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Creative Rhetoric: Milton's Satan, Adolf Hitler and others

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The boundaries of 'literature' have always been blurred, and oratory has always lurked on the fringe. In 'literature' of a narrower definition, Milton's Satan, 'like some huge ammiral', looms large as an imaginative creation. Hitler is the greatest demagogue of recent history. Milton himself was, of course, a great polemicist and rhetorician and, in good seventeenth-century fashion, not always a particularly savoury one. Was Blake right in his canonical statement that Milton was of the devil's party without knowing it?

What is rhetoric and what are the techniques which can make its creative use of language a fiendish art? Why are some speeches pernicious, others great? Are there principles underlying malign rhetoric that literature and history can be used to illustrate? In a global, postmodernist world of media power, journalism, communication and information science, older examples may still be instructive.

Keywords: Hitler; John Milton; oratory; *Paradise Lost*; rhetoric; Satan

'Rhetoric' has varied connotations, some unfavourable, 'rhetorical' likewise. It was one of the ancient liberal arts and included training in logic and the traps of argument as well as in the methods of coherent, organised statement in general. What writing skills courses today call 'prewriting' (actually research), the finding of material or ideas, the rhetoricians called *inventio*. The organisation of ideas and facts into coherent units and ultimately into paragraphs was *dispositio*. One wishes that this kind of rhetoric, including training in logical fallacies, were still rigorously taught today. But there was always the branch of rhetoric intended to move and persuade. Here rhetoric enters the realm of the creative use of language. This is not necessarily bad – one may plead eloquently and poetically in a good cause. Only too often, however, the creative possibilities of language are used to persuade for the wrong ends. Evil rhetoric can be extremely

creative, ingenious, adroit, beguiling. It juggles with the connotations of words, twists meaning, hides behind apparent good, like a wolf in sheep's clothing. Training in these arts is likewise desirable, but as a kind of inoculation. We live in a world of rhetoric, of the business executive, the advertiser, the politician. A prominent businessman in South Africa made a public statement recently about the need to 'de-recognise' profits. The anticipated profits consequent on a take-over had not materialised. The board of directors and the accountants had erred and awkward questions were being asked. Euphemism is part of the rhetorician's armoury. It takes a creative mind, and a control of the rules of English word-formation, to think up such a term. If one can 'defuse' a bomb, why not 'de-recognize' an amount on a balance sheet? Linguists tell us that coinage is one of the ways in which language expands to meet new situations, that innovation is to be welcomed, and that language change is not deterioration or decay. It is a rather myopic and naïve proposition. George Orwell's devastating exposition in *1984* of how language can become perverse should be retrieved from the realms of the forgotten. Of course, some neologisms are very much to be welcomed: 'spin-doctor', for example, or to put a 'spin' on something. A word like that we need, provided the cynical connotations do not become blurred with familiarity.

The literary archetype exemplifying rhetoric is Milton's Satan. That his rhetoric is evil has not always been acknowledged. This is a tribute to Milton's dramatic skill in creating the character and devising for him an idiom and a set of verbal and logical tactics to express his nature and his driving preoccupations and to bedazzle his followers (and also some critics). Blake's statement at the beginning of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* is frequently quoted: 'The reason Milton wrote in fetters when he wrote of Angels and God, and at liberty when of Devils and Hell, is because he was a true poet and of the Devil's party without knowing it'. Cleanth Brooks said, long ago, that a poet could write better than he knew, so contesting the capacity of the historian or scholar to give objective explanations of a poetic text (Keast 1962, 356). Doubtless, this raises the possibility of writing worse than one knows, the unwitting revelation of what does not do the poet credit. Blake's statement belongs in this theoretical camp. It is an early example of the deconstructive approach: the acute reader undermines conventional readings, provocatively points out what is inconvenient to apparent good sense and plain meaning. Shelley's statements are of the same kind: 'Nothing can exceed the energy and magnificence . . . of Satan'. 'Milton's Devil as a moral being is far superior to his God', persevering 'in spite of adversity and torture'. God is 'one who in the cold security of undoubted triumph inflicts the most horrible revenge . . .' Shelley concludes that 'Milton's poem contains within itself a philosophical refutation of that system of which, by a strange and natural antithesis, it has been a chief popular support' (Thorpe 1951, 358 ff). The text, in other words, contains within itself the germ of its own subversion, the holy grail of the deconstructive theorist's quest. Empson, among modern critics, says that Satan is 'overwhelmingly stubborn and gallant but defending a cause inherently hopeless from the start' (Milton [Norton Critical Edition] 1993, 616). However, one can

