through experience and observation. This can be observed in many references to the senses and in specific organs, such as the eye (II.v.10,22,35,43,59; II.vi.9,18,44,53,60,74). This is clearly an indicator that Davenant is deeply influenced by Bacon, who is considered to be the father of empiricism. Bacon states that "he who wishes to rejoice without doubt in regard to the truths underlying phenomena must know how to devote himself to experiment" (Opus Majus n.p). Thus, Davenant's stress on gaining knowledge through senses and via experiments echoes Bacon's ideas.

Apart from explanatory and methodological aspects of science, its utility is also touched upon. For instance, it is indicated that the students of Astragon gather "plants and minerals, searching for "virtues" in nature to extract [medicine] for instant cure" (II.v.11). Therefore, they are working, in a Baconian sense, for the benefit and relief of the state and society of man (Rosenberg 14). It should also be noted here that Gondibert's severe wounds are cured by the scientist here, again reflecting the benefit of science for the people.<sup>73</sup> In this respect, the scientists are presented as labourers working for the benefit and welfare of humanity.

Here, I would like to underline the fact that Gondibert as an epic hero is portrayed until this point as a perfect figure in all possible aspects; however, in this section of epic he is no longer a "paragon" figure, or rather a complete figure, at least in terms of science and knowledge. He learns from Astragon and his students' scientific inquiries and studies. The research of the scientists proves that human knowledge is destined to expand, and one should be ready to learn to be able to keep up with the discoveries and the new truths

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<sup>73</sup> Gondibert is portrayed as an epic hero, characterised by his willingness to listen to others, as evidenced by his deference to the counsel of a seasoned warrior who advises him to seek assistance from Astragon for his injuries. This is exemplified in the following passage: "The Duke with vertue (antiquated now) / Did rev'rence Councel, and to Age did bend" (I.vi.67). This pivotal decision to follow the counsel of a battle-hardened individual allows Gondibert to survive what initially had seemed like non-life-threatening wounds but were in fact fatal. Consequently, this illustrates that heeding advice is crucial not only for effective leadership but also for survival.

of nature; and to solve the problems of humanity; in many areas science is needed, as seen with the example of Gondibert's severe wound cured by the scientists. This section is the only section where the epic hero Gondibert is in a passive state; however, it actually directs us to a great new heroic virtue, that is openness to new knowledge. Davenant signals through Gondibert's intellectual journey that this emerging era is characterised by ground-breaking innovations. He suggests that societal elites should not only be receptive to learning but also pursue a comprehensive education. The portrayal of Gondibert, often depicted as a complete figure of virtue in various aspects, reveals his lack of completeness in the domain of knowledge and education. This serves as a reminder to the audience that, in an age marked by the advancement of knowledge, education is an essential requirement for anyone who desires to govern a nation. This is particularly pertinent as Davenant, in his Preface, indicates his intention to reach such an audience.

Astragon, assuming the role of an educator, conveys to Gondibert the critical importance of knowledge and learning as delineated below: "Wise Youth, in Books and Batails early Andes [...] Books shew the utmost conquests of our Mindes" (II.viii.20). It is palpable how Astragon emphasises the importance of education, both through reading books and experiencing battles. What is remarkable is that he accepts that the conquests of our minds are just as important as the battle in which we hazard our bodies. His perspective stresses the value given to the knowledge in this age. He further underlines the significance of knowledge, which gives insight into scientific advancement as follows:

For though Books serve as Diet of the Minde;  
If knowledg, early got, self vallew breeds,  
By false digestion it is turn'd to winde;  
And what should nourish, on the Eater feeds. (II.viii.22)

Astragon notes that although books can be a form of nourishment for the mind, if we become too attached to our own knowledge and self-importance, we can become like a person who feeds on their own flesh. Therefore, it is important to approach education with humility and a willingness to learn from others. It is indicative of the idea that the concept of truth is nothing, but an illusion based upon the knowledge humanity has, which is destined to alter within time in the light of the scientific advancement of the age.

The dialogic exchange in which Astragon addresses Gondibert regarding his scholarly pursuits illuminates an integral facet of the latter's reformed role as an epic hero. In an effusive commendation of Gondibert's learnedness through literary engagement, Astragon lauds, all "[s]hall praise thy wise conversing with the Dead; / For with the Dead he lives, who is with Books" (III.i.19). The embedded metaphor cogently suggests that individuals who delve into written works and extract wisdom therein are akin to those who share an intimate connection with the deceased. This notion stems from the understanding that books serve as a gateway to history and the insights of those long past.

Consequently, as explored above, a more nuanced understanding of the epic and epic hero emerges when viewed not solely through a Royalist lens, but as a work addressing future leaders of the nation, post-Civil War, regardless of their political affiliations. This perspective reveals the emergence of openness to new knowledge as a pivotal heroic virtue. Davenant, in his portrayal of Gondibert, evolves his epic hero who is not only educated but consistently receptive to new information. This trait is highlighted as a critical attribute for leadership in this new epoch.

Thus, as stated above, in an era characterised by rapid transformations and technological advancements, Davenant impresses upon his audience, which includes leaders from varying political backgrounds, the vital importance of embracing new knowledge. He articulates that for leaders, adapting to and integrating new information is not merely advantageous but essential; it is a virtue necessitated by the demands of a rapidly evolving age. Davenant emphasizes the dynamic nature of human knowledge, positing that to effectively navigate and govern in such transformative times, rulers must commit to continuous learning.

### **1.11 RHETORICAL PROWESS: THE QUINTESSENTIAL ART FOR AN AGE UNDERGOING TRANSFORMATION**

Another salient characteristic of Gondibert as an epic hero is his rhetorical prowess, a trait that is fundamentally intertwined with the shifting political milieu of the seventeenth century. This connection is especially evident in the post-Civil-War period when politics emerges as the primary arena for addressing and resolving conflicts. Composing his work in the context of the post-war period and aiming to educate his audience on the virtues,

actions, and values essential for this period, Davenant demonstrates a keen awareness of this prevailing reality. For Davenant, politics can be described as “[a] War disguis’d in civil shapes of Peace” (III.iii.30). A leader must not only be competent in matters of war but also adept in navigating the intricacies of peacetime politics. Rhetorical prowess serves as an effective tool in both spheres, and Davenant places considerable emphasis on this virtue, believing it to be a crucial attribute for any leader to possess. By emphasising this issue, Davenant endeavours to highlight the pertinence of rhetorical prowess as a heroic virtue and its lasting influence on war and peace times alike.

By the mid-1650s, during Davenant’s time, rhetoric had become a well-established and extensively debated subject, with a substantial corpus of commentaries on classical works pertaining to rhetoric both in England and continental Europe. This development can be attributed to the influence of the Renaissance on seventeenth-century England. The reawakening and realignment of rhetorical arts constituted key features of the English Renaissance. In addition, rhetoric emerged as a crucial component of university curricula during the Renaissance period. Numerous writers, such as Agricola, Erasmus, Luther, and Sidney, addressed this topic, thereby contributing to the formation of the humanist rhetorical tradition.

Davenant might have been cognizant of this body of work and could have been influenced by it, either directly or indirectly. His viewpoint on the matter is significantly shaped by Thomas Hobbes,<sup>74</sup> who emphasizes the importance of rhetorical prowess in numerous political writings. As Kahn elucidates, Hobbes, during his education at Oxford, was exposed to the humanist rhetorical tradition of the English Renaissance (*Prudence* 154). Consequently, it is plausible that Davenant was impacted by the Renaissance school of rhetoric through Hobbes’s influence. As for Hobbes’s views on this issue, he underscores the dramatic role of rhetoric in politics, substantiating his argument with references to actual historical events.

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<sup>74</sup> The art of persuasive speech was a widely discussed topic among seventeenth-century philosophers, both in England and continental Europe. Notably, French philosopher, inventor, and mathematician Blaise Pascal (1623-1662) drew significant attention to the subject. Davenant’s years in exile in France coincided with Pascal’s prominence in Paris. While it is plausible that Davenant may be influenced by Pascal, as various other French epic critics, including Nicolas Boileau, were, I have not found any concrete evidence in the archival documents related to such influence to substantiate this claim.



### 1.11.1 Hobbes's Views on Rhetoric as an Evil Cause of Unrest

Thomas Hobbes's perspective on rhetoric constitutes a rather intricate subject, as the renowned philosopher expounded diverse viewpoints on this matter throughout his political writings.<sup>75</sup> He even translated Aristotle's *Rhetoric* into English in 1637 and added his own commentary. In *Brief*<sup>76</sup> (1637), Hobbes defines rhetoric as "that Faculty, by which we understand what will serve our turn, concerning any Subject to win belief in the hearer" (4). His initial works display a critical scrutiny of this concept. In one of his earliest political treatises, *Elements*, Hobbes contends that "there can be no author of rebellion, that is not an eloquent<sup>77</sup> and powerful speaker [...] For the faculty of speaking powerfully, consisteth in a habit gotten of putting together passionate words, and applying them to the present passions of the hearer" (141). This indicates that the cultivation of rebellion necessitates the presence of a compelling orator capable of appealing to the emotions of their listeners. In *De Cive*, Hobbes expounds upon the nature of rhetorical prowess, or eloquence as he refers to it, asserting that it is inherently characterised by the intent "to make Good and Evill, Profitable and Unprofitable, Honest and Dishonest, appear to be more or lesse then indeed they are, and to make that seem just, which is unjust" (137). For him, the fundamental purpose of rhetorical prowess is to alter people's perceptions of the moral worth of certain actions or ideas, making them appear more or less desirable than they actually are. This, in turn, can lead to the justification of actions that would otherwise be regarded as immoral or unjust.

Hobbes's unfavourable perspective on rhetoric is undoubtedly linked to his interpretation of events during the Civil War. As Abbott notes, "Hobbes identifies oratory as a principal cause of the tensions between Parliament and Monarchy which resulted in civil war, regicide, and interregnum" (399). In *De Cive*, in the famous chapter entitled, "How the folly of the common people, and the eloquence of ambitious men, concur to the dissolution of a Common-weale" (Chapter xii, part xiii), Hobbes draws attention to the

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<sup>75</sup> It is important to acknowledge that the field of rhetoric encompasses a wide range of subjects, including logic, reason, scientific inquiry, methodological approaches, and religious discourse. In order to maintain a focused scope, this analysis will concentrate exclusively on the political dimension of rhetoric.

<sup>76</sup> The full title of the book is *A Briefe of the art of rhetorique Containing in substance all that Aristotle hath written in his three bookes of that subject, except onely what is not applicable to the English tongue.*

<sup>77</sup> In seventeenth-century England, the term rhetoric was frequently employed as a synonym for eloquence. This association can be discerned in Robert Cawdry's *A Table Alphabeticall* (1617), where "rhetoricke" is expounded as "the art of eloquence" (n.p).

ambitious men who are often skilful in rhetoric and eloquence, exploit the discontent and lack of knowledge among the common people: “They gather them into faction, while they make themselves the relators, and interpreters of the counsels and actions of single men” (155). These ambitious leaders utilize their persuasive abilities to unite people under their influence, forming factions or conspiracies driven by their thirst for power and recognition.

To consolidate their dominance within their factions, these ambitious individuals endeavour to maintain factionalism: “Now to the end that they themselves may have the chief rule in the faction, the faction must be kept in a faction” (155). The dangerous combination of the common people’s ignorance and the ambitions of individuals possessing exceptional oratory skills that can sway the masses creates a potent force with the potential to destabilize society: “[T]hus they sometimes oppresse the Commonwealth, namely where there is no other faction to oppose them, but for the most part they rend it, and introduce a civill warre” (155). The ambition of these individuals, according to Hobbes, lies at the heart of this destructive process, as their desire for power and influence motivates them to incite unrest and destabilise the society through rhetoric, ultimately contributing to the potential dissolution of the Commonwealth.<sup>78</sup> Hence, a force, a faction, that equally masters the power of rhetoric is necessary to match and oppose the evil with oratory skills.

### **1.11.2 Hobbes on Rhetorical Prowess as a Necessary Skill in Politics**

Hobbes’s conceptualisation of rhetoric as a necessary tool for good people in politics can be observed in his later works. He sees rhetoric reformed by reason as an important tool for good people: “[R]eason and eloquence, (though not perhaps in the natural sciences, yet in the moral) may stand very well together” (467-68). Kahn usefully comments on

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<sup>78</sup> In his later political writings, Hobbes characterises individuals who wield remarkable oratory skills, including preachers of radical Protestantism and ambitious politicians, as the primary instigators of the Civil War. By utilising their persuasive talents to sway the masses to their misguided cause, according to Hobbes, they collectively launched an assault on the monarchy. This approach can be found in two late works of the philosopher: *Behemoth: the history of the causes of the civil wars of England, and of the counsels and artifices by which they were carried on from the year 1640 to the year 1660, also known as The Long Parliament* (1681) and the post-humously published *A Dialogue between a Philosopher and a Student of the Common Laws of England* (1681). As *Gondibert* predates both of these works, this analysis will not delve into the discussions of rhetoric in these texts, given that they would not have been an influence upon Davenant during the composition of the epic.

Hobbes's unifying approach as follows: "In the age-old debate between rhetoric and philosophy<sup>79</sup> [...] He wants to formulate a political science that will be grounded on the truth, but will also be persuasive" (*Prudence* 156). In *Leviathan*, Hobbes openly declares that "eloquence is power" (59). This pronouncement suggests that proficiency in persuasive oratory is an essential component for acquiring influence over individuals, subsequently leading to the attainment of political power. Furthermore, this political power is indispensable for ensuring the stability and continuity of the state. "For Hobbes, rhetoric may be never fully trustworthy, but it is powerful and thus necessary for the advancement of the commonwealth," Abbott observes, but he adds that Hobbes is also aware that "[t]he power of rhetoric can be used to enliven the truth or to destroy the state" (387-88). Consequently, Hobbes acknowledges the potential for rhetoric to be exploited for nefarious purposes. Nevertheless, he posits that it can also serve benevolent objectives, provided that its application is guided by rationality and virtuous intent.

### 1.11.3 A New Enemy, a "Master of Politics," Rises: Gondibert vs Hermegild

In the epic, Davenant adopts a dual approach to rhetoric. He presents Hobbes's conceptualisation of rhetoric as both a malign skill employed by corrupt politicians, who exploit their persuasive capacities to consolidate power and manipulate the masses, and as a vital heroic prowess to counteract the effect of nefarious individuals in politics. These dual perspectives are represented through the two figures, Hermegild and Gondibert, respectively.

In the epic, Hermegild emerges in the aftermath of Oswald's death as the new rival of Gondibert. Whereas Oswald epitomises the ancient world's heroic ideals characterised by the pursuit of personal glory, Hermegild represents the antagonist, from the modern world, distinguished by his oratorical skills of persuasion in politics. Hermegild, "Silver'd with time" (III.iii.25), serves as an elderly counsellor to King Aribert and is dispatched as an emissary to halt and impede the progress of Hubert's forces. Hubert, Oswald's brother, intends to attack the capital following his sibling's demise. While on this mission, Hermegild, long in love with Gartha, Oswald's sister, who is consumed by a desire for

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<sup>79</sup> Rhetoric and philosophy have been historically perceived as two contrasting disciplines, originating from the era of Ancient Greece. The ongoing discourse examining this dichotomy is primarily characterised by the analysis of philosophy as a means to convey and scrutinise knowledge, while rhetoric is predominantly focused on the utilisation of discourse as a tool to exert influence upon the way people think.

retribution, colludes with Hubert and Gartha to devise “a treacherous scheme to get rid of Gondibert and seize the kingdom” (Gladish xxi).

One might question what it is about Hermegild that constitutes the embodiment of villainy in the modern world of seventeenth-century England or how an elderly man could pose a threat against a distinguished general beloved by his people. It is at this juncture that politics and the art of rhetoric enter the fray. Although Hermegild may possess a frail physique, his exceptional rhetorical skills render him well-suited for political combat. This seasoned politician is a master of statecraft, wielding the power of eloquence. Unsurprisingly, Hermegild is consistently referred to as “the statesman” (III.iii.64) in the epic, highlighting that his prowess is deeply rooted in the realm of politics. Hermegild’s introduction to the epic signifies a shift in the arena of conflict—from battlefields to the realm of politics and courtly intrigue. Without doubt, Hermegild’s character is predicated upon Hobbes’s unfavourable conceptualization of rhetorical prowess and its evil application in politics, as presented in *De Cive*.

Hermegild’s oratory skills become evident when he initially addresses Hubert, Oswald’s brother, who is leading the advance of his army: “Important Prince! who justly dost succeed / To Oswald’s hopes, and all my loyal ayde; / Vertue as much in all thy wounds does bleed” (II.iv.16). The eloquence of language is palpable here as he indeed persuades the prince to stop the attack. Hermegild’s mastery of rhetoric is particularly striking when he stands against the whole army full of rage and “impetuous fury” (II.iv.5) that intend to invade the capital. He is well aware of their anger and knows how to subdue them: “[...] the Armies are allay; / By rage (said he) only they Masters are / Of those they chuse, when temp’ate, to obay” (II.iv.31). He eventually persuades them to stop their advancement. The speaker of the poem tellingly comments on this as follows: “So soon lov’d Eloquence does Throng subdue; / The common Mistress to each private Minde; / Painted and dress’d to all, to no Man true” (II.iv.52). The speaker is here referring to Hermegild’s skill in using rhetoric/eloquence to persuade others to embrace his cause, and his ability to calm the heated emotions of the army. The lines “[t]he common Mistress to each private Minde; / Painted and dress’d to all, to no Man true” (II.iv.52) powerfully reinforces the idea that eloquence is a tool that can be misused to manipulate others.

Hermegild's striking imagery in his advice to Hubert: "We are the Peoples Pilots, they our winds; / To change by Nature prone; but Art Laveers" (II.iv.32), powerfully exposes how politicians manipulate the people and armies to further their own interests. In the opening line, "We are the Peoples Pilots, they our winds," Hermegild emphasises the role politicians and the leaders of the society play in guiding and controlling society, including its people and military forces. By presenting politicians as pilots, Hermegild implies that they hold the power to steer the course of a nation, using the people's energy and resources, such as armies, to further their own agendas. This remark is very much in line with Hobbesian arguments in *De Cive* where Hobbes underlines the politicians, who are skilful in rhetoric and eloquence, exploit the common people and make them part of their faction for their own interests (155). Just like an evil rhetor, as characterised by Hobbes, Hermegild sees the people as nothing but a wind that enables the pilots, Hermegild himself and his faction, to go wherever their own interests lie. Furthermore, through Hermegild, Davenant indicates humanity's inherent propensity for change and instability, as evidenced by "To change by Nature prone." It implies that both civilians and military personnel are prone to fluctuating desires and opinions. Politicians, cognizant of this, exploit it through their cunning and rhetorical skills—denoted by "Art." The phrase "but Art Laveers" demonstrates that politicians utilize their abilities to counter and redirect people's unpredictable tendencies, manipulating them to fulfil their own objectives. Hence, these lines indicate that Hermegild is indeed a Hobbesian figure who uses his rhetoric to manipulate and direct populations and armies for his own benefit.

Here one may argue that from the perspective of the crown or King Aribert, Hermegild's success in stopping Hubert and the army is noteworthy and something to be appreciated, since that was his mission, as King Aribert had dispatched him as an emissary to halt and impede the progress of Hubert's forces. However, although it may seem so, the motivation of Hermegild is not marked by the desire to help his King or the state, but rather to further his own personal interest. As indicated in the "The Argument," the prologue to Canto the Fourth, "In Council he [Hermegild] reveals his secret Breast; / Would mingle Love with Empires interest" (144). He reveals that his love for Gartha, the sister of the fallen Oswald, is the primary motivation for approaching Hubert. He states that if Hubert promises the hand of Gartha and she approves, then he will help them avenge their fallen brother, thereby enabling Hubert to ascend to the throne: "He *Gartha*

makes the price of *Rhodolind* [the princess]” for Hubert (II.iv.30). Consequently, through his rhetorical prowess, Hermegild persuades both Hubert and Gartha, channelling their actions towards his own ends. Then, Hermegild warns Hubert that “In the King’s Scale [his] merits are too light; / Who with the Duke [Gondibert], weighs his own partial heart” (II.iv.41), suggesting that against the current power of the King who has firm fist on his court in his country (II.iv.37), Hubert stands little chance. Furthermore, he reminds him: “Your army will [...] / But a small Party to *Verona* seem; / Which yearly to such Numbers yeilds [sic] a Grave” (II.iv.34), indicating that in terms of military power Hubert is also the weaker party against the crown. Accordingly, since Hubert has the weaker court and military power, Hermegild urges him: “[...] we must gain / By surer methods then depend on Warre; / And respite valor, to imploy the Brain” (II.iv.41). This scene is a good example of how politics works. Hermegild actually indicates that not all battles are won on battlefields; politics is also part of the game as he persuades Hubert to act in accordance with his own plans.

The story of Hermegild presents a compelling case study, as he successfully accomplishes his mission assigned to him by King Aribert: halting the advancing army. Simultaneously, he manipulates Hubert, the advancing army’s leader, by promising him the Lombardy throne, and Gartha, by pledging to avenge her brother Oswald’s death. All the while, Hermegild pursues his primary goal—securing Gartha’s hand. Accordingly, Davenant portrays Hermegild, an elderly figure, as a master manipulator who employs his rhetorical prowess to control everyone around him, including King Aribert, Hubert, Gartha, and the army, ultimately furthering his own objectives.

Hermegild is, indeed, the incarnation of the Hobbesian evil politician, gifted with rhetorical skill. According to Hobbes, as indicated above, skilled rhetoricians with malevolent intentions have the potential to pose a significant threat at every level from the individual to nations at large. Hermegild’s character serves as a prime example of how such politicians can effectively utilize their rhetorical expertise to manipulate both armies and the general public, coercing them into joining their factions and furthering their personal agendas. It should be noted that Hermegild’s actions not only demonstrate his ability to control and exploit those around him but also expose the vulnerability of individuals and groups to persuasive rhetoric, regardless of their original allegiances or

objectives. As a result, through the character of Hermegild, Davenant warns against the unchecked power of cunning politicians who may employ their rhetorical skills to sway the masses and advance their goals, potentially leading to destabilisation, conflict, or even war. The portrayal of Hermegild aligns with Hobbes's observations concerning the role of malevolent politicians in historical accounts of the Civil War, where such figures exploited the populace through their rhetorical prowess, ultimately initiating societal divisions and unrest.

#### **1.11.4 Gondibert as a Virtuous Hero with Rhetorical Prowess**

Kahn has argued that "Hobbes wants to contain the threat of rhetoric by acknowledging it" (*Prudence* 164). In a similar vein, Davenant emulates Hobbes's approach in his epic narrative by endowing his virtuous protagonist with the essential skill of rhetorical prowess. This strategic move serves to counterbalance the influence of malevolent characters and their manipulative tactics, ensuring that the forces of good are not only equipped to resist but also to effectively challenge and undermine the persuasive schemes of unscrupulous individuals. By granting his epic hero the power of rhetoric as a heroic virtue, Davenant emphasizes the importance of recognizing and harnessing this skill for the benefit of a just and stable society, ultimately promoting the responsible and ethical use of rhetorical abilities in the pursuit of noble causes. Although the confrontation between Gondibert and Hermegild is left unresolved due to Davenant's imprisonment and subsequent discontinuation of the epic, numerous instances throughout the text give enough evidence to showcase Gondibert's rhetorical prowess. The most prominent example undoubtedly pertains to the events leading up to the duel with Oswald.

Allsopp claims that Gondibert is actually a flawed, insufficient hero in terms of rhetorical prowess (94). He cites the example of Gondibert's failure to persuade Hubert not to seek vengeance after the death of his brother Oswald: "But Hubert's grief no precept could reform; / For great grief counsel'd, does to anger grow" (I.v.77). For Allsopp, the "conventional ethical 'precept' and 'counsel' [of Gondibert] are powerless to 'reform' Hubert's grief" (94), which, he argues, indicates the insufficiency of Gondibert's rhetorical prowess. Adopting a similar perspective, one might also adduce speculate Gondibert's inability to convince Oswald that he harbours no ambitions for the throne, which Oswald may, therefore, claim for himself, thus obviating the need for conflict.

Contrary to Allsopp's view, I argue that this interpretation overlooks the complex narrative dynamics and character motivations within the epic. Gondibert's failure to persuade Hubert is not merely a reflection of weak rhetorical skills but a narrative necessity that catalyses critical plot developments. This failure sets the stage for Hermegild's rise, a pivotal character through whom Davenant explores the nuanced political turmoil of the era. The narrative context further complicates the situation: Oswald and Hubert are primarily driven by their own aspirations to seize the throne, rather than a desire to seek retribution against Gondibert for any perceived ambition to usurp the throne themselves. Thus, Gondibert's attempts at persuasion, or the lack thereof, are somewhat inconsequential to their overarching goals. In this light, the portrayal of Gondibert's rhetorical abilities should be considered within the broader context of the characters' motivations and the narrative structure, rather than as an isolated characteristic of his heroism.

Furthermore, I contend that Gondibert's rhetorical prowess proves to be very efficacious and triumphant in the confrontation with Oswald. Undeniably, Gondibert seemingly fails in convincing Oswald that he has no aspiration for the throne, an aspiration that Oswald could conceivably satisfy on his own, thereby averting the inevitability of strife. Nonetheless, he successfully persuades Oswald to engage in a duel as opposed to initiating an all-out military confrontation. Consequently, Oswald's acceptance of the duel can be interpreted as his implicit endorsement of the genuineness of Gondibert's motives, in addition to a tacit acknowledgment of the counsel proffered by Gondibert. Oswald realises that, even if Gondibert were to renounce his claim to the throne, the latter's potential rivalry would persist as long as the reigning monarch and the princess continue to exhibit a preference for him: "Know Legacies are vain till Givers die" (I.iii.30). Moreover, Oswald laments the exigencies of circumstance and the political machinations that necessitate his confrontation with Gondibert, confessing that the escalation of hostilities is beyond his control and that the most expedient course of action is to accede to the proposed duel (III.i.34-38). Oswald's commentary thus demonstrates that he is, in fact, swayed by Gondibert's entreaties, yet the prevailing conditions and the path to the throne compel him to engage in combat. By accepting the duel, Oswald endeavours to minimize the collateral damage and loss of life that would otherwise ensue.



In this regard, considering Oswald's remarks, it is reasonable to contend that Gondibert's rhetorical prowess does indeed exert a discernible influence on Oswald.

Moreover, Gondibert's proposition of duelling, when analysed through the lens of military strategy, serves as a highly significant episode that illuminates Gondibert's rhetorical prowess as an epic hero. As previously discussed, Gondibert's offer of a duel is undeniably driven by his fervent desire to prevent further loss of innocent young soldiers, who would otherwise perish in vain. Gondibert forcefully articulates this sentiment, urging Oswald to: "Let your revenge onely on me be spent, / And hazard not my Party, nor your own. [And do not let] whole offencelesse Herds [armies, be offered] for sacrifice" (I.iii.31-32). It is evident that Gondibert's poignant plea is underscored by a profound commitment to minimising casualties for both sides, thereby reflecting a fundamentally humanitarian objective at its core. However, it can be argued that Gondibert's efforts at persuasion also encompass a strategic dimension from a military standpoint, as he is aware of the fact that his faction is at a disadvantage: "[...] you design'd our ruine by surprise, / [...] much in useful Armes you us exceed, / And in your number some advantage lies" (I.iii.30). As a leader and military tactician, Gondibert is acutely aware that his forces are not only ambushed and outnumbered, but also ill-prepared for combat, given that his party has just returned from a hunting expedition, rendering them poorly equipped for battle. Thus, Gondibert's faction faces multiple disadvantages, including their vulnerable position as a result of the ambush, as well as their inferior numbers and weaponry compared to Oswald's troops.

In light of these challenges, a direct confrontation between the two armies would result in dire consequences for Gondibert's faction due to their inherent disadvantages. Recognising these unfavourable circumstances, Gondibert employs his persuasive abilities to address the issue by proposing a duel and formulating a more advantageous course of action. By appealing to Oswald's sense of compassion, Gondibert succeeds in shifting the focus from a large-scale conflict, in which his faction would likely suffer heavy losses, to a one-on-one duel. The prospect of a duel not only mitigates these shortcomings for Gondibert but also confers an advantageous position, given his exceptional martial prowess as a hand-to-hand combatant. The eventual outcome of the duel, marked by Gondibert's triumph, validates this approach. Consequently, Gondibert's

command of rhetoric and eloquent language empowers him to sway his adversary, ultimately enabling him to secure victory in the face of seemingly overwhelming odds.

In this respect, it is evident that William Davenant, drawing from the theories and historical commentaries of Thomas Hobbes, emphasises the undeniable importance of rhetoric and eloquence in the seventeenth-century modern world. Davenant, through the character of Hermegild, highlights the potential dangers posed by politicians and societal leaders who manipulate the masses for their own interests using their rhetorical skills. Hermegild, portrayed as a hero, embodies the seditious leaders whom Hobbes holds responsible for the rise of unrest in the country during the Civil War, as discussed in *De Cive*. In order to counteract these malevolent, rhetorically skilled figures, Davenant bestows rhetorical prowess upon his epic hero, Gondibert. This approach is consistent with Hobbes's reformed view of rhetoric in *Leviathan*, where he mitigates the threat of rhetoric by recognizing and embracing it (Kahn 164). Informed by Hobbes's reformed perspective, Davenant depicts rhetorical prowess as a trait necessitated by the modern world. By endowing his epic hero with this rhetorical prowess, Davenant conveys to his audience that it is a virtue valuable in both times of peace and war.

Hence, William Davenant's *Gondibert* emerges primarily as a didactic work, with its central aim being the instruction and enlightenment of its audience. I contend that this didactic intent is intricately woven into the fabric of the narrative through the evolution of the epic hero, as Davenant seeks to impart lessons pertinent to the complexities and demands of the post-English Civil War period. The epic is crafted not solely for the Royalist court but also for the Parliamentarians, underscoring Davenant's desire to transcend partisan divides and address a broader spectrum of the nation's elites.

In this light, *Gondibert* stands not merely as a Royalist epic but as a literary endeavour for reconciliation during a time of national upheaval. Davenant's deliberate emphasis on new heroic virtues — rhetorical prowess, tempered ambition, reason, openness to new knowledge, and a pro-peace stance — is indicative of his aspiration for a harmonious post-war society. These virtues, as Davenant elucidates in his Preface, are aimed specifically at the elites, regardless of their political affiliation, who are expected to lead the nation in this new era. I contend that the reconfiguration of the epic hero in *Gondibert* is a response to the exigencies of this new epoch. Davenant modifies the heroic model to

reflect the shifting moral and political landscape, thereby aligning his work with the evolving dynamics of his time. Consequently, *Gondibert* is not only a reflection of its historical context but also an embodiment of Davenant's ambitious attempt to shape the ethos of the ruling class in a period marked by profound change and uncertainty.

Thus, by embracing the Late Renaissance Italian literary criticism's idea that the most effective didacticism in epic is realised through a singular, central epic hero — a paragon of excellence who serves as an exemplar for emulation — Davenant endeavours to illustrate to his audience the essential virtues required of those aspiring to lead the nation. This conceptual framework posits that by mirroring these idealised characters, the audience can extract significant instructional value. Accordingly, Davenant's portrayal of such a hero in *Gondibert* is imbued with qualities vital for leadership in a new era: rhetorical prowess, tempered ambition, reason, openness to new knowledge, a pro-peace stance, and justified martial prowess. These attributes, as depicted in his epic hero, are proposed as the new standards of excellence for prospective leaders.

Conclusively, under the influence of Hobbesian perspective that ambition played a key role in instigating the Civil War, Davenant criticises dangerous, or what he refers to as “feverish” ambition. However, he attributes a “warm ambition” to his epic hero, Gondibert. Unlike the Hobbesian “feverish” ambition which precipitates disaster for both the individual and the state, “warm” ambition is instrumental in enabling individuals to realise their potential. This concept serves as a resonant cautionary note for Davenant's sophisticated aristocratic audience, highlighting that regulated ambition is a prized attribute in the political sphere. In the political arena, Davenant also underlines the importance of articulate speech and eloquence by equipping his epic hero with rhetorical skills. Considering the prominent treatises on rhetoric in the seventeenth century and Hobbes's reformed attitude to it, Davenant portrays rhetorical prowess as a trait demanded by the modern world. By bestowing his epic hero with this rhetorical skill, Davenant communicates to his readers that it is a virtue vital in times of both peace and war. In relation to warfare, having witnessed the prolonged conflicts that ravaged his compatriots, Davenant depicts war not in glorious light, but as a dreadful and catastrophic event. His epic hero is characterised by a profound longing for peace, seeking to resolve conflicts through dialogue rather than through combat. However, Davenant is cognizant

of the fact, from his own experiences and Hobbes's political theory on human nature, that a desire for peace is insufficient and dialogue is not always successful. Therefore, his epic hero is granted formidable martial skills, which are to be utilized only when all other options have been exhausted. To distinguish this from the martial prowess found in classical epics, I term it "justified" martial prowess. Furthermore, it is important to underscore that Gondibert refrains from pursuing glory on battlefields and even repudiates this concept, which endangers both his own life and the lives of others. Instead, he perceives it as a catalyst for escalating violence. In the realm of science, Gondibert is characterized by rationality and an openness towards acquiring new knowledge. This represents the sole instance where the reformed epic hero assumes a passive role, characterised by a state of learning. Davenant conveys to his readers that even his almost flawless epic hero, Gondibert, is not an entirely complete entity. He absorbs considerable knowledge from scientific practitioners. In this regard, Davenant emphasises to his audience the importance of education and a readiness to embrace new knowledge in an era profoundly influenced by emerging scientific discoveries and innovations.

## CHAPTER 2: “NOT LESS BUT MORE HEROIC”

[...] Sad task, yet argument  
 Not less but more Heroic then the wrauth  
 Of stern *Achilles* on his Foe pursu'd  
 Thrice Fugitive about *Troy* Wall; or rage  
 Of *Turnus* for *Lavinia* disespous'd,  
 Or *Neptun*'s ire or *Juno*'s, that so long  
 Perplex'd the *Greek* and *Cytherea*'s Son.

(*Paradise Lost*, IX.13-19)

The identification and purpose of the epic heroes in John Milton's *Paradise Lost* has been a locus of intense scholarly debate, encompassing a diverse range of interpretive frameworks. Initially, the discourse was anchored in the context of the epic tradition, tracing its lineage from classical antecedents. This trajectory, however, underwent substantive expansion to include a wide range of theological considerations, spanning not only Christianity and its denominations but also the theologies of the Old Testament and Islam. Later developments in critical thought integrated the philosophical and political interpretations, particularly pronounced from the twentieth century onwards. While each of these intellectual traditions has made significant contributions to our comprehension of Milton's epic heroes in *Paradise Lost*, they predominantly operate on a foundational assumption, often formulated as the question: “who is the epic hero in *Paradise Lost*?”

Thus, the prevalent analytical approach in interpreting the epic heroes of John Milton's *Paradise Lost* often emphasises the presence of a central, singular epic hero. This chapter challenges this perspective, proposing that *Paradise Lost* signifies a departure from the deep-rooted seventeenth-century convention in epics revolving around a singular, predominant epic hero. Additionally, the epic diverges from late Italian Renaissance criticism, which advocates for the depiction of idealised, faultless epic heroes as instrumental for the didactic aims of epic poetry. Instead, *Paradise Lost* also aligns with the seventeenth-century French criticism that endorses imperfect epic heroes. This approach underscores the potential for readers to derive lessons not only from positive

role models but also from characters displaying negative traits, such as evil, imperfections, and failures.

In this vein, I assert that Milton's profound instructive goals in *Paradise Lost* drive him to utilise four epic heroes: the Son, as the sole perfect hero, and three others—Satan, Adam, and Eve—who exhibit various flaws and failures as well as positive aspects. Through this diverse cast, Milton redefines heroism, adapting it to the needs and complexities of his era. This period, as depicted by Milton, is one of significant transition, encompassing extensive and intricate shifts across social, theological, philosophical, and political landscapes. These shifts, hence, necessitate the development of new virtues, behaviours, and ethical standards.

