

CHARLES I: UNHERO OF ROYALIST POETRY

THESIS BY
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ABSTRACT

During the English Civil War, Charles I appeared as a character in Royalist poetry, both directly and allegorically. These depictions drew on ancient Roman epic poems, particularly Lucan's *De Bello Civili*, in their treatment of the subject matter of civil war and Charles as an epic hero. Though the authors of these poems supported Charles, their depictions of him and his reign reveal anxiety about his weakness as a ruler. In comparison to the cults of personality surrounding his predecessors and the heroes of *De Bello Civili*, his cult appears bland and forced. The lack of enthusiasm surrounding Charles I may help to explain his downfall at the hands of his Parliamentarian opponents.

Introduction

The English Civil War generated a tremendous amount of written documents as Royalists, Parliamentarians, and various radical Christian sects each advanced their own tenets in essays, pamphlets, transcriptions of sermons, and other persuasive works. Poetry is also represented; it played less of a direct role in the political discourse yet reflected the political atmosphere. One contributor of such poetry was Thomas May, who translated Lucan's unfinished *De Bello Civili* (commonly known as *Pharsalia*) and continued the story until the death of Julius Caesar, one of two central characters from Lucan's original poem. Lucan became popular during the seventeenth century, and May was one of the first English poets of the time to engage with the Roman poet in writing. His choice of continuing Lucan's poem was not unusual; continuations were a typical way of commenting on a work during the Renaissance. May's *Continuation* is a reaction to an ancient Roman civil war that was prescient to the impending English Civil War. Published in 1630, the *Continuation* was written during the period of domestic conflict that preceded the outbreak of violence beginning the English Civil War.

May's treatment of Caesar presents him as a hero not just in his martial capacity, but as a leader of men. May had only Caesar to work with because Pompey, the other hero and Caesar's military opponent in *De Bello Civili*, dies earlier in the fighting, an event that Lucan narrates. Like May, Lucan also engages with both military commanders as leaders of fighting men and prominent Roman politicians. The characters' involvement with a community of followers is an aspect of heroic depictions evident in Virgil's *Aeneid* as well as *De Bello Civili* and continental and English poetry produced during the European Renaissance. Depicting the hero of an epic as a

leader, not just a fighter, adds a dimension of morality and social success that brings the hero closer to reality while still maintaining the standard ideal of a successful warrior.

Though both Lucan and May present Caesar in his capacity as a leader, May's Caesar is much more appealing than Lucan's. Throughout *De Bello Civili*, Lucan presents Caesar as a tyrant; he is a criminal against Rome for rebelling against the Senate and for waging a civil war. This depiction is in accord with Lucan's political opinions; he was ardently pro-Republican and opposed to civil war. May, on the other hand, clearly made an effort to reverse Lucan's presentation and create instead a sympathetic Caesar. The Caesar of May's *Continuation* is a good leader as well as a strong fighter. There are notable instances of Caesar's leadership particularly the first book of the *Continuation* that demonstrate May's concern with the difficult task of remaking Caesar as the protagonist. Within the first few lines of May's poem, May assures the audience that Caesar's war, which Lucan clearly reviled, "is now made just"¹. The war, now against Egypt, is justified because Caesar must avenge the treacherously slain Pompey. This attitude marks a complete reversal of Caesar's previous enmity with Pompey. The change is abrupt, but it dignifies Caesar as a leader and competitor, proving his great respect for his opponent. In May's story, Caesar is not a scoundrel.

The decision to embrace Caesar as a hero was necessary not just for the sake of the hero-less narrative but also as a political maneuver. May dedicated his *Continuation* to King Charles I with a laudatory note, guaranteeing that readers would associate Charles with the work and perhaps also securing Charles's attention. Especially in light of Charles's growing conflicts with Parliament, continuing Lucan's attempts to vilify Caesar as a tyrant in opposition to the Republican Pompey would look like May was writing against the monarchy, a dangerous

¹ Facsimile of the fourth edition, printed in 1630. Page 2.

decision. By praising Caesar, May places himself in the vanguard of the Royalist faction that surrounded Charles I during the English Civil War.