deconstruct Empson too, or examine the logic underlying his beguiling statement, and detect the latent rhetorical device, the wolf in sheep's clothing. The proposition is that gallantry in defence of a lost cause should automatically command sympathy. Does the nature of the cause or of the person involved not count for something? The iconoclastic Empson can be surprisingly conventional.

The debate involves, in Roland Barthes's phrase, the 'death of the author' – is the text the reader's or the author's? As Foucault asks, what is an author? The god-like author (of Barthes's satirical view) disposed of (Barthes 1968, 146), the reader reads 'writing' and not a writer; there is no foundation, as Stanley Fish might say. Hence we can have interpretative communities, each putting its grid over the text. It can actually be a kind of critical determinism, not the readerly independence which the abolition of the writer seems to offer, let alone the ecstasy of *jouissance*. It is worth noting, in passing, that Fish has shifted his ground. In his keynote address to the Ninth Milton Symposium in London in July 2008, he said that the reader is duty bound to find an intention in the text and that the idea of interpretative communities was wrong. The signs were already there in his book *How Milton Works*, of 2001, which deals with the consistent, underlying given of Milton's perceptions, failure to see which has led to centuries of misreading. As so often, Fish has painstakingly thought through to a new position while the literary world is still clinging rather bemusedly to the past. The debate has a long history, with many permutations. From the same period as Cleanth Brooks, mentioned earlier, Wimsatt and Beardsley (in their famous essay *The Intentional Fallacy*), discussing the use of biography and history in criticism, point to the fallacy of going outside the poem to find an intention that is not apparent in it. We have only the text, and that, therefore, of necessity belongs to the reader. The attempt to protect the autonomous text from scholarly intrusion in favour of close reading, which the New Criticism wanted to do, in fact delivers the victim to the tormentors. The new new criticism, *la nouvelle critique*, was only a variation on a theme, not all that new, (and by now is itself somewhat long in the tooth).

This study offers another reading of Satan, based on the text but, at the same time, taking us back to the poet, the author, to what Milton was trying to do, his intention. Satan is firmly in the clutches of his creator Milton, himself an accomplished rhetorician and polemicist (and not, in fact, always a particularly savoury one). By creating Satan as a dramatic character, Milton is able to bring into being a rhetorical figure who illustrates what rhetoric all too often is. The portrait is covertly satirical and ironical. The creation of Satan must have given Milton enormous enjoyment. This is not, however, to grant Blake and Shelley their case. Their reading is a tribute to Milton's successful creation. They swallow the bait. What rather spoils the fun and breaks the rules of the game, though, is the way in which Milton sometimes warns the readers or audience, just in case they fall under the spell, as certain critics have indeed done, of the spurious glamour of the heroics. There can be virtue in the author's not displaying his hand too easily. 'Calumnious Art / Of counterfeited truth' (V: 770) is a fine description of

how false rhetoric works, a phrase that should be current in our culture of rhetoric, not hidden obscurely in a vast epic structure. Placed just before a delusively grand oratorical statement, however, it points the moral too obviously, and spoils the irony. Nevertheless, the phrase, in all its trenchancy, should be set up as a beacon for our perpetual edification, a pillar of fire to guide our footsteps through the mirage-inhabited deserts of verbal misuse.

John Aubrey, in his brief *Life of Milton* says he was 'Extreme pleasant in his conversation and at dinner, supper, etc.; but Satirical'. It is worth contemplating whether Milton is not one of our great ironists, and far from being the solemn organ voice of popular reception. Milton's Satan is the archetypal demagogue. In real life in our own time, Adolf Hitler is the supreme example – the greatest orator of the twentieth century. Their techniques are very similar.