Responding to these changes, Milton ingeniously crafts each epic hero to represent distinct forms of heroism that resonate with the evolving requirements of this transformative era. While articulating these novel virtues, whether through positive or negative examples, Milton engages with various layers of social, theological, philosophical, and political discourse through each epic hero. In this vein, while acknowledging that different epic heroes may manifest diverse new heroic virtues, or similar virtues in different contexts, I contend that Milton redefines the concept of the epic hero. This new hero is characterised by innate free will, political responsibility, rhetorical prowess, a worth determined not by lineage but by merit marked by endurance and patience, autonomous obedience to God guided by right reason, and a nuanced view of war that recognises its brutal reality yet also understands the necessity of martial prowess in a politically charged world.

Furthermore, I hypothesise that this radical reconceptualization of epic heroes in Milton's *magnum opus* serves to democratise the notion of heroism itself. By redefining heroism in this manner, Milton shifts its domain from the exclusive preserve of high society to the realm of the everyday Christian, making it accessible and relevant to a broader spectrum of society. This represents a significant departure from the entrenched norms of epic criticism at the time, which traditionally confined heroism to the elite echelons of society. In challenging the prevailing perceptions of heroism, Milton not only redefines its scope but also instructs his countrymen that they have both the right and capability to steer their own destinies and the course of religious and political affairs.

Before continuing with the evolution of epic heroes in *Paradise Lost*, I shall first address some of the problems in the interpretative frameworks used in analysing epic heroes in Milton studies. This chapter opposes the analytical approach of analysing the epic heroes in *Paradise Lost* together with *Paradise Regained* (1671) and even *Samson Agonistes* (1671). I contend that such an integrative approach is inherently flawed for several reasons. Firstly, it disregards the unique generic classifications that distinguish these works; secondly, it neglects their varied socio-political contexts. Consequently, this method leads to broad generalisations, thereby preventing a nuanced understanding of the distinct didactic intentions Milton harboured while evolving his concept of epic heroes in *Paradise Lost*. These generalisations are particularly problematic when set against the specific historical and intellectual milieu in which Milton crafted his masterwork. Therefore, in light of these considerations, this chapter will include no references to *Paradise Regained* (1671) and *Samson Agonistes* (1671) and will solely focus on the epic heroes of *Paradise Lost*, which will enable a more contextually sensitive approach to the evolution of epic heroes in this seminal text.

The comparative analysis of Milton's epic heroes within the framework of classical epics and the theological narratives of the New and Old Testaments, while effective in establishing foundational theories and contributing to Milton's canonisation, has also inherent limitations. This method, favoured by many eminent Milton scholars, often obscures the unique influences of the seventeenth century that shaped the evolution of Milton's heroes. Despite employing a comparative methodology to highlight the divergence of Milton's heroes from traditional figures, I argue that an excessive focus on classical and theological parallels risks neglecting the specific historical and literary contexts of Milton's time.

It is crucial to acknowledge, as noted in the Introduction, that seventeenth-century English literary criticism was significantly influenced by the late Italian Renaissance and seventeenth-century French literary criticism, which diverged considerably from the epic theories of antiquity. Milton was acutely aware of these distinct critical traditions, as evidenced in his prose and letters. Overemphasising classical and theological comparisons can inadvertently overshadow the critical literary contexts of the seventeenth century, which are vital for a deeper understanding of Milton's epic heroes. Therefore, in

this chapter, I aim to bring to the forefront these often-overlooked contexts. By exploring the seventeenth-century literary criticism, particularly its divergence from classical and theological models, we can gain a more nuanced understanding of the evolution of the epic heroes in *Paradise Lost*. This approach promises to illuminate the distinctive aspects of Milton's epic creation within the historical and critical literary landscape of his time.

## **2.1 THE CONTEXT BEHIND THE EVOLUTION OF THE EPIC HEROES IN *PARADISE LOST***

Studying Milton presents a multifaceted challenge, necessitating deep engagement with diverse fields such as politics, theology, and philosophy. The complexity arises, as Brackney aptly notes, from the multitude of roles and identities Milton embodies. Brackney encapsulates this with the observation that there are numerous interpretations of Milton: "Milton the liberal, Whig, rationalist, tolerationist, Christian humanist, sectarian, Arian, Hebraist, Satanist, conservative, Platonist, Calvinist, Puritan, Augustinian, neoclassicist, rabbinical scholar, authority on the hexameter, logician" (2). To thoroughly analyse the evolution of Milton's epic heroes and the theological, philosophical, and political messages he interweaves through them, it is imperative to first delve into these specific contexts. The transformation of his epic heroes and the dramatic shifts in their portrayal are deeply rooted in Milton's unique and unorthodox perspectives in politics, theology, and philosophy. In this respect, my focus will be on these contexts, particularly when they are relevant to understanding the changes in the epic heroes.

## **2.2 MILTON'S POLITICS**

The elucidation of Milton's political perspectives is indispensable for a nuanced understanding of the evolution of his epic heroes. While the scope of my analysis will delve into specific aspects of Milton's political ideologies as they pertain to the character traits and actions of these epic figures, it is crucial to initially establish an overview of Milton's political orientation during the composition of his seminal work, *Paradise Lost*. The extent to which these heroes are either suffused with revolutionary ideals or reflect Milton's shifting political attitudes is key to interpreting their complex characterisations and comprehending their transformations in the context of a transitional historical period.



As such, any rigorous analysis must commence with an inquiry into prevailing scholarly theories concerning Milton's political affiliations, particularly focusing on how these ideological leanings shape interpretive approaches to the epic's protagonists.

Barbara Kiefer Lewalski comments on Milton's political purpose during the revolutionary period:

Throughout the revolutionary period, as Milton engaged his pen to the cause of reform, regicide, and a more nearly ideal church, state, and society, he continually sought to prod, goad, and educate his countrymen to understand the evils of monarchical government, the virtue of a republic, and above all the need to secure religious toleration for all Protestants and to separate church and state. ("Milton's Politics" 142)

Milton was, without doubt, a fervent revolutionary. His tenure as a political pamphleteer marks the zenith of his career, spanning from 1641 to 1660. This period includes the era leading up to the Civil War, the conflict itself, its aftermath, and the Commonwealth. Milton did not merely witness these tumultuous times; he was deeply immersed in them, actively participating in the intellectual debates of the era, allying himself with the Parliamentary cause. Throughout these two decades, which constituted the prime of his life—from the age of 33 to 53—Milton penned “controversial prose works passionately defending ecclesiastical, domestic, and civil liberty, and attacking forms of ecclesiastical and political tyranny and idolatry” (Loewenstein, *Landmarks* 12). After the publication of *Eikon Basilike: The Pourtraicture of His Sacred Majestie in His Solitudes and Sufferings* (1649), released a mere ten days following the execution, wherein Charles I justified his divine right to rule and posited that to execute a king was to commit a sin against God's will, it was Milton who refuted the King's arguments on both political and theological fronts with his *Eikonoklastes*, published in October 1649.

During the Commonwealth, he served as the Secretary for Foreign Tongues and indefatigably supported the revolutionary cause. In his *Defensio Secunda* (1654), which Loewenstein describes as “an occasion for revolutionary mythmaking” (*Landmarks* 15), Milton composed prose that extolled the valiant deeds of revolutionary heroes so vividly that he earned the title of the “myth maker of the Commonwealth,” penning narratives that championed its principles through the embodiment of its leaders (*Landmarks* 12). Milton himself recognised this role, drawing a parallel between his work and that of an

epic poet: “[J]ust as the epic poet [...] undertakes to extol, not the whole life of the hero whom he proposes to celebrate in his verse [...] me too [...] have celebrated at least one heroic achievement of my countrymen” (YP 4.1:685).<sup>80</sup> This acknowledgment reflects his profound commitment to the revolutionary cause.

This, however, does not necessarily mean that Milton’s political views are stable and fixed and that he never criticised the Commonwealth. Throughout his career, he altered his political views in certain regards. For instance, Worden indicates that Milton endorsed the 1653 coups, supporting Cromwell and the army officers’ actions against the Rump Parliament (289-93). He favoured its expulsion and the subsequent formation of an assembly by Cromwell and his officers. This stance was immediate, as evidenced in his political tracts at the time, composed shortly after the Rump’s dissolution, aiming to justify Cromwell’s actions. During this period, Milton sought to align with Cromwell, endorsing his selection of civilian advisors (Worden 293-95). However, the aspirations had been shattered under Cromwell’s regime since the very ruler who had once appeared as a defender against the Stuarts now seemed to Milton to be akin to them (Worden 334). According to Sasek, Milton’s critique of the Commonwealth, as seen in his praise for the “Good Old Cause,”<sup>81</sup> suggests that in the later years of the Commonwealth, he believed that those in power within the Protectorate had deviated from the initial path of the revolution (6). This indicates that Milton’s views were adaptable, changing in response to emerging events.

### **2.3 MILTON’S ALLEGIANCE WHILE COMPOSING *PARADISE LOST***

Although Milton’s views are critical towards the Commonwealth, Loewenstein incisively observes that Milton remained “unchang’d” in his “fundamental principles and beliefs”

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<sup>80</sup> In the subsequent pages, unless indicated otherwise, all references to John Milton’s prose works are derived from *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, published by Yale Press between 1953 and 1982 in eight volumes. These references will be cited as YP, followed by the volume, part (if applicable), and page numbers.

<sup>81</sup> The term “Good Old Cause,” prevalent in the late 1650s and early 1660s, epitomised the political values and ideology of English republicanism. It served as an expression of ideological divergence from the Protectorate, critiquing the evolution of the revolution and contending that it had forsaken its original principles. Following Oliver Cromwell’s death in September 1658, advocates for the English republic, particularly those who had become estranged from the state during the Protectorate, rejuvenated the discourse and goals associated with the establishment of a state devoid of a monarch in 1649. (Corns, *The Milton Encyclopaedia* 135-36).

about the revolution, despite being ensconced within a hostile environment (*Landmarks* 18-19). Indeed, while Milton did levy criticism at certain practices within the Commonwealth, he steadfastly clung to his revolutionary ideals. Even as the Commonwealth waned and the bells of Restoration signalled a dire turn for the revolutionaries, he bravely upheld the revolutionary tenets in his treatises. Milton exhorted his fellow citizens to oppose the reestablishment of the Stuart monarchy, likening it to “chusing [...] a captain back for Egypt” (*YP* 7:463). It is manifestly evident that throughout the protracted years of conflict and its aftermath, Milton was integrally bound to the cause of the revolution in both spirit and deed.<sup>82</sup>

Milton embarked on the ambitious project of writing *Paradise Lost* during the final years of the Commonwealth, a period he describes in the epic as “long choosing, and beginning late” (IX.26). Edward Philips notes that Milton began his poem “about 2 yeares before the K. came-in, and finished about 3 yeares after the K’s Restauration” (Lewalski, *Milton’s Politics* 140; Sasek, *Milton’s Patriotic Epic* 13). This timeframe reveals that *Paradise Lost* was crafted during a significant time of transition: the end of the revolution to which Milton had devoted so much of his life and the reinstatement of the episcopacy, an institution he had intellectually opposed for all his life. The onset of the Restoration era marked the start of challenging times for Milton, an ardent supporter and vocal advocate of the revolution, known for his bold writings that even defended regicide.

Milton laments bitterly about the change to his situation:

I Sing with mortal voice, unchang’d  
To hoarce or mute, though fall’n on evil dayes,  
On evil dayes though fall’n, and evil tongues;

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<sup>82</sup> In *Milton and the Post Modern*, Herman Rapaport presents quite a daring claim, arguing that the perception of Milton as a humanist promoting humanitarian, libertarian, and egalitarian ideas is actually quite wrong, given the poet’s complicity with “the most repellent aspects of fascist, or totalitarian action [the actions of Commonwealth],” which proves otherwise (172). Hence, he sees Milton as a man who while so-allegedly fighting against Charles I’s absolutism, is actually fascinated with coup plotting, dictatorial regime. Indeed, while some actions of the Commonwealth are perceived as severe and striking, and certain notions proposed by Milton might be contentious, it would be reductive to confine Milton solely to his political inclinations. Undoubtedly, both Milton’s political writings and his poetry are characterised by the championing of humanitarian, libertarian, and egalitarian principles. It is pertinent to highlight that Milton himself articulated criticisms towards his political faction, as exemplified in *Areopagitica*, released on 23 November 1644, at the peak of the English Civil War. Within this treatise, he ardently contested the Parliament’s Licensing Order of 1643. This underscores that his works transcend the confines of domestic politics, aspiring towards universal virtue and aesthetic.

In darkness, and with dangers compass round,  
And solitude. (IV.24-28<sup>83</sup>)

The period was truly one of “days [...] fall’n” for John Milton. Knowing that his life was in danger now, he took refuge in hiding. On August 13, 1660, King Charles II promulgated a decree that markedly escalated the risk to Milton’s life. This proclamation commanded that books endorsing the “murder” of Charles I, were to be “publicly burned,” and indeed, Milton’s works—texts that were forthright in their support and justification of Charles I’s execution—were subjected to this fiery fate. Subsequently, on August 29, 1660, Charles II released an Act of Free and General Pardon, prompting Milton to abandon his seclusion. Though initially imprisoned in the Tower of London, he was ultimately liberated on December 15, 1660, thanks to the intercession of influential allies.<sup>84</sup> Yet, the danger was still lurking brought home by the “horrific public spectacle of hanging and disembowelling, with bodies and bodily parts hung up for all to see, [which] was meant as public warning, an assertion of power over those who contemplated dissent<sup>85</sup>” (Chernaik 111).

Though alive, this fervent revolutionary found himself in a state of isolation. The revolution to which he had devoted his formative years had come to an end. Despite his

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<sup>83</sup> All references to *Paradise Lost* cited herein are derived from the version edited by Barbara Kiefer Lewalski, and published by Blackwell Publishing in 2007.

<sup>84</sup> Jonathon Richardson presents an intriguing narrative, a story he acquired from Mr. Pope, who in turn learned it from Mr. Betterton, an individual under the patronage of Sir William Davenant himself, that it was Davenant who was instrumental in securing John Milton’s release from captivity. Richardson emphasizes the risk entailed in aiding Milton, a man notorious for supporting the “murder” of the king. He queries, “How came They to put their Interest on Such a Stretch in Favour of a Man [Milton] So Notoriously Obnoxious?” (271). He then elucidates the mutual assistance between the two poets: “twas Sir William Davenant obtain’d his Remission in Return for his Own Life procur’d by Milton’s Interest when Himself was under Condemnation, Anno 1650. A Life was owing to Milton, (Davenant’s) and ’twas Paid Nobly, Milton’s for Davenant’s at Davenant’s Intercession” (Richardson 271-72). Richardson refers here to an earlier incident in 1650, when Davenant was imprisoned by Parliamentary forces while en route to America. According to this narrative, Milton secured his release, and Davenant was merely reciprocating the favour. Certainly, the veracity of Richardson’s account is in question since there is no historical document to support it, yet the allure of such a tale is undeniably potent. Herein lies an exemplary tableau of poetic brotherhood, a symmetry so harmoniously balanced that it defies the disruptive cacophony of political divisiveness. If Milton, an advocate of regicide, could extend his hand to save a fellow “royalist” epic poet like Davenant during the Commonwealth, and Davenant, in a poetic reciprocity, could mirror that sublime act by liberating the notorious republican Milton during the Restoration, then we are witness to a form of communion that transcends the petty straits of temporal politics. They are bound by an unspoken, inviolable pact of artistic sanctity, a pulse that unifies them in their collective pursuit of the most exalted form of human expression—the transcendent domain of poetic art.

<sup>85</sup> To see the tyranny of Charles II to gain authority back in his country after the Restoration, please see N. H. Keeble’s *The Restoration: England in the 1660s* (2002), 120-21; Tim Harris’s *Restoration: Charles II and his Kingdoms* (2006), pp. 52-56; Barbara K. Lewalski’s *The Life of John Milton* (2007), pp. 398-405

monumental efforts to both defend and propagate the ideals of the revolution, they proved to be in vain. Having entered the arena of revolutionary world as a young man, he exited it as an aging old and blind figure,<sup>86</sup> his aspirations thwarted by the advent of the Restoration.

## 2.4 POLITICS IN *PARADISE LOST*

Thus, a pressing query emerges: what was Milton's political stance whilst composing *Paradise Lost*? Did he grow disillusioned with politics, choosing instead to focus on individual salvation within the contours of Christian theology, thereby positing that *Paradise Lost* ought to be appraised with a purely theological lens? Alternatively, did he maintain his republican convictions but refrained from incorporating them in his writings due to the prevalent censorship and repression following the Restoration? Or again, was he still unwaveringly devoted to republican principles, persisting in embedding political commentary in his writings, albeit covertly due to censorship and repression, implying that *Paradise Lost* is an extension of Milton's political oeuvre, artfully concealed behind the narrative of the Christian tale of the Fall?

These questions are crucial for comprehending the development of Milton's epic heroes in *Paradise Lost*. To truly grasp how these epic heroes evolve and their deep ties with the political, theological, and philosophical debates of Milton's time, it is vital to delve into Milton's political views during the composition of his *magnum opus*. Grasping his political outlook is key, as it shapes the nuanced aims behind the alterations he makes to his epic heroes.

### 2.4.1 Those Who Argue Milton Disengaged with Politics

For an extended period, many scholars interpreted this phase as the conclusion of Milton's political engagement, noting his subsequent focus on his poetics merged with his religious views rather than political discourse. E.M.W. Tillyard, in *The Miltonic Setting, Past and Present* (1938/1961), contends that Milton's perspective on politics evolved over time. He asserts, "Milton grew to think differently about politics. When he comes to write his

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<sup>86</sup> Although multiple theories exist regarding the onset and causes of Milton's blindness, it is unequivocally established that by the commencement of his composition of *Paradise Lost*, his vision was entirely lost. For additional insights on this subject, refer to: George B. Bartley's "The blindness of John Milton," *Mayo Clinic Proceedings*, vol. 68, no. 4, 1993, pp. 395–399.

great poem, politics have become less important than the fate of the individual soul” (165). Tillyard’s analysis of *Paradise Lost* predominantly focuses on its contributions to the epic genre, rather than situating it within the context of seventeenth-century England.<sup>87</sup> Similarly, in *Milton: A Biography* (1968), William R. Parker suggests that while Milton’s political beliefs might not have shifted, *Paradise Lost* transcends political commentary. Parker notes, “[t]he emphasis [is] upon the individual Christian. The poet holds out no hope for the freeing of nations; his experience had taught him otherwise. Man as a member of society must for ever suffer tyranny in some form or other” (592). Although acknowledging Milton’s commencement of the poem before the Restoration, Parker observes that disillusionment with the Commonwealth and its citizens had already set in, a sentiment intensified by the Restoration. However, Parker seemingly downplays Milton’s bold political stance in *Readie and Easie Way* (1660), a tract published in the same year as Charles II’s return to England. I should stress here that this was the king whose father’s execution Milton had justified through his writings. Parker characterizes Milton’s actions as “spitting into the everlasting sea” rather than confronting prevailing winds (590), implying Milton’s defiance was more a gesture for posterity than an immediate political act. This interpretation, in my view, strips the tract of its immediate political relevance and urgency. Milton’s *Readie and Easie Way* (1660), written amidst the throes of a political upheaval, was not a mere gesture towards the future but a vehement call to resist the monarch’s return. It demonstrates Milton’s unwavering commitment to his republican ideals, despite the immense risks. This act of defiance, in the face of potential dire consequences, illustrates that Milton’s political fervour remained undiminished. The tract stands as a testament to Milton’s enduring engagement with the political realities of his time, revealing a continuous, active involvement rather than a withdrawal into the realms of poetry and religion.

Several other critics share a similar perspective. In *The Christian Revolutionary: John Milton* (1974), Hugh M. Richmond posits that Milton’s political failures led him to lose his fervent political commitment. A.L. Rowse, in *Milton the Puritan* (1977), argues that the post-Restoration environment compelled Milton to disengage from the transient

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<sup>87</sup> Kindly refer to the section entitled “Giving Up on Arthurian Epic” for my detailed critical evaluation of Tillyard’s analytical approach.

nature of politics. This, Rowse believes, was ultimately beneficial, as it redirected Milton's talents towards poetry (215). Richard Helgerson also contends that Milton became detached from the political realm following the Restoration. This detachment, according to Helgerson, is evident in *Paradise Lost*, suggesting that the epic lacks political underpinnings (278-280).

Blair Worden argues that following the Restoration, Milton "does not merely return to his right hand, from prose to poetry: he withdraws from politics into faith" (244). According to Worden, Milton's greatest works are characterized by his retreat from politics. The Milton who once championed the revolutionary cause now assigns this very revolutionary discourse to Satan, the embodiment of evil, indicating that "if the language of political resistance has become unfitting, so has the language of republicanism" (245). The fact that Satan now uses the republican discourse once advocated by Milton signifies this change. He further argues that Milton's Satan acts in the manner of "some orator renowned / In Athens or free Rome, where Eloquence / Flourished [...]" (IV.670-72). The great ideals Milton once associated with ancient Greece and Rome are now defended by Satan, while "Christ [asserts] that political virtue has nothing to learn from pagan sources, from 'all the oratory of Greece and Rome'" (245). Worden makes a striking observation to indicate the dramatic shift in Milton's writing: "How far we have come from the Milton who, in the wake of regicide, had recommended Mediterranean political wisdom as the cure for his country's ills, and who had envisioned his fellow Englishmen building 'another Rome in the west!'" (Worden 245).

Worden's critique, while insightful, navigates through a labyrinth of interpretative missteps as his approach has more than one critical error. Firstly, he identifies Satan's republicanism as a mirroring to Milton's own disillusionment with such ideals, neglecting to discern the nuanced tapestry Milton weaves. He overlooks Milton's intention of employing Satan as more than a straightforward villain; instead, Milton uses him as an epic hero marked by flaws in both action and thought. Through these errors, Milton seeks to indirectly highlight the issues of his era to his audience.<sup>88</sup> Secondly, he presumes that Satan earnestly champions republican ideals, thus interpreting Satan's perspectives and

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<sup>88</sup> For a detailed analysis of Milton's employment of flawed epic heroes, please see the section titled "Epic Hero: Paragon of Virtue or Flawed Figure."

motives as sincere. On the contrary, the latter sections of *Paradise Lost* suggest that Milton's depiction of Satan is not of a revolutionary hero but of a tyrannical figure, manipulating revolutionary and republican rhetoric to deceive the angels. In crafting Satan's character, Milton seeks to illuminate the potential misuse of rhetoric, the art of persuasive speech, urging vigilance and discernment in his audience. Lastly, Worden, in alignment with various other scholars, attempts to intertwine *Paradise Lost* with *Paradise Regained* to substantiate his argument related to Satan. However, this approach neglects the distinct historical and political contexts of each work. By forcing these epics into a singular interpretative framework, the unique narrative and thematic elements inherent to each work are regrettably overlooked.

Stephen Orgel and Jonathan Goldberg, in a parallel critical vein, contend that Milton's unconventional religious beliefs were "hardly one that any Christian nation would have embraced as doctrinal," and assert that his epic "barely allows its heretical views to be seen; it similarly suppresses its politics" (xix-xx). Contrasting with their viewpoint, the poem is, in fact, permeated with Milton's distinctive theological and political perspectives. An example of this in *Paradise Lost* is the theological notion that the Son is not eternally "begotten" of God but is instead "begotten" at a specific point in time and subsequently elevated to divinity.<sup>89</sup> Additionally, the work engages with numerous political themes, including the divine right of kings,<sup>90</sup> the comparison of monarchy and democracy, and the misuse of rhetoric in political discourse.

Lastly, in her book *Milton's Words* (2009), Annabel Patterson posits that Milton deliberately eschewed the integration of politics and poetics, consciously omitting the revolutionary vocabulary prevalent in his political pamphlets from his major poetic

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<sup>89</sup> Please refer to the "Free-will" section for an in-depth examination of Milton's theological perspectives, which are often deemed "heretical," and his unique approaches to Christianity.

<sup>90</sup> Regarding the historical evolution of the concept of divine kingship in English politics, starting with the accession of the Stuart Dynasty and its influence on Milton's *Paradise Lost*, please refer to Volkan Kılıç's PhD dissertation entitled "Milton and Politics: A Study of Milton's Political Ideas in His Pamphlets and *Paradise Lost*" (2011, Hacettepe University, Turkey), passim. Kılıç, building upon the interpretations of many critics before him, posits the epic as a "poem in which [Milton] voiced his political thoughts and ideals in an allegorical manner" (2). I find myself in disagreement with this perspective of seeing the epic as a mere political allegory, as I contend that *Paradise Lost* is primarily a didactic epic encompassing multiple layers, with politics being a significant yet only singular layer amongst them. Nevertheless, Kılıç's detailed examination of the idea of divine kingship during the Stuart era in England and Milton's critique of it in *Paradise Lost* is noteworthy.



compositions. Scott L. Newstok critiques Patterson's methodological approach as fundamentally flawed, describing it as reliant on "quantitative summation," a practice that involves tallying the frequency of specific words in Milton's political and poetic texts. Newstok characterises her methodology as a "fairly blunt approach" (E260). Further reinforcing the critique of Patterson's approach, Victoria Silver remarks that her work "remains tacit, without citation, and intellectually imperious, in the manner of critical essays written some generations ago" (1018). Despite these various positions, it is certainly the case that most critics would agree that *Paradise Lost* was penned during a time when Milton's direct involvement in politics had concluded.

#### 2.4.2 Those Who Argue Politics is Embedded in *Paradise Lost*

In contrast, various critics assert that Milton's *Paradise Lost* is intrinsically intertwined with politics. A notable proponent of this view is the esteemed Milton scholar Don M. Wolfe, who in his work *Milton in the Puritan Revolution* (1941), particularly in the chapter "Tyrants and Men of Destiny," highlights the influence of Milton's political beliefs on the narrative structure and the portrayal of characters in the epic (208-49). David Loewenstein posits that the political imagery within *Paradise Lost* aligns with Milton's stances expressed in his prose political tracts, suggesting that the poem serves as a poetic extension of these views (*Milton and the Drama of History* 74-88). Joan S. Bennett contends that while the epic may not be a direct political allegory of the seventeenth century, it nonetheless embodies Milton's republican leanings, noting that Milton incorporates elements from his political tracts in crafting his characters (*Reviving Liberty* 33-56). Additionally, Paul A. Rahe emphasises the resonance of Milton's political viewpoints within the epic<sup>91</sup> (270-72).

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<sup>91</sup> The list can be furthered. The earlier contributions include Don. M. Wolfe's *Milton in the Puritan Revolution* (1941), offering a foundational perspective on Milton's political environment. Christopher Hill's *Milton and the English Revolution* (1977) then provides a deep exploration into the political nuances of Milton's time. Further insights come from Michael Wilding's *Dragons Teeth: Literature in the English Revolution* (1987), which examines the literary aspects of the English Revolution, and Mary Ann Radzinowicz's article "The Politics of *Paradise Lost*," in *Politics of Discourse: The Literature and History of Seventeenth-Century England* (1987), spanning pages 204–229, contributing a detailed political analysis of Milton's work. Joan Bennett's *Reviving Liberty: Radical Christian Humanism in Milton's Great Poems* (1989) adds to this discourse by examining Milton's radical themes. The 1990s witnessed significant contributions such as David Quint's *Epic and Empire: Politics and Generic Form from Virgil to Milton* (1993), particularly noteworthy on pages 268–269, 300-302, and 305–307, and Perez Zagorin's *Milton: Aristocrat and Rebel - The Poet and His Politics* (1993). This was followed by Sharon Achinstein's *Milton and the Revolutionary Reader* (1994), Laura L. Knoppers's *Historicizing Milton: Spectacle, Power, and*

In my opinion, the most insightful interpretation of Milton's perspective on politics in *Paradise Lost* is offered by Mary Ann Nevins Radzinowicz.<sup>92</sup> Radzinowicz challenges views that interpret *Paradise Lost* as either politically disengaged or cryptically political. Instead, she posits that *Paradise Lost* is a didactic piece with a public function, as Milton endeavours to educate his readers (122-23).<sup>93</sup> According to Radzinowicz, Milton upholds the classical role of epic poetry as a medium for instruction through art. She suggests that Milton assumes the role of "poet-political teacher" akin to a Socratic mentor, presenting problems for debate and opportunities for correction (123). Thus, the epic is not merely a veiled political narrative but also serves a broader educational purpose, including political instruction. However, my approach diverges from Radzinowicz's method of revealing the didactic layers of the epic. While she uses Milton's deviations from biblical narratives and other sources to demonstrate his instructional intentions, I believe the key to uncovering Milton's didactic aims, and his messages in politics, theology, and philosophy, lies in the evolution of the epic heroes in *Paradise Lost*. Following the tradition of the period, Milton views these heroes as primary vehicles for conveying his teachings and messages. It is therefore crucial to meticulously examine how Milton diverges from typical epic conventions in developing his characters, endowing them with specific traits, thoughts, and actions.

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*Poetry in Restoration England* (1994), Thomas N. Corns's *Regaining Paradise Lost* (1995), notably on pages 137–139, David Armitage's *Poet Against Empire* (1995), and Christopher Hill's later work, *Milton and the English Revolution* (1997). The decade concluded with David Norbrook's *Writing the English Revolution: Poetry, Rhetoric, and Politics, 1627–1660* (1999). Entering the new millennium, Barbara Kiefer Lewalski's article "Paradise Lost and Milton's Politics," in *Milton Studies*, vol. 38 (2000), spanning pages 141-168, provided a comprehensive exploration of Milton's political ideologies. Additionally, Blair Worden's *Literature and Politics in Cromwellian England* (2007) expands the understanding of the political backdrop to Milton's works.

<sup>92</sup> Here, I must regrettably state that the esteemed scholar, Mary Ann Nevins Radzinowicz, passed away in 2023 while I was engaged in composing this chapter in Durham. Her demise can be likened to the dimming of a guiding star in the skies of Milton scholarship. Nonetheless, her contributions will persist in lighting the paths for all future scholars of Milton exploring *Paradise Lost*.

<sup>93</sup> In the essay "Great Senates and Godly Education: Politics and Cultural Renewal in Some Pre- and Post-Revolutionary Texts of Milton," included in *Milton and Republicanism*, Cedric C. Brown echoes Radzinowicz's method and contends, "Milton wrote a poem directed at the spiritual discipline of his countrymen, and with that function in mind one could conduct a counter-argument to say that he was as political as he needed to be" (58).

## 2.5 “ANSWERABLE STYLE:” MILTON ON EPIC THEORY

Before delving into the ways Milton crafted his epic heroes as reflections of his own era, it is imperative to first outline his theoretical framework concerning both the epic genre and its heroes. This task is especially challenging, given that Milton never authored a formal treatise on literary criticism that articulated his views on epic poetry. Scholars specializing in Milton have often sought to extrapolate his stance on this subject from his extant prose works. While this methodology is valuable due to the absence of direct sources, it is marked by analytical problems. Given that Milton’s writing career extended over four decades, it is reasonable to assume that his views underwent significant changes. Consequently, utilizing a prose work from Milton’s earlier career as a lens through which to interpret the content of *Paradise Lost* risks assuming a static nature to his viewpoints, which is likely to be inaccurate. This is exemplified by the fact that Milton originally aspired to compose an epic centred on Arthur, but later reconsidered, questioning both the suitability of Arthur as epic material and even casting doubt on the historical existence of such a figure. In this respect, I will bear these considerations in mind and exercise the utmost caution when attempting to forge connections between his political writings and the evolutionary trajectory of epic heroes in *Paradise Lost*.

### 2.5.1 How Epic Poetry Should Be

As previously articulated, ascertainable insights into Milton’s perspectives on the epic genre are relatively scarce. However, one of the infrequent windows into his views on this matter can be found in his treatise, *The Reason of Church Government* (1642). Within this text, Milton offers commentary on the epic genre:

Epick form whereof the two poems of Homer and those two of Virgil and Tasso are a diffuse, and the book of Job a brief model: or whether the rules of Aristotle herein are strictly to be kept, or nature to be follow’d, which, in them that know art and use judgement, is no transgression, but an enriching of art: And, lastly, what K[ing] or Knight before the conquest might be chosen in whom to lay the pattern of a Christian Heroe. (*YP* 1: 813-14)

Overall, this passage could be seen as a preliminary articulation of Milton’s own theoretical framework for epic poetry, an exploratory space where he grapples with the balance between tradition and innovation, form and freedom, and classical and Christian elements. Milton here places his thoughts within a lineage of epic poetry, citing Homer,

Virgil, and Tasso as diffuse models, and the book of Job as a more concise example. The mention of these models serves to contextualize his own endeavours within a rich tapestry of epic history. Milton's query regarding whether to follow Aristotle's rules strictly or to rely on nature raises an interesting tension between strictly following the generic conventions in epic tradition or breaking away from them, which he deems as following "nature." For Milton, adhering to nature—when executed by those who are both artful and judicious—is not a breach of art but an enhancement of it. This stance in my opinion sheds light onto Milton's perception of diverging from the conventions and his legitimization of his own deviations from established forms and rules, assuming that they are conducted in the spirit of artistic enrichment.<sup>94</sup> Moreover, the question concerning which King or Knight "before the conquest" might serve as a template for a "Christian Hero" highlights Milton's endeavour to integrate classical and Christian elements in the crafting of an epic protagonist. The juxtaposition of the Book of Job with classical epics serves as a significant indicator of this integrative aim. It suggests a nuanced interplay between historical models and Christian ethics, an interplay that is further developed and resonates in *Paradise Lost*.

This pioneering approach is palpably evident in *Paradise Lost*. At the commencement of Book I, the revered poet proclaims his audacious ambition for the narrative: "[...] it pursues / Things unattempted yet in Prose or Rhyme" (I.15-16). In my assessment, this statement serves not only as a testament to Milton's intent to signal to his readership that his *magnum opus* represents a radical reimagining of poetics, setting it apart from traditional epics, but also as a preparatory gesture, priming the readers for the revolutionary content awaiting them in the subsequent books of the epic.

### 2.5.2 Didacticism of the Epic Genre

Didacticism occupies a central position in Milton's conceptualisation of the epic genre. *Apology for Smectymnuus* (1642), Milton stipulates that a poet should not "sing high praises of heroick men [...] unlesse he have in himselfe the experience and the practice of

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<sup>94</sup> In this context, it is essential to emphasise that John Milton's divergence from the models set by Homer and Virgil in *Paradise Lost* does not imply a lack of respect for these classical authors. Milton's assertion of superiority in his epic is not founded on his literary skills alone, but rather on the subject matter of *Paradise Lost*. Milton's admiration for Homer and Virgil is evident; he refers to Homer as "the rising sun or morning star of cultured literature" (xx). Regarding Virgil, Milton describes him as a "summus artifex decori," the great master of what is appropriate," a trait that Milton himself greatly valued (Martindale 107).

all which is praise-worthy” (*YP* 1:890). This assertion implies that an epic poet must personally embody the virtues they intend to depict in their narrative. Milton perceives a relationship between epic poetry and lived ethics. Consequently, it can be posited that, for Milton, the epic serves as an ethical roadmap for real-world conduct. Further emphasising the importance of didacticism in his conception of epic poetry, Milton notes: “If I were certain to write as men buy Leases, for the lives and downward, there ought no regard be sooner had then to God’s glory by the honour and instruction of my country” (*Reason, YP* 1:810). This statement reinforces the didactic imperative he envisions for the genre, aligning it closely with broader societal and moral objectives.

