Professor David Peimer | Milton's Paradise Lost: Is it 'of the devil's party,' as Blake Suggests?
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Slides are shown throughout the presentation

- Great. So, hi everybody and hope everybody is well and everybody in the north able to enjoy some summer coming up. So, we kick off with England which we'll be doing over the next period. A month and a half to two months, I think. And in particular, starting with Milton and then going through to... Pardon me. Through the centuries to the much more modern writers. And to be really honest upfront, when I... You know, obviously, I'm sure many have read Milton way back when we were students and reading then. And in a sense what struck me preparing again for today was when I read him as a student, I think I understood partly but it was never taught in the context of his life and actually how fascinating and pretty revolutionary he was because of the times that he lived in, the times of the royalist versus the parliamentarians and basically the civil war between King Charles and Cromwell and the two armies fighting it out and the beheading of King Charles.

So basically, Milton is living at this extraordinary time which is in essence the time of the English revolution. Is it going to become a republic? Is it going to stay a monarchy? With a radically different approach to the systems happening all these years ago. And Milton is plumb in the middle of this, I would say, pretty enormous revolutionary times of change. And when one knows that context and starts to understand the link between his life and what he did and what he achieved in addition to his physical blindness that happened by going blind so young, the whole poem took on a completely different meaning for me. And I want to share some of those thoughts today 'cause I think they resonate with ideas that we can glean from this guy, this poet who lived so many years ago. You know, about four centuries. So I think they are real ideas that echo and I know that he often comes across as very difficult to read because I'm going to look at it... You know, the sentence structure where he puts the verb and how he plays with nouns and verbs and how he makes up words. But in particular it's the syntax of the sentence that makes it hard. And it's often just seen as, "Oh, this is just a guy who wrote 10,000 lines, a book of 12 chapters, on basically the first couple of stories of the book of Genesis." You know? And it's just a retelling of, rehashing of the old biblical story.

When one knows, again, the context of his life and delves a little deeper into the actual poems and what Blake, Wordsworth, Keats, and T.S. Elliot and some of the others wrote about his work. As I say, it starts to take, for me, a really fascinating and intriguing approach to poetry and his approach to his life and just how radical he really was. So I'm going to share some ideas and these are my ideas, of course, because there's so many interpretations. One can have lack of Shakespeare or go to so many others. You know, of these absolute poetic giants of literature. And I want to share some ideas that I think resonate for us possibly today. So first of all, Milton is living 1608 to 1674. He writes "Paradise Lost" in 1667. So all of this period, it's after Shakespeare. It's approximately 50 years after Shakespeare, but it's in plumb in the centre of that key revolutionary period in England between, as I said, the royalists and the parliamentarians and which way will England go. And he is absolutely part of that. Sorry. Absolutely part of that generation and plays a very active role as a writer.

He is the son of the composer, John Milton, whose own Catholic father had disinherited him because of his conversion to Protestantism. So this is the time of the Protestant-Catholic enormous clash, obviously in England, partly feeding into the Civil War. He comes from a wealthy family. Although his father was disinherited by his own father, he nevertheless makes money. He comes from a pretty wealthy family and he has private tutors and he ends up learning to speak Latin, Greek, Hebrew,

French, Spanish, Italian pretty well. Especially obviously the more Latin-based languages. In 1638, he went for a year and a half trip through Europe in particular focusing on France and Italy. We need to remember, this is beginnings of the Enlightenment, post the beginnings of the Renaissance. And in Italy, he spends quite a long time with Galileo, which is not that well known but is very important, who he meets through Galileo's illegitimate son. And Galileo was under house arrest at the time and of course, had been arrested and accused of heresy against the Pope and the Catholic church. So, Milton meets him and they spend quite a lot of time talking art, science.

If we can imagine going back into that world, Galileo's been terrified with torture if he doesn't recant and along comes this young English poet and meets him and they talk 'cause he can of course speak Latin and Italian, et cetera. And the influence is pretty big on Milton, I would suggest. And we see references in the poem to Galileo's... And building on Copernicus and Kepler's ideas, that obviously, the earth is not the centre of the universe. The earth is just one planet of many circling our sun in our solar system. So that revolutionary scientific thought up against the Catholic church at the time feeds into even more into Milton's revolutionary ideals for democracy, justice, forgiveness, pro-Protestantism against what he sees as a utter corruption of the Catholic Church led by the Pope. He comes back. And at the age of 34, he marries the 17-year-old Mary Powell. They don't have a great marriage. Intellectually, he is frustrated. The age difference and also just the intellectual contrast. And she has quite strong royalist views and he has very strong and committed Republican views. Mary eventually returns home to her parents.

1644, he wrote a very important article and it's actually used... It's become one of the most influential defences of free speech and freedom of the press and he condemns censorship of almost any form. And that article was taken up by the English parliament and it spread through Europe and eventually to America and elsewhere. It's a very important beautifully written article which I don't have time to go into now. But it's 1644. That's how early it is for freedom of the press, freedom of speech, completely against King Charles and the England of that time, divine right of kings. You know, King Charles' divine right of kings. God has given him the right to rule. What he says goes. Nobody can question, challenge the rule of one individual over everybody else. And the clash, of course, between him and parliament which is going to come. He's also the first modern writer to employ unrhymed verse certainly in the English language where he's not interested so much in the rhyme at all, and he makes a point of it. And you know, the attacks. You know, is it very coarse? Is it poetry? Isn't it... All those... You know, we can't imagine those attacks on him at the time. I mean, outside of theatre, it wasn't... The aim was to write poetry with rhyme. So it's another part of what he saw as freeing up of the language and the strictures of writing in this language.