What are these techniques? In Book V of *Paradise Lost*, the angelic narratorial voice tells Adam about God's proclamation of the Son, the beginning of the action. The scene has been much discussed by commentators either anxious or gleeful that Milton's doctrine of the Trinity might not be quite what the Council of Nicaea would want, but this vast topic cannot be dealt with in this article. The proclamation is a necessary dramatic device to get the story going. The aggrieved Satan and his followers gather on a northern peak, Satan's 'Royal seat'. From this 'Royal seat' he delivers a democratic speech against the newly established sovereignty. He starts by proclaiming the high status of his followers, pointing out that 'by Decree' another has 'engrossed' to himself 'all power' and 'us eclipsed under the name of King anointed'. 'Anointed' is a neat point, being the sacramental moment of the coronation ceremony that confers divine right. New powers have been created to which 'knee-tribute' has to be paid. This 'yoke' has to be 'cast off'. They are sons of heaven: 'and if not equal all, yet free / Equally free'. Orders and degrees, he tells them, 'jar not with liberty'. One must remember that he is talking from his 'Royal seat' to his followers, but undermining their loyalty to a yet higher authority. 'Reason' or 'right' cannot assume 'Monarchy' over those who are by right 'His equals', 'if in power and splendour less'. They are 'in freedom equal', not subject to law or edict, which they do not need. This is to abuse their own 'Imperial titles which assert / Our being ordained to govern, not to serve'. It is an assertion of natural rights for high-ranking angels.

Milton was a notable opponent of monarchy and an eloquent supporter of the execution of Charles I. Charles had tried to rule by decree, had not called Parliament for eleven years and had imposed taxes without parliamentary consent. Yet this does not mean that Milton is on Satan's side when Satan preaches republicanism. Satan is a dramatic creation: Milton ironically presents arguments for freedom and basic equality in a perverted cause, with appropriate republican clichés about 'knee-tribute', unktion and yokes that must be cast off. Satan plays on a sense of grievance in his audience which is really his own. He appeals to reason and to right; rejects decree and edict, power that has been engrossed. There is a nice play on the word 'equal' which is echoed

elsewhere in Satan's rhetoric, but in his world some are more equal than others because he is most concerned to preserve his own eminence among his followers. His argument begs the question, assuming what he wants to assert but not actually proving it. (This 'begging the question' is one of the basic logical errors of argument which a student of the liberal arts would have been trained to avoid.) The argument reinforces what Satan and his followers want to think, arouses prejudice, pretends to a general rule, blackens the opposition, uses a potentially good concept for the wrong purpose (the wolf in sheep's clothing), appeals to self interest, exploits a current situation and uses clichés that exclude complexity. He has read his audience well, and knows how to make his appeal to their lower instincts.

Above all, he convinces himself and bolsters his own ego. His arguments are examples of rationalisation, projection and transfer (those three psychological processes by which devious human nature evades the truth) born of his own sense of grievance and thwarted ambition. The relationship between demagogue and audience is symbiotic – like answers to like, deep calls to deep, or shallow to shallow.

There is a lovely touch in the next scene, when Abdiel is the lone voice among Satan's followers to challenge and refute; to dare to oppose and to stand out against the mob; to subject the heady, democratic, anti-monarchical rhetoric to analysis. He points out that monarchs do not reign over equals and that there can be no equality with the Son, who in fact is the agent of their creation. We are not dealing here with monarchies on earth, Satan's false analogy. Analogy is a rhetorical trap of which the users themselves are often unaware. It should be precise in its correspondence. In any case, it is only an illustration, not a proof, as it is so often thought to be by both users and receivers. Satan cannot face facts, claims that they are all 'self-begot', 'self raised'. Of course, Abdiel finds no response among the crowd:

his zeal
None seconded, as out of season judged
Or singular and rash. (V: 850–852)

The critic of the prevailing mood is so often dismissed by such arguments. The meeting huddles together in the face of challenge. Rather, as Satan speaks again, their response is

as the sound of waters deep
Hoarse murmur echo'd to his words applause. (V: 871–872)

Milton knew his group dynamics and his mass psychology. The first instinct is the herd instinct, to huddle together, and the easiest response is to condemn the awkward point raised as egregious, unsound, provocative: annual general meetings, boards of directors, parliaments, university senates, caucus meetings – the phenomenon may be observed frequently enough. But behind all the fiendish adroitness and Satan's occasional lack of awareness of his own rhetorical and psychological lapses (for the two often go together

in demagoguery) lie Satan's own maniacal impulses and egotism, the impulses that he has to satisfy. While preaching freedom, he is slave to himself.