### **2.5.3 Didacticism of Epic Poetry and its Role in Aiding the Government in Educating the Nation**

After concentrating on the role of epic poetry in educating the populace of a nation, Milton further questions the methods of education and the manner in which the public is guided towards an improved existence in mind, body, and soul within a state:

[...] in every Nation; and are of power, beside the office of a pulpit, to inbreed and cherish in a great people the seeds of vertu and publick civility, to ally the perturbations of the mind, and set the affections in right tune, to celebrate in glorious and lofty Hymns the throne and equippage of Gods Almightyesse. (*Reason, YP* 1:816-17)

Milton openly indicates that education should not be restricted solely to religious teachings delivered from the pulpit. By invoking the “office of a pulpit,” he alludes to the traditional platform in churches or chapels where sermons are delivered. This pulpit stands as a symbol of religious authority and the transmission of spiritual lessons. Undoubtedly, it can be interpreted as a critique of institutionalized religion. Notably, Milton’s assertion about aligning “the affection in right tune” carries significance, as it can be construed as a censure of the doctrines espoused within institutionalized religion. As an advocate for individual liberty in both political and religious spheres, Milton perceived institutionalized religion as an extension of the state's ideology. Milton's stance was so unyielding that he even declares, “[T]yranny had invaded the Church” (*Reason of Church Government, YP* 1:823), signifying his profound reservations about the educational content promulgated within institutionalised Churches.

He further delves deeply into the mechanisms of education within a nation, emphasizing the pivotal role of the state in shaping educational outcomes:

If our Magistrates, as in those famous government of old would take into their care, not only the deciding of our contentious Law cases and brauls, but the managing of our publick sports and festival pastimes [...] but such as may inure and harden our bodies by martial exercises to al warlike skil and performance, and may civilize, adorn, and make discreet our minds by the learned and affable meeting of frequent Academies, and the procurement of wise and artfull recitations sweetened with eloquent and gracefull inticements to the love and practice of justice, temperance, and fortitude, instructing and bettering the Nation at all opportunities, that the call of wisdom and vertu may be heard every where [...] (*Reason, YP 1:819*)

Milton further argues that the means of education should also be shouldered by the state officials which was once achieved by the old examples of good government. Then he states: “Whether this [the instruction of nation] may not be not only in Pulpits, but after another persuasive method, at set and solemn Paneguries, in Theaters, porches, or what other place, or way may win most upon the people to receiv at once both recreation, & instruction, let them in authority consult” (*Reason, YP 1:819-20*). Here it is visible that Milton attributes great significance to education of the public in any way possible.

The structured sequence of discussions in the preface to the second book of *The Reason of Church Government* is also noteworthy. Milton starts with the didactic significance of epic poetry. He then ponders its relevance to his contemporary society, considering whether other literary media, like drama, might be more potent tools for instruction. Progressing, he emphasises that the education of the public should not be the exclusive responsibility of the pulpits or institutionalised churches. Instead, the state ought to play a more proactive role. The culminating point of his argument is the recognition of the necessity of employing all available educational means for the betterment of the nation. This is highly important in order to see how Milton desires to use his art, his epic poetry, for the purpose of education of his nation. He discusses the role of government, but within this context, epic poetry emerges as a “collateral help,” to use Davenant’s terminology. Milton openly states that if he were to write an epic, “there ought no regard be sooner had, then to [...] instruction of my country” (*Reason, YP 1:810*), indicating how significant “instruction” or didacticism holds for him.

#### 2.5.4 Whether Epic or Drama is Better Suited for Didacticism

It should be noted here that within the framework of his literary contemplations, Milton grapples with the potential challenges of penning epic poetry during a period that might be ill-equipped to value its profundity, and within an environmental context seemingly inhospitable for its cultivation. He expresses this reservation, stating, “if to the instinct of nature and the emboldening of art ought may be trusted, and that there be nothing adverse in our climate, or the fate of this age” (*Reason*, *YP* 1:814). This concern finds resonance in *Paradise Lost* where he articulates his aspiration to realize his epic vision “unless an age too late, or cold / Climate, or Years damp [his] intended wing” (IX.44-45). Such a bitter thought compels Milton to introspectively consider the efficacy of the epic form as a didactic tool as compared with drama and this leads him to postulate, “whether those Dramatic constitutions, wherein Sophocles and Euripides raigne, shall be found more doctrinal and exemplary to a Nation” (*Reason*, *YP* 1:814). What is underlined here is Milton’s unwavering commitment to didacticism within his literary undertakings. It foregrounds his belief in literature not just as an art form, but also as a potent vehicle for moral and ethical instruction, reflecting his deep-seated conviction in the pedagogical power of the written word.

#### 2.5.5 Why Milton Chose Epic over Tragedy

The discourse surrounding Milton’s preference for either the epic or tragic form as a conduit for didacticism offers profound insights into the structural and poetic choices he made in *Paradise Lost*. It can be inferred from a draft in Milton’s “Trinity College Manuscript,” that his initial intention was to pen a drama entitled *Adam Unparadised*. Evidently, Milton originally sought to portray the fall of humankind within the conventions of the tragic genre. This raises the pertinent question: why did Milton abandon the idea of a tragedy in favour of an epic?

Marianna Woodhull posits three reasons for Milton’s change in direction: firstly, she suggests that the narrative of Adam’s fall is not an isolated incident but rather is situated within a broader, more monumental event, namely the confrontation between the Son and Satan. Such a vast tableau is arguably better suited to the epic form, given the genre’s capacity to accommodate “marvellous details” (16). Furthermore, Woodhull advances a compelling point which I deem particularly salient: she asserts that the epic genre permits

a more optimistic perspective on humanity's potential for post-fall redemption. She elucidates this by stating, "in an epic the emphasis is thrown upon the triumph of a cause, in a tragedy the stress is upon the suffering of the hero" (17). Woodhull interprets Milton's transition from tragedy to epic as an indication of his recognition of the inherent limitations of the tragic form. From her perspective, Milton perceived the epic as a more apt vessel for his vision. While Woodhull's observations are indeed persuasive, I posit that she perhaps overlooks the intricate poetics woven into the fabric of the epic. Her analysis, rooted in the paradigms of classical epic and tragedy, posits the Son as the quintessential epic hero due to his role as the "hero who triumphs" and identifies the Son's victory as the primary thematic focus (16, 43).<sup>95</sup>

However, I wish to propose an alternative perspective. I am inclined to believe that Milton underwent a reconceptualization of Adam's character, no longer perceiving him through the tragic lens. By endowing Adam with novel attributes, I assert, Milton pioneered a fresh form of epic heroism. In my estimation, Milton reframed Adam's narrative, not through the tragic prism, but by reimagining him as a unique epic hero. As such, Milton keenly explores and champions innovative forms of epic heroism, both political — encompassing concepts like free-will, lineage— and theological, including themes of obedience and the Thomist notion of courage as endurance and patience. A deeper exploration of this proposition, particularly the metamorphosis of Milton's epic protagonists in alignment with his didactic objectives, will be undertaken in subsequent sections of this chapter. Another important aspect of choosing epic was without doubt the fact that Milton saw it as the foundational nationalistic genre.

### **2.5.6 Milton's Desire to Verse a Nationalistic Epic**

Milton's conceptualisation of epic genre serving a nation is visible in his interpretation of the history of epic poetry. The passage below from Milton's *Reason of Church*

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<sup>95</sup> In this context, it is imperative to foreground a compelling argument on this topic presented exclusively by Arnold Williams. Williams asserts that the primary impetus behind Milton's predilection for the epic rather than tragedy was the challenge of delineating the motivation for Satan's rebellion. According to Williams, Milton believed that *in medias res* "gave him [Milton] time to build up the character of Satan into an artistically convincing portrait of pride, ambition, and envy before he had to supply the motivation for Satan's rebellion [hence] the reader then comes to the account of the rebellion with a characterization of the fallen Satan in his mind and is inclined to read into the unfallen Satan the vices of the fallen Satan" (5).



*Government* elucidates the multi-faceted ambitions underpinning his epic endeavour related to nationalism:

What the greatest and choicest withs of Athens, Rome or modern Italy, and those Hebrews of old, did for their country, I in my proportion, with this over and above of being a Christian, might doe for mine; not caring to be once nam'd abroad, though perhaps I could attaine to that, but content with these British lands as my world, whose fortune hath hitherto bin, that if the Athenians, as some say, made their small deeds great and renowned by their eloquent writers, England hath had her noble achievements made small by the unskilfull handling of monks and mechanicks (*Reason of Church Government*, YP 1:812).

Milton reveals a calculated literary nationalism, acknowledging the influence of Athens, Rome, and Italy, but emphasizing his focus on enriching these “British lands.” This nationalistic lens serves as a strategic manoeuvre to situate his work within a broader literary tradition while still targeting a British audience. Furthermore, his Christian faith is not presented as mere accoutrement but as a qualitative differentiator, infusing the epic form with a layer of ethical and spiritual depth that pagan predecessors could not achieve. While he entertains the idea of international fame, Milton prioritises national impact over global recognition, indicating a more nuanced interplay between personal ambition and collective identity. His critique of previous narrators—specifically, their “unskilfull handling”—both identifies a cultural void and situates him as the ideal candidate to fill it, aiming to elevate Britain’s “noble achievements” through eloquent narration. This role of eloquence correlates with the Athenian tradition of rendering “small deeds great and renowned,” positioning Milton as an aspirational narrator who seeks transformative impact on his countrymen.

### **2.5.7 The Choice of Language in *Paradise Lost***

Milton’s choice of English for his epic is a significant aspect that sheds light on his didactic objectives and aspirations on epic poetry. Throughout his writing career, Milton predominantly employs Latin, the lingua franca of seventeenth-century Europe, for his political works. However, for the purpose of writing an epic to glorify God and instruct his countrymen, he opts for English. He states that he

knew it would be hard to arrive at the second rank among the Latines, [he] apply'd my selfe to that resolution which *Ariosto* follow'd against the perswasions of

*Bembo*,<sup>96</sup> to fix all the industry and art I could unite to the adorning of my native tongue; not to make verbal curiosities the end, that were a toylsom vanity, but to be an interpreter & relater of the best and sagest things among mine own Citizens throughout this Iland in the mother dialect. (*Reason*, *YP* 1:810-11)

In this context, it is evident that Milton is aware of the linguistic limitations imposed by his choice to write in English, as opposed to Latin. This decision confines his work largely to an English-speaking audience, thereby diminishing his potential for broader European readership (Sasek 11). Such a limitation can be interpreted as a form of sacrifice on Milton's part, strategically undertaken to fulfil his didactic objectives specifically aimed at his English compatriots. In prioritizing the educational needs of his countrymen, Milton is clearly willing to forgo the opportunity for a wider European influence. This particular decision illuminates the inherent politics of didacticism within Milton's theoretical framework of epic poetry. His focus is not solely on the literary merits of the work, but also on its educational impact on a national audience. This intent is clarified through Milton's own words: "what the greatest and choycest wits of Athens, Rome, or modern Italy, and those Hebrews of old did for their country, I in my proportion with this over and above of being a Christian, might doe for mine" (*Reason*, *YP* 1:812). By invoking historical precedents, Milton situates his endeavour within a lineage of intellectual contributions aimed at national betterment. Thus, Milton's decision to employ English in his epic poetry is not merely a linguistic choice, but also a manifestation of nationalistic aspirations. His choice of language serves as a crucial vehicle for his overarching didactic and nationalistic aims.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Loewenstein interprets this reference by Milton as an allusion to a notable anecdote about Ludovico Ariosto (1474–1533), an Italian poet. Ariosto, reportedly, disregarded the counsel of his friend Pietro Bembo (1470–1547), a prominent figure in the revival of classical tradition, who advised him to write in Latin. Instead, Ariosto chose to pen his romance epic, *Orlando Furioso* (1532), in his native language. He justified this choice by expressing his desire to be regarded as the foremost among Italian writers, rather than a secondary or tertiary figure among Latin authors (Loewenstein, *Major Writings on Liberty, Politics, Religion* 89).

<sup>97</sup> In the twilight of his life, John Milton harboured little expectation of attaining a European reputation as an epic poet, a constraint exacerbated by his linguistic choice for *Paradise Lost*, given that Latin was the lingua franca of the era (Spencer 81). Consequently, Milton's decision to compose in English constituted a linguistic barrier, effectively circumscribing the trans-Channel dissemination of his work and precluding his inclusion in the pantheon of Europe's epic poets. Remarkably, the vicissitudes of time have led to a radical transformation in the global linguistic landscape. Latin, once the international scholarly language, has been relegated to a specialised, academic sphere, leading many Latin epics to gather proverbial dust on library shelves. Meanwhile, *Paradise Lost* has gained global recognition, not solely on account of its intrinsic literary merits but also because English has supplanted Latin as the modern lingua franca. Thus,

### 2.5.8 Giving Up on Arthurian Epic

Milton's preliminary tendencies towards nationalism within the epic genre are evident from his early compositions, which manifest an inclination to construct an epic centred on King Arthur. To comprehensively understand Milton's poetic and political orientations in *Paradise Lost*, it becomes imperative to explore the factors that initially enticed him to contemplate an Arthurian epic, and subsequently, the reasons that prompted him to forsake this concept.

Milton's early aspirations to compose an Arthurian epic are first mentioned in *Mansus*, as Helen Cooper highlights. This poem, dedicated to Giovanni Battista Manso, a prominent Italian patron of literature and supporter of Tasso, features Milton expressing his desire to narrate the tales of "the kings of my native land and Arthur, who set wars raging even under the earth, or tell of the great-hearted heroes of the round table" (Cooper 253). A few months later, Milton reiterates his intention to compose a British epic in *Epitaphium Damonis*, his pastoral elegy mourning the loss of his friend Charles Diodati, further solidifying his early epic ambitions (Cooper 255).

Condee also elucidates on Milton's contemplation of King Arthur as the potential protagonist for his intended epic: "Certainly a poet who is looking (as Milton was in 1641) for the proper king or knight to be doctrinal and exemplary to his nation ought not at the same time to turn his back on the native language of his nation" (164). Through Condee's observation, it becomes evident that Milton's selection of Arthur was aimed at offering his compatriots a recognisable persona with which they could both identify and derive lessons from. The deliberation over language further substantiates this argument. By employing the vernacular of his compatriots, Milton aspired to connect with and edify them more profoundly. This then poses the compelling query: what factors precipitated Milton's decision to forsake the notion of penning an Arthuriad?

Lawrence Sasek posits that Milton chose not to compose an Arthuriad, asserting that Milton "considered himself at work fulfilling the patriotic aim as early as 1651, and that in 1658 he turned to the subject of *Paradise Lost* for wholly positive reasons, confident

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Milton's initial "constraint" has metamorphosed into an asset, contributing to the work's enduring international appeal. So unfolds the irony woven by destiny.

that his aim had been achieved” (Sasek 2). Sasek interprets this “patriotic aim” to signify Milton’s support for the establishment of the Commonwealth, a goal he believed had already come to fruition. Conversely, Basil Willey contends that Milton’s abandonment of Arthurian subjects was not solely driven by a sense of patriotic accomplishment. According to Willey, Milton’s disinclination towards the Arthurian material emanated partly from his rejection of the genre of romance. As a Protestant intellectual cognisant of the burgeoning scientific milieu of his era, Milton was inclined to select a subject rooted in historical veracity, a criterion the Arthurian legends arguably failed to meet (Willey 226-27).

Tillyard posits that when Milton embarked upon his long-anticipated epic in the late 1650s, he relinquished the idea of using Arthur as its foundational material. Tillyard’s initial rationale suggests that Arthur’s status as a Royalist hero presented a conundrum for Milton. Namely, it would be an arduous endeavour for him to maintain, as the centrepiece of his narrative, a figure that was emblematic of his adversaries in the aftermath of the Civil War (*The Miltonic Setting* 192-93). Tillyard further proposes that as Milton progressed with time, he “grows disillusioned with his country” (*The Miltonic Setting* 199).<sup>98</sup> Adding nuance to this perspective, Tillyard asserts, “Milton grew to think differently about politics. When he comes to write his great poem, politics have become less important than the fate of the individual soul” (165).

While the association of Arthur with Royalist symbolism, as proposed by Tillyard, is a tenable argument, the latter supposition of Milton’s disillusionment with politics appears more contentious. As previously noted, Milton started his epic around 1658, coinciding with the concluding years of the Commonwealth. Notwithstanding the Republic’s impending dissolution, Milton unwaveringly upheld his political doctrines, calling upon his fellow citizens to fight the potential reinstatement of the monarchy. Challenging Tillyard’s claim, there is a clear absence of concrete evidence pointing to Milton’s increasing disillusionment leading to his withdrawal from politics. In fact, Milton’s

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<sup>98</sup> This similar argument of disillusionment can also be observed in Malcolm Mackenzie Ross’s *Milton’s Royalism*, pages: 55-57, 95, and also in Herbert Grierson’s *Milton and Wordsworth*, pages: 78-79. In her enduring 1932 research, Roberta Florence Brinkley offers a swift examination of Milton’s allusions to Arthurian lore. She posits that Milton relinquished his pursuit of an Arthurian epic due to an escalating inclination towards the Saxons as opposed to the British in *The Arthurian Legend in the Seventeenth Century*, pages: 126-141.

ongoing commitment to writing revolutionary texts evident in works like *The Readie and Easie Way* (1660), even after initiating his epic in 1658, and his consistent upholding of revolutionary ideals in these works demonstrate his unwavering political position. This presents a narrative that is distinctly at odds with Tillyard's viewpoint. The shortcomings in Tillyard's analysis appear to arise from his tendency to evaluate *Paradise Lost* and its central characters largely through the lens of the epic genre and theological considerations, thereby sidelining the inherent political undertones of the epic.

Numerous critics from the twentieth century have emphasised that *Paradise Lost* is deeply entwined with the political backdrop of its period. This epic represents a pivotal moment in Milton's literary endeavours. He moved from composing overt political tracts, where he fearlessly voiced his revolutionary views, to a more nuanced literary domain, subtly weaving his political sentiments for an astute readership. The tumultuous political landscape largely influenced this shift in his writing style. However, it is essential to underline that *Paradise Lost* should not be regarded as just a covert political statement. The epic delves into diverse themes, spanning theology, philosophy, and critical analysis of the epic tradition, among others. Among these varied subjects, politics undeniably serves as one of the central pillars supporting Milton's grand narrative and his didacticism.

### **2.5.9 Audience**

The centrality of didacticism in Milton's conceptualization of the epic genre is unmistakable. A crucial question then arises: who constitutes the intended audience that Milton seeks to instruct? This question is of paramount importance for tracing the developmental arc of Milton's epic heroes. Apart from the enigmatic phrase "fit audience [...] though few" (VII.31) in *Paradise Lost*, Milton offers scant explicit commentary on this issue. The subject of his audience has been a locus of intense scholarly debate among Miltonic critics. Some contend that Milton's intended audience is an elite cadre capable of discerning the nuanced teachings he aims to impart, while others counter this view by arguing for a broader, more inclusive readership. Prior to delving into how Milton's epic heroes serve as educational vehicles, it is essential to engage comprehensively with the complexities surrounding the question of audience.

In examining the intended audience for epic literature during the period, conflicting perspectives arise. Initially, it was considered that epics were predominantly aimed at an elite readership. As articulated by Johnson in his *Life of Milton*, he contends that, during this era, “to read was not then a general amusement [...] the number was then comparatively small” (135). This statement underscores the assumption that reading, and by extension, the epic form, was largely the preserve of a select, educated few.

However, this narrative is complicated by N.H. Keeble, who argues that the political and religious ferment of the time spawned “an unprecedented increase in press activity associated with the gathering momentum of the English revolution” (“Pamphlet wars” 429). He cites Richard Baxter, a Puritan minister, who lamented the profusion of texts emerging during this period: “Every ignorant, empty braine [...] hath the liberty of the Presse whereby [...] the number of books is grown so great that they begin with many to grow contemptible” (qtd. in Keeble, “Pamphlet wars” 429). Building on this, Keeble further posits that the era saw a dramatic escalation both in the act of writing and the number of readers. As he observes, “[n]ever before had so many people turned to writing, never before had so many seen their thoughts into print, and never before had what they printed generated such extensive interest and public debate” (*Writing of The English Revolution 2*).

Within this broader framework, Condee delves into the literary expectations of Milton’s readership. He argues that Milton’s audience would have been familiar with the epic conventions utilised by previous epic poets such as Homer and Virgil, arguing Milton “could rely on this knowledge in his readers, and he invites comparison with Virgil and Homer in his introduction to *Paradise Lost*” (54). In a similar vein, Davis Harding, in the inaugural chapter “Fit Audience” in *The Club of Hercules* (1962), elaborates on the educated background of Milton’s readership. Harding contends that Milton’s “fit audience” would have possessed a substantial familiarity with two expansive domains: Biblical texts and classical languages and literature, with particular emphasis on Latin. He notes that schoolboys of the time were well-versed in the works of Ovid and Virgil, and some even had a “certain familiarity with the main outlines of the Homeric story” (23). Harding concludes with the observation that Milton’s audience was “unusually well equipped to understand his uses of classical literature and had, furthermore, developed a

background of reading and listening habits which guaranteed a closer and more intelligent inspection of *Paradise Lost* than most modern readers are qualified to give it” (10). Thus, the academic discourse underscores the notion that Milton’s audience was not only familiar with epic conventions, but was also extensively educated in both Biblical and classical literature. This indicates that the prevailing educational curricula at the grammar-schools of the time ensured that Milton’s potential readers were adept in understanding the complex intertextual layers and subversions present in his magnum opus.

In the scholarly debate related to Milton’s concept of his “fit audience,” Warren Chernaik offers a nuanced perspective. Chernaik concentrates on the semantics of the terms “fit” and “audience” as used by Milton in his political writings, probing into the specific demographic that the poet envisaged as his readership. Contrary to the notion that Milton’s works were universally intended, Chernaik posits that “Milton’s ‘fit audience’ can be accepted ‘as an intellectual elite, those ‘of a better breeding,’ capable of sound judgment’” (117). According to Chernaik, this inclination towards a discerning readership is evident even in Milton’s early tracts, where the poet explicitly states his desire to engage with an “elegant and learned reader” (118).

However, Chernaik is careful to distinguish that Milton’s conception of “fit audience,” though few in number, is not demarcated by elite social standing or wealth. Rather, the focus is “on the moulding of future citizens, with an emphasis on intellectual pursuits” (121). His interpretation finds resonance in the work of Loewenstein, particularly in his commentary on Milton’s choice of blank verse. Loewenstein argues that Milton aspired to reach “cultured readers sharing his vision of political and religious reformation [...] who will appreciate the boldness of his prophetic enterprise and ‘vast Design’” (*Landmarks* 20). These remarks are indeed noteworthy.

Within this scholarly context, it is evident that the scarcity of Milton’s readers is not a reflection of socio-economic factors but rather of intellectual readiness. As Davis Harding has pointed out, a general audience equipped with a school-level education during Milton’s time was largely familiar with epic traditions due to the academic curricula. Consequently, even though Milton might have penned his epic in a state of despair, without the expectation of reaching a broad readership, there existed a potentially

receptive audience. The multiple reprints of *Paradise Lost* in a relatively short period substantiate this claim.

Hence, while Milton may have conceptualised his “fit audience” as numerically limited, this limitation is principally defined by intellectual engagement rather than wealth or social standing. The academic milieu of the time, marked by a curriculum rich in epic traditions, suggests that a discerning, if not extensive, readership was indeed attainable.

### **2.5.10 The Methods to Instruct His Audience**

Building upon the question of Milton’s intended audience, the ensuing critical inquiry focuses on how Milton sought to impart instruction to his readers. An interesting approach was put forth by Stanley Fish, a distinguished twentieth-century Miltonist. In his landmark text *Surprised by Sin* (1967), Fish advances the provocative thesis that readers are intended to experience a fall analogous to that of Adam, thereby gaining insight into their own lack of innocence:

(1)The poem’s centre of reference is to educate the reader who is also its subject; (2) Milton’s purpose is to educate the reader to an awareness of his position and responsibilities as a fallen man, and to a sense of the distance which separates him from the innocence once his; (3) Milton’s method is to re-create in the mind of the reader (which is, finally, the poem’s sense) the drama of the Fall, to make him fall again exactly as Adam did and with Adam’s troubled clarity, that is to say, ‘not deceived.’ (Fish 1)

In Stanley Fish’s scholarly interpretation of John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, the engagement with the text is conceived as an intricate, didactic endeavour that extends beyond literary appreciation. According to Fish, the poem immerses readers in an educative process that prompts existential and theological self-examination. Readers are not passive consumers of the text but rather active participants in a moral and spiritual drama that mirrors the Fall of Adam. This interaction is deepened by a continual dialogue with various authoritative figures embedded within the text—God, the Son, the narrator, and angels—each serving to provide a corrective lens through which readers can assess their own fallen nature and ethical obligations. These interventions are not random but appear to be meticulously orchestrated by Milton to maintain a balance between self-discovery and guided revelation, thereby fulfilling the poem’s pedagogical intent.



Furthermore, Fish underscores the fundamentally theological orientation of the poem. His analysis elevates the text from a literary masterpiece to a form of religious or spiritual discourse. He even goes on to say that “for the Christian reader *Paradise Lost* is a means of confirming him in his faith” (55). This observation cements the poem’s role not just as a narrative retelling of the Biblical story of the Fall, but also as an experiential platform designed for the spiritual exploration, reaffirmation, and ultimately, the theological edification of the reader.

In contrast to Stanley Fish’s theological interpretation of John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, Sharon Achinstein adopts a distinct analytical lens that diverges significantly in its assessment of Milton’s objectives vis-à-vis his audience. While Fish postulates that Milton aspires to engage his readers in a theological journey toward understanding their own fallen nature, Achinstein argues that Milton seeks to politically activate his readers, training them to become discerning agents of revolutionary change. In *Milton and the Revolutionary Reader* (2016), Achinstein indicates that Milton aims to cultivate his readers as agents of political change, emphasising how

Milton aimed not simply to pass on his revolutionary or theological ideas in code, but also to stress training in fit reading as a political lesson [...] Rather than dismissing the public as an audience for politics, Milton aimed to create revolutionary readers, those who would be able to read and understand the coercive nature of many printed opinions. The revolutionary reader would be well armed to see through the manipulations of future politicians. (224-25)

Achinstein’s arguments are predicated on the notion that *Paradise Lost* stands in a lineage of pamphlet literature that originated during the Civil War and persisted through the Restoration, thereby fostering a new cadre of activist readers pivotal for instigating revolution. However, this view is met with a critique from Thomas N. Corns, who argues that while Achinstein “historicizes the reader as a developing and shaping presence, she neither adduces evidence for the distribution or reception of specific texts nor identifies who read them and why” (Corns 540). Corns’s criticisms raise valid concerns. While the question of reader identity has long been a contentious issue in Milton studies, the greater problem might lie in Achinstein’s conflation of *Paradise Lost* with Milton’s earlier prose tracts that were decidedly revolutionary during the Civil War and the Commonwealth period. This viewpoint risks anachronism by implying a continuity of sociopolitical

context from the Commonwealth into the Restoration. It is critical to recognize that *Paradise Lost* was a work commenced in the waning days of the Commonwealth and completed during the Restoration—a period less accommodating to Milton’s radical political views. Given this change in milieu, extending the revolutionary intent of his earlier prose to this epic work may warrant further scrutiny. He was no longer in a position to openly express his radical and revolutionary political viewpoints, apprehensive of the potential repercussions that could result in his confinement or worse.

While I concur with Achinstein’s premise that Milton embeds political lessons within *Paradise Lost* as warnings to his readers about the potential deceptions of future politicians, I diverge from her assertion that Milton’s objective was to cultivate “active revolutionary readers.” It is indisputable that Milton sought to instruct his readers, yet the modality of this instruction appears to be different from what Achinstein suggests. During the waning moments of the Commonwealth, even as the prospect of Restoration loomed ominously, Milton ardently championed revolutionary principles in his prose tracts, urging his compatriots to oppose the reinstatement of the Stuart monarchy. However, post-Restoration, Milton was acutely aware that the milieu for active revolutionary engagement had evaporated and that advocating for such revolutionary ideas could be perilous.

Consequently, I argue that with *Paradise Lost*, Milton’s objective shifts: he aims not to galvanize his readers into revolutionary activism that would engender systemic change, but rather to incite a form of personal cognizance or enlightenment regarding the inherent complexities and moral dimensions of theology, politics, and philosophy especially through his epic heroes and to guide them to the idea that they have both the right and capability to steer their own destinies and the course of religious and political affairs. In this sense, Milton’s strategy aligns more closely with Fish’s audience model, which posits that Milton encourages self-critical theological reflection among his readers. However, where Fish perceives primarily theological underpinnings, I argue that political dimensions also resonate within the text. While Fish accurately contends that Milton engages his readers in a self-examining journey to question their faith, this dialectic, I believe, contains multiple layers, including the realm of politics. Indeed, Milton crafts a readerly experience in which the allure of eloquent rhetoric, notably in Satan’s speeches,

serves as a didactic lesson. In an era where oratory and political discourse assumed an unprecedented significance, Milton admonishes his readers to maintain a vigilant critical stance against persuasive rhetoric. Thus, the epic serves as a nuanced platform for both theological and political edification, instructing readers to be continually self-aware and discerning.

## **2.6 WHO IS THE EPIC HERO OF *PARADISE LOST*?**

For some scholars, the epic hero of *Paradise Lost* is Christ, while others contend that it is Satan; another school of thought posits Adam in this central role, and there are even those who argue that Milton himself is the epic hero. Prior to delving into the evolution of Miltonic epic heroes, it is imperative to first review the extensive body of literature that grapples with the issue of identifying the epic hero. This preliminary analysis aims to clarify the unique direction of the current dissertation in comparison to prevailing interpretations, while also establishing the selection of epic heroes to be examined in this chapter. This step is crucial, as a thorough understanding of who constitutes an epic hero in *Paradise Lost* is foundational for demonstrating their evolution throughout the narrative.

The question concerning the identification of the epic hero in John Milton's *Paradise Lost* is indeed an intricate intellectual inquiry that has captivated scholars and critics for nearly three centuries. The conundrum is fundamentally linked to the kinds of questions that critics pose in their quest to determine the epic's hero. These interrogative lines of inquiry include, but are not limited to: what constitutes the principal action in the epic narrative—whether it is the fall of the celestial angels or that of humankind; who emerges as the noblest figure; around which character the pivotal action revolves; who personifies positive attributes; who ultimately emerges triumphant, or alternatively, who manifests victory even in the face of defeat; and what overarching objective Milton aimed to accomplish through this epic work.

The resolution to these complex questions varies significantly, dependent on individual hermeneutic approaches to the text, resulting in a multiplicity of answers. Some critics, for instance, maintain that only specific sections of *Paradise Lost* fulfil the conventional

criteria of an epic narrative. As such, they argue that the central heroic figure of this isolated section should be recognised as the epic hero of the entire composition.

Additionally, certain critics adopt a more traditionalist stance, evaluating potential heroes through the prism of classical epic conventions, often eschewing nuanced considerations of the particular narrative embedded within *Paradise Lost*. For these scholars, the decisive factors lie in the degree to which characters in the epic resemble established archetypes from traditional heroic narratives. Thus, they attribute the status of the epic hero to the character who most embodies the features and attributes historically ascribed to heroes in the epic tradition. Hence, the question of identifying the epic hero in *Paradise Lost* is both intricate and multi-faceted, inviting a range of interpretations. The divergent answers serve as indicators of the different methodological approaches and critical questions that scholars bring to their reading of this seminal work.

The responses to the question of identifying the epic hero in *Paradise Lost* can be classified into three distinct groups: the first comprises those aligned with what is commonly referred to as the Satanist school, which argues it is Satan who is the hero of the epic; the second consists of those advocating for the Son as the epic hero; and the third encompasses those who posit Adam in this pivotal role of the central epic hero of *Paradise Lost*.

### **2.6.1 Satan**

John Dennis contends that Satan is the authentic hero of Milton's epic, arguing that Milton "knew very well, that in *Homer* the Action lay chiefly between Man and Man: For *Achilles* and *Hector* are properly the Principals, and the Gods are but Seconds. [Milton] was resolved therefore, that his Principals should be the Devil on one side and Man on the other: and the Devil is properly his Hero, because he gets the better" (n.p). This suggests that, for Dennis, the ultimate criteria for determining the epic hero are rooted in the notions of success and victory within the epic narrative.

William Blake's commentary on Satan stands as one of the most impactful and has resonated widely in the subsequent works of literary criticism. In his *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Blake famously observes, "[t]he reason Milton wrote in fetters when he wrote of Angels and God, and at liberty when of Devil and Hell, is because he was a

true Poet and of the Devil's party without knowing it" (150). When Blake's opposition to institutionalised religion and tyranny is taken into consideration, it is clear that his analysis is fundamentally influenced by the idea that Satan acts as a liberator against the tyranny of God. This interpretation indirectly lends support to the notion that Satan is the epic hero of *Paradise Lost*.

William Hazlitt posits that Satan occupies the role of the epic hero in *Paradise Lost*, because of the self-will and indomitable spirit he embodies. Hazlitt argues that Satan is the most noble figure within the epic's tapestry, someone who, even when faced with the most devastating of defeats, retains the audacity to inaugurate a new theatre of conflict in his struggle against tyranny (124-25). Echoing a similar analytical framework, Percy Bysshe Shelley contends that Satan is the epic hero of *Paradise Lost*, distinguished both physically and morally. According to Shelley, Satan's heroism is underscored by multiple facets: his formidable physical attributes, his bold disposition, and his apparent moral nobility, the latter of which is revealed in his dignified concession to defeat and his unwavering resolve to oppose divine tyranny. Shelley observes that God, "in the cold security of undoubted triumph, inflicts upon his enemy the most horrible revenge" (30-31). This observation serves as the basis for Shelley's argument that Satan's moral stature surpasses that of God: whereas God manifests tyrannical cruelty in victory, Satan embodies leadership qualities and displays courage even in defeat.<sup>99</sup>

Thomas Babington Macaulay argues that Satan is victorious, perhaps not in his war but in his intellectual stance because Satan's

intellectual nature is victorious over the extremity of pain. Amidst agonies which cannot be conceived without horror, he deliberates, resolves, and even exalts. Against the sword of Michael, against the thunder of Jehovah, against the flaming lake and the marl burning with solid fire, against the prospect of an eternity of unintermitted misery, his spirit bears up unbroken. (41)

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<sup>99</sup> I believe the analogous viewpoints of William Blake and Percy Bysshe Shelley on the role of Satan as the epic hero in *Paradise Lost* are, to a significant extent, products of the historical and social contexts in which they lived. Their aversion to institutionalised religion and political tyranny likely shaped their readings of the text, arguably leading them to a particular, if not partial, understanding of Satan's character. It is my contention that their interpretations are not the result of an oversight or inability to discern the evolving complexities of Satan's character as revealed in the later portions of Milton's epic. Rather, they deliberately choose to maintain their stance, employing Satan as a vehicle to articulate their own socio-political critiques of their respective eras.

Macaulay's conceptualisation of Satan as the central figure resonates with the earlier interpretive paradigms put forth by Blake and Shelley.

The central issue with scholars who view Satan as a liberator and God as a tyrant resides in their disproportionate focus on the initial books of *Paradise Lost*. While the initial magnetism of Satan is indisputable, as he does indeed portray himself as a liberator in these early sections, his authentic intentions and inherent nature become manifest in the subsequent portions of the text. I argue that these critics overlook what Milton sought to accomplish with the character of Satan: to illuminate the perils of persuasive rhetoric, a theme to which I shall return in greater detail later in this chapter, specifically in the section dedicated to a novel attribute of the epic hero introduced by Milton—Rhetorical Prowess. These scholars succumb to Satan's oratorical craft, precisely as Milton intended, yet neglect to apprehend Satan's genuine nature as subsequently elucidated by Milton.