He was revered by poets later. The romantics, obviously, Blake, Wordsworth, Thomas Hardy, so many others. 20th century T.S. Elliot was very much against him, led a bit of a campaign. He had a career as a pamphleteer under Charles the First, the autocratic rule, and then the British breakdown with constitutional clash and ultimately civil war and ultimately the beheading of the king. So this is happening in the mid-1600s of the civil war that is emerging, that is coming. It's all building up. Milton contributes to this massive shift in public opinion in England. He was a civil servant. He became a civil servant in England under Cromwell. Cromwell promoted him what we would probably call a high up senior service in the foreign office in England, or not quite foreign secretary or Minister of Foreign Affairs. Nothing like that. But he was in charge of languages which was very important because they had to communicate with all the different languages of Europe all over. So not just as a translator but as a writer and thinker of ideas in other languages. Then of course, the restoration comes in 1660 and the brief republican parliamentary period ends and Cromwell has died. He loses his vision. He goes blind

completely and he's in his forties, which is very important because the whole of "Paradise Lost" was dictated while he was completely blind, which is quite a remarkable achievement but also shows that sheer determination and tenacity of the man. He and this whole question of light and blindness and vision, it informs the poem so much on a metaphorical level in many ways.

But he's unrepented for his political choices. Even though, you know, Cromwell, the republican, the parliamentarians have lost and the restoration of the next King Charles has happened, he's unrepented. He will not change his political views. During Cromwell's time, he became secretary for foreign tongues, it was called, 1649, which was really this foreign official. And with the parliamentary victory in the Civil War, Milton also wrote articles in defence of Republican and emerging democratic principles, the right of people to hold their rulers to account. You know, I'm just trying to summarise a lot of the ideas permeating at the time and what he's really encapsulating. Hold the ruler to account, one of the key tenants of any democratic society or emerging the beginnings of democracy. And through that, a commitment to Republicanism. And he's finding the words. He's finding the language for it in England, and very strong commitment. 1652, he became totally blind. So, for the last 12 years was completely blind in his life. Cromwell's death happens in 1658 and then the English republic collapses soon after. But as I said, Milton sticks with his beliefs.

By 1660, there's already... The restoration has begun of the next King Charles. His writings were burned. He was briefly arrested. His writings were burned. I mean, we have to imagine this obsession with rulers to burn the writers, burn their books. We all know Heinrich's great phrase: Where they first burned books, they will later burn people. But in its obsession to actually burn it, to make a physical, visceral performance, theatrical performance of burning the actual books and papers of these people and imprison them briefly. So we can go into the psychology of burning later. Anyway, he was imprisoned briefly but then he was pardoned. But he was blind. He's dictating "Paradise Lost". You know, and so on. And he withdraws from public life completely, Obviously, he has to. He has no choice anymore. He's unrepentant, as I said, and he dies pretty impoverished as a poet and as a human being. So that's, in a nutshell, the essence of his life.

And that context is crucial because there's been a lot of debate about how much of that whole period in English history feeds into this poem, "Paradise Lost". You know, how much... It may not be as simplistic, as literal as the Paradise and the Garden of Eden and the story of Adam and Eve and the fall as the fall of England and the restoration of the monarchy. But he is very strongly and refuses to recant his political views. And he's met Galileo, let's not forget. And seen what Galileo went through. And others are going through all over Europe and England. So I think there is space for an argument that we can see some of the metaphors in this poem that are absolutely linked to that revolutionary period. Because when you look at his writings about freedom of press, free censorship, the right to hold your rulers to account for whatever their actions, what is parliament, what is the vote, all of these ideas are coming into England in a very strong way, and he's at the core. Because he is such a good writer, he's at the core of getting the ideas out in really good English and therefore read as much as possible. His philosophy is really... He's torn, as many of the Renaissance's artists and writers were, between a Protestant version of Christianity and certainly against the divine right of kings and is absolutely anti-monarchy, as I said, but there's an attempt to integrate this Protestant theology with classical literature: Homer, Virgil, and the others.

Go back to the "Odyssey" and the "Iliad" and those remarkable poems and stories of those. And there's an attempt to almost... To perhaps nostalgically, perhaps a bit naively, you know, hark back to that period of ancient Greece a little bit to ancient Rome of moment of what we might call a certain kind of

democracy. Obviously, I'm not going to talk about the slaves at the moment in ancient Greece, but there's a desire to bring back literature and the role of writing and ideas, the linking of the two, having a public role in society. Not just something read by isolated individuals wherever. It's a much more activist sense of living and living as a writer. And what's also interesting is that he's so anti-Catholicism because of course he's allied to the Protestant side and interestingly in the poem, there's a huge amount of reference but more in particular to the Old Testament and much less to the New Testament. He does see England, I think partly, at least as a metaphor in this poem as rescued from monarchy. These are references in the poem to the Old Testament and Israel and Cromwell almost kind of hoped for mythical Moses figure in a way. And of course, it all changes with the restoration of the monarchy.