He has a few moments of truth. In Book I, when he awakes in Hell after a disastrous defeat in battle, he sees Beelzebub, his right-hand man, realises the nature of the fall, and in an unguarded moment expresses regret:

O how fallen, how changed
From him who in the happy realms of light
Clothed with transcendent brightness didst outshine
Myriads though bright. (I: 84–87)

The 'happy realm of light' – what an admission! But in the middle of the line the rhetoric of calculation takes over: 'mutual league', 'equal hope / and hazard in the Glorious Enterprise, / now misery hath joined in equal ruin'. It is an odd argument, although the repetition of 'equal' has a fine rhetorical ring to it; 'equal ruin' is hardly comfort, even if they are all in it together. The rhetoric collapses: Milton must have chuckled as he dictated the phrase. But although 'He with his Thunder' has proved stronger (a bad lapse of military intelligence) Satan does not repent 'that fixt mind', born of a 'sense of injured merit', and will not cease to struggle against Him who 'Sole reigning holds the Tyranny of Heaven'. Milton's control of the rhetoric he puts in Satan's mouth is masterly, as is his insight into Satan's psychology: 'Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heav'n' (I: 262). The other moment of truth comes early in Book IV, when Satan sees the beauty in Eden that he has come to destroy. However, he has to do it; Milton comments: 'necessity the tyrant's plea'. The analogy with things earthly now holds good: Satan is an earthly tyrant and the later books show him as the originator of political tyranny in human history.

What we are given is a sight of enormous gifts irretrievably misdirected. Milton called it 'hardening'. As Satan says, 'the mind is its own place' – the bastion of self-justification. In another moment of truth he says 'myself am hell', but he finds himself unable to repent. Imagine standing up before the mob and saying that one has been wrong. It is a political impossibility and, in any case, pride does not permit it, for this would mean submission. 'Necessity the tyrant's plea' imposes its own necessity, for Satan is trapped and has created his own predestinarian inevitability, his own inescapable necessity, his determinism. The struggle for freedom against tyranny has resulted, precisely, in lack of freedom. Milton's God, in his opening speech in Book III, a speech which many critics have used to make this deity an unpopular and prosy authoritarian, rejects predestination as the heavenly dispensation. In creating this God, Milton was refuting predestinarian theology, the doctrine of election, held by the majority of his own side in the struggle, both political and ecclesiastic, in the England of his time. It is the argument, too, of that much earlier pamphlet, the pioneering statement on freedom to speak and publish, the *Areopagitica*, a reproach penned against the puritan House of Commons. No wonder Milton created Abdiel: his own career is witness to a similar

independence. Perverse rhetoric brings its own reward, the demagogue's hardening, even if political success has followed. Milton's study is of the tyrant and not only of his rhetoric. One hates to refute such a fascinating and attractive figure as William Blake, but Milton is not unknowingly on Satan's side, and his God and heaven are not without their virtues. *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* is, after all, a youthful *jeu d'esprit*.

What follows is the great parade-ground scene, the review of the troops before their great commander. Commentators have remarked on the fascist, Nazi nature of the scene, probably thinking of the parade-ground scenes orchestrated and choreographed by Albert Speer: one does not see comparisons, however, with the equally relevant military scenes that used to take place on Red Square. Totalitarianism is much the same everywhere, depending on force, public displays intended to intoxicate, and rhetoric that offers some kind of salvation with a vaguely apocalyptic creed. During the march past, Satan's heart distends with pride. Self-intoxication of the leader is part of the total picture.