John Ruskin hints that Satan functions as the epic hero primarily on the basis that he perceives the principal action of the poem to be the fall of the angels, with Satan serving as the pivotal figure driving this narrative<sup>100</sup> (156-57). Similarly, Alexander Raleigh argues that Satan merits the designation of the title epic hero due to the poem's focalisation around Satan's actions and accomplishments<sup>101</sup> (132-33). David Masson contends that the defining features of epics are their grand actions, and by extension, that epic heroes are characterised by physical dynamism. According to Masson, Satan qualifies as the hero in Milton's opus because he is a "gigantic being stepping forth into colossal activity" (12).

### 2.6.2 Christ, The Son

Additionally, various critics maintain that the real epic hero in *Paradise Lost* is the Son. According to Addison, Milton did not aim to craft an epic centred around epic heroes,

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<sup>100</sup>Here, I shall, however, acknowledge that Ruskin does not specifically state that Satan is the epic hero of the narrative, it is rather my interpretation of his argument that the fall of the angels is the central action of the epic that suggests he accepts Satan as the epic hero. For further detail, please see Ruskin, John. *The Complete Works of John Ruskin: Sesame and Lilies the Ethics of the Dust, the Crown of Wild Olive*, edited by E T Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, vol. 8, Longman, 1905, pages: 156-61.

<sup>101</sup>Interestingly, Raleigh suggests that Milton's deliberate omission of the term "heroic" from the original titles of the text serves to obfuscate the identity of the epic's hero. Raleigh infers that this omission is tactical, implemented to circumvent questions concerning the heroic entity of the narrative, thereby intimating that the absence of a "heroic" subtitle could imply that, for Milton, only Satan would suffice as an answer to the query of who the hero might be (Raleigh 132-33).

arguing anyone who “looks for a hero in *Paradise Lost* searches for that which Milton never intended” (59). He instead sees the principal action as holding primacy over individual characters. Nonetheless, Addison states that “if he will need fix the name of an hero upon any person it is certainly the Messiah who is the hero, both in the principal action, and in the chief episodes” (59).<sup>102</sup>

Kuntz, in contrast, challenges the notion that Christ serves as the epic hero, citing his failure to meet the traditional criteria defining such a role. Kuntz elaborates that “Christ makes only four speeches in the whole of *Paradise Lost*. Considering the number of speeches in the poem, this is an exceptionally small number for the purported hero to make [...] Secondly, Christ appears only infrequently in the poem, and when He does appear He is always second to His Father [...] Thirdly, Christ’s principal action in the epic would seem to be His conquest of Satan and his crew’s eviction from heaven. This conquest is hardly the principal action of *Paradise Lost*” (14-15). While Kuntz’s argument concerning Christ’s peripheral role in the main action of the epic appears cogent, his analysis is not without its limitations. Specifically, Kuntz neglects to offer a comprehensive definition of what constitutes an epic hero. His assertion that Christ’s infrequent appearance disqualifies him from hero status is presented without further elaboration, thus leaving his argument only partially substantiated.

In his *Essays on Milton* (1914), Elbert N. S. Thompson identifies two discrete actions within the narrative framework of *Paradise Lost*: the fall of the angels and the fall of humanity. Rather than privileging one as the principal action, Thompson posits that both are central to the epic’s thematic landscape. He contends that Christ serves as the “hero of the first plot,” while Adam emerges as the “hero of the second and the representative of the whole race” (99).

### 2.6.3 Adam

Sir Richard Blackmore contends that Adam is the epic hero of *Paradise Lost*, owing to his status as the principal character around whom the narrative’s actions are centred.

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<sup>102</sup> John Leonard suggests that Addison is among the initial critics to suggest Milton’s novel form of heroism, which “repudiates martial heroism, but he retreats from this argument as soon as he has made it. His aim is to secure Milton a place among the classics, not to elevate him above them” (*Faithful Labourers* 275).

While Blackmore's perspective is not novel, he provides a compelling argument to bolster his position. According to Blackmore, older critics err in their understanding of

[b]elieve[ing] the Idea of Hero implies illustrious Vertue as well as military Fortitude; but this Error is occasion'd, by confounding the Notions of a Moral and a Poetical Hero; the first is always a Person of regular and vertuous Manners, but the other may be a agitious, unjust, and cruel Man; nothing being requir'd in his Character, but that it should be pertinent and necessary in the Fable; that is, that he should eminently serve to bring about the principal End, whence some useful and instructive Moral shall arise. (52)

Blackmore critiques those who search for a character embodying unblemished virtue, which he argues Adam does not possess. Instead, Adam's heroism, according to Blackmore, lies in his serving as a cautionary example. Leonard challenges Blackmore's argument, questioning why, if one were to adhere to these criteria, Satan would not make a more fitting epic hero than Adam (*Faithful Labourers* 289). Nonetheless, Blackmore's assertions remain pertinent. Although he operates within the traditional framework of a singular epic hero—leading him to identify Adam as such—he astutely recognises Milton's didactic intent to instruct the reader not only through virtuous exemplars to emulate but also through flawed characters from whom valuable lessons can be gleaned.

According to Richardson, the epic is centred on Adam, as he is “the First the Representative of Human Race” (clxvi). In Richardson's view, the narrative is inherently tied to Adam, whether or not he is directly featured in a given part of the story. He acknowledges that Adam diverges from traditional epic heroes, characterising him as someone who “is not Such a Conqueror as Subdu'd Armies or Nations, or Enemies in Single Combat, but his Conquest was What Justly gave Heroic Name to Person, and to Poem” (clxvi). This suggests an evolution in the criteria for epic heroism as presented by Milton, where victory is no longer an indispensable factor for qualifying as an epic hero.

Dr. Samuel Johnson asserts that Adam is indisputably the epic hero in John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. This perspective stands in stark opposition to Dryden's argument, which holds that Adam's shortcomings disqualify him from this esteemed role. Johnson's analysis centres on Milton's draft sketches for *Adam Unparadised*, a tragedy concerning the fall of Adam, found in the Trinity Manuscript. He contends that these sketches, particularly the composition and arrangement of scenes in *Adam Unparadised*,



demonstrate that Adam is indeed the focal character, as the entire narrative revolves around him (80-82).

Similarly, Tillyard asserts that either Adam alone or the pair of Adam and Eve together are the epic heroes because “[t]he whole trend of the plot and of the geography make Adam and Eve central; and Heaven and Hell fight for them” (*Studies* 50). He counters critiques suggesting that Adam lacks positive action by stating, “resistance to Satan was the best that was open to him [...] Milton deliberately pits the actions of Adam and Eve against those of Satan, considering them more truly heroic” (*Studies* 50). This perspective illuminates the innovative virtues that Milton seeks to convey through his chosen epic heroes, and thus Tillyard stands as one of the first to acknowledge the revolutionary intentions underlying Milton’s conceptualisation of epic heroism.

Kuntz contends that Adam qualifies as the epic hero in Milton’s masterwork because he possesses free will that influences his vicissitudes; additionally, Kuntz asserts Adam to be “morally and physically the most noble character in the poem prior to its fall” (64). To substantiate this, he refers to the lines from *Paradise Lost* such as “Two of far nobler shape, erect and tall, / Godlike erect, with native honour clad” (IV.288-89). Nevertheless, Kuntz’s interpretation encounters difficulties when scrutinised through the lens of classical epics. He deploys the term “noble,” but it does not align with the traditional conception of nobility found in classical epics, which is often delineated by *basileos*, lineage, and status. In this respect, Kuntz’s analytical framework is flawed: he seeks to identify Adam as an epic hero based on conventional attributes, whereas Adam would not meet the criteria for being an epic hero if assessed according to the norms of traditional epics. Nonetheless, a noteworthy contention posited by Kuntz pertains to Adam’s qualification as the epic hero, based on his moral comportment following the fall. Kuntz observes,

Satan and Adam both transgressed God’s law. Both were punished. Both admit the justice of their punishment, but they react in opposite ways. Satan resolved to war eternally against God. He simply refused to accept justice. Even more, he fought against it. Adam, on the other hand, accepts justice. He does not find acceptance easy, as is evidenced by his long discussion with Eve before they finally try to reconcile themselves with God. (75)

In this regard, Kuntz diverges from the commonplace analyses to assert that Adam's distinctiveness as an epic hero is not anchored in his fall, but rather in his subsequent ethical response towards divine justice. He underlines the potentiality of Adam's redemption as a salient criterion for his heroism.

## **2.7 CRITIQUE OF THE QUESTION “WHO IS THE EPIC HERO”**

### **2.7.1 The Problem of the Central and Singular Epic Hero**

Hence, it is visible that the question of identifying the epic hero in *Paradise Lost* is both intricate and multi-faceted. The divergent answers serve as indicators of the different methodological approaches and critical questions that critics bring to their reading of this seminal work. Yet, all the answers are grounded on the very same foundational question of “who is the epic hero in *Paradise Lost*?” This dissertation challenges this traditional line of questioning and argues that *Paradise Lost* represents a departure from the entrenched seventeenth-century concept that epics are characterised by a central, singular epic hero. Numerous previous critics, though they presented notable views, were fettered by this prevailing notion of the era. They have overlooked the crucial aspect that, to fully understand Milton's didactic intentions with his epic heroes, the question “who *is* the epic hero of *Paradise Lost*?” should be reframed to “who *are* the epic heroes of *Paradise Lost*?”

### **2.7.2 The Problem of Perfect Epic Hero: Paragon of Virtue or Flawed Figure?**

Before expanding on the identification of the epic heroes in *Paradise Lost* and the rationale for their status, it is necessary to highlight a problem in the arguments presented by the critics mentioned earlier. This problem centres on their belief that epic heroes should be flawless figures. These critics often identify the epic hero in *Paradise Lost* by considering who emerges victorious or who appears as the most noble figure in the epic. This perspective is influenced by the Italian Renaissance criticism, which posited that the epic hero should embody perfection in every attribute, aligning with the didactic purpose of epic poetry. According to this view, the effectiveness of an epic in imparting lessons is contingent on the exemplary nature of its hero. This concept of Italian Renaissance literary criticism was indeed prevalent in the seventeenth-century English literary milieu, as evidenced in other contemporary epics.

However, it is important to acknowledge that, as outlined in the Introduction, the perspectives of the French critic Bossu were influential in England during Milton's era. Bossu contends that readers can glean lessons not only from positive exemplars but also from negative ones, including instances of evil, flaws, and failures. My analysis suggests that Milton diverges from the traditional Italian concept of the epic hero as a paragon of virtue and aligns more closely with Bossu's viewpoint. This shift can be attributed to Milton's pedagogical approach, which encourages readers to engage actively and critically, discerning between appearances of goodness, virtue, evil, and tyranny. Milton offers negative examples to prompt self-reflection among his readers. He explicitly articulates this intent in *Paradise Lost*, stating: "[L]et it profit thee to have heard / By terrible Example the reward / Of disobedience" (VI.909-11). Thus, Milton's stance is unequivocal: he advocates for the instructional value of negative examples in imparting lessons.

Hence, I contend that Milton's departure from singular, central and perfect epic hero concept is motivated by two principal factors. First, Milton is compelled to amalgamate the genres of tragedy and epic through the intricate narratives of Adam and Eve, as well as Satan and the Son, owing to the inherent structure of the biblical story of the Fall and the rebellion of Angels.<sup>103</sup> This fusion necessitates the inclusion of both the Son and Satan as heroes, since there is an additional principal action—the rebellion and fall of the angels. Second, the overarching didactic aim of Milton necessitates the deployment of multiple epic heroes, both good and flawed, in *Paradise Lost* to enlighten his "fit audience" on multifaceted issues spanning theology, philosophy, and politics. Central to Milton's innovative approach to epic heroism is this dual imperative: he strategically develops each epic hero to impart specific moral or thematic lessons.

Consequently, a critical and intriguing inquiry presents itself: within the narrative landscape of *Paradise Lost*, which characters merit classification as epic heroes, and which of these figures should be pivotal in analysing Milton's revolutionary evolution of the epic hero archetype? This question gains significance in the context of the broader

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<sup>103</sup> As previously mentioned, Milton's initial intention was to compose a tragedy known as *Adam Unparadised* (early 1640s), evident in the "Trinity College Manuscript." However, he eventually abandoned this concept, concluding that the epic form was more suitable for didactic purposes. For further details on this subject, please see the section titled "Why Milton Chose Epic over Tragedy."

discourse previously articulated. Our exploration must venture beyond conventional paradigms, acknowledging that the epic heroes in *Paradise Lost* are not necessarily embodiments of perfection. Milton's narrative philosophy embraces the pedagogical potency of flawed characters, illustrating that lessons can be as effectively imparted through negative examples. Moreover, the quintessence of the epic in Milton's rendition does not obligatorily revolve around a singular, central heroic figure. This leads us to the profound and compelling question: "who, in the grand tapestry of *Paradise Lost*, truly constitute the epic heroes?"

Maurice Bowra posits that epic heroes essentially "represent something outside of themselves" (15), a concept further elucidated by Hainsworth who asserts that such heroes are "exploratory besides being celebratory; that is, they are concerned with something beyond themselves, with examining heroism as well as exemplifying it" (39). He additionally proclaims that epic heroes can instruct not merely through virtuous qualities and commendable deeds that invite emulation, but also via their lapses and shortcomings. The observations made by Bowra are indeed compelling, opening a new door to our understanding of the role of epic heroes; however, it appears that Bowra fails to enter through that door himself.<sup>104</sup> While I concur that his willingness to accept flawed heroes provides a valid interpretive framework for discerning Milton's intentions in *Paradise Lost*, his perspective seems limited. Specifically, although his assertion that epic heroes "represent something outside of themselves" (15) is meritorious, he does not fully grapple with the nuance that an epic poet might utilise multiple epic heroes to convey a variety of issues or impart different moral lessons. In *Paradise Lost*, each designated epic hero serves not merely as a singular pedagogical archetype but as a unique lens through which various theological, philosophical, and political matters can be explored, either through their virtues or vices.

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<sup>104</sup>Maurice Bowra aligns most closely with my perspective by suggesting that epic heroes serve to represent something beyond themselves. However, constrained by the traditional model of a single, central epic hero, he overlooks Milton's more nuanced ambition of employing multiple epic heroes in *Paradise Lost* to convey diverse moral and thematic lessons with each hero. In this conceptual framework, Bowra contends that "[a]s Aeneas stands for Rome, so Gama stands for Portugal, Gofredo for Christian chivalry, and Adam for all mankind" (16). Guided by this intellectual construct, he designates Adam as the quintessential epic hero of the narrative.

In this context, I contend John Milton's profound instructional objectives in *Paradise Lost* compel him to employ four epic heroes: The Son, Satan, Adam, and Eve. Through each character, Milton explores new forms of heroism that resonate with the unique demands of his contemporary epoch. This era, as depicted by Milton, represents a distinct phase of transition, marked by comprehensive and complex changes across social, theological, philosophical, and political dimensions. These changes necessitate the cultivation of novel virtues, behaviours, and ethical standards. In response, Milton strategically modifies each epic hero to embody specific types of heroism that align with the requirements of this transformative period. Milton's use of these epic heroes is not monolithic; each is crafted to fulfil different roles and embody different aspects of heroism. Even when multiple heroes are engaged in similar heroic themes, Milton assigns them unique roles and motivations. These epic heroes symbolize broader ideals that extend beyond their individual narratives. Their distinct relevance to particular heroic concepts is so critical that a failure to analyse their roles as epic heroes would result in an incomplete understanding of Milton's intentions regarding new forms of heroism.

A prime exemplar of this is Eve, often overlooked as an epic hero by numerous scholars, and predominantly interpreted in relation to Adam. Yet, a profound comprehension of Milton's conceptualisation of dis/obedience as a heroic virtue, and his perspective on reason as a tool for discerning good from evil, requires an evaluation of Eve and her own heroic stature. It is through Eve, rather than Adam, that Milton illuminates this particular new heroism, obedience.<sup>105</sup> Hence, if one were to examine the notion of obedience as a heroic virtue solely through Adam as the epic hero, the profundity of Milton's intentions would remain obscured or misunderstood. This serves as an exemplary illustration of how Milton employs specific epic heroes to articulate distinct heroisms, thereby educating his audience about these virtues in a transformative era.

Hence, in the following pages, I will undertake a comprehensive examination of the evolution of epic heroes within John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, focusing on Milton's initiation of specific new heroisms that respond to the contemporary contexts and demands of his era. This exploration will specifically encompass an in-depth analysis of

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<sup>105</sup> Please see the section titled "Adam and Eve: Obedience as Autonomy in *Paradise Lost*" in this chapter for further elaboration on this subject of obedience as a heroic virtue.

The Son, Satan, Adam, and Eve, with the objective of uncovering Milton's didactic intentions behind these epic heroes. Through this analysis, I aim to illuminate not only the individual attributes and narrative trajectories of these characters but also to articulate how their combined stories contribute to an enhanced understanding of the dynamic nature of heroism as conceived by Milton, in response to the socio-theological, philosophical, and political transformations of his time.

## 2.8 LINEAGE AND STATUS OF EPIC HERO

The notion of lineage,<sup>106</sup> when considered as a characteristic feature of epic heroes, emerges as a central theme in the metamorphoses of epic heroes in *Paradise Lost*. Through an exploration of lineage and status, Milton engages with intricate political and theological conundrums. The subjects of lineage and status are astutely explored by Milton in *Paradise Lost*, where he juxtaposes Satan and the Son within a political context, and Adam and Eve within a theological context. One might argue that this theme is so deeply embedded in the fabric of the epic that it acts as the base upon which the primary events of the narrative are built. Prior to an in-depth examination of Milton's perspective on this matter within the epic and his strategic employment of it to mould his heroes to give certain messages in politics and theology, it is essential to scrutinise the subject of lineage and merit as articulated in Milton's prose tracts.

Milton maintains a sceptical stance towards individuals who rise to prominence not due to genuine merit but rather owing to their lineage and inherited privileges. For Milton, merit embodies a synthesis of authentic capability, moral integrity, and virtue. For him, the absence of a merit-based selection process, in both the political and theological domains, paves the way for corruption, inequity, and the ultimate degeneration of society.

When Milton offers his observations on the individual members of the Long Parliament,<sup>107</sup> he notes that while there were "some indeed Men of Wisdom and Integrity;

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<sup>106</sup> I wish to highlight that in Milton's view, the concept of noble ancestry, or *basileos*—a defining trait of classical epic heroes — is fundamentally understood as the inherited rights of the elite. This encompasses not merely the fact of being born into an elite lineage but also all the attendant privileges that such birth confers. Hence, it is my contention that within the context of *Paradise Lost*, the term "lineage" is synonymous with "birthright."

<sup>107</sup> The Long Parliament, an English legislative assembly that endured from 1640 to 1660, was established in the aftermath of the Short Parliament, which had a brief tenure in the spring of 1640 subsequent to an

the rest, (to be sure the greater part,) whom Wealth or ample Possessions, or bold and active Ambition (rather than Merit) had commended to the same place” (“The Digression” in *History of Britain*, YP 5.1:442). This highlights Milton’s disapproval of those who occupied influential seats in the parliament not due to their genuine merit but on account of their affluence or ambition. He contrasts merit with these other attributes, insinuating that genuine merit stands apart from sheer ambition or monetary wealth. Further elucidating this point, Milton asserts that some “had been called from Shops and Ware-houses, without other Merit, to sit in Supreme Councils and Committees, (as their Breeding was) fell to Huckster the Common-wealth” (“The Digression” in *History of Britain*, YP 5.1:444), thereby expressing his criticism of those who climbed the ranks based on their ancestry or background rather than on merit. Such individuals, in the absence of true merit, assumed authoritative roles, and their deeds (such as “huckstering the common-wealth”) manifested their inappropriateness for these positions. Delving deeper, he contends that due to the elevation of lineage above merit,

every one [those in power] betook himself, setting the Common-wealth behind, his private Ends before, to do as his own profit or ambition led him. Then was Justice delayed, and soon after deny’d: Spight and Favour determined all: Hence Faction, thence Treachery, both at home and in the Field: Every where Wrong, and Oppression: Foul and Horrid Deeds committed daily, or maintain’d, in secret, or in open. (“The Digression” in *History of Britain*, YP 5.1:442)

In this passage, Milton vividly highlights the detrimental consequences of valuing lineage above merit in leadership roles. When those at the helm act based on personal interests, relegating the “common-wealth” to the background, the foundational pillars of society begin to crumble, resulting in a procrastination and subsequent denial of justice. Subjective biases, as indicated by “spite and favour,” become the driving force behind decisions, thereby giving rise to divisions and treachery, both within and outside the nation’s boundaries. This self-centred ambition catalyses pervasive malfeasance, subjugation, and unscrupulous behaviour, both hidden and public. At its core, the excerpt serves as a cautionary remark about the societal disintegration that occurs when merit-based systems are replaced by nepotism or favouritism.

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11-year parliamentary absence. This assembly was summoned through a royal decree on 24 September 1640, with representative elections taking place in October of the same year.

Milton's perception of lineage versus merit is visible in *Paradise Lost* especially through the clash between Satan and the Son. Milton intricately crafts this confrontation, transforming a theological narrative into a multifaceted tale imbued with political nuances. The motivation of Satan's rebellion, which will ultimately result in the fall of the angels and humanity, is deeply merged with matters of lineage and merit.

Satan's rebellion starts when God announces the Son as the chief figure to whom all the angels of every rank should bow:

Hear all ye Angels, Progenie of Light,  
 Thrones, Dominations, Princedoms, Vertues, Powers,  
 Hear my Decree, which unrevok't shall stand.  
 This day I have begot<sup>108</sup> whom I declare  
 My onely Son, and on this holy Hill  
 Him have anointed, whom ye now behold  
 At my right hand; your Head I him appoint;  
 And by my Self have sworn to him shall bow  
 All knees in Heav'n, and shall confess him Lord:  
 Under his great Vice-gerent Reign abide  
 United as one individual Soule  
 For ever happie: him who disobeyes  
 Mee disobeyes, breaks union, and that day  
 Cast out from God and blessed vision, falls  
 Into utter darkness, deep ingulft, his place  
 Ordaind without redemption, without end. (V.600-15)

God's proclamation encapsulates two salient themes: (1) the Son's elevation as the preeminent sovereign of heaven, and (2) the mandate that all must acknowledge his supremacy or face dire, irrevocable consequences. Notably, the rationale behind the Son's anointment remains implicit, grounded solely in the divine edict of God. This

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<sup>108</sup> The term "begot" in this context has been the subject of extensive theological discussions. While I have chosen to omit further exploration of this topic in this dissertation, primarily because I do not perceive its direct relevance to the development of epic heroes in *Paradise Lost*, it is crucial to understand that two principal interpretations emerge in Miltonic studies: first, the idea that God fashioned the Son following the creation of the angels. Secondly, the perspective asserting that the Son had already existed, leading to the interpretation of "begot" as signifying "exaltation" in the heavens. In Miltonic studies, for proponents of the former viewpoint, one might refer to Raleigh's work, *Milton* (London: Edwin Arnold, 1909). For the latter perspective, notable references include Masson's *Poetical Works of John Milton* (London, 1890), III, 473; Fletcher's *Milton's Rabbinical Readings* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1930), pp. 150-56; Grierson's *Milton and Wordsworth* (Chatta and Winders, 1950), pp. 98-99; and Arnold William's "The Motivation of Satan's Rebellion in *Paradise Lost*," pp.266-68. It is pertinent to mention that this bibliography is taken from William's article and later updated.



monumental alteration heralds a political shift within the celestial realm, precipitating Satan's revolt.

Subsequently, the narrative offers an alternative perspective aligned with biblical recounting. Raphael, assuming the role reminiscent of an epic bard, chronicles the apostasy of the angels and the Son's triumphant ascendancy. Raphael delineates the underlying motives of Satan's defiance; Satan is revealed to be so

[...] fraught  
 With envie against the Son of God, that day  
 Honour'd by his great Father, and proclaim'd  
 Messiah King anointed, [that he] could not beare  
 Through pride that sight, & thought himself impair'd. (V.661-65)

Here, according to Raphael's account, the genesis of Satan's rebellion is rooted in pride and envy. These two sentiments catalyse Satan's dissent. Raphael depicts Satan rallying a third of the angelic host in the celestial north, where he "[tells] the suggested cause, and casts between / Ambiguous words and jealousies, to sound / Or taint integrity" (V.702-04). It is evident that Raphael's exposition emphasises the corruptive power of Satan's words but minimally delves into the intricacies of Satan's motives, underscoring primarily his pride and envy. However, it is imperative to acknowledge that Raphael represents the divine faction. Consequently, his portrayal of Satan's insurrection might be tinged with bias, casting it in a predominantly negative light.

In the first book of *Paradise Lost*, the reader encounters Satan's personal account concerning the origins of his rebellion. As elucidated in the section entitled "Rhetorical Prowess," Satan perceives his rebellion as a righteous stand against what he deems as celestial despotism. From Satan's perspective, God's governance lacks equity and justice, primarily because he believes God has deprived him of his rightful status and disrupted the inherent equality of Heaven. Central to Satan's argument is his contention that the Son, in terms of lineage, does not surpass him. Consequently, the decision to elevate the Son as the Vice-regent of Heaven is, in Satan's view, a grave injustice. He posits his own superiority based on his lineage. He deems the motivation of his rebellion is therefore based on injustice in the politics of the heaven.

This stance appears somewhat justified, especially when considering that God's proclamation of the Son as the Vice-regent is devoid of any explicit rationale. Peguero

interrogates the ambiguity surrounding the Son's elevation, questioning "what the Son has done to merit such a high place in God's kingdom. It is true that the Son is the only one that comes forth to volunteer himself as a sacrifice for mankind's salvation. However, this does not occur until after Satan rebels and tempts mankind" (Peguero 27). However, what Peguero misses here is the theological layer of Milton's poetics. Here Milton's stress is on the fact that God is clearly omniscient. People may not understand his actions, yet time justifies his judgement as later seen in the poem.

Later in the epic, it is revealed that the Son's ascendancy is not attributed to his birthright as Satan claims, but rather to his intrinsic merit. This is fully expressed by God when He praises the way the Son has so generously offered to save humankind through his goodness and by this act has proved that he is motivated more by love than a desire for glory. He acknowledges how the Son is willing to give up everything to save

A World from utter loss, and hast been found  
 By Merit more then Birthright Son of God,  
 Found worthiest to be so by being Good,  
 Farr more then Great or High; because in thee  
 Love hath abounded more then Glory abounds (III.308-12)

It is the possession of these qualities that prompts the exaltation of the Son by the God is observed. This veneration, however, is not without foundation. The remarks made by God are pronounced subsequent to the pivotal incident that illuminates the way the Son's title, "Son of God" stems from "merit more than Birthright."

Following God's foresight of humanity's impending fall, the Son inquires about the possibility of extending mercy to humankind without compromising divine justice. In response, God elucidates that such an act would necessitate an apt sacrifice: an individual of profound worth must willingly endure death to atone for humanity's transgressions. God subsequently addresses the celestial assembly, posing the question: "Which of ye will be mortal to redeem / Man's mortal crime, and just th' unjust to save, / Dwells in all Heaven charity so dear?" (III.214-215). However, this profound query is met with resounding silence: "He asked, but all the Heavenly Quire stood mute, And silence was in Heaven: on man's behalf / Patron or Intercessor none appeared" (III.217-19). It is only the Son who steps forth, proclaiming:

Behold mee then, mee for him, life for life  
 I offer, on mee let thine anger fall;  
 Account mee man; I for his sake will leave  
 Thy bosom, and this glorie next to thee (III.236-39)

This pivotal moment underscores the magnitude of the Son's sacrifice. He emerges as the sole entity prepared to sacrifice his position in Heaven and offer himself for the salvation of humanity; this offer demonstrates his merit. This act accentuates his distinctive status within the celestial realm, reinforcing his exceptional nature amongst God's creations. It also attests to the validity of the esteemed titles bestowed upon him by God. It becomes increasingly evident that God's appointment of the Son as the new Vice-regent of Heaven was predicated on merit from the outset. While this meritocratic choice may have eluded recognition initially, the unfolding of events vindicates God's decision. Through this narrative, Milton underscores God's omniscience. Thus, the ways of God are justified.

It is imperative to highlight that one of the foundational motives behind God's creation of humankind was to counteract the loss Satan inflicted upon Heaven, having successfully swayed a significant portion of the angelic host to rebel against the divine order. To redress this imbalance, God envisioned crafting a new being to fill the void left by the fallen angels, with aspirations of ultimately elevating this new creation to join Him in Heaven. However, Satan's machinations lead humanity astray, compelling them to partake from the Tree of Knowledge, thereby thwarting God's original design. Through his self-sacrifice, the Son facilitates not only humanity's potential redemption but also the restoration of God's initial purpose for humankind. Consequently, the Son's act of sacrifice transcends mere human salvation, serving also to elevate the divine glory.

Through the confrontation between Satan and the Son, Milton illuminates the political nuances inherent in the dilemma of lineage versus merit. Milton delineates God's methods as favouring merit over mere lineage. This is corroborated by the deeds of the Son, which demonstrate his genuine worthiness of the honours and titles bestowed upon him by God. In this context, the primacy of merit, surpassing the privileges of lineage, is fully established.

The intricate matter of lineage is further portrayed and elaborated through Adam and Eve, where Milton addresses the subject within a theological framework. He skilfully merges

the possibility of humanity's redemption following the Fall with the notion of merit, portraying it as a heroic virtue attained through endurance and patience. In doing so, he delves deep, navigating the multifaceted nuances associated with the genealogy of the human race. In Book VII, Raphael recounts Adam and Eve's divine origin and their role on Earth; they are

[c]reated in his [God's] Image, there to dwell  
And worship him, and in reward to rule  
Over his Works, on Earth, in Sea, or Air,  
And multiply a Race of Worshippers. (VII.627-30)

Adam and Eve, crafted in the divine image, symbolise the zenith of God's creations. Such an origin lends credence to the notion that humanity's lineage was of unparalleled distinction. They are also preordained to preside over the earth, aligning their lineage with that of majestic rulers. In exchange, God seeks their adoration, fealty, and the extension of their lineage. From this perspective, the initial state of humanity is characterised by both eminent lineage and esteemed status. Within the context of *Paradise Lost*, the reverence conferred upon Adam and Eve is inherent, not earned. Their lineage, thus, is inherently noble.

The epic further accentuates their innate supremacy. Upon beholding them, Satan is profoundly struck:

Two of far nobler shape erect and tall,  
Godlike erect, with native Honour clad  
In naked Majestie seemd Lords of all,  
And worthie seemd, for in thir looks Divine  
The image of thir glorious Maker shon,  
Truth, wisdom, Sanctitude severe and pure, austere  
Severe but in true filial freedom plac't;  
Whence true autoritie in men [...] (IV.288-95)

This evocative depiction highlights humanity's initial state of grace, presenting them as near-paragons of virtue. However, this is before their tragic fall. Their sin ushers in "Death into the World, and all our woe, / With loss of Eden" (I.3-4). The subsequent afflictions and mortality are stark reminders of the first humans' transgression, indicating the fleeting nature of their initial grandeur.

Milton's portrayal of humanity's initial bestowed grandeur, juxtaposed with its subsequent loss through self-inflicted actions, offers an insightful exploration into the nuances of lineage and merit. This narrative presents a compelling comparison between Adam and Eve and the Son. Both are endowed with divine privileges before they have exhibited their worthiness. However, only the Son, through his self-sacrifice, validates his divine lineage, while Adam and Eve's transgressions cast a shadow on the nobility initially granted to them.

Central to Milton's narrative with regard to lineage is an underlying theological message. The Son's sacrifice paves the way for humanity's redemption, offering them an avenue to reclaim their lost grandeur. To Milton, this presents the descendants of Adam and Eve, the readers, grappling with the inherited consequences of original sin, with a profound theological lesson. I believe it indicates that even without inherent divine grandeur in their creation, they can, through adherence to God's commandments and the principles of Christianity, manifest their merit. By tracing humanity's journey—from their divine endowment, through their subsequent fall, to the potential for redemption via demonstrable merit—Milton champions the narrative of the everyday Christian. The focus is less on humanity's transgression and more on the redemptive power of the Son's sacrifice, underscoring the theme of valuing merit over lineage.

This observation is to some extent echoed by Bowra, who posits that "Milton's solution to the Fall of Man is that out of it a new kind of goodness is born, and that man can show heroic qualities by doing his duty in the face of great obstacles" (210). This perspective holds merit in *Paradise Lost*. Bowra further elucidates: "The old poet, who had himself hoped that a new Heaven would be built in England, and had seen his hopes shattered by the corrupt doings of men, found a solace in the thought that a man's nobility lies in his own grasp and is his to command" (210). While Bowra's initial observation regarding humanity's potential for redemption is insightful, he does not fully develop this idea, nor does he recognise that Milton's intent in evolving his epic heroes is fundamentally to educate his audience. He acknowledges that man should "show heroic qualities," yet he offers limited elaboration on these qualities, merely alluding to the epic: "Add Virtue, Patience, Temperance, add Love" (XII.583). This oversight occurs because Bowra does not fully appreciate how Milton intricately crafts his epic to foster new forms of heroism

and educate his readers. Where Bowra initiates but does not complete his analysis, I intend to further explore and elucidate these heroic qualities in relation to Milton's conceptualisation of merit.

To truly understand the concept of merit and how to achieve it in this context, it is crucial to explore the condition of humanity in the postlapsarian world, as illustrated in Book X of *Paradise Lost*. After the original sin, when humanity's first ancestors ate the forbidden fruit, the Son descends to Earth to pass judgment. His verdict brings significant hardships: women are doomed to endure painful childbirth, and men must labour tirelessly to coax food from a now-stubborn Earth. Moreover, angels, acting on divine orders, alter the Earth's orbit, disrupting the climate. The previously stable and mild weather gives way to extreme temperatures. This drastic change symbolizes the departure from the harmony and grace of their pre-fall existence.

In this new world, Death and Sin inform Satan that all living things are now subject to death, marking their inevitable end, and that sin will spoil human thoughts and deeds. This introduces a pervasive presence of evil, compelling humanity to confront not only a physically daunting world but also the inner struggle against sin and vice. It is a dual battle – against both the harsh elements and moral decay; thus, it is a battle that is both physical and spiritual in nature.

God decides to maintain these severe conditions until Judgment Day, highlighting the enduring trials of humanity. The postlapsarian world is not just challenging for survival; it becomes a severe, unforgiving environment that pushes human resilience to its limits, both physically and spiritually. Life transforms into a ceaseless struggle, starkly different from the earlier ease and contentment. Humans find themselves in a state of perpetual patience and endurance battling against the relentless difficulties of a world fundamentally altered by their fall, and against the seductions of evil.

In the face of such hardship, Milton suggests that endurance and patience<sup>109</sup> emerge as fundamental heroic virtues necessary for life on earth. These concepts receive extensive

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<sup>109</sup>In this analysis, it is essential to first acknowledge the work of previous scholars who have emphasised the significance of endurance and patience as key Christian virtues in Milton's writings, particularly in contrast to similar virtues in pagan narratives. These critics have often focused on how these virtues are depicted through characters such as the Son, Satan, and Adam in the epic's narrative. My approach,

exploration in Milton's prose works. In *Christian Doctrine*, Milton posits that fortitude may be regarded as an act "exercised in the resistance, or the endurance of evil" (XVIII, 346-47). Milton's distinctive perspective on endurance is critical, especially when examining the impact of Thomas Aquinas's revised interpretation of courage, which forms a core component in his reimagining of Christian heroism. Aquinas, transforming Aristotle's notion of courage to fit a Christian paradigm, introduces an innovative understanding of this virtue, essential for grasping the concept of heroizing the Christian everyman (Elders 32). According to both Aquinas and Aristotle, courage is linked with confronting life-endangering scenarios or deeds, suggesting that authentic courage entails risking one's life in the face of peril. Pieper accentuates this idea, noting that "the deepest bodily injury is death and all other injuries are prefigurations of death" (130), thereby inherently associating courage with the notion of death.