There's also references to the Garden of Eden so strongly because so much of the poem is about the Garden of Eden, the fall of Adam and Eve. Is it an allegory? Does it reflect his sense of England's fall from grace? You know, this great hope of an Eden in England, a republic, a democracy, justice, human rights. It has been debate almost ever since he wrote the poem. There's Samson's blindness that he talks on about which is his own blindness, but it's also his own loss of sight. But is it a metaphor for England's blind acceptance of Charles II retaking the throne as king? You know? All of these are hinted at in the poem. And I don't think these are completely out of the loop ideas of some scholars wherever. I do think that they're strongly hinted. And given his activist life, it's hard to imagine. If we imagine living in those times, I imagine him divorced from those periods. He writes so many other articles. Just to give you a flavour, he wrote an article called the "Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce" in 1643 at the beginning of the English Civil War. And it was seen as heresy at this time because it threatened the religious and moral fabric of the English nation. He expressed support for polygamy and his ideas about divorce. He argued that divorce is a private matter. Not a metaphor, legal, or ecclesiastical individuals, but it's private. And this is the radicalism of this guy's thinking on a political scale. And to write about it in those times, I mean, he's risking. You know, ultimately his life of course. Huge risk.

So 20th century, T.S. Elliot and some of the other English poets, they attacked more his use of language. T.S. Elliott wrote about that Milton used the English language as if it was a dead language. And you know, so many others attacked him more for the use of language than for the ideas. William Blake, one of his... One of the poets who absolutely adored and admired Milton, made 70 illustrations of his works especially in the marriage of heaven and hell. And Blake was the one to say, which I put in the introduction here for today, that Milton was a true poet and of the devil's party without knowing it. And I want to explore that idea as we go through now. If we can go on to the next slide, please. So this on the left hand side is Blake's cover of the poem called "Milton". He wrote a poem called "Milton", a long poem. And that's Blake's own drawing of the cover. In the middle, this is the article he wrote about liberty and freedom of speech, freedom of the right of speech and of the press and of freedom of expression in all forms: literary, verbal, et cetera. And then on the right is very early version, pardon me, of his other poetry. Not only "Paradise Lost". If we go on to the next page, please. The next slide.

This is "Paradise Lost". 1667, he wrote it. And this is a much later... This is the beginning of the 1800's version which they would print with a picture of Milton and there's the front cover of it. Blake wrote this epic poem called "Milton" where Milton literally comes down in the form of a comet to Blake and he gives Blake the gift of creativity. And in the poem, the spirit of Milton enters Blake through his foot. And on the one hand, it's an ironic joke, But on the other, it enables Blake to then put on a bejewelled sandal and walk into the city of art and Blake is then ready to finish the creative work that Milton started. I'm trying to encapsulate what so much of what Blake wrote about Milton because he was so influenced, as so many of the others were, by Milton as much as Shakespeare. For him, the influence of Milton comes through the ideas of freedom, individual and political, and the imagination for all people

on earth. And in Blake's preface to his poem, "Milton", he talks about the influence of what Blake calls the old Hebrew prophets in Milton and the poem. In particular, "Paradise Lost" and other poems.

Quite a fun thing is that sometimes some friends of William Blake would visit and he'd be lying naked with his wife and they'd be reciting "Paradise Lost" together. This is actually true. I've checked in the letters and other writings. And the friends would come in and they would be shocked and, "Oh, what are you doing?" And et cetera. Blake were just unfazed. He'd look up and he'd say, "Come in, come in my friend. It's just Adam and Eve, as you know. We are just playing Adam and Eve." So they could be ironic and playful about it. Blake, and of course, all the intoxicants I'm sure him and others were taking. Same with Wordsworth and the others, go on and on. Okay, if we can go on to the next slide please.

So this is the beginning of the poem. On the right hand side first. The opening lines of the whole of "Paradise Lost", "Of man's first disobedience and the fruit of that forbidden tree whose mortal taste brought death into the world and all our woe." He says it right up front. Cuts to the chase. This is what the whole poem is going to be about. The first disobedience, the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve eating the apple, and then the fall. And that's almost it. And then the battle between Satan and God and Satan coming down to earth and what Satan does. It's the main character or Satan who has by far the most juicy, fantastic poetry language. Whereas God has quite dry, quite pedantic language. That's why he's of the devil's party because whether he knew it or not, in Blake's opinion, is that the passion and the richness of the language and the poetry belongs to Satan. And the convincing arguments and the rhetoric belong to Satan, not God.

God is seen as quite cruel, quite careless, quite distant, and almost what we would might call bureaucratic today. You know, it's that corporate or bureaucratic language in a way. You know, that formal stuff. Satan is the opposite. He's the man of passion and then action and then free spirit and free love and free whatever. And he challenges and questions everything, which is what I want to get, to the spirit of radical questioning of everything in that story of Adam and Eve and the fall and the first and the original sin, all of that in Genesis. Basically what Milton is doing is writing his own version of the first part of Genesis, of the story of the garden of Eden and the original sin and the fall of Adam and Eve. Satan and God are the other two main characters. Beelzebub and some of the other angels. You know, they're all there, et cetera. But the main ones are those characters. And then God's expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden or eating an apple in the tree and what does that really mean and symbolise.