The opening of Book Two sees Satan on his throne in Hell, the picture of arbitrary monarchy, whatever his rhetoric says about equality and freedom: 'By merit raised to that bad eminence', as Milton sardonically remarks. His opening speech from the throne includes a revealing little undercurrent. Satan points out that he occupies a dangerous position, hinting that none of his followers would really want to be in his shoes. The argument reinforces his heroism and at the same time makes it less likely that anyone would oppose him. The figure of assured power fears rivalry, and indeed, he has led them into a pretty pickle. Fear of rivalry is one of the many crosses that the arbitrary ruler has to bear. The parliamentary debate that follows is remarkable for the way in which Milton exposes undercurrents of personal rivalry and hatred among the debaters. The scene is dramatically rendered with brilliant creations of styles of rhetoric that reflect the personalities and characters of the contenders, Moloch and Belial. Self-interest, hatred, meanness of spirit, cowardice, and stupid valour are the characteristics of hell's conclave, as they are in this world of ours, and Milton exposes it all. However, Satan and Beelzebub have determined beforehand how to handle the affair, which they do very adroitly. No annual general meeting or meeting of a board of directors, or the senate of a university, or caucus meeting of a political party in crisis, or a cabinet has been better managed. There is a book for the business executive on Shakespeare's insights into the world of leadership, power and rivalry; it is time someone used Milton for the creation of better executives. One hopes, however, that Satan's defects will be seen for what they are and not copied as the road to corporate success. Oh, one's prophetic soul!

As Alan Bullock (1965, 373–374) records, Otto Strasser (Hitler's socialist associate in the early days of National Socialism until he was sidelined and dumped) describes the way in which Hitler sensed the mood and the emotional need of the crowd before him, 'the secret desires, the least admissible instincts': 'He enters a hall, he sniffs the air'. But at the same time the situation releases his own inner drives. Herman Rauschning spoke of 'the morbid derangement and the pseudo-creativity of his hysteria' (Bullock 1965,

375). Bullock also speculates as to the degree to which he was swept along by belief and to which he deliberately exploited the irrational side of human nature. Hitler used words 'less to communicate his thoughts than to release the hidden spring of his own and others' emotions' (Bullock 1965, 372).

Certainly, Hitler could argue with all the appearance of reason. To an assembly of industrialists at Düsseldorf, the centre of the steel industry, in 1932 – an audience concerned about working-class movements and economic stagnation – he made the following relatively sober, apparently reasoned, statements:

“But it is absurd to build up economic life on the conceptions of achievement of the value of personality and on the authority of personality, while in the political sphere you deny this authority and thrust in its place the law of the greatest number – democracy.

For it was not German business that conquered the world, followed by the development of German power, but the power-State which created for the business world the general conditions for its subsequent prosperity.” (Bullock 1965, 197)

Of the Nazi movement, changing his mode from apparent reason to raw, emotional appeal, he said:

“Here is an organisation which is filled with an indomitable, aggressive spirit, an organisation which, when a political opponent says ‘Your behaviour we regard as a provocation’ does not see fit immediately to retire from the scene, but brutally enforces its own will and hurls against the opponent the retort: ‘We fight today! We fight tomorrow! And if you regard our meeting today as a provocation we shall hold yet another next week – until you have learned that it is no provocation when *German* Germany also professes its belief . . .’ And when people cast in our teeth our intolerance, we proudly acknowledge it – yes, we have formed the inexorable decision to destroy Marxism in Germany down to its very last root . . . Today we stand at the turning-point of Germany’s destiny . . . Either we shall succeed in working out a body politic hard as iron . . . or else, lacking this internal consolidation, Germany will fall to final ruin.” (Bullock 1965, 198–199)

The assembled industrialists cheered wildly. However, Hitler was not offering them capitalist freedom from the Marxist threat, but a state-dominated command economy as severe as any in Marxism. What started as one of the devices by which one can beg the question – ‘But it is absurd’ – relies for final proof on irrational appeal. Once in power, Hitler put the economy on a war-time footing.

Though generally contemptuous of religion and especially of Christianity – the religion of the weak according to Nietzsche (although there was indeed a section of the church, the ‘German Christians’, that espoused the Aryan Christ) – Hitler could fall back on religiosity in moments of emotion and triumph, probably sincerely believing for the moment in what he was saying. On returning to his native Vienna after the *Anschluss*, he burst forth:

“I believe that it was God’s will to send a youth [the down-and-out young Hitler] from here

into the Reich to let him grow up, to raise him to be the leader of the nation so as to enable him to lead back his homeland into the Reich . . .