Lucan's pro-Republican and anti-war positions made *De Bello Civili* relevant to English readers on both sides of the conflict during the English Civil War. These readers related primarily to three key themes. First is the concept of civil war itself, which Lucan opposed, as is made clear from the many editorial comments in the poem. Another important theme is the opposition between Republicanism, which Pompey's forces espouse, and unilateral tyranny, which is Caesar's goal. Finally, and most relevant to this work, is the opposition between the personalities of the two leaders, Pompey and Caesar, that was important to *De Bello Civili* and its English readers, because the two men offer two different models of leader-hero. This aspect of the work is less directly connected to the conflict of the English Civil War itself, but it is intimately linked with the poetic reactions to the war that illuminate cults of personality around Royalist and opposition figures. These poems are central to this thesis, which seeks to engage questions about the personalities depicted in the poetry produced during and about the English Civil War.

Both the Royalists and the Parliamentarians—the two major parties to the English Civil War—adopted *De Bello Civili* as a rallying point and major inspiration for their writings about the war. Each side could lay claim to the work because it did not align perfectly with either side, leaving something for each. The Parliamentarians had a slightly stronger claim due to Lucan's clear favoritism of the Republican forces in *De Bello Civili*². Lucan is indeed arguing for Republicanism throughout *De Bello Civili* and lamenting the installation of the tyrannical system of government instituted in Rome as a result of Caesar's victory in the Roman civil war.

² David Norbrook. *Writing the English Republic: Poetry, Rhetoric and Politics, 1627-1660*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

However, in a similar vein to the feelings espoused in Royalist writings produced during the English Civil War, Lucan's opposition to civil war in general is also an important aspect of his politics as presented in the *De Bello Civili*. He describes civil war as an insult to the gods and as personally horrific.³ It is convenient for Lucan that the instigator of the conflict was Caesar, whom he did not favor, and it may be that starting the civil war was just another crime to lay at Caesar's feet. However, civil war still enjoys a special prominence in Lucan's accusations. For example, Lucan is so committed to "Reprisal for civil war," that he is willing to sacrifice the Republican cause of winning the war in order to make sure Caesar receives his deserts.⁴ The narrator acknowledges that allowing Pothinus and Achilles to kill Caesar would enable Cato and Brutus to carry the day, but he insists that Roman civil war requires Roman punishment: "Avert this abomination,/You Fates—Caesar's throat cut, and Brutus not there;/that Egyptian crime should forestall Roman tyrannicide./spoiling the lesson."⁵ Civil war is clearly problematic for Lucan.

Caesar was also problematic, though for the English readers of *De Bello Civili*. As May's treatment of Caesar indicates, he is an attractive figure even though his behavior is questionable. Similar problems surrounded Charles I; they are captured in poets' responses to the king. Poetic depiction is a valuable tool in establishing a cult of personality around a monarch or other political leader. The cult of personality that surrounded Charles emerges in poems about him, both in works that are explicitly meant to him, and more subtly in works of fiction or history that are set elsewhere but nonetheless reflect the feelings of the author. These depictions can be assessed in the same way that fictional or mythic figures are assessed but with additional historical flavor. The factual details may be unreliable as a result of poetic license, but

³ Book II.

⁴ Jane Wilson Joyce, trans., *Pharsalia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 340.

⁵ Joyce, *Pharsalia*, 341-343.

a poetic depiction of Charles yields information about tensions between the acceptable modes of discourse about the king and the less polite but more honest feelings of the poet.

The poetry produced immediately before and during the English Civil War reveals a tepid, waning cult of personality surrounding the uninspiring Charles I. There exists poetry glorifying Charles I's reign produced by his supporters, notably Richard Fanshawe and Abraham Cowley, but these efforts are more dutiful than an impassioned testament to the King's charisma. They reveal anxiety about the Civil War, several of Charles's flaws, and a number of reasons to be concerned that have nothing to do with Charles's personal appeal. William Davenant's epic poem also reveals similar issues, though the poem is not ostensibly about Charles. The poetry surrounding Charles indicates that he had a strong base of supporters, but their support for him was less about his strengths as a leader and more about the shared goals of his followers.