And he's obsessed with this story of Milton. And the whole so much of "Paradise Lost" is obsessed with this and the battle and the conflict between Satan and God. And he is of Satan's party whether knowing it or not, as Blake says, and I agree with it. Then on the left... Sorry, to go on the bottom here, "All is not lost. The unconquerable will and study to avenge, immortal hate and courage never to submit or yield. And what else not to be overcome?" So, he starts with it. This is what I'm going to look at. Man's first disobedience. Then all is not like... What else is to be ob... I'm going to dive into questioning everything about the early part of the story of Genesis. And it's that radical questioning spirit that is so... For me, it's so exciting in this poem given especially the times that he's writing. From the left, this is also in the first part of the poem, in Book 1 of the 12 books. "And chiefly thou O Spirit, before all temples instruct me for thou knows't. What in me is dark, illumine what is low, that to this great argument I may assert eternal providence and justify the ways of God to man." And that's the key phrase which is given to us in the first 30-40 lines of the entire 10,000-line poem. "And justify the ways of God to man."

So I'm going to look at this first story of Genesis, of this on the one hand bearded legend, idea, symbol, metaphor, allegory, whatever you want to call it. And I'm going to look at what is God doing to justify his ways to men. That's written as a question. How is God justify in his ways to men? How do we account for evil? How do we account for cruelty? For selfishness, greed? All the so-called sins. And let's remember he'd read his Dante written in the 1200. You know, Dante's Infernos which is obsessed with similar questions and he'd read many of the others 'cause he could understand. He'd read them in the original languages. So how can I justify the ways of God to man? That's the key question in all of Milton. And I think that runs through his poetry, his life as the primary obsession. Because can I justify the divine rule of one individual over all his subjects in England or wherever? Can I justify that one person makes all the rules? Can I justify what is justice, what is law, what is mercy, forgiveness? Does it have a role? What is a crime? You know, what is freedom? Free speech? All of these things are bubbling so powerfully in England at the time and he's caught up in the zeitgeist completely. So how can I justify the ways of God?

Look at our own times of the 20th century and the horrors we've been through talking about Germany and other countries, Russia, so many others, which is human nature. How do we justify the ways of God to men? Given all of these negative associations with the ways of God. That I know I'm repeating here, but I think it's so important 'cause it's misunderstood. It's the spirit of radical questioning that for me informs this poem. Okay. If God is all good and all powerful, then God is also the author of evil. So, where does Satan fit in? Where does God? These are old questions we know. But the radicalism of the time, he's putting it into a poem, and pretty directly. Is he a heretic? Is he a puritan Protestant? Is he a Christian? Is he more allied to the classical, ancient Greek tradition of poetry of Homer and the others? Is he more obsessed with the Greek tradition of fate and choice and the gods in ancient Greece and how the humans play things? But there is free choice but there's also fate and the endless philosophical core debate in ancient Greek culture, ancient Greek life, Which is fascinating and stays with us forever. Destiny versus free choice. How much is which? What's that role if there's an almighty omnipotent God who decides everything and determines everything?

Scholars have argued that there's... And this is coming out of Blake and others, the Hebraic tradition of debate and juxtaposition of stories and connections and they talk about the gaps in meaning, the gaps in stories, and trying to debate and find out, endlessly discuss the meaning of it. And many scholars argue that he's imbued with the Hebraic. What they call, coming from Blake, the Hebraic tradition. Find the gaps. And Milton uses all of this, even some... Quite a lot of fairly contemporary scholars who talk about the Midrash and how they might have influenced Milton. Who knows? But he's trying to rewrite at least one story coming from Genesis and the Christian story which is a part of any Christian tradition. Okay, what I would like to do is we are going to play a short clip which has got John Gilbert and Ian Richardson that you read from the first part of "Paradise Lost". If we can play it, please.

A video plays

- "Of mans first disobedience and the fruit of that forbidden tree whose mortal taste brought death into the world and all our woe with loss of Eden till one greater man restored us and regained the blissful seat. Sing heavenly muse that on the secret top of Oreb or of Sinai didst inspire that shepherd who first taught the chosen seed in the beginning how the heavens and earth rose out of chaos. Or if Zion Hill delight thee more and Siloa's brook that flowed fast by the oracle of God, I thence invoked thy aid to my adventurous song that with no middle flight intends to soar above the Aonian Mount while it pursues things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme. And chiefly thou, o spirit, that does prefer before all temples the upright heart and pure, instruct me for thou knows't, thou from the first wast present, and

with mighty wings out spread dove-like satst brooding on the vast abyss and mad'st it pregnant. What in me is dark, illumine. What is low, raise and support that to the highth of this great argument. I may assert eternal providence and justify the ways of God to men."