In three days the Lord has smitten them . . . And to me the Grace was given on the day of the betrayal [the myth used to explain Germany's surrender in 1918] to be able to unite my homeland with the Reich . . . I would now give thanks to Him who let me return to my homeland in order that I might now lead it into my German Reich. Tomorrow, may every German recognise the hour, and measure its import and bow in humility before the Almighty who in a few weeks has wrought a miracle upon us." (Bullock 1965, 435)

He was, after all, the man of destiny. It is not a question only of posturing or calculation – there is the element of belief and the presence of a system of thought or a creative mythology, combined with a powerful inner compulsion. The mind is indeed its own place. The arrests by the SS immediately after the *Anschluss* totalled 76,000 in Vienna alone, while Hitler wept in public for joy at the realisation of his Germanic ideal: 'my German Reich'. There was no room for Abdiels. The element of belief as part of the tyrannical pattern is shown by Hitler's private rambblings to Bormann. He had his mythology (Bullock 1965, 627). Milton, the author, can allow his Satan moments of doubt, but we can only guess at the tyrants of history.

One cannot finish without at least some consideration of Marxist rhetoric. Stalin, asked in 1936 whether people in Russia were really free, said:

We did not build this society in order to restrict personal liberty but in order that the individual may feel really free. We built it for the sake of real personal liberty, liberty without quotation marks. (Hodgkinson 1955, 52)

Choice between parties by free election in this rhetorical system is a 'drab formality' of bourgeois democracy (Hodgkinson 1955, 44). Moscow Radio (11 Feb. 1951) explained:

[B]ehind the screen of bourgeois parliamentarianism lurk the terror and dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. In bourgeois countries the state is ruled not by the people but by capital – by a handful of cosmopolitan swindlers who are prepared for the sake of power and profit to trample on their own legislation. (Hodgkinson 1955, 44)

Stalin and the Party had of course starved millions of 'kulaks', the independent peasantry, to death in pursuit of the noble ideal. When a brave official reported to Stalin the state of the Ukraine, Stalin suggested that he was 'a good orator' who should 'join the Writers Union' and 'concoct fables' (Sebag 2004, 87). Stalin of course knew, and even admitted to Kaganovich, that the famine in the Ukraine was a set of 'glaring absurdities'. It is a creative phrase: 'Necessity, the tyrants plea', as Milton put it. 'The end justified the means'; 'You can't make an omelette without breaking eggs' (Sebag 2004, 88). Kaganovic justified reprisals involving the deportation of fifteen Cossack villages to Siberia by claiming in a letter to Stalin that this was 'the resistance of the last remnants of the dying classes leading to a concrete form of the class struggle' (Sebag 2004, 103).

In eliminating the peasantry, Stalin was continuing the policy of that intellectual of the minor aristocracy, Ulanov, alias Lenin, (Sebag 2004, 45). This started around 1930. In 1937, the year after the 'real freedom' quoted above, Stalin started the purges of Trotskyites, Leninists, 'saboteurs', and all among the party and his close associates whom he paranoically suspected of faint dissidence, to be tried before his hanging judge, Ulbrikh, and summarily shot in the back of the head in the Lubianka, just across the road. The mind is indeed its own place, but a mythology is a great help and a pinch of rhetoric adds the final touch, creating a beautifully enclosed system.