However, in a Christian framework, Aquinas significantly alters this understanding of courage. His interpretation first broadens the notion of "battle," suggesting that courage encompasses not only physical combat but also the individual's personal and spiritual struggle against evil, as elucidated in his *Summa Theologica* (2880-87). The profound implication of Aquinas's revised definition is its applicability beyond warriors, extending to ordinary Christians engaged in the battle against sin and evil. This transformative view notably shifts the emphasis from aggression to endurance as the primary act of courage. Aquinas presents endurance as superior to aggression for three reasons: it involves confronting a more formidable adversary; it pertains to immediate rather than anticipated danger; and it demands a prolonged and sustained effort (*Summa Theologica* 2885). This reconceptualization not only redefines courage but also aligns closely with Milton's depiction of Christian heroism, where endurance emerges as a key virtue. The concept of courage as transformed by Thomas Aquinas's doctrine is a fundamental foundation for the Christian epic heroism for Milton. Qiaoying underlines that by placing endurance at the centre of courage, Thomist doctrine "broadens the scope of courage to include the

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however, differs by situating these virtues within the context of the themes of lineage and merit, with a specific focus on their relevance in the postlapsarian world – the world after the Fall of Man. I argue that the true importance of endurance and patience is most evident in this postlapsarian context, diverging from previous interpretations that placed greater emphasis on the prelapsarian period. This perspective seeks to offer a more nuanced understanding of these virtues, viewing them not as static qualities but as dynamic attributes that gain significant relevance and depth in the context of humanity's changed circumstances after their exile from Eden.

weak, including Christians” (484). Therefore, the revised understanding of courage as a heroic ideal allows Milton to depict ordinary Christian citizens in heroic terms, which in this case are Adam and Eve.

It is imperative to acknowledge here that the concept of endurance in Milton’s theological discourse is intrinsically linked with patience. These virtues coexist, particularly in relation to fortitude. Milton views patience as a crucial aspect of human existence post-Eden, positing that God tests individuals “for the purpose of magnifying their faith or patience” (*Christian Doctrine*, XV, 87). For Milton, patience encapsulates “enduring present afflictions in the hope of future fulfilment” (Schiffhorst 56), thereby establishing a profound connection between patience and endurance. Schiffhorst aptly notes that in Milton’s view, “[f]ortitude [...] is enduring and patient” (56). Baumgartner also asserts that Milton’s notion of patience is deeply influenced by St. Augustine’s theological works (207). St. Augustine characterises patience as a virtue “by which we tolerate evil things with an even mind, that we may not with a mind uneven desert good things [...] the impatient, while they will not suffer ills, effect not a deliverance from ills, but only the suffering of heavier ills” (xxiv). In this light, patience emerges as a virtue crucial for maintaining equilibrium in the face of adversity.

Similarly, in *Christian Doctrine*, Milton defines patience as a virtue “whereby we acquiesce in the promises of God through a confident reliance on his divine providence, power and goodness, and bear inevitable evils with equanimity as the dispensation of the supreme Father, and sent for our good. Opposed to this is impatience under the divine decrees; a temptation to which the saints themselves are at times liable” (*Christian Doctrine* III, 69). This definition mirrors Augustine’s perspective, highlighting patience as essential for enduring evil and resisting temptation. Both texts underscore patience as a cornerstone of virtue, pivotal in the Christian ethos of enduring hardships and maintaining faith amidst tribulations. This dual emphasis on patience and endurance not only reflects a theological standpoint but also resonates with the broader human experience of facing and overcoming adversities, both physical and spiritual, thereby reinforcing the relevance of these virtues in theological context.

The vital significance of endurance and patience in the epic can easily be seen in Milton’s famous remarks in the Invocation to Book IX in which he details how his perception of



heroism that differs from that held in Antiquity. He states that true heroism is “Not less but more Heroic then the wrauth / Of stern Achilles” (IX.14-15), and defines this heroism as “the better fortitude / Of Patience and Heroic Martyrdom / Unsung” (IX.31-33). These lines demonstrate how important and central these concepts of heroism are to Milton’s epic. He desires to show his audience who live their lives after the Fall, that they have chance to redeem themselves by showing merit to God by enduring and being patience, and through adherence to God’s commandments and the principles of Christianity, they can, manifest their merit. This message is well acknowledged by Adam who states at the very end of the epic: “Greatly instructed I shall hence depart, / Greatly in peace of mind [...]” (XII, 557-58).

Hence, the plot of the epic heroes Adam and Eve, within the context of lineage and merit, serves as a mechanism to heroize the everyday Christian. Within Milton’s discourse, an ordinary Christian holds the potential to rise as a hero, unveiling the multifaceted narrative agenda of *Paradise Lost*. By presenting Adam and Eve as figures initially in a state of grace, later fallen, but with an inherent potential for redemption through merit by showing endurance and patience, Milton offers a profound parallel to his readers. Just as their ancestors had the opportunity for redemption, so too can the common Christian emulate these epic heroes in their own life journey. This narrative shift redefines the traditional archetype of epic heroes. While the classical epic hero was defined by noble lineage, conferring status, physical prowess, and inherent superiority in general, Milton introduces a revolutionary concept: an epic hero who does not inherit greatness but attains it through personal endeavour, showing endurance and patience, and merit. This reframing challenges the classical notion of heroism, positing that true greatness is not a birthright but is earned through one’s actions.

Thus, it becomes evident that Milton’s emphasis on merit, discernible in his political writings, also resonates in the character arcs of his epic heroes in *Paradise Lost*. The merit versus lineage debate is a central motif, intricately woven into the narratives of both the angelic rebellion and humanity’s fall. Through the narratives of Satan and the Son, Milton illuminates the political facets of this debate, while the story of Adam and Eve delves into its theological dimensions. In reshaping the traditional notion of epic heroes, Milton

challenges the supremacy of lineage, advocating instead for the primacy of merit in determining worthiness.

## **2.9 FREE WILL: A HEROIC VIRTUE OR VICE?**

In *Paradise Lost*, the notion of free-will as a heroic attribute also occupies a paramount position. All the primary actions of the epic, namely Satan's rebellion, the Fall of humankind, the Son's self-sacrifice, and two parallel scenes of reconciliation, one on the human plane, that seems to enable the scene on the divine plane which leads to God's reconciliation to humankind and begins the process of regeneration and restoration, are all underscored by the principle of free-will. Milton incorporates this characteristic in all the epic heroes within the epic. For some scholars, it is arguably the most pivotal theme throughout the epic, as elucidated by Charles Williams in *The English Poetic Mind* (119). Every hero in the epic undergoes a test of their free-will: they are forewarned and subsequently presented with a choice.<sup>110</sup> God indicates that the repercussions of their decisions will be a direct result of the choices they independently make using their free-will. This quintessential trait of epic heroes is explored with such nuance and intricacy in the epic that, through this heroic virtue, Milton delves into an array of subjects, encompassing theology, politics, and philosophy.

### **2.9.1 Conventional Views on Free-will in Seventeenth-century England**

Milton's conceptualisation of free-will is intricate and multifaceted. He deviates from the "predestinarian orthodoxy" propounded by the conventional Calvinist Puritans of his era. This conventional approach emphasised that humanity's inherent nature, degraded and bound by sin, inhibited his capacity to attain salvation through the exercise of free-will. The Calvinist perspective on free-will, as indicated in *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, pivots on two primary tenets. Firstly, there is the conviction that the Fall was divinely orchestrated by God: "Nor ought it to seem absurd [to say] that God not only foresaw the fall of the first man, and in him the ruin of his posterity; but also at his own pleasure arranged it" (Calvin 3.13.232). Secondly, there is the belief that God selectively chooses

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<sup>110</sup> Specifically, Raphael warns about Adam and Satan, whilst Adam warns Eve.

individuals for reconciliation, implying that His grace is extended to a limited few, the elect. Elaborating on this doctrine, Calvin states that,

the mind of man is so entirely alienated from the righteousness of God that he cannot conceive, desire, or design anything but what is wicked, distorted, foul, impure, and iniquitous; that his heart is so thoroughly envenomed by sin that it can breathe out nothing but corruption and rottenness [...] their soul inwardly bound with the fetters of wickedness. (Calvin 2.5.394)

Thus, from the Calvinist viewpoint, individuals are unalterably predestined by God either for salvation or damnation. Consequently, humanity's sinful condition effectively negates their free-will.

In stark contrast stands Jacobus Arminius's perspective. It is noteworthy that Arminius's stance evolved over his lifetime; he initially demonstrated a leaning towards Calvinism but subsequently distanced himself from it. Arminius came to believe that God's grace is offered to all:

were the fact otherwise, the justice of God could not be defended in his condemning those who do not believe' [...] Second, in opposition to the mainstream Calvinists, he posits that grace can be resisted rather than being inexorable...To frame it differently, if adequate grace were not universally extended, then the individuals deprived of it would be incapable of willing good, rendering them effectively devoid of freedom. Thus, in the absence of grace, God alone would bear the onus for the damnation of those without salvation. (qtd. in Danielson 56)

Milton's stance on the concept of free-will reveals a discernible shift towards the Arminian position, rather than the Calvinist approach. While the Calvinist argument posits a strict predestinarian framework, suggesting that individuals are unalterably predestined by God either for salvation or damnation, the Arminian viewpoint emphasises the universality of grace and the potential for human choice. It underscores the belief that evil can be resisted and that individuals, through the exercise of their free-will, play a role in their spiritual destiny. This Arminian inclination in Milton's thought becomes evident when one delves into his prose works. Through his writings, Milton articulates a vision of humanity where free-will, in conjunction with divine grace, shapes one's spiritual journey, thereby leaning more towards the Arminian doctrine than the rigid determinism of the Calvinist approach.

### 2.9.2 Milton's Theorisation of Free-will in His Tracts

In his seminal work *Areopagitica* (1644), John Milton explores the intricate interplay between human free-will and divine design, using the biblical narrative of Adam as a central reference. He states,

when God gave him [Adam] reason, he gave him freedom to choose, for reason is but choosing; he had bin else a meer artificiall Adam, such an Adam as he is in the motions. God therefore left him free, set before him a provoking object, ever almost in his eyes; herein consisted his merit, herein the right of his reward, the praise of his abstinence. Wherefore did he creat passions within us, pleasures round about us, but that these rightly temper'd are the very ingredients of vertu? (*YP* 2:527)

Milton posits that God endowed Adam with reason, which inherently carries the gift of choice. The phrase “for reason is but choosing” underscores the inseparability of reason and choice. Without the ability to choose, Adam would have been nothing more than an automaton, devoid of genuine human essence. The term “a meer artificiall Adam” alludes to a puppet or inauthentic version of Adam, one that operates solely based on predetermined actions and not on individual freedom.<sup>111</sup> From this perspective, the value of a decision is intrinsically linked to its being made with free-will.

At this point, I would like to highlight the intersection of the notion of free-will in *Areopagitica* with the domain of politics. It is pertinent to remember that *Areopagitica*, penned in 1644, emerged as Milton's counterargument to the Licencing Act of 1643, which the Parliament enacted to suppress dissenting voices. Remarkably, even though Milton's political affinities were aligned with Parliament, he vociferously opposed this act. This underscores the supreme value he placed on the individual's right to express himself/herself freely and as importantly, to be able to read freely. Central to this treatise is Milton's unwavering commitment to championing the inviolability of free expression. By skilfully weaving the theological underpinning of free-will, as personified by Adam, into his plea for uninhibited speech, Milton crafts a theological scaffold for his discourse. However, Milton's argumentation extends further. He introduces a political dimension:

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<sup>111</sup>Regarding Milton's understanding of free will as presented in *Areopagitica*, Loewenstein asserts that Milton's libertarian perspective had not fully embraced the Arminian approach. This approach “posited a more Pelagian challenge to Calvinism by stressing that individuals were free to accept or reject the divine grace needed for salvation – in contrast to Calvinism's intensely negative view of human agency and will” (*Landmarks* 28).

the moral responsibility that accompanies free-will. Within the pages of *Areopagitica*, Milton articulates that God entrusts Adam “with the gift of reason to be his own chooser” (YP 2:514). Armed with reason,<sup>112</sup> humans possess the capability to navigate their existence, determining their own fates. As free-will is inherently bestowed, the onus of moral responsibility also gravitates naturally to individuals. This endows them with a political duty, anchored in theological principles. This amalgamation of free-will and the prerogative of free speech in Milton’s work is pivotal for comprehending his intertwined theological and political views. The political dimension of free-will is particularly evident when considering the portrayal of Satan as an epic hero.

Milton touches upon the issue of free-will again in *Christian Doctrine* in which Milton’s views without doubt are closest to Arminian doctrine.<sup>113</sup> In *Christian Doctrine*, he openly states that

[b]y virtue of his wisdom God decreed the creation of angels and men as beings gifted with reason and thus free will. At the same time he foresaw the direction in which they would tend when they used this absolutely unimpaired freedom. What then? Shall we say that God’s providence or foreknowledge imposes any necessity upon them? Certainly not: no more than if some human being possessed the same foresight. (Wolfe 6.C.D.13)

It is evident that Milton champions the idea that humans possess the free-will and rationality to discern between right and wrong; consequently, the ramifications of their decisions lie squarely on their own shoulders. I believe it is crucial to emphasise that Milton underscores free-will and reason as attributes “gifted” by God. Thus, as indicated above, he depicts this heroic trait as an innate virtue bestowed upon all of humanity. This portrayal holds significant weight. Milton’s framing of free-will as an innate heroic virtue, and the political responsibility that comes with it, provides a theological foundation for his endeavour to heroize the everyday Christian. In doing so, he allows his audience, the

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<sup>112</sup> For a detailed analysis of Milton’s conceptualisation of reason, please refer to the section “Autonomy in Obedience: Unveiling Milton’s Vision of Reason” under “Obedience as a Virtue of Autonomy.”

<sup>113</sup> However, it must be observed that Milton’s perspectives on Arminian theology underwent a transition over time. In *Areopagitica*, Milton initially perceived Jacobus Arminius’ doctrine as problematic. This could be attributed to a potential misunderstanding of Arminianism by Milton, or perhaps to his inability to recognise Arminius’s deviation from Calvinist doctrines. For further information on this matter, one may refer to Dennis Danielson’s article, “Milton’s Arminianism and Paradise Lost,” published in *Milton Studies* 12 (1978), pages 47-73.

ordinary Christians, to identify with this heroic quality on a personal level. This identification encourages them to view themselves as the protagonists of their own narratives, empowered to shape their destinies.

The concept of free-will is also inherently intertwined with the theological issues of predestination and God's omniscience. The essence of free-will might seem contradictory to the notion of an omniscient, all-knowing God. In *Paradise Lost*, Milton's portrayal of God suggests an entity who "behold[s] from his prospect [lookout point] high / Wherein past, present, future he beholds" (III.77-78) and is "foreseeing" (III.79). This portrayal unequivocally establishes God's omniscience in Milton's narrative. Hence, the presence of free-will, as a defining trait of the epic's heroes, does not inherently conflict with this omniscient God. While Milton's God possesses foreknowledge of future events, it does not imply a preordained fate. As articulated in the epic, God professes: "if I foreknew, / Foreknowledge had no influence on their fault, / Which had no less prov'd certain unforeknown" (III.117-119). Here, Milton indicates that God possesses omniscience which does not equate to predestination or determinism. Barbara Lewalski interprets this particular passage as mirroring Milton's arguments, also present in *Christian Doctrine* 1.3-4. She posits that "God does not predestine any to sin or damnation and that his perfect foreknowledge of events does not amount to predestination; rather, he foresees because he knows past, present, and future at once. God knows what will happen [...] but does not cause the actions of humans or angels" (111-19). Hence, Milton clearly indicates that God is indeed omniscient however he assigns the responsibility for their actions to humans.

Hence, the prose tracts of Milton initially indicate first that humans are innately endowed with free-will and all individuals have this heroic virtue. Second that with free-will comes moral responsibility as God "trusts him with the gift of reason to be his own chooser" (*YP* 2:514). Thus, accountability lies with individuals, placing the onus of their actions upon themselves and not God. This sentiment is palpably evident in the epic. A poignant declaration regarding free-will comes from God himself, stating that he designed humans "[s]ufficient to have stood, though free to fall" (III.99). This declaration carries significant implications. Primarily, it intimates that the actions and decisions of humans are autonomously determined, emphasising their agency and independence. Additionally, it

underscores that the concept of free-will is multifaceted; it can manifest as a virtue when exercised judiciously, leading to commendable outcomes. Conversely, when misapplied or utilised without due consideration, free-will can transform into a vice, resulting in regrettable consequences. Thus, the characterisation of free-will, whether as a virtue or a vice, is intrinsically linked to the discernment and judiciousness of the individual wielding it. If one's exercise of free-will culminates in adverse outcomes, it indeed reinforces its potential to be perceived as a vice. Raphael further reinforces this in his conversation with Adam, asserting that Adam's will is "By nature free" and is not governed "by Fate / Inextricable, or strict necessity" (V.527–8). David Loewenstein interprets this as a clear Arminian message: while God foresees events, the choice to stand or fall lies with humans and angels; the decision during temptation remains an individual's prerogative (*Landmarks* 28).

### **2.9.3 Adam and Eve**

Undoubtedly, the concept of free-will is intricately explored through the narrative arcs of central figures, particularly in relation to the story of humanity's Fall, epitomised by Adam and Eve. Being portrayed as the progenitors of humanity, these characters naturally serve as touchpoints for readers, facilitating an easier identification and connection with these epic heroes. In this context, Adam and Eve's engagement with the dual facets of free-will — as both a heroic virtue and a potential vice — serves as a profound reflection on human nature. Their experiences with free-will resonate deeply, suggesting that this intrinsic ability to choose, for better or worse, is not confined to the pages of an epic but is a legacy inherited by all of humanity. As descendants of these epic figures, readers are subtly reminded that they too are imbued with this defining trait of free-will, bearing both its empowering potential and its attendant responsibilities. Thus, through Adam and Eve's narrative journey, Milton offers a poignant commentary on the universality and enduring relevance of free-will as a cornerstone of the human experience.

The theme of free-will is initially introduced through a direct command from God to Raphael. God's directive to Raphael is not just to engage in a dialogue with Adam, but to provide him with foreknowledge about Satan's impending schemes. Furthermore, God emphasises the significance of imparting to Adam the essence of free-will. This is captured in the following verses:

Happiness in his power left free to will,  
 Left to his own free Will, his Will though free,  
 Yet mutable; whence warne him to beware  
 He swerve not too secure: tell him withall  
 His danger, and from whom, what enemie  
 Late falln himself from Heav'n, is plotting now  
 The fall of others from like state of bliss;  
 By violence, no, for that shall be withstood,  
 But by deceit and lies; this let him know (V.235-43)

Following this revelation, God offers an additional, profoundly significant observation: “Lest wilfully transgressing he pretend plead / Surprisal, unadmonished, unforewarned” (V.244-45). Through this statement, God underscores a pivotal point: Adam will not be taken by surprise or caught off guard by events, as he has been duly forewarned. The implication here is profound: Adam, equipped with the knowledge of potential perils, has the agency to exercise his free-will in determining his path. The responsibility for his decisions and their ramifications rests solely with him. In essence, Adam stands as the architect of his own destiny, endowed with the gift of choice and the weight of its consequences.

Upon their meeting, Raphael imparts a significant message to Adam, underlining that his will is

By nature free, not over-rul'd by Fate  
 [...]
 Our voluntarie service he requires,  
 Not our necessitated, such with him  
 Findes no acceptance, nor can find, for how  
 Can hearts, not free, be tri'd whether they serve  
 Willing or no, who will but what they must  
 By Destinie, and can no other choose? (V.527, 529-34)

Raphael's words delve deep into the interplay between fate and free-will. He posits that while humans are not bound or subjugated by fate. The essence of free-will remains intact, allowing individuals to make choices based on their own volition. By choosing freely, without coercion, Adam's actions and the choices of all humans gain inherent worth and merit. This sentiment directly challenges the deterministic Calvinist view that humans are mere puppets, controlled by the strings of fate. This sentiment resonates with Milton's assertions in *Areopagitica*. Similarly, Raphael informs Adam that God does not desire



humanity's "necessitated" allegiance but rather their genuine assent borne out of free-will. The parallels between the themes presented in *Areopagitica* and *Paradise Lost* are evident. Milton consistently underscores the principle that the merit of a decision derives from its origin in free-will, rather than any external compulsion.

Another pivotal scene elucidating free-will as a heroic feature unfolds in Book IX between Adam and Eve. In the lush confines of Eden, amidst the myriad tasks that beckon daily, Eve proposes to Adam that they might be more efficient if they divided their labours and worked separately. Adam, however, is apprehensive about this idea, having been forewarned by Raphael of Satan's designs to corrupt God's newest creations. He believes that gardening alone, Eve might be more vulnerable to Satan's insidious temptations. Eve, exuding confidence in her stance, counters Adam by extolling the perfection of God's creation. She asserts that as direct creations of God, they are fortified against any test that Satan might pose.

It is at this juncture that Adam, drawing upon the doctrine of free-will, responds. While he acknowledges the inherent perfection of God's work, stating, "Nothing imperfect or deficient left / Of all that he Created" (IX. 345-46); he also underscores their endowed free-will, remarking, "God left free the Will, for what obeys / Reason, is free, and Reason he made right" (IX.351-52). This echoes Milton's thoughts in *Christian Doctrine*, "men as beings gifted with reason and thus free will" (Wolfe 6.C.D.18). Adam expounds on the interrelationship between free-will and reason, suggesting that free-will is intrinsically tied to the capacity to discern the righteous path, more specifically, the path aligned with God's intent. In this discussion, Adam refutes the notion that free-will is purely a force for good. He posits that free-will is complex; it can manifest as a commendable trait when applied with wisdom, yielding positive outcomes. On the contrary, when wielded recklessly or without proper reflection, free-will can devolve into a detrimental force, bringing about undesirable outcomes. Hence, the portrayal of free-will, be it as a virtue or a vice, is fundamentally associated with the wisdom and prudence of its bearer.

Subsequently, Eve's choice to work independently, a decision made through her free-will despite Adam's cautions, paves the way for Satan's temptation and ultimately, humanity's fall from grace. This sequence of events underscores the premise that individuals, by virtue of their free-will, are the masterminds behind their fates. They

possess the autonomy to chart their courses and bear the consequences of their actions. This sentiment sends a resounding message: while God may be the creator, it is not He but the individuals themselves who are accountable for their deeds. Responsibility for one's actions does not rest with the divine merely by virtue of creation; rather, it is firmly shouldered by individuals, endowed as they are with the gift of free-will.

#### **2.9.4 The Son**

The concept of free-will as a heroic virtue when used right with reason is best exemplified by the Son. As I elaborate in the section on "lineage and status," the Son's sacrifice indeed attests to his merit. What is significant about this act within the context of free-will is that it is a decision autonomously made by the Son, which confers upon the deed its profound significance and grandeur. It is crucial to briefly recapitulate the sequence of events leading to the Son's sacrifice: After God's prescience of humanity's impending downfall, the Son questions whether mercy can be shown to humankind without undermining divine justice. In response, God clarifies that such an act would require a fitting sacrifice. God then addresses the heavenly beings, enquiring who would undertake such a sacrificial act. Yet, this momentous question is met with profound silence: "He asked, but all the Heavenly Quire stood mute, / And silence was in Heaven: on man's behalf / Patron or Intercessor none appeared" (III.217-19). This is highly significant in the context of free-will, for only the Son, exercising his free-will, proffers himself as a sacrifice for humanity's greater welfare: "I offer, on me let thine anger fall; / Account me man; I for his sake will leave / Thy bosom, and this glory next to thee" (III.237-39). Here, the Son distinguishes himself as the sole being ready to offer himself for humanity's salvation. Through his own free-will, he provides humanity another opportunity for redemption. Consequently, free-will emerges as a paramount trait of the Son in his capacity as an epic hero, given that it is instrumental in affording humanity another chance.

In this context, the Son emerges as a distinct figure when juxtaposed against characters such as Satan, his fallen angels, and Adam and Eve. All these characters, influenced by their autonomous choices and volitions, experience a downfall. Milton, in my estimation, utilises these contrasting narratives to convey a profound message regarding the nature of free-will. He suggests that this very essence, the capacity to exercise free-will, can either elevate beings to exalted heights or precipitate their tragic descents. The pivotal

factor determining the trajectory is the individual choices made by these characters. Therefore, the ensuing consequences are not arbitrarily meted out by external forces. Instead, the responsibility and accountability for their fate lies squarely on the shoulders of those endowed with the gift of free-will. This intrinsic power, when wielded judiciously, can lead to salvation, but when misused, it can result in ruin. Milton's *Paradise Lost* thus underscores the weighty implications of our decisions and the inherent moral responsibility that accompanies the exercise of free-will.

### 2.9.5 Satan

Within the pantheon of epic heroes in *Paradise Lost*, Satan stands out as a central figure where the nuances, particularly the political aspects of free-will, are explored. As is always the case for all the epic heroes in *Paradise Lost*, Satan is given prior warning.<sup>114</sup> In the concluding sections of Book IV, Gabriel declares: "Satan, I know thy strength, and thou know'st mine, / Neither our own but giv'n [...] how weak / if thou resist [...]" (IV.1005-6, 1012-13). Gabriel's admonition to Satan underscores the impending consequences should he continue on his path of defiance, hinting at the unmatched might of God he would confront. Burden provides further insight into this exchange, positing it as a warning to Satan about the formidable omnipotence of God (30-31). This dialogue is crucial in understanding the intricate interplay of free-will within the narrative. While Satan retains the agency to determine his course, he is also equipped with the foreknowledge of potential outcomes. Consequently, the decisions Satan later takes are made with full awareness, underscoring the idea that they arise from his deliberate exercise of free-will, and he has been duly forewarned about the ramifications of his choices.

A salient point warranting exploration is the autonomous decision-making exhibited by Satan and his followers in their rebellion against God. Their collective defiance is not a mere consequence of coercion or manipulation; rather, it stems from the exercise of their

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<sup>114</sup>Milton's consistent approach of forewarning epic heroes is a method to "justify the wayes of God" (I.26). This suggests that God, in his benevolence, consistently offers a warning, either directly or through his angels, to these heroes, urging them to tread cautiously. This act stands as a testament to God's benevolent intentions towards his creations. Yet, the irony lies in the consistent failures of these figures: Satan chooses defiance, Eve succumbs to Satan's deception in the form of a serpent and partakes from the Tree of Knowledge, and Adam, driven by his profound love for Eve, also consumes the fruit, unable to bear the thought of parting from her.

individual free-wills. This observation is pivotal in deconstructing the perception that Satan's followers were merely victimised or ensnared by his machinations. Instead, they were active participants in the rebellion, making conscious choices in alignment with their beliefs and desires. Steadman offers an insightful perspective on this dynamic, stating: "Far from saving them, he drags them with him into damnation. Instead of leading, he misleads" ("Renaissance Hero" 96). Through this assertion, Steadman endeavours to delineate the contrasting leadership styles of the Son and Satan, at the head of their respective factions. However, my interpretation, particularly informed by the deliberative scenes in Book II of *Paradise Lost*, challenges this viewpoint.

In my opinion, one of the best scenes related to free-will within the context of politics is present in Book II where the audience observe how the concept of free-will is relevant to politics. When Satan begins the debate on what to do next after their fall, he states:

Mee though just right, and the fixt Laws of Heav'n,  
Did first create your Leader, next, free choice,  
With what besides, in Counsel or in Fight,  
Hath bin achiev'd of merit [...] (II.18-21)

Here, Satan suggests that he was justly chosen as the leader of the rebellious force with the clear free will of his followers while they were in Heaven. This endows his claim to the throne with strength and justice, thereby implying that his status as leader should persist in Hell as well. Satan further declares that his selection was made with the free will of the angels; thus, he possesses a "safe unenvied Throne / Yielded with full consent" (II.23-24). The emphasis is consistently placed on the free will and consent of the angels as Satan seeks to vindicate his position as the supreme leader in Hell.

In my view, this passage is highly significant in terms of Milton's political message regarding the concept of free will as a heroic virtue: with free will comes the moral responsibility to direct one's own life. Milton illuminates the relevance of free will within the political sphere, where it entails the responsibility to make correct and just decisions. Upon subsequent reflection, especially after the revelation of Satan's inherent malevolence, it becomes apparent that the fallen angels made a grievous political error by participating in Satan's rebellion and electing him as their leader. Milton indicates the possible negative consequences of individual responsibility of choosing the right thing

that comes with free-will. For Milton, the possession of free-will inherently carries with it the moral duty to select the righteous course in political matters. The portrayal of Satan and his followers serves as a stark illustration of the detrimental outcomes that arise from making misguided political choices.

In my assessment, this sentiment can be traced back further to the real-politik of the late 1650s when Milton started his epic. In Milton's *Easie and Readie Way* (1660), Milton emphasises that liberty inherently carries the political duty of determining one's own future. The text clearly states that God "didst create mankinde free" (YP 7:213), suggesting that the freedom vested in individuals is a divine endowment and, thus, revered. He further articulates: "He who cannot be content with this libertie to himself, but seeks violently to impose what he will have to be the only religion, upon other men's consciences, let him know, bears a minde not only unchristian and irreligious, but inhuman also and barbarous" (YP 7:380). There is no ambiguity in Milton's assertion of individual freedom in this political discourse. Milton, I discern, employs compelling rhetoric; as he exhorts his compatriots to oppose the re-establishment of episcopacy, he substantiates his stance with both religious and political reasoning, highlighting that their divinely granted liberty stands threatened with the impending Restoration:

if we return to kingship, and soon repent, as undoubtedly we shall, when we begin to finde the old incroachments coming on by little and little upon our consciences, which must necessarily proceed from king and bishop united inseparably in one interest, we may be forc'd perhaps to fight over again all that we have fought, and spend over again all that we have spent, but are never like to attain thus far as we are now advanc'd (YP 7:357).

For Milton, the decision between preserving the Commonwealth or reverting to monarchical Restoration is not merely political—it is existential. He emphasises the weight of responsibility accompanying free will in the political realm, suggesting that any missteps could have severe repercussions. This work illuminates Milton's insights into the profound responsibilities associated with individual free will. In *Paradise Lost*, the narrative of Satan and his followers exemplifies the dire outcomes of misguided political, and decisions echoes Milton's views in *The Readie and Easie Way*. Initially swayed by Satan's persuasive oratory, his followers eventually come to the harrowing realisation of their misjudgement, resulting in profound losses. Hence, the political dimensions of free

will and its dire consequences when used wrong are shown through Satan and his followers.

Milton's didactic approach to the theme of free will as a heroic virtue is thus multifaceted. First, he utilises instructional dialogues, as evidenced by the discourses between God and Raphael, Raphael and Adam, Satan, and Adam and Eve. These figures elucidate the concept of free will to other characters within the epic, serving a dual purpose. Not only do these dialogues enlighten the characters within the narrative, but they also provide an educative experience for the readers who engage with them. Hence, the concept of free will as a heroic virtue is presented by Milton as an innately given gift from God. Through this virtue, Milton imparts the theological lesson that humans are the architects of their fate; it is they, not God, who determine the course of their lives. He elucidates this on theological grounds and diverges from the conventional Calvinist view of predestination prevalent during his time. On a political level, Milton suggests that with free will comes the moral responsibility to choose rightly. Otherwise, this virtue may manifest in people as a vice.

Milton then illustrates the power and implications of free-will through the trajectories of his epic heroes. These characters' fates, whether ascendant or tragic, are determined solely by the choices they make autonomously. In doing so, Milton presents a spectrum of outcomes. At one end, we have the commendable example of the Son, who epitomises the virtuous exercise of free-will. Conversely, figures such as Satan, his cohorts, and Adam and Eve exemplify the perils of misusing this profound gift. Through these contrasting portrayals, readers are provided with clear illustrations of the potential rewards and repercussions associated with this heroic virtue. They are shown that free-will, while inherently neutral, can metamorphose into either a vice or virtue based on its application. In this vein, Milton's Arminian conceptualisation of free-will serves as a potent reminder to his readership. It underscores the message that individuals are the architects of their destinies and bear the sole responsibility for the paths they choose in life. Written during the Restoration period, Milton's message had significant relevance to his contemporary audience.

## 2.10 OBEDIENCE AS A VIRTUE OF AUTONOMY

The conceptualisation of obedience within the political framework of *Paradise Lost* indeed occupies a pivotal position. Of all the reimagined heroic virtues Milton introduces, obedience emerges as the most challenging to grasp within the secular milieu of the twenty-first century. The heroic virtue of obedience in Milton's oeuvre is richly layered, with its roots deeply entrenched in theology—a facet that is both conspicuously evident and politically nuanced. The theological underpinnings of obedience intricately weave through the fabric of free will and reason. In examining the heroic attributes of Milton's characters, I shall further explore the nexus between reason and obedience. The dual catastrophes of *Paradise Lost*—the fall of both angels and humanity—are precipitated by acts of disobedience. These acts, while differing fundamentally in nature—Satan's characterised by rebellion, Eve's by succumbing to temptation—underscore the pivotal role of disobedience in the narrative. Satan's rebellion catalyses the downfall of the angels, just as humanity's Fall follows Eve's transgression of God's edict.

The delicacy of the subject necessitates addressing whether Milton indeed advocates obedience as a heroic virtue and subsequently, to whom obedience is owed. Is obedience tantamount to a passive state, a voluntary forfeiture of one's autonomy? Milton's conceptualization of obedience as a demanded heroic virtue is characterized first by the fact that it is “freely and wilfully chosen” and secondly that it is based on “reason.” In my prior analysis, Milton's depiction of humanity is intricately associated with the possession of free will. This concept is foundational to the responsibility of self-determination, as underscored in *Areopagitica* where God entrusts man with “the gift of reason to be his own chooser” (*YP* 2:514). Such autonomy, the inherent ability to shape one's destiny through reason, surpasses involuntary servitude, transforming human devotion to God into a sphere of conscious and willing choice.

Within the context of obedience as a heroic virtue, reason may initially seem to be at odds with obedience since while reason promotes autonomy obedience is marked by dependence or submission. This, however, is not the case in Milton's conceptualization of obedience as he, according to Michael Schoenfeldt, sees obedience to be “not a function of servility, but rather the highest form of ethical autonomy. While blind, unthinking obedience to authority is in many ways worse than disobedience, willed

obedience to the higher authority of reason is an unequivocal good” (394). Schoenfeldt’s remark captures the essence of Milton’s educative aim with obedience as a heroic feature. Milton’s obedience is indeed not a passive servility but rather an active process of choosing right, using reason. In this respect, it is necessary to elaborate on the concept of reason<sup>115</sup> here.

### 2.10.1 Autonomy in Obedience: Unveiling Milton’s Vision of Reason

The essence of human freedom, as articulated by Milton, is intrinsically linked to the faculty of reason. It is through reason that humans engage with the world, discern truth, and make choices that reflect their understanding and values. “When God gave [Adam] reason, he gave him freedom to choose, for reason is but choosing; he had bin else a meer artificial Adam” (*YP* 2:527), Milton argues, suggesting that without the ability to reason and choose, humanity would be reduced to automatons, devoid of the divine spark that animates the human soul. In this context, for Milton, the notion of reason constitutes the faculty within individuals that empowers them to discern between good and evil.

The notion of reason presents a multifaceted issue that has persistently been at the forefront of philosophical and theological discourse since antiquity.<sup>116</sup> By the time Milton

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<sup>115</sup> At this point, it is essential to elucidate why reason has not been treated as an epic heroic trait within this chapter. Milton’s portrayal of reason is not as a virtue or a heroic characteristic for the audience to aspire to; rather, he sees it as a foundational intellectual capability that supports other heroic virtues such as obedience and the moral responsibility inherent in free will. Reason, according to Milton, acts as the cornerstone that allows other virtues to operate effectively. Hence, in Milton’s perspective, reason is not a virtue by itself but a crucial cognitive mechanism that enables individuals to make informed choices between righteousness and wrongdoing.