- Things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme. There at the beginning we have quite explicitly the exalted ambition Milton set himself. And what things? A cast list of God, Satan, good angels, bad angels, sin, death, titanic struggles, cosmic villains. For this stupendous adventure, Milton felt that the necessary technical instrument couldn't be what he called the jingling sound of like endings that is rhyme, but the English equivalent of the unrhymed achievements of Homer in Greek and Virgil in Latin. Milton himself called it English heroic verse without rhyme. In spite of Milton's withdrawal from the world, when "Paradise Lost" was first published in 1667, it quite quickly began to be noticed and even revered. It went into a second edition in 1674, the year of his death, and from then on it became both a commercial success, though Milton himself received only 10 pounds for it, and a potent influence on thought in general and poetry in particular. The age to come more worldly in many ways was nevertheless prepared to see it as a great monument. Today we are bound to have our difficulties with "Paradise Lost". But as one of its modern editors have put it, "If the imagination of the modern reader cannot go along with Milton's passionate faith in God and free will and the attainment of a paradise within, he can at least hardly fail to respond to a compassionate myth of the precarious human situation. A myth, which in one way or another, comprehends all that man has felt and thought and done throughout the course of history." Listen to what is in some ways the first great speech of the poem in Book 1 of the 12 books. "Satan cast down by God to hell with the other rebel angels seized close by him, one next himself in power and next in crime," Beelzebub, Satan's left hand. And Satan addresses him like this.

- "If thou beest he, but O how fallen, how changed from him who in the happy realms of light clothed with transcendent brightness didst out-shine myriads though bright. If he whom mutual league, united thoughts and counsels, equal hope and hazard in the glorious enterprise joined with me once, now misery hath joined in equal ruin into what pit thou seest from what highth fallen, so much the stronger proved he with his thunder. And till then who knew the force of those dire arms? Yet not for those, nor what the potent victor in his rage can else inflict. Do I repent or change? Though Changed in outward lustre. That fixed mind and high disdain from sense of injured merit that with the mightiest-"

- Okay, let's hold it there.

- "And me preferring his utmost..."

- It's basically... It's some of Satan's speeches. Satan's getting wound up 'cause he's lost the battle with God and he's coming down to earth with this kind of language that I was mentioning. And he now comes down in... The phrases from the poem, "Wafts on the calmer wave by dubious light with mischievous revenge." Everybody loves Milton's Satan. And I don't think anybody is an exception for the reasons that I mentioned right at the beginning. Who is Satan as a character? Because this is written with a sense of dramatic characters almost in this dramatic poem. God, Satan, Adam, Eve, Beelzebub and a couple of others. Put it in contemporary language. To me, Satan is a pretty consummate politician. He's already established himself. He's visited pandemonium, which is in the poem the word pandemonium, which parallels with that political landscape that I mentioned earlier of the Civil War period. And he's free to bring mayhem to God's new creation, the human race, which is about to be created with Adam and then Eve. Having negotiated with demons and he schmoozed his horrible relatives, who in the poem, by his daughter sin and the offspring death. Satan passes through

the gates of hell. He visits chaos and he gets chaos' approval for his mission. Satan says, "Havoc and spoil and ruin are my gain and so my journey begins." Havoc and spoil and ruin are my gain. Beautiful way of putting the words. Not just, "I'm going to come and have a war and kill and murder and conquer." Havoc and spoil and ruin are my gain.

These lines burn in and they're Satan's. God's a far, far less evocative. He's bringing in the spirit almost of Achilles in Homer's "Iliad" where in the beginning of the "Iliad", Homer talks about rage. Depending on the translation, rage or anger. But rage shall be my motive. And the whole poem is a play out of the... In the "Iliad" of Homer, of Achilles' rage. So he's setting up at the beginning, I'm going to explore in the spirit of Homer what is it to justify the ways of God to men and what is this first fall of disobedience. It's almost like his concept of the beginning, of the origin is not a neat tree, Adam, Eve, a battle between God and Satan. Satan comes down, convinces Eve, he convinces Adam. He's all very sweet. Well, not sweet. But you know, kind of bit logical and... I'm not going to say my real opinion, you can get it, I'm sure. But instead it feels like a messy... A messy sort of flood in tumult of seas and it's almost like if we imagine the world after the Big Bang.

So imagine Milton today. It's much more messy and mixed up and confused and contorted, this battle between God and Satan, and this Adam and Eve characters coming out and the language that are mentioned. And in addition to that, he's already gone to meet Galileo and there are lines in the poem where it has one of the angels, Raphael. He's looking at the heavens. And Raphael, the angel in the poem says, "By night the glass of Galileo. I see through the glass of Galileo. I observe imagined lands and regions in the moon." And he goes on and on. He talks about the great architect. Is it God? Is it the universe? Is it version of a Big Bang? To me it's much closer to the crazy wildness of a Big Bang. Maybe I'm pushing the metaphor. But in finding, I sense it in his writing and in his life. He talks about Catholicism. Not in the poem. In some of the writings. Catholicism is, quote, "The worst of superstitions. It's a heresy against the scriptures. This is like powerful stuff to write. In this war between Protestant and Catholic, parliamentarians and royalists." Milton goes on. You know, there's a conflict in Milton. 'Cause I think ultimately in the poet, he is writing about his own battle with all the evil and horror in the world. Well, how can I justify God? What do I do? Again, back to that original idea. He's writing about his own inner conflict with all these characters, I think.