Nearer home we were recently informed that Britain and others have been 'promoting illegal regime change in Zimbabwe'. Claims by the opposition to have won the election are a 'provocation'. 'Things will never change'; 'Zimbabwe will never be a colony again'. These are beautiful examples of the creativity that masquerades as good, the wolf in sheep's clothing. Regime changes do indeed all too often come about in the wrong way, and Britain was indeed once a colonial power. 'Provocation' implies that an angry or even violent response is justified. Colonialism was wrong, and invoking the past and taking a staunch anti-colonialist stand is calculated to win sympathy. But the analogy is false, like Satan's preaching of republican liberty and equality. South Africa has been told by some that the Scorpions (a special investigative unit) were 'enemies of the democratic order'. Perhaps certain democrats were feeling uncomfortable. It all depends on the connotations of 'democratic'. East Germany, until the Wall was demolished, was the Democratic Republic of Germany. There is also the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. We read in John's Gospel the well-known (perhaps no longer so well-known) statement: 'Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends'. Laying down one's life for another (even if the origin is now a little blurred) gains ready acceptance as a noble sentiment. The phrase has figured in recent South African political posturing. It has a grand ring to it. It was followed by the statement of preparedness to 'kill'. Under public outcry, it was denied that the latter had been meant literally. Was the 'die for' not also subject to revision? At any rate, in relation to the origin of the phrase, the juxtaposition of 'die for' and 'kill for' is a total contradiction. The problem is partly gross ignorance, but would education or information have been of any avail? There is the intoxication of words. South Africa has been told that the judiciary, or certain individual judges, are 'counter-revolutionary'. There have, furthermore, been suggestions that the judiciary should not become involved in politics. Take your pick – you cannot have both. We all know that in a democratic country the separation of the powers, of the judiciary, the legislature and the executive, is according to the book. Among other things, this gives the judiciary independence from state and party. Therefore, the judiciary should not get involved with politics! Or, if it does, it should do so on the side of 'revolution'. A related euphemism that has currency and needs 'demystifying' is the adjective 'progressive', whether applied to linguistics or economics. Frequently, nothing has been more progressive.

In Milton's day, the judges under Charles I were the King's men. When asked to

determine whether it was right to impose taxes by arbitrary decree, they decided in the King's favour. The notorious Judge Jeffreys, under Charles II, was openly partisan and abused from the bench those haled before him who were of the wrong persuasion. The integrity of the judiciary has had a long, slow, uneven evolution in the history of civilisation. It is not unknown for judges in 'revolutionary' regimes to be, like the King's judges of seventeenth-century England, supporters of the state or the party, Ulrikh, for example. We follow the leader, the *Fuhrer*, or *Vozdh*, or whoever. One just has to choose the right judges. 'Counter-revolutionary' is a form of question-begging, resting on absence of argument, and a kind of reverse euphemism, conferring virtue, reason and right in the name of the people. Those who suffer are the Abdiels, the lonely maintainers of inconvenient opinion.

Even if these rhetoricians write worse than they know, or knew, and even if their language calls for deconstruction (for it certainly contains within itself the seeds of its own dissolution, although in this case the authorial figures are not 'dead' or irrelevant to the interpretation), this kind of language is creative. It juggles with the connotations of words. It requires considerable ingenuity. But it is also a sign of language decay, of slippage, of words coming loose from their moorings and going into free fall (to employ a mixed metaphor). Strangely, such language is, at the same time, system bound. Of this kind of language Milton's Satan, a satirical and ironical dramatic creation by an author, is the archetypal deployer. Milton was prophetic. Satan, like the others cited, has his mythology, his system, his co-ordinates, his specialised vocabulary and idiom and, behind it all, his inner compulsion. Milton creates an appropriate idiom and psychology for his character and has left us the trenchant comment: 'calumnious art of counterfeited truth'. F. R. Leavis, in *Revaluation*, in a once famous essay, which is by now probably forgotten, condemned the style of *Paradise Lost* for its empty gesture. He was, in this instance, wrong, though his general search for language that is poetically valid goes to the heart of what the critic has to do, maugré Terry Eagleton's charge of 'naïve mimeticism' (Eagleton 1983, 37). Leavis disregarded the enormous, perverted energy of Satan's language. It is a poetic *tour de force*, and one of our essential poles of reference, along with George Orwell's *newspeak*. Perhaps, in this instance, one needs a foundation in order to do the deconstruction. Anti-foundationalism cannot do the job. Dare one suggest truth and morality? Furthermore, we need to understand the workings of euphemism and its inverted counterparts, false analogy and begging the question.

The tyrants and their lackeys who have strutted the world's stage in reality (or who still do so) must be granted their genre of creativity, but should (vain hope!) contemplate Milton's Satan, to their edification. University students taking English, linguistics, journalism, marketing, culture studies, history, political science, law, sociology – and drama – should have Milton's Satan as part of their education. Never let it be said that the canonical or the Eurocentric is irrelevant: 'the mind is its own place', 'necessity the tyrant's plea', 'calumnious art of counterfeited truth'. Such insights cannot but be ever relevant and contemporary.

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