<sup>116</sup> The scope of ethics, conceptualised as reason, is indeed a composite subject with a profound heritage in both Eastern and Western intellectual spheres. While it has thrived since the era of Aristotle and was further cultivated by the Stoics, the analysis here is confined to the milieu pertinent to John Milton’s interpretation of right reason. Christian thinkers of the Middle Ages, notably Thomas Aquinas, have been instrumental in shaping the discourse, as have contributions from Jewish and Muslim scholars; and the Renaissance and the rise of Protestantism facilitated diverse interpretations of right reason (Frankena 4-6). For a more expansive exploration, particularly in relation to Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, readers may refer to the foundational study by Robert Hoopes, *Right Reason in the English Renaissance*, published in 1962 by Harvard University Press, which lays the groundwork for understanding the role of reason during the Renaissance; this is pertinent to grasping Milton’s employment of the concept in his literature. William K. Frankena furthers the discussion on the ethical implications of reason with his 1983 article “The Ethics of Right Reason” in *The Monist*, which provides a philosophical context that enriches the interpretation of reason within Milton’s corpus. Advancing to contemporary analysis, Paul Hammond’s *Milton’s Complex Words: Essays on the Conceptual Structure of Paradise Lost*, which appeared in 2017, with an online edition released by Oxford Academic in 2018, delves into the intricate conceptual framework of *Paradise Lost*, highlighting the multifaceted aspect of reason in Milton’s epic. Most recently, K. Asiatidou’s 2021 study entitled “Reason in seventeenth-century millenarian England: The example of John Milton’s *Paradise*



articulated his views, the discourse had proliferated with a myriad of perspectives across both philosophical and theological spheres. The conceptualisation of reason by Milton is particularly noteworthy, given that his position represents a singular confluence of traditions, described by Hoopes as “a voice in which the voices of classical Antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the Renaissance have merged into one” (Hoopes, 200). Prior to delving into Milton’s interpretation of reason, it is imperative to explore the prevailing debates surrounding it. The central query concerning reason revolves around whether ethical attainment is feasible through the judgement of humanity’s inherent faculties, or whether it necessitates guidance from a transcendent source. These questions also inform Milton’s conception of reason. It is essential to acknowledge Milton’s dualistic view of reason: “For there are two forms of reason, ‘either natural or rectifi’d,’ the former being that reason which is common to all men as part of their human nature, and the latter, ‘rectifi’d,’ which is the reason that is enlightened by divine illumination, harmonises with the divine rationale, and strives to conform to God’s will” (Paul Hammond 15). For Milton, the ultimate resolution lies in the synthesis of these dual aspects.

The broad understanding of natural reason pertains to the innate cognitive capacity for processing information, rendering judgements, and deriving ethical determinations. It functions as a neutral mechanism, capable of being harnessed for both virtuous and nefarious purposes. The humanist tradition primarily concerns itself with this aspect of reason. According to Hoopes, the classical-humanist tradition “founded its hopes for moral and religious improvement on a faith in man’s essential goodness and rational self-control” (Hoopes 105). From this humanist standpoint, the potential for humanity to elevate itself and make moral decisions rests solely on human capability, attributed to the natural power of reason. This view stands in stark opposition to Calvinist and Lutheran doctrines,<sup>117</sup> which view human nature as irredeemably tainted by original sin, thereby incapable of possessing “right reason.” Thus, in their view, human faculties alone are insufficient for ethical discernment. In contrast, the humanist view accentuates the human element and capacity for reason.

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*Lost*,” published in *Litera*, adds the latest scholarly perspective, situating Milton’s use of reason within the specific historical and theological milieu of seventeenth-century England.

<sup>117</sup> To examine the Calvinist doctrine of inherent sinfulness from birth, please refer to the section “Free-will,” where this concept is thoroughly discussed.

“Right reason,” conversely, represents a conception of reason that is in harmony with truth and fundamentally the divine order. Douglas Bush contends that this idea of “right reason” is intrinsically linked to theological principles, positing that for Milton, “the supreme manifestation of right reason is God himself” (n.p). Milton asserts that accurate conceptions of the divine cannot be attained by relying solely on nature or reason without the illumination provided by the word of God as revealed in scripture (Hammond 155). Thus, “right reason” is not merely analytical but normative, outlining the manner in which one should think and act according to divine instruction. As Hoopes suggests, the prevalent theological stance of the era held that “reason is supreme in man because it follows the natural ordering of his faculties as established by God” (190). This raises a fascinating question: Is “right reason” simply following God’s orders to the letter? Is the ultimate test of “right reason” just doing what God says because He says so? Within the context of *Paradise Lost* and its theme of “disobedience”: Did Eve and Adam “mess up” just because they ignored what God explicitly told them not to do?

Milton delves into the nature of right reason and commandment, with regard to these questions, in a significant excerpt from the *First Defence*. He proposes that the righteousness of God’s decrees stems not only from divine volition but from His intrinsic nature: “If he commanded it, it was lawful, commendable, and glorious. It was not because God commanded it that it was right and lawful [...] but it was because it was right and lawful that God commanded it.” (Wolfe 6.F.D.XX). Herein, Milton attributes to divine commands an inherent righteousness; they are commendable not solely by virtue of God’s decree but because they epitomise what is intrinsically right and lawful. This perspective challenges the notion that divine will is the definitive arbiter of morality, advocating instead that the divine will mirrors an objective moral reality that is fundamental to God’s nature or essence.

Milton’s conception of reason is an intricate synthesis of humanist thought and the Christian doctrine of “right reason.” He concedes that humans indeed possess the faculty to discern between virtue and vice, yet he refutes the notion that humankind’s inherent nature or the unaided exercise of natural reason is sufficient for true understanding. Milton posits, as Hamilton has observed, that “no one can have right ideas of God by relying upon nature or reason alone without the guidance of the word of God in scripture”

(Hammond 155). Thus, while he recognises the intrinsic human capability for rational judgment, he emphasises the necessity of aligning this judgment with the divine principles as articulated in Scripture. This stance places him at odds with the Calvinist perspective, which regards human capacity as too marred by sin to form ethical judgments independently. Milton does indeed draw from the Christian conception of reason, accentuating the importance of divine scripture. Yet, as previously mentioned, he elucidates how the veracity of God's word stems not merely from divine command but from its congruence with an absolute moral truth that is integral to the nature of God. Thus, Milton presents a nuanced view of reason as a divine endowment, which, when informed by Scripture, can lead to just judgment.

Within the framework of Miltonic thought, reason is pivotal in transforming obedience into a proactive, self-determined virtue. Humanity is endowed with reason to voluntarily and consciously embrace the path delineated by God; and, as previously established, God's path is invariably aligned with "right reason." Hoopes asserts that "freedom consists in obedience to reason" (191), encapsulating Milton's message. It is within human purview to select the path of righteousness enlightened by divine instruction. In this dynamic, God does not compel humanity; instead, He provides them with the gift of reason and His law to steer that reason aptly. The essence of obedience to God, therefore, is not passive submission but an active, self-governing expression of heroism. This concept underscores the Miltonic narrative that true liberty is realised through the deliberate choice to follow divine wisdom, a choice made possible through the harmonious interplay of human reason and divine guidance. Milton's conceptualisation of reason thus bestows upon humanity a dynamic form of agency—an agency that not only allows for the exercise of free will but also demands a moral and intellectual engagement with the choices one makes. This active agency differentiates human beings from an "artificial Adam," a being who, without the capacity for reason, would merely act out a preordained script without consciousness or comprehension. In this light, obedience becomes not an act of submission, but an active act of affirmation—a conscious endorsement of divine wisdom, achieved through the profound exercise of reason bestowed upon humanity by God.

### 2.10.2 Adam and Eve: Obedience as Autonomy in *Paradise Lost*

In Book V of *Paradise Lost*, Milton paints a vivid scene where Eve awakens from a dream fraught with ominous undertones. In her dream, an ethereal voice tempts her towards the Tree of Knowledge, prompting her to defy the singular commandment imposed by God upon her and Adam—abstaining from the fruit of that very tree. Upon recounting her troubling vision to Adam, his reaction is one of concern, yet he offers reassurance. Adam posits that the dream does not seal their fate; rather, it is a mere shadow, unable to dictate future actions, especially when countered by the power of reason. He eloquently articulates the supremacy of reason, which presides over lesser faculties within the soul, “know that in the soul / Are many lesser faculties that serve / Reason as chief [...]” (V.100-3). Adam’s conviction is firm: Eve’s reason guided choice to resist the temptation she encountered in slumber will ensure that “what in sleep thou didst abhor to dream, / Waking thou never wilt consent to do” (V.120-21). It is visible that Adam sees reason as a guardian to resist evil.

This exchange between Adam and Eve is profoundly telling of the complex dynamics between free will and reason in the context of obedience. Through Adam’s counsel, Milton illustrates that the foreboding dream holds no real power over Eve, for her actions are not predestined; they are subject to her free will. Adam underscores that reason is a divine endowment meant to steer humanity towards righteousness. It is this gift of reason that safeguards them, provided that it is wielded wisely to guide their free-willed choices. This resonates strongly with Milton’s citation of Lactantius in his *Commonplace Book*, where he declares, “strength depends not upon his body but upon his reason, which is for a human being the strongest safeguard and defense” (qtd. in Hammond 160). The advice Adam imparts to Eve reflects this principle, evoking the same notion as articulated in the *Commonplace Book*. In essence, Adam’s guidance anticipates the purpose of Raphael’s visit—as Raphael further elucidates the divine workings to Adam, Adam will now be able to impart this understanding to Eve. His words are a testament to the intrinsic relationship between the liberty to choose and the rational faculties that inform such choices, emphasizing that obedience to divine will is not a matter of compulsion but a deliberate and rational decision.

In Book IX, the progression towards the eventual fall of man epitomises Milton's portrayal of obedience as a heroic virtue and autonomy as its complex counterpart. This duality is explored under the "free-will" subsection titled "Adam and Eve," particularly in Book IX, where Eve's yearning to work apart from Adam—to expedite their tasks—brings this interplay to the fore. Adam, enlightened by Raphael about Satan's intention to subvert God's newest creation, counsels caution. Yet, Eve maintains her stance on autonomy and her capacity to withstand evil's allure:

And what is faith, love, virtue, unassayed  
Alone, without exterior help sustained?  
[...]  
Frail is our happiness, if this be so,  
And Eden were no Eden thus exposed. (IX.335-36, 340-41)

Eve's assertion is a declaration of her belief in her readiness to face trials alone, positioning her autonomy as a test of her virtue. Adam's response underscores the double-edged sword of free-will: it empowers one to make choices that define their character. By choosing not to heed Adam's prudent advice, Eve inadvertently sets herself on a path that converges with Satan's deception, illustrating the intricate relationship between obedience as a heroic virtue and the exercising of autonomy. During the pivotal temptation scene, as Satan entices Eve towards the Tree of Knowledge, she initially attempts to rebuff the temptation, invoking the divine command that forbids them from partaking of its fruit – the single stipulation set forth by God:

But of this tree we may not taste nor touch;  
God so commanded, and left that command  
Sole daughter of his voice; the rest, we live  
Law to our selves, our reason is our law. (IX.651–54)

Schoenfeldt interprets the speech here as alluding to Paul, who "incorporated the Stoic ideal of natural law into a Christian ethics to produce a model of inner virtue available to the Gentiles" (400). Eve's assertion is thus imbued with the philosophy that the choice to adhere lies within their own discernment. Hammond argues that Eve's remark "Law to our selves" "does not mean that they are free to do anything they wish, but that they are free to follow their God-given reason, which is their law in all matters apart from the one divine prohibition" (163). This sheer trust in the innate human capacity of reason however will prove to be inefficient against Satan as he in the form of a serpent states that eating

from this tree enabled it to speak: “Strange alteration in me, to degree / Of Reason in my inward Powers, and Speech / Wanted not long, though to this shape retain’d” (IX.599-601). This notion deeply influences Eve. She eventually reasons that if consumption of the tree’s fruit truly led to death, the serpent would not live, let alone possess the faculties of speech and reasoning. Therefore, she concludes that the prohibition must indicate the fruit’s inherent value. Succumbing to this reason, Eve consumes the fruit, thus contravening God’s sole commandment.

Milton delineates a pivotal moment where Eve’s judgment is clouded through her dialogue with Satan. He explicitly describes the serpent’s words as being “imregn’d / With reason” (IX.737-38), underscoring the malleability of reason under the influence of persuasive language. Here, the conflict is not just between the perspectives of Eve and Satan but within Eve’s own mind—a tension between the seductive logic offered by the serpent, which appeals to her innate reasoning, and the divine edict to abstain from the forbidden fruit. Eve’s decision to yield to the former is a rejection not only of God’s command but also of Adam’s cautionary advice concerning Satan’s potential deceit.

The descent into disobedience and the subsequent fall of humanity are charted by Eve’s overreliance on her natural reasoning, which neglects the “right reason” that aligns with divine instruction. Milton conveys a stern message: true obedience to God emerges not from innate reason alone but from right reasoning that can distinguish between the serpent’s cunning persuasion and the immutable laws set by God. Without this enlightened reasoning, the virtue of obedience cannot be sustained. Moreover, Milton posits that the proper exercise of free will, an intrinsic human attribute, is advantageous only when it is navigated by this form of right reasoning that inherently leads to obedience. This principle is at the heart of Milton’s message regarding Eve’s choice.

Upon being confronted with Eve’s fateful decision, Adam is ensnared in a complex moral quandary. The depth of his connection to Eve is such that he cannot envision existence without her, as evinced by his words, “How can I live without thee” (IX.908). He pledges an unwavering commitment to her, determined that their destinies are irrevocably intertwined, regardless of the outcome, as he proclaims with fervour: “flesh of flesh, / Bone of my bone thou art, and from thy state / Mine never shall be parted, bliss or woe”

(IX.914–16). Adam’s bitter state, being in between his love and obedience to God, here highlights a profound conflict between personal autonomy and obedience.

Adam perceives his very being as inextricably linked to Eve, to the extent that he professes, “[o]ur state cannot be severed, we are one, / One flesh; to lose thee were to lose myself” (IX. 958–59), thus surrendering any semblance of individual autonomy. His choice to partake of the forbidden fruit, aligning himself with Eve’s act of disobedience, is not a reflection of independent will but a capitulation to his perceived inability to be apart from her (Schoenfeldt 400-2). Schoenfeldt captures this focal transition, where Adam’s autonomous self is overshadowed by a love so profound that it blinds him to the virtue of obedience and the wisdom of divine decree (401-2). It is a potent demonstration of how love, in its most intense form, can override the faculty of reason.

This act is indeed emblematic of the complex interplay between love, free will, and obedience within Milton’s narrative. Adam’s love renders him incapable of autonomous action, suggesting that true autonomy requires the ability to act independently of such binding affections. Milton posits through Adam’s dilemma that obedience to divine command should stem from a place of considered, autonomous choice, rather than a mere reaction to the circumstances imposed by relationships. This narrative arc serves to underscore Milton’s broader theological assertion: that obedience born of autonomy and free will is the truest form of devotion.

### **2.10.3 Satan**

Milton intensifies the exploration of obedience by juxtaposing Satan’s rebellion with the divine structure of authority. Satan, engaging in debate with Abdiel in Book V, presents his insurrection as a response to perceived injustice, arguing that God’s elevation of the Son above the angels was unfair. This claim is progressively undermined as the narrative reveals the righteousness of God’s decision to appoint the Son as His vicegerent, which is validated by the Son’s virtuous actions and rightful thinking, aligning with divine reason.

Satan’s transgression, therefore, is deeply rooted in flawed reasoning. He proclaims that he and his compatriots are “self-begot, self-raised / By [their] own quickening power” (V.860-61), asserting their independence from God’s creative power and, by extension,

the obligation of obedience to Him. This stance is not merely a rejection of God's sovereignty but also a denial of God's singular status as the Creator. Satan's failure to acknowledge this displays an egregious departure from right reason.

The crux of Satan's disobedience lies in his inability to comprehend God's ways. His autonomy, tainted by erroneous judgment, precipitates his fall from grace. Despite exercising his free will, Satan's actions are not informed by an understanding of the divine order but are marred by a critical lack of insight into the nature of God's wisdom. Through Satan's narrative, Milton suggests that God's path is invariably just, for He possesses ultimate power and knowledge. This depiction serves to reinforce the notion that true obedience is not mere subservience but an enlightened affirmation of the natural and divine order, which requires both right reason and the submission to the Almighty's omniscient design.

Milton's argumentation culminates in the assertion that obedience is an autonomous exercise of reason, freely engaged with and guided by free will. It posits that one's primary duty is towards the exercise of one's own reason. Such an exercise, when conducted authentically, inevitably leads to obedience to God, for Milton holds the conviction that reason is a pathway to the divine. Even in the absence of immediate understanding of God's ways, His directions are ultimately shown to be just, as illustrated by the vindication of the Son's exaltation in *Paradise Lost*.

While initially, one might sympathise with Satan's rebellion due to the apparent lack of explanation for the Son's elevation, the unfolding events demonstrate the Son's worthiness of his status, thereby justifying God's decree. The narrative suggests that human beings, constrained by temporal limitations, are not always privy to the divine rationale at the moment of command. However, Milton suggests that the fabric of God's universe is woven with the threads of righteousness and that all His dictates, when seen through the lens of time and the unfolding of divine providence, reveal a wisdom that aligns with the highest exercise of reason. Thus, obedience to God is not blind submission but a reasoned alignment with a divine order that is, by its nature, oriented towards the ultimate good.



## 2.11 RHETORICAL PROWESS: “CALUMNIOUS ART”

The notion of rhetorical prowess as a newly emergent defining characteristic of Milton’s epic heroes is arguably the most pivotal feature in relation to the evolution of his epic protagonists. This topic is intricately intertwined with the political climate of Milton’s era. During the post-restoration period, a time when politics assumed an unprecedented significance due to the diminishing feasibility of deciding political and religious differences through warfare, Milton was acutely conscious of the influence of rhetoric within the political domain. Milton’s perspective on this emergent heroic attribute possesses two distinct facets: (1) To caution his readership about the malevolent figures in politics who possess exceptional rhetorical skills, and (2) to underscore the imperative of possessing commendable rhetorical prowess in order to counteract such individuals.

### 2.11.1 The Perception of Rhetoric in Seventeenth-century England

In the article entitled “Milton’s View of Rhetoric,” John M. Major contends that John Milton, throughout his educational journey, acquired an extensive knowledge of rhetoric (685-87). Nevertheless, as he was exposed to the ideologies of various philosophers, literary figures, and cultural movements of his era, Milton’s perspective shifted, leading him to perceive rhetoric with increasing scepticism. He came to view it as a potentially deceptive art, one that could easily mislead people (Major 685-711). There are two primary influences on Milton’s perspective: the philosophies of Bacon and the prevailing Puritan ethos of the period. Major highlights Bacon’s observation from *De Augmentis Scientiarum*, where he states, “eloquence is doubly inferior to wisdom;” yet, “in profit and in popular estimation, wisdom yields to eloquence” (*Works* IV.454-55). It is evident from this that Bacon, too, had reservations about rhetoric, recognising its profound influence on the masses even while harbouring doubts about its true value. Furthermore, Major underscores the influence of religious movements, especially those that advocated for a “plain style” of communication. For instance, Richard Foster Jones observes that leaders within the Puritan community “insisted on the vanity of eloquence, contrasted true substance with frivolous ornament, profit with vain delight, and maintained that plainness is the proper vesture of truth” (qtd. in Major 709).

However, a fundamental problem arises with Major's interpretation of rhetoric, especially in its application to *Paradise Lost*. He perceives rhetoric predominantly as an art centred around eloquent speech replete with metaphors, rather than understanding it as the intricate art of persuasion. While Major's analysis is commendable for shedding light on the potential influences that shaped Milton's stance on rhetoric — encompassing his educational background, religious influences, and renowned scientific figures — he seemingly overlooks rhetoric's most prominent aspect: its intrinsic connection to politics. This oversight unfortunately hinders Major from fully comprehending the political undertones that Milton embeds within *Paradise Lost*, particularly through Satan's employment of rhetorical prowess, which is depicted as his leading characteristic feature of him.

The concept of articulation as a weapon used by corrupt politicians, as indicated by Loewenstein in "Radical Puritan Politics," was already a topic much discussed by Puritans (218). As early as 1649, William Walwyn<sup>118</sup> argues in *Fountain of Slaunder Discovered* (1649) that

the Politicians of this world are Satan's chief Agents, by whom all discords and dissentions amongst men are begot and nourished: and that the Politicians chief Agent is his tongue, wherewith in an evil sense, and to an evil end, he speaks to every man in his own language, applies himself to every man's corrupt humour and interest, by it he becomes all things to all men, that by all means he might deceive some. (25)

Walwyn's emphasis on the politician's tongue as "his chief Agent" is particularly poignant, highlighting the power of rhetoric as a tool for manipulation and deception in politics. He suggests that politicians, through their cunning use of language, can adapt and cater to individual desires and biases, seeking to "deceive some." This perspective

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<sup>118</sup> During the Civil War, William Walwyn emerged as a notable dissenting Puritan, ardently supporting the Parliamentary forces. In 1646, he forged a strategic alliance with John Lilburne and John Wildman, culminating in the formation of the Levellers, a pioneering political faction. This group, with its progressive agenda, emphasised the importance of trial by jury, sought the termination of censorship on books and newspapers, and advocated for suffrage for every adult male. They also called for annual elections, championed absolute religious freedom, and aimed for the dissolution of both the monarchy and the House of Lords. Walwyn's contributions have solidified his status as a pivotal figure in the evolution of left-wing politics in England.

underscores the Puritan belief in the danger of political rhetoric, viewing it as a weapon wielded by the corrupt to further their own ends.

Herbert Zarov draws attention to Milton's intricate treatment of rhetoric in *Paradise Lost* and posits that echoes of this treatment can also be traced in some of Milton's political writings, most notably in *Eikonoklastes*. This particular work was crafted by Milton to serve as a justification for the execution of Charles I, positioning itself as a rebuttal to the Royalist propaganda found in Charles I's *Eikon Basilike* (49). Within *Eikonoklastes*, Milton casts a discerning eye on the potential dangers of rhetoric, especially when it is manipulated by influential figures to craft falsehoods that deceive the public. He cites Charles I as an embodiment of this deceptive use of language. Milton contends that Charles often veered towards "subtle dissimulation" (*YP* 3:376) in his discourse, favouring "words which admit of various sense" (*YP* 3:342) and constructing sentences that, while seemingly sincere on the surface, were inherently misleading — described pointedly as "faire in seeming, but fallacious" (*YP* 3:418). Through such observations, Milton seeks to illuminate the profound and often perilous implications of misused rhetoric, especially within the political arena.

### **2.11.2 Approaches Towards Satan's Rhetorical Prowess and Republican Discourse**

Milton's remarks in *Eikonoklastes* are especially applicable to Satan. Many critics interpret Satan's motivation with references to all the book, without any regard for Milton's presentation of the order of events in *Paradise Lost*. In my opinion, Milton's use of *in medias res* while portraying the rebellion of Satan is central to his argument and didactic aim. The initial allure of Satan's rhetoric, as pages turn, gives way to his true intentions. Just as the rebel angels are persuaded by the rhetoric and argument of Satan's speeches, readers are initially persuaded by his remarkable and plausible arguments, it is only after page after page, that readers realize that they had fallen victim to the rhetoric of Satan, just as the angels had done and that God was right all along. This method, as I have discussed in the part "The Methods to Instruct his Audience,"<sup>119</sup> forces Milton's

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<sup>119</sup> This critical approach was first proposed by Stanley Fish in the context of theology, arguing "Milton's method is to re-create in the mind of the reader (which is, finally, the poem's sense) the drama of the Fall, to make him fall again exactly as Adam did" (1). Although Fish rightly argues that Milton involves his readers in a profound self-reflective journey to interrogate their faith, I posit that this dialectic encompasses several dimensions, notably the political sphere. For further details on this matter, kindly refer to the section "The Methods to Instruct his Audience" in this chapter.

readers to be active and realize the dangers of rhetoric as a strategic, political skill, since they have experienced it first-hand while reading the epic.

Within this context, Loewenstein contends that Satan's character does not evolve throughout *Paradise Lost* (39). Rather, his eloquence, while steeped in notions of freedom and equality, also reveals his concealed agenda and inherent envy. Milton thus suggests that Satan is capable of deception and falsehood. Loewenstein points out that when Satan "scorns the idea of the Son as their new Lord and appeals to the authority of 'Imperial Titles,'" his aristocratic scorn becomes apparent once more. It highlights the irony of Satan discussing the peril of liberty while enthroned on a mountain, a "place [...] so high above [his] Peers" (V.812). Additionally, Loewenstein draws upon Raphael's words to underline Satan's pretence: he acts as though he were "[a]ffecting all equality with God, / In imitation of that Mount whereon / Messiah was declar'd in sight of Heav'n" (V.763–65) and was in a "God-like imitated State" (II.511). Loewenstein thus directs attention to Satan's actual motives: while posing as a liberator and a champion of revolution, he in fact regards himself as superior to all and covets the position of God.

Loewenstein's interpretation of Satan's inherent duplicity might seem astute, yet it arguably neglects the deliberate order of events and Satan's speeches as depicted by Milton. Loewenstein concentrates on instances of deceit in Book V, overlooking the initial and most compelling addresses of Satan in Book I that already captivate the reader's judgment. It is important to note that even though Book I includes observations that echo Loewenstein's viewpoint, such as the narrator's comment that Satan aspired "[t]o set himself in Glory above his peers / He trusted to have equall'd the most High" (39-40), these are not direct declarations from Satan but rather the narrator's interjections. As such, they should not be taken as evidence of self-contradiction in Satan's speeches. In my estimation, Loewenstein does not fully appreciate Milton's strategy of cultivating discerning readers who can grasp the nuances of rhetoric as a tool of political manipulation. Milton's narrative compels readers to initially succumb to Satan's persuasive discourse, only to later confront his genuine intentions, thus emphasising the need for critical engagement with rhetoric and its potential implications.

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In Book V, the narrator delineates how Satan achieves his objectives “with calumnious art” (V.770), pointing to Satan’s deployment of his rhetorical prowess for malevolent ends. This not only underscores Satan’s misuse of eloquent speech but also serves as an admonition to readers about their potential deception by his words. It could be perceived that I am contradicting myself, given that I have previously noted the narrator’s commentary in Book I, which suggests that Satan, under the facade of republican rhetoric, is primarily self-serving. Consequently, one might question my decision to dismiss the narrator’s assertions in Book I while endorsing his observations in Book V. However, it is crucial to grasp the progression of the narrative. By the juncture at which readers engage with Book V, they have already been exposed to ample instances of Satan’s speeches and deeds that indicate his malevolent intentions. This accumulation of evidence lends credence to the narrator’s remarks in Book V. In stark contrast, when considering Book I, readers are lacking any corroborative evidence beyond Satan’s own speeches to discern his ulterior motives. This distinction, in my view, is of paramount significance and deserves careful consideration.

### **2.11.3 Satan’s Allure and the Rhetoric of Liberty and Equality**

In *Paradise Lost*, the figure with the most compelling powers of expression and, consequently, rhetorical prowess, is unquestionably Satan. Satan consistently prevails in the majority of rhetorical encounters he partakes in: during his rebellion against God, he amasses a third of all the celestial angels to join his cause; when attempting entry to Earth, he persuades the Archangel Uriel with his eloquence, portraying himself as “a stripling Cherube” (III.636) freshly descended from Heaven, brimming with curiosity about the nascent world; subsequently, he successfully tempts Eve to eat from the Tree of Knowledge through his persuasive discourse. Evidently, the mastery of oration emerges as Satan’s most potent attribute, which he consistently employs to significant effect. Consequently, rhetorical prowess is presented as a quality securing Satan’s triumph in these encounters.

The first book of *Paradise Lost* harbours scenes where the expressive power of Lucifer shine the most bright. Satan’s presents himself as a revolutionary leader, as advocate or “[p]atron of liberty” (IV.958), an ardent and selfless revolutionary who fights not for himself but for his people, a someone of principle who has the guts to stand against the

strongest being in existence, and a political liberator daring to defy a tyrant even after a defeat:

All is not lost; the unconquerable Will,  
And study of revenge, immortal hate,  
And courage never to submit or yield:  
And what is else not to be overcome? (I.106-109)

He appears to be a figure of unwavering commitment, who clings tenaciously to his revolutionary principles despite his setbacks. He presents himself as a revolutionary combatting the “grand Foe, [the God] / Who now triumphs, and in th’ excess of joy / Sole reigning holds the Tyranny of Heav’n” (I.122-24). His depiction suggests that although he may be vanquished in physical combat, his steadfast belief in liberty and equality continually emboldens him to rise and persist in his noble yet impossible rebellion against a tyrant. In my estimation, Satan’s intensified adherence to republican values post-defeat only serves to reinforce and advance his argument for opposing despotism. His assertion that “what is else not to be overcome” is particularly impactful, following three lines that underscore the importance of maintaining the struggle despite military loss. This statement suggests that as long as his followers remain resolute in their cause, they will not succumb to defeat, regardless of the circumstance.

In my estimation, Milton creates a sense of empathy for Satan, with the poem’s narrator highlighting his acute suffering even amidst the voicing of his rebellious declarations, as depicted in the lines, “in pain / [...] ract with deep despair” (I.125-26). Loewenstein scrutinises this portrayal of anguish, remarking, “the poet focuses our attention on Satan’s inner torment, warning us not to be taken in by his forceful rhetoric and alerting us to the incongruity between outward performance and inward despair” (*Landmarks* 60). Loewenstein’s interpretation posits that Satan’s oratory is steeped in hypocrisy, for while he adopts the guise of a revolutionary, his actions are self-serving. This reading, I have argued, does not fully appreciate the structured progression of Satan’s orations. Contrary to Loewenstein’s assertion, I would counter that Milton’s depiction of Satan in a state of despair serves not to undermine his sincerity but to bolster his rhetorical prowess, effectively ensnaring the reader with Satan’s eloquence, particularly as these expressions of empathy follow closely on the heels of his seductive oratory. Book I abounds with instances that suggest Satan’s empathetic stance towards his followers: “Waiting revenge:

cruel his eye, but cast / Signs of remorse and passion to behold / The fellows of his crime” (I.604-6). It is imperative to highlight that these reflections are attributed to the bardic narrator and not to Satan himself. It is further noted by the observation that they, the followers of Satan, remained loyal to their shared cause until the end (I.611). This again marks the greatness of Satan’s use of rhetorical prowess masterfully.

I would also like to highlight that the republican rhetoric espoused by Satan is reinforced in both Book I and Book II through the depiction of a democratic environment created by Milton. The assembly scenes in Pandæmonium, particularly in Book II, are of particular note, where various prominent figures of Satan’s faction express their views on their plight and future actions with remarkable freedom and boldness. For example, Moloch’s speech is blunt and direct; he argues passionately for renewed warfare, given they have nothing left to lose (II.51-105);<sup>120</sup> in contrast, Belial, countering Moloch, suggests that their punishment might have been harsher and proposes the potential for divine forgiveness, but really to ensure that nothing active is expected of him (II.119-225). Mammon then presents his views with conviction, rejecting any further subservience to God. He dismisses further conflict but proposes that they could transform Hell into a paradise through their own labour (II.230-283). Following Mammon’s speech, it is noted that there was considerable acclaim from Satan’s legions, endorsing his vision (II.285-290). It is at this point Beelzebub intervenes and proposes a different tactic, intimating knowledge of a newly created world and humanity and suggesting they seek vengeance through the corruption or destruction of this favoured new race (II.310-378). All the members of Satan’s host listen to these suggestions and ultimately, “[t]hey vote” (II.389), casting their lot in favour of Beelzebub’s scheme.

The assembly within *Paradise Lost* showcases a vivid embodiment of republican virtues of freedom and equity, as each speaker is granted the liberty and equal opportunity to articulate their perspectives, culminating in a decision reached through the democratic act of voting. Such a depiction starkly contrasts with the image of God, whom Satan has branded as the one “Sole reigning holds the Tyranny of Heav’n” (I.124). I posit that this

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<sup>120</sup> In this instance, it is noteworthy that Moloch echoes the rhetoric previously employed by Satan, labelling God as a ‘tyrant’ (II.59) and a “torturer” (II.64). This repetition of discourse within Satan’s ranks, I contend, reinforces the depiction of Satan as a figure emblematic of republican ideals.

democratic process serves to reinforce the republican narrative ascribed to Satan in Book I. It is my belief that Milton skilfully crafts his narrative to ensnare his readers with Satan's rhetorical prowess, an eloquence suffused with republican principles. The veracity of Satan's orations is not only rhetorical but also substantiated by the deeds of himself and his legion, as evidenced by their commitment to free speech and egalitarian voting practices, at least for Book I. Consequently, Satan emerges as the quintessential epic hero, his rhetorical mastery most luminously displayed in the opening books of the epic.

Another notable illustration of Satan's rhetorical skill is evident in the sequence following the proclamation of the Son's ascendancy and the subsequent declaration of his kingship by God in Book V. Satan, dissatisfied with God's judgement and mandates, endeavours to incite his fellow angels to dissent. Notably, he harnesses republican rhetoric to rationalize his revolt, delivering an address that resonates with the passion of a revolutionary figure poised against tyranny:

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 your selves  
 Natives and Sons of Heav'n possest before  
 By none, and if not equal all, yet free,  
 Equally free; for Orders and Degrees  
 Jarr not with liberty, but well consist. (V.787-793)

With these words uttered, Satan crafts a compelling case, appealing to the inherent nobility and preeminent status granted by their "nativeness" to Heaven—a lineage that endows them with innate superiority, manifesting in liberty and equality. He acknowledges the existence of a hierarchy but maintains that, despite variations in rank, their fundamental state of freedom is unaltered due to their "native" origins within Heaven, untouched by possession or subjugation under a monarch. He argues that the divine decrees and the structured hierarchy amongst the angels are not a constraint but an affirmation of their freedom. Satan brings into question the political dynamics with the anointment of the Son as the heavenly Viceroy, positing that it is unjust for the indigenus angels to be governed by a newly anointed being merely by divine decree. In doing so, Loewenstein observes, Satan "appropriates the defiant language of republicanism to persuade his compatriots, whose emotions he plays upon, that their ancient liberties (since



the angels have been “Equally free”) are endangered by the new monarchical rule of the Son” (“Radical puritan” 218). In Satan’s eyes, this equates to tyranny and the misuse of supreme power:

Who can in reason then or right assume  
 Monarchie over such as live by right  
 His equals, if in power and splendor less,  
 In freedome equal? or can introduce  
 Law and Edict on us, who without law  
 Erre not, much less for this to be our Lord,  
 And look for adoration to th’abuse  
 Of those Imperial Titles which assert  
 Our being ordain’d to govern, not to serve? (V.794–802)

The captivating rhetoric of Satan within *Paradise Lost* is such that it becomes palpable why a number of critics have posited that Milton might have, either inadvertently or deliberately, aligned his narrative with Satan, particularly when juxtaposed with Milton’s own political writings. David Loewenstein points out the parallel between the voice of Satan and Milton’s personal beliefs as articulated in *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* (1649), where Milton proclaims: “No man who knows ought, can be so stupid to deny that all men naturally were borne free, being the image and resemblance of God himself, and were by privilege above all the creatures, born to command and not to obey, and that they liv’d so” until the Fall (*YP* 3:198-99). In a manner akin to Milton, Satan asserts that his listeners are inherently free by virtue of their creation. What proves to be more significant is that through Milton’s portrayal, Satan prompts the angelic host not merely to challenge God’s supreme power but also to recognize their primordial status: they are destined “to govern, not to serve,” echoing Milton’s sentiment that humans are “born to command and not to obey.” The congruence between the rhetoric of Milton and Satan is indeed striking. In *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* (1649), Milton contends that “kings and magistrates hold authority from the people, who retain sovereign power fundamentally in themselves, [and if] they shall judge it for the best, [they can] retain him or depose him” (*YP* 3:206). This line of reasoning is mirrored in Satan’s discourse, which not only incites the angels to scrutinize the unfettered authority of God but also to remember their autonomy in accepting or rejecting a newly anointed monarch by God, for such an appointment may imperil their liberty.