Was Milton more of the bookish scholarly mind? In a bit more like Goethe's Dr. Faust in some translations who sees the world through the ancients, classical mythology? Or is he much more the activist who's immediately engaged in the politics of his times? I think he's torn between both. Milton wrote, "I cannot praise an unexercised mind." This goes back to Plato. Those who live the examined life and those who live the unexamined life. "I cannot praise an unexercised mind that never sallies out to see his adversary, that which purifies us is trial. Trial is the contrary in how we grow." William Blake, "Without contraries, there can be no progression." It's exactly coming from Milton. He's saying it right here. I need to seek my adversary. I need to seek the contrary all the time in me as a poet and in my society. So it's... You know, he is this blind guy who's writing this pretty scary, long, difficult poem. But it's not just about heaven and hell, it's all metaphor, it's all symbolic. And I think he's torn and trying to express in some way his own inner conflict.

Milton introduced 630 words to the English language. Ben Johnson, 558. For those of us who... For anybody wants to be pedantic about numbers, John Dun, 342. Shakespeare, approximately 230. So it's almost double from Shakespeare. Just new words. Some of them were disasters, but some of them are through with us. And it's how he played with noun and verb. Outerspace comes from Milton from "Paradise Lost", archfiend, self-delusion, pandemonium, sensuous. These are words that Milton made

up and they're in the poem. So going back to that original idea, how do we justify God's ways? Milton believes he have to go into hell or W.B. Yeats poem, "Into the foul rag and bone shop of the heart." To go down into hell back, Dante, blind in the world... Most are blind in the world in order to perhaps see a little bit or get a glimpse of paradise regained. And his argument shows where does the role of God in all of these. We have to take our own journey in this. And that's Homer, that's Dante, it's the odyssey of the individual to find out for themselves what is all of this, this vision of the world inherited from Christianity, from this religion there, to aspects, wherever. What is it? Why is it? He speaks personally to the inspirer in the little bit I showed. Instruct me for you know. Thou knows God. What in me is dark? Illumine what is low and raise and support that I may justify the ways of God to men. In other words, help me. It's a bit like King David in the Bible. You know, talking to God. "Come on, give me help. Buddy, be my coach." Or the book of Job, obviously. Doubt, question. Those are the aspects that really come in to the spirit of Milton as the poet.

Milton is his own raw material with all his human defects, all his darkened light. And he says to God, "Well, this is all I got to work with. So, help me buddy." In book three, we see how it's working out for him. We've been in hell for two books already, Chaos and eternal night. So what, as Milton, have I to do with light? I'm blind. It's 55 lines of invocation and so much is a lament for a life spent in the dark literally in his own life and metaphorically of course. Seasons return but not to me returns day or night or sight of bloom or sight of summer rose or sight of flocks or herds or even human face divine. The human face divine. If he could only see... If the poet could only see it again for a moment, perhaps something. Help me God. You've made me blind. How can I see? What can I... You know, what more can I do? It feels such a connection we can all make to the 20th century and the 21st. You know, the horrors of what has happened and the people profoundly believing.

But the Book of Job yet again comes into it. And here for me originates so much of this radical questioning of theology and a theological way of seeing the world in particular through Christianity or Protestantism. Physical incapacity, spiritual incapacity, blind in sight, he's begging God. He says to God, "Shine inward, and the mind through all her powers. Irradiates, there plant eyes, all mist from thence. Purge and disperse in me that I may see and tell of things invisible to mortal sight." It's in the poem. It's his own inner battle and war, I would say, symbolised all the characters he's created. He writes about God. But from an earthly point of view, not from some special throne up in heaven, I think as part of his hatred of the divine right of kings because the king could see themselves as sitting literally next to God. So this earth, there's nature. Who's designed all this? What is the design? Who are these creatures that you've created, God? You've created them and you want everyone to be good, and whatever.

Relationship, sex, curiosity, mistakes, sorrow, and a perhaps a glimpse of the human race face divine. His own position surrounded by royalists. He's slandered by what he called evil tongues in another one of his articles in the face of violence. But still the poet must sing. And that goes way back to Homer in the "Odyssey". Sing amuse through me to tell my story of Odysseus. You know, he's referring back to classical mythology, to Christianity, to others that are mentioned. Marvel, Blake, Shelly, they all see this unconscious or conscious defence of Satan because Satan is the questioning, challenging spirit to God. And if God is almighty, et cetera, how can we see another version of Satan, not just as this terrible evil and this some simplistic polemic? And for Milton in the end, knowledge leads you from a dark savage path, then perhaps a glimpse to paradise regained. Satan is the great salesman in "Paradise Lost". Not God. He can talk. He can output anyone. He's got the rhetoric, he's got the speech, the passionate language. He's a Machiavellian manipulator as well. You know, he's a classic, almost a Shakespearean villain. He's exciting. He's fun. His army is defeated. Satan's army is defeated. So what does he do? He

gets out of hell, passes through, as I said, chaos, gets an entry back into earth and then he gets Eve's attention. Now if we can go onto the next slide, please.

So, “The mind in its own place and in itself can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven. What matter where, if I be still the same, and what I should be, all but less than he whom thunder has made greater? We shall be free. The almighty has not built here for his envy, will not drive us hence. Here we may reign secure and in my choice to reign is worth ambition though in hell. Better to reign in hell than serve in heaven." This is the great speech of Satan. And look at the rhetoric. It's passionate, it's gentle, it's an intellectual argument. It's all of these structures put together in the poem but it's...

- [Lauren] All right, everyone. David is reconnecting now. Again, apologies for the inconvenience. He should be on momentarily. All right, we've got you back David.

- Okay, if we can go onto the next slide please. So this is another area of question where Satan is inciting Adam and Eve and Satan comes down and he's talking. So "One fatal tree there stands of knowledge." I just want to move this out here. It stands of knowledge. "Forbidden them to taste. Knowledge forbidden?" Well, who has the right to forbid knowledge? What is the knowledge? "Suspicious, reasonless. Why should their Lord envy them that?" So Satan threw a very thoughtful, reasoned argument and rhetoric and say, "Why should their lords envy them that? Why should their Lord be against them having knowledge?" What's the problem, God? "Can it be sin to know? Can it be death? And do they only stand by ignorance? Is that the happy state, the proof of their obedience and their faith?" Just to not eat an apple in the tree, not to have knowledge? "O fair foundation laid whereon to build their ruin. Hence I will excite their minds with more desire to know." Satan comes to say, "I want to give them knowledge. What's the problem of them going to University of the tree and getting some knowledge?" University of the apple. You know, getting a PhD in apple. I mean, what's the problem, God? And in this way of questioning, it's radical for the times. He convinces Adam and Eve. If we can go on to the next slide, please. "It's better to reign in hell than to serve in heaven." Well, why not? God, if you want to be so cruel headmaster or professor, whatever, and deny them knowledge, why shouldn't they have some knowledge? What's the problem? He questions the very foundation of this whole idea of original sin and so many of the other ideas coming out of this story in Genesis. This is just here. This is from the very first copy of the book on the right.

Moving on to the next slide, please. So these are some phrases from Milton 'cause I want to show some of the language that he uses. "I sing of chaos and eternal night, taught by the heavenly muse to venture down the dark descent and up to reascend." So like Dante in the "Inferno", I have to go down to the dark of my heart, the dark of everything in order to get some light. Now is God going to help me on the journey or not? I don't know. Satan is saying, "Well, why can't you, Adam and Eve, have a better knowledge? So have a bit of the apple." "Never can true reconcilement grow where wounds of deadly hate have pierced so deep." These words are this powerful poetry. "The mind is its own place and in itself can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven." So it's all located in the human mind. Free choice. So what do I justify God's ways? If God is omnipotent or powerful, again, where's the role of the human mind and some decision making power of the individual? "What hath night to do with sleep?" He wants to question everything in this poem. It's endless. "Long as the way and hard, that out of hell leads up to light. Did I request thee, Maker, from my clay to mould me man? Did I solicit thee from darkness to promote me?" It's almost like I've applied for the job or you've given it to me. You gave it to me. You gave birth... You're my parents. I'm not responsible for my birth. You did it. "Deep-versed in books and shallow in himself." I love that line. Goethe takes it up in his "Faust" as well. "Without

contraries is no progression. Attraction and repulsion, reason and energy, love and hate, are necessary to human existence." William Blake.

That's exactly coming out of Milton. Without contraries, there's no progression. Pros and cons, this and that. Dialectic debate, discuss and argue. Not one monolithic king, not one monolithic belief at the expense of any other belief or even question. Can we have the next slide, please? "When I consider how my light is spent..." This is from a poem, not from "Paradise Lost". But this is on his blindness which I'm sure many know. But it's a remarkable poem. "When I consider how my light is spent, Ere half my days in this dark world and wide and that one talent which is death to hide lodged with me useless though my soul more bent. 'Doth God exact day-labor light denied?' That murmur soon replies, 'God doth not need man's work. His state is kingly. Thousands at his bidding speed and post o'er land and ocean without rest. They also serve who only stand and wait.'" For me, it's a questioning. You blinded me, you've made me blind, if you are this omnipotent God, how do I find light? What do I do? Physical and spiritual always brings the question of God in. This is in poem, not just "Paradise Lost".

Bring on to the next one, please. "Where brooding darkness spreads his jealous wings and the night Raven sings, they're under ebon shades and low brow'd rocks as ragged as Locks in dark desert ever dwell." It's just rich and attractive. It's like going on a tourist trip to a place of that's exotic and full of desire and passion that Satan offers. Okay, on to the next slide, please. So it's "Eve and the Apple." This is again Satan. He's talking to Eve. "So what can your knowledge hurt him or this tree import against his will if all be his? Or is it envy and can envy dwell in heavenly breasts?" Is God jealous if you have knowledge? And can it dwell in heavenly breasts? "I feel the link of nature draw me, flesh of flesh of my bone thou art. And from thy state, mine never shall be parted, bliss or woe." These are convincing subtle little arguments for the character of Eve, and then of course Adam as well. You know, and why can't you have the knowledge that will come?