It must be emphasised that the intended audience of *Paradise Lost* were likely to be well-acquainted with the political discourse sparked by Satan, particularly when considering the political climate of the seventeenth century. This subject matter undoubtedly strikes a chord with an audience that had endured the tumultuous political strife and subsequent conflicts. The Civil War is distinctly marked by controversies surrounding the notion of divine right, which posits that the monarch possesses inherent authority, granting him absolute power, versus the argument that his power ought to be curtailed by the populace, by Parliament. The motivations attributed to Satan bear a striking similarity to those of the revolutionary forces, as he contends that his rebellion is against a despot whose rulings, though they may be unjust, are deemed incontrovertible.

The figure of Milton's Satan is persistently aligned with the political aspects of his insurrection. He professes to challenge not the celestial order but rather the "Tyranny of Heav'n" (I.82, 124), which demands from its subjects a blind allegiance devoid of scrutiny. He portrays the Almighty as a vengeful despot, characterised in human terms by his propensity for wrath, exhibiting "impetuous rage" and "fury" (I.175, 179). He further posits that God's legitimacy is predicated upon "old repute" and "custom" (I.639-40). David Loewenstein posits that Satan's depiction of God mirrors "Milton's hostile representation of King Charles as a raging absolutist monarch whose arbitrary power and authority are sustained by the tyranny of 'Custom' and the idols of tradition" in *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* ("Radical puritan" 206).

Therefore, the arguments and stirring republican rhetoric of Satan indeed echo Milton's own when he was opposing the despotism of Charles I. This similarity is not due to Milton aligning with Satan's cause, as Blake once suggested, but rather reflects the sophisticated and layered objectives Milton had in educating his audience through the epic heroes. The very republican rhetoric employed in Books I and II is a strategic element of Milton's design, crafted to lure his readers with the charm of Satan's rhetoric, which will ultimately be unmasked as deceptive and mendacious when Satan's true intentions are disclosed: not to challenge a despot, but to claim imperial titles for himself and ascend above his equals (V.763-65, V.812). Consequently, the audience, initially captivated by the rhetoric and reasoning in Satan's orations, comes to the realisation that they have been ensnared by the same rhetorical devices that deceived the angels, leading to their fall, affirming

that God's perspective was just all along. Thus, the readers are not merely observers of the perils of rhetorical prowess in politics within the narrative, but they also experience its impact directly.<sup>121</sup>

## 2.12 MARTIAL PROWESS AND GLORY

The discourse on martial valour within *Paradise Lost* has long stirred academic debate. The manner in which Milton constructs the notion of martial prowess presents a multifaceted problem that engenders a plethora of enquiries. Milton certainly employs the traditional tropes of epic warfare within Book VI; however, this does not necessarily indicate his endorsement of martial prowess as inherently heroic. Does Milton adhere to the conventional epic framework that valorises martial themes as heroic? Alternatively, does he diverge from this norm, perceiving martial endeavours through a critical lens? The historical context of the Civil War and Milton's personal involvement further complicate the subject of his stance on warfare. How could Milton, who through his political treatises endorsed the overthrow of the tyrannical Charles I, be unequivocally opposed to conflict?

A simple yes or no response scarcely suffices to encapsulate Milton's true intentions, given the dichotomy between the Christian and the politically engaged Milton. As such, any analysis of martial prowess and its heroic portrayal within *Paradise Lost* must proceed with caution. Milton weaves an intricate tapestry that intertwines theological and political strands, thereby ensuring that the portrayal of his epic heroes is equally complex and layered.

### 2.12.1 A Brief Outline of War in *Paradise Lost*

Indeed, the portrayal of the war in heaven within *Paradise Lost* should be recognised not as a direct depiction of martial action but as a narrative recounted by Raphael to Adam, detailing the rebellion of Satan and the ensuing sequence of events. Book VI is largely

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<sup>121</sup> This is also my answer to the renowned "Milton Controversy" debates that transpired during the twentieth century. These debates primarily centred on the question of why John Milton, though unconventional but a devoted Christian, allocated some of the best lines in his *magnum opus*, *Paradise Lost*, to Satan, the embodiment of evil. In my view, this strategic element of Milton's design was carefully crafted to lure his readers with the charm of Satan's rhetoric, which will ultimately be unmasked as deceptive and mendacious when Satan's true intentions are disclosed.

allocated to this narrative of angelic conflict in the celestial realm. Raphael informs Adam—and, by extension, Adam’s descendants—that the hostilities extended over a span of three days. On the initial day, the two contending forces confront each other with a display of both sublimity and intensity. In this clash, Satan and Michael engage in personal combat, where Michael, wielding a long and sharp sword, inflicts a severe wound on Satan, necessitating a retreat of the rebellion’s forces. However, the audience is made aware that, as an angel, Satan’s injuries are temporary, and he recuperates with alacrity. The subsequent day sees Satan’s army deploying cannons and gunpowder, which temporarily places God’s army at a tactical disadvantage. In a fervent response, they “at length pulling up Mountains overwhelm’d both the force and Machins of Satan” (Argument, VI.4-5), burying the insurrectionists and their artillery. On the third day, God resolves to conclude the warfare. He commands the Son to enter the fray. Endowed with omnipotent force, the Son confronts the rebellion’s forces and, single-handedly, decisively defeats them, thereby concluding the war in heaven.

### 2.12.2 Milton’s Conceptualization of War and Martial Heroism in His Tracts

The idea of war and martial prowess can also be observed in Milton’s political oeuvre. For instance, in *Of Education* (1644), Milton articulates a robust manifesto for educational reform. He posits that an ideal curriculum should equip citizens “to perform justly, skillfully and magnanimously all the offices both private and publike of peace and war” (YP 2:378–79). At this juncture, Milton appears to advocate for the necessity of martial skills amongst individuals. Composed amidst the tumult of the Civil War, it seems rational for Milton to promulgate an educational framework that prepares citizens for conflict, particularly as the Parliamentarians were engaged in what they deemed a just war to depose a despotic monarch. Milton’s perspectives here may be construed as being directly influenced by the socio-political climate of his nation during that era.<sup>122</sup>

In *Second Defense*, Milton states:

I exchanged the toils of war, in which any stout trooper might outdo me, for those labors which I better understood [...] I concluded that if God wished those men to achieve much

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<sup>122</sup> It is imperative to highlight that, as addressed in the “Giving Up on Arthurian Epic” section, Milton harboured ambitions to craft an Arthurian epic, unmistakably imbued with elements of warfare. Thus, during that past period, Milton evidently regarded warfare as a suitable subject for epic literature.

noble deeds, he also wished that there be other men by whom these deeds, once done, might be worthily quoted and extolled. (*YP* 4.1:553)

This passage not only casts light on Milton's profound self-awareness but also on his reverence for warfare when pursued for a righteous cause. While he openly concedes his own limitations in the face of the physical demands of combat, he simultaneously elevates the act of warfare, viewing it as a pursuit as noble and worthy as literary craftsmanship. By juxtaposing "the toils of war" with the "labors which I better understood", Milton accentuates the intrinsic value of diverse contributions to society. His assertion regarding God's intention for some men to enact noble deeds on the battlefield, and for others to chronicle and praise them, underscores his belief in a divinely orchestrated balance of roles. Each individual, in Milton's perspective, is bestowed with particular talents and destinies. While some are preordained to shine in acts of valour during war, others, like Milton himself, are chosen to immortalise and celebrate those acts through the power of the pen. In essence, for Milton, warfare, when engaged in for a just cause, stands on a pedestal of honour parallel to the esteemed art of writing.<sup>123</sup>

In *Christine Doctrine*, section VIII, Milton touches upon the concept of warfare. While recognising the calamities and atrocities of war, he states that war is permissible if it is waged for a just and moral cause in accordance with the laws of God (*passim*). Milton's view in this context is considerably shaped by Hugo Grotius's seminal work *The Rights of War and Peace* (Oldman 108-09, Abbot 20-21). While the extent of Grotius's influence on Milton invites continued scholarly debate, it is noteworthy that Milton references Grotius within several political tracts, including *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, *The Judgment of Martin Bucer* (1644), and *Tetrachordon* (1645). In *The Rights of War*, Book III, Chapter 11, entitled "The Right of Killing Enemies in Just War to Be Tempered with Moderation and Humanity," Grotius posits that war constitutes a calamity that ought to be averted. Nevertheless, he contends that if the declaration of war is grounded in legitimate reasons such as the defence of oneself and property, and if it is conducted with honour, then it is justifiable (*n.p.*). Oldman suggests that Grotius's thesis, which condones

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<sup>123</sup> Milton's assertions find validation in subsequent works he penned. As he alludes in his remarks, he composed several poems such as the Sonnet "To General Fairfax" and Sonnet "Cromwell." In these pieces, Milton lauds the military triumphs of these figures. This literary endeavour underscores Milton's endorsement of warfare, provided it is undertaken for a just and ethical reason.

war when waged for a righteous cause and executed in a just manner, resonates within Milton's own perspective on warfare, an element that permeates *Paradise Lost* (7, 125). This is indeed a valid observation since Milton's approach towards war is nuanced as he recognises war's brutal reality yet also understands the necessity of martial prowess in a politically charged world.

Prior to examining the depiction of martial prowess as a heroic attribute, it is pertinent to consider earlier critiques of Milton's perspective on warfare. Initial commentators such as John Dennis and Joseph Addison viewed the conflict depicted as a utilisation of an epic trope; after all, a quintessential epic is founded upon a narrative of warfare. Therefore, for these critics, Milton's representation of the battle in Book VI is as authentic as those found in the compositions of Homer, Apollonius of Rhodes, and Virgil. Contrasting with this perspective is Voltaire's contention that Milton sought to depict warfare in its conventional, sublime form consistent with epic tradition, but instead rendered a portrayal that bordered on the absurd. A third standpoint is presented by Arnold Stein, who considers the conflict in Book VI as intentionally absurd. However, diverging from the preceding second group of critics, Stein asserts that this was a deliberate "epic farce," crafted to provoke mirth ("Answerable Style" 21-22). John Leonard offers a poignant observation on this debate: "Where Voltaire and Johnson had laughed at Milton, Stein urges us to laugh with him" (*Faithful Labourers* 302). While there are indeed elements within the war that could be construed as comedic, thereby serving to elicit laughter, I contend that the overriding tone of the conflict is imbued with a profound sublimity and seriousness. It is as earnest in its portrayal of warfare as the battles depicted in the classical epics.

### **2.12.3 Satan**

The martial prowess of Satan in *Paradise Lost* is indeed a defining trait of his character as an epic hero. C. Maurice Bowra, in his work *From Virgil to Milton* (1945), contends that Milton's critique of Homeric and Virgilian epics stems from their focus on warfare, which he does not view as a truly heroic theme (197). Milton's epic, while incorporating war, does not extol it as a heroic endeavour. Bowra was the first to analyse Satan through the lens of ancient heroism in terms of martial valour: "In Satan Milton displays various

qualities that belong to the old type. He is a great leader in war” (228).<sup>124</sup> In Satan’s narrative, war is the instrument to defy Heaven’s tyranny and to lay claim to the celestial throne he regards as his due. This assertion of right is later undermined by his own vainglory, mirroring Achilles, and a pursuit of terrestrial fame akin to that of Aeneas (Bowra 230). It is clear, therefore, that Milton attributes the classical epic hero’s pursuit of objectives through martial strength to Satan. This strategy significantly underscores Milton’s critique of the age-old heroic ideal, defined by martial expertise. By allocating such traits to the villain in his narrative, Milton implicitly dismisses the archaic notion of heroism founded on martial prowess (Bowra 228-29, Harding 41, Loewenstein 103).

The old heroic nature of Satan can be observed right in Book VI when he addresses his followers later at night after the first day of the war. He reassures them that despite being “danger tri’d” they remain “not overpower’d” (VI.418-19), suggesting that their struggle will not only secure the freedom they believe to be their right but also prove their valour. Therefore, they should aspire for

Honour, Dominion, Glorie, and renowne,  
Who have sustaind one day in doubtful fight  
(And if one day, why not Eternal dayes?)  
What Heavens Lord had powerfullest to send  
Against us from about his Throne, and judg’d  
Sufficient to subdue us to his will,  
But proves not so: then fallible, it seems,  
Of future we may deem him, though till now  
Omniscient thought. (VI.422-30)

Satan’s role as a military commander in *Paradise Lost* is not just notable; it is exemplary. His powers of expression stand out, particularly on the first day of battle when, despite losing to Michael and sustaining injuries that forced a retreat, he chooses not to dwell on defeat. Instead, he emphasises their survival, which, to him, suggests a chink in the

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<sup>124</sup> I should acknowledge the fact that the hypothesis that Satan is characterised by certain classical heroic attributes originates with E.M. Tillyard in his scholarly work, *Milton and the Epic* (1938). Tillyard confines his assertion to the statement that Satan “embodies some of the heroic qualities and who in his voyagings satisfies Milton’s oft-repeated allusions to the *Odyssey* of Homer. It may even be that Milton modelled his plot on the *Odyssey*” (203), yet he does not delve into a detailed analysis of this idea. This critical interpretation is later heavily elaborated on by leading Milton scholars including C. Maurice Bowra in *From Virgil to Milton* (1945), pages 221, 227-30; Davis P. Harding in *The Club of Hercules* (1962), pages 44-67; Stanley Fish in *Surprised by Sin* (1967), and John Steadman’s various works including *Milton And The Renaissance Hero* (1967) and “The Idea of Satan as the Hero of ‘Paradise Lost’” (1976).

armour of an ostensibly omnipotent God. Such an interpretation serves to heighten his followers' morale, igniting within them a renewed belief in the possibility of victory. Through his powerful rhetoric, Milton's Satan adeptly marshals his forces, readying them for the battles ahead. He tempts them with promises of honour, dominion, glory, and fame—rewards synonymous with the quintessential attributes of heroes from the ancient epic tradition. Remarkably, Satan reveals, albeit indirectly, that his rebellion, initially launched as a crusade against tyranny, is in truth fuelled by pride and a thirst for fame. This revelation is crucial for the audience, as it strips bare the real motives behind Satan's purported war against divine oppression—revealing that it is, in essence, driven by his own pride.

Milton juxtaposes Satan's archaic heroic values of "Honour, Dominion, Glorie, and renown" with a starkly contrasting perspective in Book XI of *Paradise Lost*. As articulated by Bowra, "Milton quite deliberately fashioned Satan on heroic models, because he rejected the old heroic standards and wished to show that they were wicked" (229). This becomes explicit when Michael rebukes the ideology and heroic code of the pagan world marked by martial heroism:

Such were these Giants, men of high renown;  
 For in those dayes Might onely shall be admir'd,  
 And Valour and Heroic Vertu call'd;  
 To overcome in Battle, and subdue  
 Nations, and bring home spoils with infinite  
 Man-slaughter, shall be held the highest pitch  
 Of human Glorie, and for Glorie done  
 Of triumph, to be styl'd great Conquerours,  
 Patrons of Mankind, Gods, and Sons of Gods,  
 Destroyers rightlier call'd and Plagues of men.  
 Thus Fame shall be atchiev'd, renown on Earth,  
 And what most merits fame in silence hid. (XI.688-99)

In this passage, Michael's words shine a critical light on the misplaced heroism lauded by Satan. He reveals the grim reality behind the glorified terms "valour" and "vertu"—that they lead to the conquest and devastation of nations, to "Man-slaughter." Through Michael, Milton articulates a powerful condemnation of the ancient heroic ideals, presenting the so-called valorous "Giants" as nothing more than harbingers of violence and destruction. This narrative voice exposes the folly of celebrating such destructive



force as “Heroic Vertu” and derides the notion of martial conquest as the zenith of human glory. In doing so, Milton challenges not only the heroic concept itself but also the societal glorification of such figures, urging a re-evaluation of what truly constitutes glory and honour.

Thus, within the narrative of *Paradise Lost*, Milton delineates two divergent attitudes: Satan’s, which exalts martial prowess as a means to attain glory and renown, and Michael’s, which perceives such martial heroism as synonymous with homicide and widespread slaughter. In this respect, Milton presents Satan in old heroic terms to discredit and criticise the pagan heroic ideology and code (Bowra 228-29, Harding 41).<sup>125</sup>

Satan’s duel with Michael indeed further tethers Satan to the Homeric tradition. Raphael, in the manner of a bardic narrator, portrays them in Homeric terms:

They ended parle and both addresst for fight  
Unspeakable; for who, though with the tongue

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<sup>125</sup> However, it is pertinent to note that Harding’s interpretation diverges to some extent from that of Bowra. Whilst Bowra contends that through Satan, Milton repudiates and critiques the ancient ideals of heroism, Harding supplements this by suggesting that *Paradise Lost* occasionally displays Milton’s admiration for these ideals. For example, Harding posits that Milton holds in regard the audacious exhortation of Sarpedon in the *Iliad* (24, 43-44), and by having Satan emulate this rhetoric, albeit for nefarious purposes, Milton renders Satan as a satirical echo of the Homeric hero Sarpedon. In this vein, according to Leonard, Harding “is sometimes for the ‘old heroic creed’ and sometimes against it depending on the moment and context” (310). While there is a general veracity to Harding’s observations, the comparison between Sarpedon and Satan does not fully withstand scrutiny. Harding overlooks the context of Sarpedon’s oration. The setting in *Iliad* is as follows: Sarpedon, having come to Hector’s aid with his valiant Lycians, finds himself in a predicament where death seems inevitable. It is within this moment that he expresses to his Lycian comrade Glaucus his remorse for having left his illustrious homeland for the war, vowing not to enter battle again should he survive. Yet, recognising the futility of retreat, he contends that they must now fight bravely, either to seize glory from their adversaries or to bestow it upon them. The speech is certainly striking, but Harding fails to acknowledge that it epitomises the Homeric notion of *kleos apthiton* (eternal fame) attainable through martial valour. In my estimation, Satan is not merely a parody in this context; rather, he sincerely shares with Sarpedon the belief that martial heroism, the risking of one’s life, can lead to glory and renown. The nobility of Sarpedon’s intentions does not inherently validate his actions. While Milton might have esteemed Sarpedon’s rousing speech, it is doubtful he revered it to the degree of endorsing the principle that glory, acquired through death in battle, is commendable. Lastly, I should address a common oversight in Milton studies, which often interprets the epic hero Sarpedon in terms of Greek heroic epic, particularly when drawing parallels between Satan and ancient epic heroes. Recent scholarship, however, underscores that Lycian Sarpedon’s culture has unique heroic traditions, markedly distinct from its Greek counterparts. For an in-depth understanding of this distinction, refer to the foundational works in the field: Trevor Bryce’s *The Lycians in Literary and Epigraphic Sources* (Museum Tusculanum Press, 1986), Antony G. Keen’s *Dynastic Lycia: A Political History of the Lycians and Their Relations with Foreign Powers, c. 545-362 B.C.* (Brill, 1998), Cevdet Bayburtluoglu’s *Lycia* (Suna & Inan Kirac Research Institute on Mediterranean Civilizations, 2004), and Fahri Işık’s *Uygarlık Anadolu’dan Doğdu* (Akdeniz Ülkeleri Akademisi Vakfi, 2019). These texts collectively provide valuable insights into the distinctiveness of Lycian culture and its heroic ideals.

Of Angels, can relate, or to what things  
 Liken on Earth conspicuous, that may lift  
 Human imagination to such highth  
 Of Godlike Power: for likest Gods they seemd,  
 Stood they or mov'd, in stature, motion, arms  
 Fit to decide the Empire of great Heav'n. (VI.296-303)

What is remarkable here is that Raphael underlines how hard it is for him even to describe the clash of two great angels in a way that a human can conceive it. Furthermore, he likens them to “Gods” who are about to decide the fate of Heaven. This is clearly a Homeric allusion because this is just like the duels of the warriors of the ancient world which decide the fates of the *polis*, city states, through combat. Milton then continues with the description of the duel scene detailing the combat, “Now wav'd thir fierie Swords, and in the Aire / Made horrid Circles; two broad Suns thir Shields / Blaz'd opposite” (VI.304-6). He further continues the details of the duel, the sword of Michael, he says, met

The sword of Satan with steep force to smite  
 Descending, and in half cut sheere, nor staid,  
 But with swift wheele reverse, deep entring shar'd  
 sheared, cut off All his right side; then Satan first knew pain,  
 And writh' d him to and fro convolv'd; so sore  
 The griding sword with discontinuous<sup>o</sup> wound  
 Pass'd through him [...] (VI.324-30)

Thus Satan is wounded by Michael's sword, leading him bleed “[a] stream of Nectarous humor issuing flow'd / Sanguin, such as Celestial Spirits may bleed, / And all his Armour staind ere while so bright” (VI.332-34). Milton's portrayal of the duel between Satan and Michael is indeed nothing short of extraordinary examples of Homeric epics. He even goes on to state that their clash was like “Two Planets rushing from aspect maligne / Of fiercest opposition in mid Skie” (VI.313-14), which indicates the greatness of their clash, which is way beyond the power of humanity.

Here it is significant to touch upon an important issue regarding the immortality of the angels, which according to certain critics, creates the problem of martial validity. It is indicated in the epic that “soon he [Satan] heal'd; for Spirits that live throughout / Vital in every part, not as frail man, / In entrailles, Heart or Head or Liver or Reines / Cannot but by annihilating die” (VI.344-47). Leonard, while discussing commentaries on the war in heaven and whether or not it is to be thought comic, states that “comedy comes from

the fact that gods and angels are immortal” (*Faithful Labourers* 274).<sup>126</sup>For him, the fact that angels are immortal makes the struggle seem comic because it is futile. Perhaps it is. However, Milton’s treatment of the martial scene is not. Maybe what is at stake is not their bodies, yet it is everything of importance, the dominion of heaven. If defeated, they are to face the judgement of God as rebellious angels who not only defied his pronouncement when he exalted the Son but also ruined the harmony of heaven. If victorious, they are to gain, in the words of Satan, “Honour, Dominion, Glorie, and renowne” (VI.422). Accordingly, the outcome is crucial in every way possible for Satan’s force. Eventually Satan loses the war and is defeated when the Son intervenes. And with the defeat of Satan we observe the defeat of the old heroic ideology and code characterised by martial prowess.

#### 2.12.4 The Son

The role of the Son as the commander of divine forces is unequivocal, as God Himself ordains his participation in the conflict on the third day. With divine empowerment, the Son decisively overpowers the rebels. This raises a perplexing query: if such a swift victory was within the Son’s grasp, why would God permit the war to take place at all? Why expose his faithful to the traumas of combat? The elucidation to this conundrum is provided by God Himself before dispatching the Son to conclude the hostilities:

Two dayes, as we compute the dayes of Heav’n,  
 Since Michael and his Powers went forth to tame  
 These disobedient; sore hath been thir fight,  
 As likeliest was, when two such Foes met arm’d;  
 For to themselves I left them, and thou knowst,  
*Equal in thir Creation* they were form’d,  
 Save what sin hath impaired, which yet hath wrought  
 Insensibly, for I suspend thir doom;  
 Whence in perpetual fight they needs must last  
 Endless, and no solution will be found (VI.685-694; italics mine)

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<sup>126</sup> The problem with the immortality of angels, according to Leonard, can also be found in Voltaire’s “An Essay on Epick Poetry.” Voltaire indeed perceives the actions of angels, such as uprooting and casting mountains, as humorously incongruent with the epic genre, even daring to state that French critics might dismiss *Paradise Lost* as a “Paradise of Fools” due to these elements of levity. Nonetheless, it is crucial to note that Voltaire’s critique does not extend to the question of angelic immortality. For a detailed examination of Voltaire’s commentary on this matter, one should consult Florence Donnell White’s *Voltaire’s Essay on Epic Poetry: A Study and An Edition*, specifically pages 141-142, where these observations are discussed.

God's intent was to allow "Michael and his Powers" the opportunity to try quell the insurrection on its own terms, although He knew that left to their own devices the forces of both sides would be locked "in perpetual fight [...] and no solution [...] found.". It emerges that Michael and Satan, being "Equal in thir Creation," should theoretically be evenly matched, yet it is Michael who prevails in combat. The question then arises: what enables Michael to surpass Satan? The answer lies in the righteousness of his cause, the allegiance to God's will, validating God's sovereignty.

However, Satan misinterprets his survival after the duel not as a reprieve but as a sign of potential victory, prompting him to regroup his forces. On the second day, despite initial advancements made by Satan's legion with their infernal artillery, they suffer defeat once more under the weight of mountains cast upon them. Recognising the futility of demonstrating to Satan his fallacy and rebellion, God acknowledges that no lesson will be learned through these means. It is only after all has been attempted that God commissions the Son to intervene.

Although the Son appears as the leader of God's forces and ends the war instantly, he should not be treated as operating on the same level of leadership as Michael. Before sent to war, God equips him with formidable weapons:

Ascend my Chariot, guide the rapid Wheelles  
That shake Heav'ns basis, bring forth all my Warr,  
My Bow and Thunder, my Almighty Arms  
Gird on, and Sword upon thy puissant Thigh;  
Pursue these sons of Darkness, drive them out  
From all Heav'ns bounds into the utter Deep:  
There let them learn, as likes them, to despise  
God and Messiah his anointed King. (VI.711-18)

The Son then enters the fray, yet he deliberately withholds his full power: "Yet half his strength he put not forth, but check'd / His Thunder in mid Volie, for he meant / Not to destroy, but root them out of Heav'n" (VI.853-55). This moment marks the Son's swift and effortless victory over Satan's forces.

The restraint shown by the Son has sparked varied interpretations among scholars. Arnold Stein regards the depiction of warfare in Book VI as verging on the absurd, specifically labelling the Son's conserved might as "physical ridicule" (25). John Leonard, however,

challenges this view and posits that while “this mocks the devils, but mockery of devils need not extend to mockery of epic war” (303). He suggests that there is an “allusion” to Hesiod, recognizing Newton’s original observation of the parallel. In *Theogony*, Zeus does not moderate his thunderbolts but rather, ““showed forth all his strength” and came down from Olympus ‘hurling his lightning thick and fast’” (qtd. in Leonard 304). Leonard proposes that Milton is not demeaning the epic tradition but rather enriching it: “Milton here is not belittling epic but taking it to a new level. The Son checks his thunder in mid-volley not because he is performing a comedy number, but because his less is more than Zeus’s most” (303).

While the interpretation that Milton aims to demonstrate the Son’s restrained power as surpassing that of the principal deity of the Greek pantheon is compelling, I propose a more nuanced perspective. By construing the Son’s might as merely a superior force within the heroic framework of antiquity, we inadvertently confine his grandeur to the parameters of ancient martial prowess. This interpretation suggests that the Son’s greatness is derived from his dominance over the most formidable entity known to the ancient world, thus assessing him through a classical lens.

In my estimation, Milton’s intention is not to merely portray the Son as a figure of immense martial strength. When considering Michael, who engages and triumphs over Satan in single combat, one could argue for the pre-eminence of God’s forces in martial terms. Yet, the Son’s role is fundamentally distinct. Milton’s objective, as I see it, is not to reinforce the Son’s martial might but to transcend the archetype of the martial hero. With the Son, Milton signifies the ascendancy of Christian heroism over the conventional valour of bygone antiquity marked by martial heroism. The Son’s true merit as the leader of God’s forces does not rest on his combat skills, but on the Christian virtues he embodies — free-willed obedience to God, his earned distinction, and his voluntary sacrifice for humanity. These attributes position him as the quintessential Christian hero, and it is for this reason that God equips him with the instruments and power necessary to quell Satan’s insurrection decisively. I should also add the fact that the Son has the power to destroy his enemy yet he chooses only to kick them out of heaven (VI. 55). This again marks a difference from ideals of old world’s epic heroes who use destruction to reach glory. The

Son, on the other hand, “not only surpassed them in destructive might [...] but was capable of a still loftier mode of valor” (Steadman, “The Suffering Servant” 32).

William R. Herman’s perspective is noteworthy in this discussion. He remarks upon the Son’s rapid triumph and asserts: “From the Hellenic point of view [...] His action is disappointing and annoying. Physical glory, and the recognized leadership that goes with it, are missing” (Herman 16). Herman overlooks the radical poetic stance Milton adopts, a departure from the pagan tradition that I have delineated. Milton intentionally diverges from this classical heritage. Indeed, the Son embodies nearly every attribute of an epic hero: noble lineage, unparalleled martial prowess—demonstrating that even his restrained force surpasses that of Zeus—and he is a leader to his followers. What then is absent? Physical glory and acknowledged leadership, according to Herman. Yet, it is critical to emphasize that the Son’s lack of these traits is not due to an inability to attain them, but rather a conscious renunciation. This is precisely what distinguishes the Son as a novel archetype of the epic hero, one defined by Christian virtues as previously outlined. Therefore, while numerous critics posit that Milton critiques martial heroism and its archaic heroic ideals rooted in the ancient world through Satan’s defeat, I propose that this critique is equally manifest in the Son’s victory.

It is imperative to acknowledge that the portrayal of God’s army, and notably its commander Michael, in *Paradise Lost* transcends a purely theological interpretation. There exists an additional dimension pertaining to the politics of martial heroism that Milton introduces. This notion is partially explored by Barbara Kiefer Lewalski. She contends that while the overthrow of Satan’s legions in Book VI and Michael’s subsequent disavowal of martial heroism might commonly be read as Milton’s renunciation of martial glory and a marker of the constraints of warfare, they simultaneously suggest “its [war’s] necessity as a response to blatant evil” (Lewalski, *Milton’s Politics* 157). However, she does not elaborate on this any further. A more nuanced examination is required to fully comprehend the political implications of martial prowess as a heroic attribute.

The significance of martial heroism, which distinctly characterizes Satan as an epic hero, is equally pertinent in delineating the figure of Michael, to such a degree that Michael’s martial might surpasses Satan’s, as evidenced by his triumph in single combat. To grasp

the potential political connotations of Michael's martial prowess, one must first understand that Satan, from the inception of his insurrection in *Paradise Lost*, is persistently entreated to renounce his revolt, as depicted through Raphael's telling of the events and Abdiel's admonitions in Book V and Book VI. Despite these entreaties, Satan remains unyielding, leading to an unavoidable conflict in Heaven. Milton's message is clear: martial prowess becomes a requisite in the realm of pragmatic politics when diplomatic discourse fails. Michael's valiant confrontation with Satan must be viewed in this light — as a warrior combating an intractable adversary impervious to peaceful negotiation.

It is crucial, however, to distinguish the motivations that underpin the martial capabilities of Satan's legions and those of God's forces. Raphael's speech illuminates this divergence:

I might relate of thousands, and thir names  
Eternize here on Earth; but those elect  
Angels contented with thir fame in Heav'n  
Seek not the praise of men (VI.373-76)

While Satan's cohorts wield warfare to attain "Honour, Dominion, Glorie, and renowne" (VI.422), Raphael clarifies that God's forces are not driven by a quest for glory in their martial deeds; their combat is solely in the service of the God. Therefore, the disparate motivations of these entities should inform our understanding of martial prowess, particularly from a political standpoint. Milton delineates Satan's martial prowess as rooted in a nefarious yearning for personal glory, while he presents Michael's martial competence as a manifestation of divine service. Thus, Milton vindicates Michael's martial attributes as politically justifiable, given their righteous impetus.

It might be contended that despite Michael's martial prowess and his victory over Satan in personal combat, his actions alone are insufficient to conclude the celestial conflict. The celestial realm endures turmoil and destruction as the warfare persists. Barbara Kiefer Lewalski posits that Michael's inability to vanquish Satan underscores the inherent constraints of warfare: "however good the cause, however heroic the warriors, however divinely authorized and necessary—as the war in heaven clearly was, and as Milton always thought the English war had been—war cannot by itself eradicate evil" (Lewalski,

*Milton's Politics* 157). The depiction of combat is intended to render the celestial conflict comprehensible to human readers. At the outset of Book VI, Raphael prefaces his narrative to Adam by noting the difficulty of conveying the celestial war in terms comprehensible to mortals. The immortality of the angels means that the conflict could not be resolved through combat alone; divine intervention was required to signify the supreme authority of God. Mortals, in contrast to the immortal Satan who can only suffer temporary injury, are susceptible to death. This distinction allows human beings to relate to war and its finality. Despite the acknowledgment of war's atrocity, its presence in human affairs remains a pragmatic reality. Where Michael's attempts are thwarted by the eternal nature of his adversaries, human conflicts, constrained by mortality, can reach a definitive end through warfare.

In conclusion, in synthesising the theological and political dimensions within Milton's *Paradise Lost*, one may posit that Milton perceives the act of warfare as manslaughter and murder, thus highlighting the profound limitations and the inherently destructive nature of martial conflict. Theologically, Milton engages in a discerning critique of traditional heroic ideals, which are rooted in an archaic warrior code, and by casting Satan in the mould of the pagan epic hero, he not only repudiates the antiquated values of the old world but also adeptly contrasts them with the noble virtues of Christian heroism. This bifurcated portrayal serves a dual purpose: firstly, to expose the inherent atrocity and obsolescence of the old heroic code; and secondly, to affirm the transcendent worth of Christian heroism.

From a political standpoint, Milton, as a conscientious commentator on the nature of governance and societal dynamics, concedes that the reality of political engagement often precludes the possibility of resolving conflicts through peaceful dialogue alone. In such scenarios, martial prowess emerges as an exigent necessity, a means to confront and contain the insidious spread of unequivocal evil. Thus, within the narrative framework, Milton deftly utilises the character of Michael to explicate the crucial distinction between the pursuit of vainglory, as exemplified in traditional epics, and the exercise of martial might underpinned by a righteous cause. Herein lies a subtle yet significant exhortation to Milton's contemporaries: the endorsement of martial valour is contingent upon its alignment with divine justice, rather than the pursuit of terrestrial acclaim. It is through



this nuanced depiction that Milton encapsulates his vision of martial prowess — not as an end in itself, but as a judicious instrument wielded in the service of a just and divine order.

### 2.13 DEMOCRATISING HEROISM

Milton's redefinition of heroisms and evolution of his epic heroes in *Paradise Lost* is akin to an architect drafting a new blueprint, where varied heroisms serve as fundamental elements in constructing a more inclusive structure of heroism. These heroic traits—obedience, free-will as political responsibility, autonomous obedience to God guided by right reason, worth determined by merit rather than lineage, and rhetorical prowess—collectively form the architectural design that reimagines the traditional epic hero.

In this blueprint, Milton's ultimate aim is to democratise heroism, making it accessible and relevant to the everyday Christian and citizen. By thoughtfully integrating these virtues into the structure, he shifts the domain of heroism from the exclusive preserve of high society to the common realm of the everyday individual. This architectural design of heroism allows for a reconfiguration of its traditional boundaries, extending its reach beyond the elite social strata to include a broader spectrum of society. This significant departure from the entrenched norms of epic criticism, prevalent at the time, marks Milton's revolutionary aspiration. His new design for heroism does not merely challenge prevailing perceptions but rebuilds them, creating a space where heroism becomes a shared attribute of all citizens, empowering them to be masters of their own fate. Thus, in this newly constructed edifice of heroism, every Christian and citizen finds a place, heralding a transformative shift in the understanding and accessibility of what it means to be a hero.

Here, it is imperative to argue that his idea of democratising heroism – making it relevant and accessible to a wider audience – is deeply rooted in his prose. This concept becomes particularly clear in his response to Salmasius in *A Defence of the People of England*<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Milton's *A Defence of the People of England*, now known as *First Defence*, was composed in response to Claude De Saumaise, also known as Salmasius, and his work *Defense of the Reign of Charles I*. Published anonymously in November 1649, likely under Charles II's patronage, Salmasius's text defends absolute monarchy and the divine right of kings, while criticising the Parliamentary government in England. It also challenges the notion that the English Revolution was a people's movement. In *First Defence*, Milton counters the concept of divine right, distinguishing between kings and tyrants, and focuses on the role of

(1651). Salmasius sharply criticises the English people involved in the regicide of Charles I and scorns them as “blind and brutish, without skill in ruling, and most fickle of men, the emptiest, and unsteadiest, and most inconstant” (*YP* 4.1:471).<sup>128</sup> Contrasting this view, Milton acknowledges that while this description may apply to the lower strata of the populace, it certainly does not hold for the middle class, credited with a significant number of individuals endowed with sound judgment and a keen understanding of affairs (*YP* 4.1:471). This interaction is crucial for comprehending the theological and political dimensions that underlie the poetic portrayal of heroism in *Paradise Lost*. Milton’s intended audience is the middle class, whom he perceives as key in determining not just their personal destinies but also the fate of the entire nation. His prose, thus, reflects his view of middle-class Englishmen as capable of being the master of their own destiny.

All the newly conceptualised forms of heroism culminate in the ultimate goal of educating individuals about their inherent right and ability to steer their own lives. In addressing the theme of lineage, John Milton challenges the conventional glorification of ancestry, advocating instead for merit as the paramount measure of a person’s value. He suggests that it is the responsibility of individuals to lead lives that demonstrate their merit. Milton further posits that with free will comes the ethical and political obligation to discern right from wrong. He acknowledges that while free will is a divine gift, its misuse, unguided by sound reasoning, can devolve into vice and lead to ruin. Consequently, individuals must be cognizant of their theological and political responsibilities, choosing the correct path through reasoned judgement.

Regarding obedience, Milton’s discourse culminates in the idea that obedience is a voluntary application of reason, consciously aligned with and directed by free will. He contends that one’s principal duty lies in the exercise of one’s own reason, which, when genuinely engaged, naturally results in obedience to God. Milton maintains that reason is a conduit to divine understanding. In the context of martial prowess, Milton perceives acts of warfare as essentially equivalent to manslaughter and murder, thus highlighting

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the people in the revolution. Accepting Salmasius’s assertion that the revolution defied the majority’s will, Milton elucidates the issues, thereby elevating Cromwell’s and the Rump Parliament’s choices, and lauding the patriotic spirit of the middle-class Puritans from whom they emerged.

<sup>128</sup> It is important to highlight that this comment, which Don M. Wolfe, the editor of Volume IV of *YP*, draws attention, is not an exact quotation from Salmasius. Instead, it represents John Milton’s summary of multiple statements made by Salmasius in *Regia*, predominantly in section I.18 (*YP* 4.1:471).

the profound moral shortcomings and inherently destructive nature of such actions. However, he also acknowledges the necessity of martial skill in a politically volatile environment. Thus, in a broader sense, he advocates for the acquisition of martial capabilities as a means of self-protection. As for rhetorical prowess, in a world increasingly dominated by politics, Milton warns his audience of malevolent political figures who possess formidable oratorical skills. He underscores the importance of developing commendable rhetorical abilities to effectively counteract such foes.

Thus, Milton's reimagining of heroism through the evolution of his epic heroes in *Paradise Lost* is an invitation for his fellow countrymen to see themselves as heroic figures with power and authority. This intricate blend of heroisms in *Paradise Lost* establishes the theological and philosophical base upon which the notion of democratising heroism stands. Hence, by reframing heroism in theological, philosophical, and political contexts as a democratised concept, Milton empowers his readers, suggesting that they have the right and the ability to control their own destinies. This strategy not only challenges the traditional epic narrative that limited heroism to the upper echelons of society but also redefines it in a way that resonates with a broader audience. Milton, therefore, effectively elevates his countrymen to heroic status, reshaping the conventional epic framework and affirming the individual's role in shaping both societal and personal destinies.

## CONCLUSION

William Davenant and John Milton embarked on the composition of their respective epics *Gondibert* and *Paradise Lost* against a backdrop of political turmoil and defeat, yielding a pervasive sense of desperation and an unpredictable future. It is observed that the development of their epic heroes is intrinsically influenced by their individual political, theological, and philosophical perspectives. Furthermore, these heroes' evolution reflects their authors' unique reactions to the significant shifts characterising their era. This thematic progression serves a didactic purpose, aiming to educate their readers about the requirements of the emerging epoch.

Davenant found himself exiled in France following the Royalist defeat in the English Civil War during the late 1640s and early 1650s. As a poet laureate who had staunchly supported the Royalist cause, including military service as a knighted veteran, Davenant's efforts ultimately proved futile. Worse still, Davenant, formerly favoured in the court of Henrietta Maria, queen of Charles I, fell out of favour as power dynamics shifted from Maria's court to that of Charles II, the executed king's son. This new court humiliated him, disparaging his poetry and lifestyle. The loss of court favour rendered him doubly defeated and irrelevant. Furthermore, he was dispatched to the American colonies by the newly crowned Prince Charles II. As indicated in the archival documents presented in Chapter I, Davenant's destination was fraught with crises, reflecting the extent of the Civil War's impact even in such distant locations. Thus, this was a demotion rather than a promotion or personal choice. En route to America, his ship was captured by pirates, and he was eventually sold to the Puritans in England, marking the beginning of his imprisonment at the hands of his former adversaries.

Like Davenant's, Milton's experience was steeped in despair. Even in the late 1650s, during the declining phase of the revolution, Milton recognised the unrecognisable transformation of the revolutionary movement and levied criticism against the Protectorate. The resurgence of the monarchy with the onset of the Restoration in 1660 heralded a period of despair for revolutionary intellectuals like Milton. In my view, Milton's encounter with defeat was particularly acrimonious. He was not merely a passive supporter of the revolution; during the Civil War, he was instrumental in establishing the

ideological foundations that underpinned the revolutionary fervour. Milton's political and theological arguments justified the execution of Charles I and contested the notion of divine kingship in *Eikonoklastes*, reputedly authored by Charles I in 1649. He also served as the Secretary for Foreign Tongues under the Commonwealth. Yet, despite these monumental contributions to the revolutionary cause, his efforts seemed futile. Milton, who had entered the revolutionary fray as a youthful idealist, emerged as an aged, blind figure, disillusioned by the advent of the Restoration. His engagement in anti-monarchical political writings post-Restoration resulted in a significant period of imprisonment, further underscoring the challenges he faced during this tumultuous era.

Both epic poets shared a common experience of isolation and despair. Davenant embarked on the composition of *Gondibert* prior to the execution of the King and his subsequent displacement to America in the late 1640s while Milton started *Paradise Lost* in the waning days of the revolution, in the late 1650s. The late 1640s and early 1650s symbolised defeat for Royalist Davenant, while the late 1650s and the post-Restoration era, starting in 1660, represented a period fraught with challenges for the revolutionary Milton. Despite the daunting circumstances, these remarkable poets were not overcome by despair. On the contrary, they clung to their pens with unwavering determination, employing their epic works as the means to engage with the world and express their views.

Beyond the shifting political landscapes and the scourges of war, the era in which these poets crafted their *magnum opera* was characterised by vibrant and dynamic debates in theology, philosophy, and the ground-breaking advancements in scientific discovery and invention. I assert that both poets were acutely aware that their era marked a distinct and transformative juncture, characterised by intricate shifts across the spectrums of society, philosophy, theology, and politics. These profound changes necessitated the emergence of new virtues, behaviours, and ethical standards. Bearing a didactic intent, they adeptly integrated their perspectives on these transformative developments into their epic compositions, particularly through the evolution of their epic heroes. This integration not only reflected the multifaceted nature of their times but also aimed to instruct and guide their readers through the complexities of a rapidly changing world.

Their epic heroes were meticulously crafted as reflections of the poets' personal responses to the multifaceted challenges and inquiries catalysed by the intricate social, religious, philosophical, and political transformations unfolding in the seventeenth-century England. Moreover, the epic heroes in these literary works served not only as conduits for social and political commentary but also as blueprints for ethical systems harmonious with the demands of the contemporary era. In doing so, they facilitated the moral advancement and progression of the audience, ensuring that their epics transcended mere storytelling to become vehicles for moral enlightenment and ethical guidance.

As previously delineated, there exist numerous parallels between these two epic poets concerning the circumstances and objectives underpinning their compositions, such as authoring from a stance of defeat, experiencing imprisonment, being cognizant of societal, religious, philosophical, and political shifts in their times, employing the epic as a didactic medium, and responding to these changes by sculpting their epic heroes to embody forms of heroism in alignment with the evolving demands of this transformative era. However, there are also marked distinctions between them: their political affiliations, perspectives on the emerging virtues, behaviours, and ethical values necessitated by the changing epoch (even when their heroisms appear similar, they may originate from divergent political, theological, or philosophical bases), their engagement with different epic traditions, target audiences, pedagogical approaches, and the utilisation of epic heroes.

The political stances of William Davenant and John Milton have been a locus of intense scholarly debate. This is a very important issue since in order to perceive the complex layers of didactic messages in their epics and evolution of their epic heroes, one has to first truly grasp their political allegiances. In this respect, the interpretations of the evolution of the epic heroes in the respective epics are deeply marked by how we interpret the political stances of these poets while composing their *magnum opera*.

I have argued that Davenant's political stance during that period diverges from the perception commonly held in academic circles that *Gondibert* is a Royalist epic, and that this discrepancy has led to numerous misinterpretations concerning the epic and the evolution of the epic hero Gondibert. The prevailing hypothesis regarding William Davenant's epic, *Gondibert*, posits that it functions as an allegory for the Civil War. It is

seen as an effort to validate the Royalist viewpoint, offering commentary on contemporary events as an extension of the ongoing Civil War discourse, and affirming the legitimacy of Charles II. This interpretation predominantly stems from the entrenched academic perspective that Davenant remained a staunch Royalist even after their defeat in the Civil War, a stance he purportedly maintained during his exile. However, recent studies and the archival documents regarding his voyage to America provided in the first chapter indicate that Davenant's political views were more complex and multi-faceted than previously believed. Following the loss of his king and literary patron, he fell out of favour in the Caroline court under the newly crowned Prince Charles and was demoted to the American colonies. One of his initial motivations for writing his epic was to restore his prestige, a goal that ultimately proved unsuccessful. It is noteworthy that Davenant continued *Gondibert* while imprisoned by the revolutionaries and even distributed signed copies to key revolutionary political figures. This suggests that his epic, and the messages within, were crafted to appeal to revolutionary sentiments as well. Critics like Watkins and Newitt argue that Davenant's aim was to curry favour with the Commonwealth for patronage, indicating a shift in his political allegiances. While it is true that Davenant's epic harbours reconciliatory intentions, it is crucial to note that he began writing *Gondibert* before the king's execution and his displacement to America. Consequently, this analysis leads to the conclusion that *Gondibert* ought to be regarded as a reconciliatory piece, aimed at the post-Civil War context. The political nuances and educational purposes in Davenant's *Gondibert* reveal a universal allure that surpasses specific political leanings, rendering the work accessible and relevant to both Royalist and Republican audiences. Therefore, its interpretation should not be restricted solely to the realm of political allegiances or isolated political critique.

Considering Milton's political orientation, it is indicated that there is a plethora of interpretations about his stance during the composition of *Paradise Lost*. Recent scholarship in Milton studies, however, suggests that he remained a fervent revolutionary when drafting his epic. Milton's critique of the revolution's trajectory, particularly his disapproval of the Protectorate in the late 1650s, does not imply a complete disenchantment with revolutionary politics. This counters the argument of critics like Tillyard, Parker, Richmond, Rowse, Worden, and others, who suggest that Milton shifted focus to individual salvation within Christian theology in *Paradise Lost*. Instead, as

Wolfe, Bennett, Rahe, and others contend, Milton's steadfast commitment to republican principles is evident in his persistent infusion of political commentary into *Paradise Lost*. This is particularly apparent in his bold tract *The Readie and Easie Way*, penned in 1660, two years after he began writing *Paradise Lost* and just before Charles II's return to England. Created during significant political turmoil, this tract was not merely a nod to the future but a robust call against the monarchy's reinstatement, showcasing Milton's staunch adherence to republican values even at great personal risk. However, my interpretation diverges from those who view *Paradise Lost* as a cryptically political allegory. I align with Radzinowicz's perspective, which views *Paradise Lost* as a didactic work with a public function, wherein Milton aims to educate his readers (122-23). Thus, it is observed that the epic is not just a concealed political narrative; it serves a broader pedagogical purpose, with political instruction being only one aspect amidst others, including theological and philosophical dimensions.

Therefore, the political orientations of both poets are multifaceted. Davenant's *Gondibert* is a reconciliatory work tailored for the post-Civil War era, crafted to resonate with both Royalists and revolutionaries. On the other hand, Milton remains a steadfast revolutionary, unyielding in his firm revolutionary political beliefs. Thus, it is concluded that both works along with the development of their epic heroes should be analysed considering these nuanced political allegiances.

The choice of target audience profoundly impacts the development of epic heroes, a critical aspect in understanding the intentions and teachings embedded in the evolution of these characters. The divergence in the targeted audience between two epic poets is a key factor. Both poets articulate their perspectives and insights on this matter with considerable depth in their prose. Davenant, in the Preface to *Gondibert*, explicitly mentions that his epic is not crafted for the average individual. He proposes that "Heroique Poesy" should cater not to the masses but to those holding power and authority, whom he calls "chiefs." For Davenant, the intrinsic value of an epic resides in its didactic capability and its potential to better society. He advocates for the promotion of virtuous leadership, believing that the conduct of these leaders can exert a widespread positive impact on society. The heroes in his epic are therefore tailored to educate and influence societal leaders. This perspective aligns closely with the political theories of Thomas



Hobbes. Hobbes maintained that people are fundamentally self-serving, often disregarding the collective good, a trait that can undermine political stability and social cohesion (*De Cive* 34). He argued for the consolidation of power in the hands of those capable of maintaining order and averting a “war against all” (*Leviathan* 113). Davenant’s approach, echoing Hobbes, implies that the most effective way to improve society is by shaping the morality and decision-making of its leaders. In Davenant’s view, the reformation of society starts with its leaders, who set examples for the rest of the population to follow.

Milton’s targeted audience for *Paradise Lost* is more complex and problematic compared to Davenant because, unlike Davenant who openly states his views on this subject in his Preface, Milton provides no explicit explanation or commentary on this subject in his epic, apart from his enigmatic phrase “fit audience.” However, I contend that he indicates his views on this issue in his prose works. Some indicate that Milton’s intended audience is an elite cadre capable of discerning the nuanced teachings he aims to impart, while others counter this view by arguing for a broader, more inclusive readership. This dissertation uses the latter approach. Milton’s targeted audience is not marked by socio-economic factors but rather the poem is aimed at a general audience whom Milton believes to be at the helm of their own and their countries destinies. Of course, this does not necessarily mean that Milton has an egalitarian approach of embracing people from all walks of life. In *First Defence*, he ensures that, while perhaps not all people in his country are yet ready to be the choosers of their own destiny and that of their own country, certainly he credits the middleclass as including a significant number of individuals endowed with sound judgment and a keen understanding of affairs (*YP* 4.1:471). Milton’s intended audience is mainly the middleclass, whom he perceives as key in determining not just their personal destinies but also the fate of the entire nation.

While Davenant targets an elite audience, Milton’s intended audience is much broader, including middleclass readers. The difference between these two poets fundamentally stems from the idea of who should govern the politics, religion, and other areas in a country. While Davenant thinks it is best for the elite to be in the helm and guide the country, Milton believes it should be the people themselves who should be at the helm to guide their own destinies.

Furthermore, it is also observed that both Davenant and Milton share a common perspective on the role of epic poetry as a vehicle for instruction, wherein epic heroes are expected to serve a didactic function aimed at shaping the moral conduct of individuals. It is imperative to emphasise that both epicists accomplish their educational objectives through the portrayal and development of their epic heroes. The evolution of these heroes is distinctly shaped in accordance with the specific messages the poets intend to convey. Notably, both poets express their candid opinions on this matter within their prose writings. It is worth highlighting that both of them view instructional epic poetry as a valuable tool in the service of the state. Davenant, in his Preface, contends that the traditional pillars of government, namely religion, the military, policy, and law, fall short in moulding the character of the populace, necessitating an additional “collaterall [sic] help” from epic literature (37). He further asserts that religious and philosophical doctrines, which attempt direct guidance through “precepts,” prove inadequate due to their uninspiring approach. Consequently, he assigns the responsibility of instructing the masses to poets. In a similar vein, though with subtle distinctions, Milton maintains that education should extend beyond the teachings dispensed from the pulpit, which he associates with institutionalised religion. He advocates for alternative forms of education that can instil “seeds of virtue and public civility” while harmonising the emotions and aligning affections correctly (*YP* 1:810-19). Unlike Davenant, Milton’s advocacy for epic poets’ role in education arises not from the inefficacy of other educational means, but rather from his profound scepticism regarding the teachings of the Church, which he perceives as an extension of state ideology rather than the embodiment of truth, as evinced by his statement that “tyranny had invaded the Church” (*YP* 1:823). This nuanced distinction is crucial to comprehending Milton’s theological messages within his epic works, which diverge significantly from the teachings of the institutionalised Church.

Hence, Davenant and Milton both regard epic poetry as a powerful tool for moral and civic education, a goal they accomplish through their portrayal of epic heroes. Nonetheless, their underlying motivations and viewpoints on this subject vary significantly. Davenant sees epic as a necessary supplement to traditional avenues of governance and education, while Milton’s advocacy stems from his reservations about the alignment of institutionalized religion with the state’s ideology. This distinction

underscores the profound theological underpinnings of Milton's epic works and the divergence between his vision and the teachings of the established Church.

Furthermore, it is indicated that both poets recognised the necessity of deviating from conventional epic criticism to fulfil their didactic aims. While expressing their genuine admiration for classical epic poets like Homer, Virgil, and Lucan, they also understood that to convey novel ideas, it was imperative to depart from these traditional paradigms and innovate in both content and style. For Davenant, this endeavour was akin to navigating "untry'd Seas" (Preface 3), a metaphor symbolising his daring contributions to the epic genre. Davenant's primary objective was not to replicate prior epic models but to forge a work that harmonises with the political, scientific, and philosophical demands of the new age.

Similarly, Milton exhibits a profound respect for the epic tradition, incorporating both classical and Christian elements. He acknowledges his debt to the lineage of epic poetry, referencing Homer, Virgil, and Tasso as broad inspirations, and the Book of Job as a more specific influence. Milton posits that innovation, when undertaken by those skilled and judicious, does not constitute a violation of artistic norms but rather enhances them (*YP* 1: 813-14). This, however, does not imply that these poets completely abandoned the conventions of classical antiquity's epic traditions, the late Renaissance Italian, and the seventeenth-century French literary criticism. They surely incorporated elements from these traditions.

Regarding the deployment of epic heroes in their narratives, it is observed that while both poets recognise the instructional value of epic heroes, their methods of employing these figures are distinctly different. Davenant conveys his thematic messages through the thoughts, speeches, virtues, and actions of a central, single epic hero, Gondibert. In contrast, Milton utilises a diverse array of characters as epic heroes. This divergence arises from their engagement with different epic traditions and their differing views on instructional efficacy – whether it is best achieved through positive role models for emulation or if negative examples can also serve as effective teaching tools. Davenant's technique is deeply rooted in Late Renaissance Italian literary criticism, which extols a central hero as the embodiment of virtue. This approach hinges on the concept that educational value is derived from imitating these paragon figures, suggesting that the

poem's instructional quality is dependent on the hero's exemplarity. As for Milton, this analysis represents a significant departure from the prevailing academic approach in Milton studies, which typically centres on the question: "Who is the epic hero in *Paradise Lost*?" This study rephrases the inquiry to "Who are the epic heroes of *Paradise Lost*?" In adopting this methodology, Milton partially diverges from the traditional paradigm that centres on a single, idealized hero. He instead draws inspiration from the tenets of seventeenth-century French literary criticism, particularly the doctrines of Rene Le Bossu. Bossu asserts that educational lessons can be derived from a spectrum of characters, ranging from those with positive attributes to those characterized by negative aspects, including evil, flaws, and failures. This theoretical framework enabled Milton, who had originally contemplated writing a tragedy entitled *Adam Unparadised* focusing on Adam and Eve, to engage with these figures on epic heroic terms in his work. Additionally, the overarching didactic objective in Milton's epic necessitates the portrayal of a diverse array of epic heroes, each exemplifying a blend of commendable and flawed attributes.

In this respect, Davenant's approach involves a singular, exemplary epic hero, which is evident from his epic being named after its main character, Gondibert. Conversely, Milton employs a range of characters, incorporating both a perfect hero, as illustrated by the Son, and imperfect heroes, such as Satan, Adam, and Eve, to achieve his instructional objectives. Within this framework, Milton also gives significant importance to negative examples in his narrative, employing them effectively for didactic purposes.

The lineage and status of the epic heroes are critical in understanding the didactic intentions of the poets concerning their epic heroes. At the time, the prevailing literary norm dictated that an epic hero should be of noble lineage and occupy a high social status. The approach of the poets to this aspect varies, reflecting the target audiences of their respective epics. As previously mentioned, Davenant aims to write for the elite, positioned at the higher strata of society, whereas Milton's work appeal to a more diverse audience, predominantly the middleclass. Adhering to the literary conventions of his time, Davenant's central epic hero, Duke Gondibert, is characterised by his eminent lineage and notable social standing, inheriting the prestigious title of Duke from his ancestors. Frequent references to his noble bloodline underscore the importance of lineage in

Davenant's portrayal of his epic hero. Davenant's selection is underpinned by the notion that depicting epic heroes of similar status and lineage to his elite audience enhances the potential for emulation, offering them relatable paradigms. Furthermore, Davenant's preference for an elite epic hero aligns with the Hobbesian view that societal harmony, order, and peace are best preserved when decision-making roles are held by the elite.

In stark contrast to Davenant, Milton fundamentally diverges from the conventional seventeenth-century literary norms in epic literature, prioritising merit over lineage. This debate between merit and lineage is a key theme intricately interwoven into the narratives of both the angelic rebellion and humanity's fall in his work. Through the confrontation between the Son and Satan — with Satan asserting his superior lineage and thus claiming a rightful higher position in the celestial hierarchy — Milton articulates a clear political stance: in governance, merit should be the primary determinant for ensuring harmony, order, and peace, rather than lineage. This is demonstrated within the narrative when the Son's actions and decisions affirm his worthiness, thereby validating the correctness of his appointment as the vice-regent of Heaven.

Milton also delves into the theological dimensions of this issue through the characters of Adam and Eve. He portrays them as epic heroes who, though initially graced at birth, fall due to their transgressions but possess the potential for redemption through merit, demonstrated by their endurance and patience. Through this depiction, Milton conveys a profound message: as their forebears had the chance for redemption, so too can ordinary Christians attain salvation through perseverance and patience, virtues Milton deems integral to merit. This narrative suggests that true greatness is not a matter of inheritance but is achieved through personal effort and righteous living.

The stance of epic heroes towards martial heroism is another critical aspect of their evolution, deeply reflective of the changing age. Both epic poets deviate from the prevailing literary conventions of their time, which traditionally emphasise martial heroism as a central trait of epic heroes. At first glance, their approaches might seem similar, characterised by a preference for pacifism, yet acknowledging the necessity of martial action in the realm of realpolitik. When their epic heroes engage in conflict for a just cause, both poets ensure that these characters avoid seeking personal glory on the

battlefield, thus differentiating their portrayal of martial heroism from classical precedents focused on personal fame and glory.

Despite these apparent similarities, a deeper analysis reveals distinct foundations underpinning each poet's approach. Davenant's depiction of war is shaped by his first-hand experiences of prolonged and devastating conflicts. He portrays war not as a glorious endeavour but as a dire and catastrophic event. His central epic hero, Gondibert, is characterised by a profound longing for peace, preferring negotiation over warfare. Nevertheless, influenced by his experiences and Hobbes's political theories on human nature, Davenant recognises that the aspiration for peace and dialogue, though ideal, is not always achievable. He concedes that in situations where dialogue proves ineffective, the exercise of martial prowess becomes an essential recourse.

Milton, in contrast, adopts theological reasoning to perceive warfare as akin to manslaughter and murder, thereby underscoring the severe limitations and inherently destructive nature of martial conflict. Theologically, he offers a critical evaluation of traditional heroic ideals entrenched in an outdated warrior ethos. By depicting Satan as a character reflective of the pagan epic hero, at least in this context, Milton not only discredits the obsolete values of the old world but also skilfully contrasts them with the elevated virtues of Christian heroism. Politically, as a thoughtful commentator on governance and societal dynamics, Milton acknowledges that the complexities of political realities often make peaceful resolution of conflicts unfeasible. In such instances, martial prowess becomes an imperative, serving as a means to address and restrain the pervasive influence of unambiguous evil. Unlike Davenant, who draws upon Hobbes's political philosophy, Milton relies on the theological writings of Grotius to rationalise martial heroism. In this way, theology is employed to serve political objectives. Thus, while their approaches towards martial prowess may appear similar, the underlying justifications for each poet's use of martial heroism are founded on different grounds.

The most salient new form of heroism in both epics, in my opinion, is rhetorical prowess. This trait is deeply interwoven with the dynamic political landscape of the seventeenth century, particularly evident in the post-Civil War era when politics became the predominant field for resolution of conflict and dialogue. Rhetorical prowess is so integral to both epics that it arguably supersedes martial prowess as the principal mode of

confrontation among heroes. Given the significant treatises on rhetoric of the seventeenth century and Hobbes's revised perspective on it as a tool to shape politics and potentially instigate rebellion, Davenant depicts rhetorical prowess as a requisite skill in the modern era. Hobbes's view is predominantly defined by the belief that one of the key factors contributing to the rise of rebellion, leading to the Civil War in England, was the influence of malevolent individuals who were skilled in rhetorical prowess. Influenced by Hobbes, Davenant acknowledges the significant role of rhetorical prowess in politics. By endowing his epic hero with this trait, Davenant suggests that effective leadership in society, particularly in governance, requires mastery of rhetorical prowess, which he metaphorically describes as "[a] War disguis'd in civil shapes of Peace" (III.iii.30). Milton, paralleling this view, conceptualises politics as a continuation of warfare and considers the art of expression as a novel form of conflict. Echoing Hobbes, Milton's prose writings also highlight rhetorical prowess as a tool often wielded by corrupt figures. Consequently, it is inferred that rhetorical prowess as a heroic virtue serves a dual purpose in Milton's work: firstly, to alert his readers about the presence of malevolent political figures with exceptional skills in articulation, and secondly, to emphasise the crucial need to possess admirable rhetorical skills as a means to effectively challenge such individuals.

It is noteworthy how two poets, each once aligned with differing political ideologies, converge in their portrayal of this new form of heroism. This similarity in approach is a testament to the transformative spirit of the post-Civil-War period, a time when politics supplanted warfare as the foremost arena for conflict resolution. The commonality in their perspectives not only reflects this shift in their era, but also signifies their mutual inclination towards peaceful resolutions. For both poets, dialogue is elevated as the primary instrument for problem-solving and conflict resolution. This shared emphasis on the power of discourse underscores a broader cultural and societal transition towards valuing communication and negotiation over physical confrontation, illustrating a significant shift in the conceptualisation of heroism and leadership in their respective works. Their narratives suggest a growing recognition that the art of persuasion and the ability to engage in effective dialogue are crucial skills for navigating and resolving the complexities of their changing world.

A notable and distinct heroic trait of Davenant's epic hero, Gondibert, is his receptiveness to new knowledge, reflecting the poet's awareness of an age characterised by groundbreaking discoveries and inventions that were profoundly reshaping people's understanding of the world. Gondibert, initially depicted as a "paragon" figure exemplifying perfection in various aspects, is uniquely portrayed as lacking completeness in knowledge and education. This is evident in the section of the House of Astragon, reminiscent of the early concepts of the Royal Society of Science, where Gondibert's seemingly fatal wound is healed by scientific knowledge. Furthermore, his introduction to various scientific disciplines, where he is humbled by the scientists' expertise, highlights his eagerness to learn from others. This trait is not only central to his character but also highly esteemed by the scientific community. In an era of rapid change and innovation, Davenant underscores to his audience, predominantly the societal leaders, the necessity of being open to new knowledge. He posits that for leaders, adapting to new information is not merely a choice but an imperative, a virtue mandated by the new age. Davenant emphasises that human knowledge is ever-expanding, and rulers must be prepared to continually learn to keep pace with ongoing discoveries, new truths, and emerging discussions vital for addressing humanity's challenges. This portrayal of the epic hero as someone who must adapt to the demands of the time is a distinctive aspect of Davenant's work, setting him apart from John Milton. While Milton exhibits a positive stance on the significance of science in his early prose tracts, he does not explicitly address this theme in *Paradise Lost*.

Davenant also introduces a distinctive heroic trait which he terms "warm ambition," drawing influence from Hobbes's viewpoint that ambition was a pivotal factor in triggering the Civil War. Davenant critiques what he labels as "feverish" ambition, asserting that this type of unchecked ambition can endanger political stability and social harmony. Yet, he departs from Hobbes's purely negative view of ambition by conceptualising and ascribing to his epic hero, Gondibert, a nuanced form of ambition: "warm ambition." This redefined ambition, in contrast to Hobbes's destructive "feverish" ambition, is portrayed as a tempered and constructive force, empowering individuals to fulfil their potential and contribute positively to society. This reimagined concept of ambition serves as a significant admonition to Davenant's elite aristocratic audience. It underscores the idea that ambition, when properly channelled and moderated, becomes a



valuable trait in the realm of politics. It suggests that those who possess this “warm” ambition can ascend in the political landscape without causing harm to themselves or their nation. This reinterpretation of ambition as a positive and controlled force is Davenant’s way of reconciling the dangerous aspects of ambition with the need for personal and societal advancement, providing a balanced perspective that aligns with the complexities of his era’s political and social dynamics.

Milton distinctively introduces the concept of free will, along with the accompanying political responsibility, as a heroic virtue and a divine endowment. In his portrayal of this virtue, he departs from the traditional Calvinist doctrine of predestination, adopting an Arminian theological perspective that champions human agency in shaping one’s destiny. This theological stance places the responsibility for life’s trajectory firmly on individuals, rather than ascribing it to predetermined divine will. Politically, Milton views free will as entailing significant moral and political responsibilities, highlighting the imperative of making ethical decisions. This perspective is particularly resonant with the political climate of the late 1650s, a period rife with debate over whether to restore Charles II to the throne or to continue the republic. By embedding in the theological notion that mankind is inherently endowed with free will and the attendant political and moral responsibilities, Milton instructs his audience that political responsibility is an inherent aspect of this divinely granted autonomy. Consequently, being the master of one’s fate is not merely a choice but an essential duty. This conceptualization of free will extends beyond mere theological debate, embedding individuals within the broader context of social and political realms. This heroic ideal, rooted in Milton’s distinctive theological views – views that were deemed heretical in his time – is absent in Davenant’s writings. Such a divergence is not merely indicative of the period’s ethos but rather reflects Milton’s personal theological insights.

Milton reinterprets another heroic trait in his work: obedience as an expression of autonomy. This reimagining is intricately linked to Milton’s unique theological leanings and his interpretation of reason as a tool for discerning good from evil. Milton does not perceive obedience to God as a relinquishment of one’s autonomy; rather, he views it as an autonomous exercise of reason, actively engaged with and steered by free will. This perspective advocates that the primary obligation of an individual lies in the utilisation of

their own reason. In Milton's view, authentic engagement with reason naturally culminates in obedience to God. He firmly believes that reason is a conduit to the divine, facilitating an understanding of God's laws and principles. Moreover, Milton suggests that even when God's ways are not immediately comprehensible, individuals should adhere to their reason and obedience. Over time, this reasoned obedience will reveal the righteousness of God's ways. This distinct approach to obedience as a heroic trait, as envisioned by Milton, underscores a deep-rooted belief in the intrinsic alignment of human reason with divine wisdom, positing that true autonomy and enlightenment are achieved through a reasoned understanding and adherence to divine will. This nuanced conception of obedience and reason as interdependent facets of autonomy and faith sets Milton apart in his literary and theological explorations.

The divergence between these two poets essentially originates from their perspectives on who ought to govern the political, religious, and other spheres in a nation: while Davenant advocates for the elite to steer the country, Milton contends that the people themselves should be at the forefront, guiding their own destinies. In this respect, though contextually Davenant presents new heroisms—a pro-peace demeanour, justified martial prowess, rhetorical prowess, tempered ambition (which Davenant names “warm” ambition), reason, and openness to new knowledge—Davenant's approach is to some extent in the vein of the “traditional epideictic function” of epic tradition to serve the education of the elites of the society. Milton's desire, however, is that of a revolutionary not only in terms of the content but of his ultimate aim with the revolutionary content. I contend that with all the new heroisms that daringly break away from the epic tradition, Milton dares to achieve what I refer to as “democratising Heroism.” All these new heroic traits—obedience, free-will as political responsibility, autonomous obedience to God guided by right reason, worth determined by merit rather than lineage, and rhetorical prowess—collectively reimagines the traditional epic hero and more importantly make the concept of heroism more inclusive. By redefining heroism in this manner, Milton shifts its domain from the exclusive preserve of the aristocracy to the realm of the everyday Christian, making it accessible and relevant to a broader spectrum of society. This ultimately serves the purpose of showing his audience that it is them and not the minority elite who have both the right and capability to steer their own destinies and the course of religious and political affairs.

As closing remarks, I shall also remark that scholarly studies on the evolution of epic heroes have predominantly been influenced by the late nineteenth and mid-twentieth-century academic paradigms. These eras were marked by structuralist approaches, emphasising the identification of shared patterns and recurring themes in epic studies. Such methodologies aimed to underscore the universal traits and actions of epic heroes across various times and places. However, in their quest to define a universal archetype for epic heroes, these studies often oversimplified the diversity of these characters and failed to fully grasp the intricate intentions of the poets and the subtleties in their portrayal of heroism. The methodological flaw of selectively using data to support predetermined theories has been increasingly evident as new manuscript discoveries reveal the vast and varied nature of epic heroes, demonstrating that they cannot be confined to rigid formulae, stereotypes, or categories.

This study highlights the importance of considering the unique perspectives and arguments of poets when analysing the evolutionary path of epic heroes. While different epic heroes may share similar traits and actions, the underlying reasons and messages imbued by the poets can significantly alter the intended meanings of these attributes. The examination of Davenant and Milton's works exemplifies this point. On the surface, their epic heroes may exhibit numerous common heroic characteristics, but a more profound analysis reveals that these traits are rooted in varying contexts. The evolutionary paths of their epic heroes are distinct, shaped by the specific messages and intentions the poets wished to convey to their audiences. Therefore, a nuanced understanding of epic heroes necessitates an appreciation of the diverse and individualised approaches of the poets who created them.

Expanding on my earlier observation, it is evident that while existing research on the evolution of epic heroes is extensive, it predominantly adheres to structural methodologies that interpret these figures through rigid formulae. Consequently, to borrow Davenant's evocative metaphor, this field stands as a largely uncharted academic ocean, teeming with opportunities for scholarly exploration and discovery. There is a beckoning call to academics to delve into the study of these monumental figures of epic literature, heroes whose voices and legacies are destined to echo through eternity. Hence, this great area of study offers a rich canvas for scholars to re-examine and reinterpret the

epic heroes, moving beyond formulaic constraints to uncover the deeper, more nuanced aspects of their evolution. Such research holds the promise of revealing the multifaceted nature of these legendary characters, shedding light on their complexities, and providing fresh insights into the timeless narratives they inhabit. The opportunity to contribute to this field is not just an academic exercise; it is a chance to engage with the enduring echoes of these epic heroes, to explore their continuing relevance, and to ensure that their profound impact on literature and culture is fully appreciated and understood in all its richness and diversity.

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Tarih: 06/02/2024

Tez Başlığı: Epik Kahramanların Değişen Yüzleri: William Davenant'ın *Gondibert* ve John Milton'ın *Kayıp Cenne*'inde Kahramanlık İdeallerinin Evrim Süreçleri

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