If we can go onto the next one, please? "The great architect did wisely to conceal and not divulge. His secret to be scanned by them..." This is a reference to Galileo, not only God, who is more the God. The Galileo scientist who's discovered a whole different way of seeing the world, radically new. Oh, God. Moving on to the next slide, please. This is from "Milton". "But Milton entering my foot, I saw in..." Et cetera. I'm not going to go onto it now. This is from the preface on "Milton" by William Blake. Going on to the next slide, please. And this is "Milton" by Tennyson. "O mighty mouth, inventor of harmonies." This is all about Milton. "A name to resound for ages. Starred from Jehovah's gorgeous..." Et cetera. "Rings to the roar of an angel onset." And if we'll go to the last one. William Wordsworth, 1802. "Milton! Thou should be living at this hour England hath need of thee she is a fen of stagnant waters..." Et cetera, et cetera. "Oh Milton, raise us up to return to..." All these poets who are so revered and studied everywhere referred back to Milton. Not only Shakespeare but Milton. And through that, there's the lineage to Homer.

One last point that I want to leave us with, 'cause I know it's right at the end of time, is the idea of banishment and exile which is such a contemporary idea I think for us today. And he uses this. There are those words in the poem that Satan is banished. Adam and Eve are banished from the Garden of Eden and sent into exile because they want some knowledge. Okay? Because they've disobeyed God is the real reason. But then why link it to the tree of knowledge? So I'm trying to give the perspective through Milton's eyes. So this idea of banishment plays out in the whole poem. Who is banished? Who is exiled? In today's language, who's a citizen? Who's an alien? Who's a foreigner? Who's an insider? Who's allowed to be here? Who's not allowed? Who's in? Who's out? Who's in the club that rules? Who isn't? Banishment happens on so many levels. You know, who's at the political elite? Who isn't?

And it goes all the way through. And I think this idea that he's obsessed with 'cause it is in the poem, to justify God's ways to men.

Why are they kicked out of the garden? Why do they have to find Eden by going through hell? And then maybe a bit of a glimpse of compassion, forgiveness, and justice. So, why are they banished? Why can't they discover it in other ways? So all of this is thrown into open question through the character of Satan. And then Adam and Eve have to try and figure it out themselves as well. And I think this idea is so powerful and just one of the many ideas resonant for us today, this sense of borders and banishments and in and out and what's allowed and what isn't and who is. And it goes back to Milton at the beginning of this idea of the activist. You know, pleading for freedom of speech and freedom of thought and expression. Because if you have that, you can be the Book of Job. You can be Satan in his poem and question everything and challenge everything and anything and why not. And if you can do that, you then throw everything up and you create a visionary role for a writer, for individuals, for education as opposed to perhaps the groomed ignorance in much of education we might have today. Okay, I'm going to hold it there. Sorry for that little cut. But it just hasn't happened for a hell of a long time. Okay, there's some... Sorry, if you can go back to the other one. Lauren, can I see the questions?

- [Lauren] You have to pull up the questions on your end if you click the Q and A button.

- No, no, I need the other screen. The screen with the slide.

- [Lauren] The slide?

- Yeah. I don't have the Q and A come up with the screen.

- [Lauren] This shouldn't affect it. You should be able to see the questions regardless.

- Okay. Okay, I'll manage to find it. Okay, thank you.

Q & A and Comments

So David, "Was 'Paradise Lost' burned by the noise?" That's a great question. That's a fantastic question. I don't know. I'm going to check it. It's really.. It's a wonderful thought.

Barbara, thank you so much.

Alison, "I studied 'Paradise Lost' text at school." Okay, thank you.

That's very kind. 934. "The techno break was the fault of Satan." Well, maybe God. Maybe God crosses me because I'm challenging and questioning someone.

Sandy, "Has anyone read his Hebrew poetry?" No, I haven't. And I'm going to be honest with you, unfortunately I didn't have time to explore his writings, his much deeper influence of what Blake calls Hebraic tradition in "Milton". But it's a great idea.

James, the great fire. Yes, Puritan saw the fire. God's punishment. Thank you. That's a fantastic reminder.

"For the last centuries depraved and wicked way of life for the court. The Royalists on the other hand took the view that God was punishing London for having supported parliamentary in the Civil War and having supported overthrowing and killing of Charles." Thanks for so much. I really appreciate that reminder. So it's tricky to balance how much of the life and the history with the 10,000 lines in the poem, but that's great and that's important.

Thanks. Thanks. Okay, more you're studying Dante, less familiar with Milton. Yup. Well, Dante and Homer, I go back to them all the time. You know, again and again and again 'cause I think so much... And these people were trying to... Let's remember they were beginning... You know, early stages of enlightenment, renaissances, all of that is fermenting in Europe and England obviously. So they're reclaiming the classics as part of that endeavour.

Carol, thank you.

Roberta, "Richard Bentley described Milton as a furtive spinose." Okay, that's interesting. That'd be fascinating to explore.

Diane, thank you. Yeah, I know there's so much that one can explore and I'm going to be honest. I hadn't revisited this poem since I studied it so many years ago and it just blew my mind re-looking at it. You know, in all these different ways. Diane, back to university.

Ah! 94, that's amazing.

Susan, thank you so much.

So, thank you so much Lauren for your help as always. And thank you everybody. Apologies again for that brief break. The work of God or Job or Satan. But thanks and have a great rest of the weekend.