A Lapsing Cult: Depictions of Charles I in Royalist Poetry

Royalist poetry produced before and during the Civil War reveals an ambivalent commitment to Charles as a real-life leader-hero and an ambivalent view of leader-heroes in general. Charles does not seem to inspire deep personal loyalty; rather, he serves as a rallying point for preserving a way of life, which emerges as much more important than the role of a royal as a leader-hero. Though poetry exists extolling him and his reign, the endorsement seems stiff and wan in some places. The poets' comments are typically not personal; rather they are merely a reflection of obligatory service to a king or praise of the nationwide relative peace that preceded the period of the Civil War, which itself can seem hollow or double-edged. As in *De Bello Civili*, civil war is implicitly or explicitly presented as highly undesirable because it disturbs the peace and prosperity that existed at least for the poets. Despite foreign wars and domestic problems, Charles's reign is passed off as a golden age of peace.

The idea is confirmed with natural imagery particularly in Richard Fanshawe's shorter poems about Charles I. Many of Fanshawe's poems are explicitly about or directed to Charles I and II. In these poems, he directly compares the Stuarts to Julius and Octavian Caesar, figuring himself as the lionizing Virgil. He invokes other Classical associations with monarchy, including the idea of a "golden age" associated with peace and a glorification of pastoral nature similar to Virgil's Eclogues. This device is particularly noticeable in "An Ode Upon occasion of His Majesties Proclamation in the yeare 1630. Commanding the Gentry to reside upon their Estates in the Country" published in the collection *Il Pastor Fido* in 1647.

In 1626 and 1627, well before the beginning of the fighting, but after political conflict had erupted, Charles I issued and reissued a proclamation instructing the landed gentry to take residence in their country estates rather than in London. Charles I historian Kevin Sharpe

analyzes the reactions surrounding Charles's proclamation in his book *The Personal Rule of Charles I*. As Sharpe explains, unlike similar attempts by Charles's predecessors Elizabeth and James, Charles put forth "the effort during the 1630s to give the proclamation teeth"⁶. Sharpe also posits that "it is not easy to judge the king's success"⁷, citing frequent reiterations of the policy and prosecutions as evidence of its failure as well as contemporary accounts suggesting that it did create a big impact on people's lives. Sharpe, however, does not mention Fanshawe's 1630 poem on the subject, which at least implies unpopularity. The poem must be a response to unhappiness because it is necessary to defend the decision. Though the poem is ostensibly supportive of the King, it does reveal anxiety about Charles's leadership. He is not a powerful, literary leader-hero in Fanshawe's eyes.

In the ode, Fanshawe does establish a connection between the success of kingship and the approval of the people—the community for the hero to lead. The landed gentry, at least, are unhappy followers whom Fanshawe is attempting to mollify by persuading them of the wisdom of Charles's decision. That there is even a need to convince Charles's followers to do his bidding proves the importance of a leader having support from his community. Of course, this example proves the importance of support in a rather negative way, indicating a lack of confidence in Charles's leadership. A good leader does not necessarily lead unquestioned, but it is surprising that he requires the help of a poet to diffuse the situation. What is more, the people who matter appear to be only the gentry; the majority of the population of Britain is dismissed as "clownes" left to work the "despised Fields." It does not matter if they like or support Charles; their opinions are simply irrelevant. Based on this ode, Charles does not seem to have a strong connection to his community of English subjects.

⁶ Page 415.

⁷ Page 416.

This lack of enthusiasm is carried into Fanshawe's poetic choices. His own hesitation to embrace the king whole-heartedly is evident in his hesitation to introduce the King to the poem: neither Charles nor his proclamation appears until the fourteenth stanza of the ode. Rather, Fanshawe spends the opening of the poem itemizing the conflicts happening in nearly every other locale in Europe. Fanshawe concludes the catalog by making a sharp contrast to the peace enjoyed in England, but it is too little and too late to ameliorate the anxious effect of the previous stanzas. Fanshawe's unnervingly thorough list of details belies his confidence in Britain's "halcyon," revealing genuine worry about England's security.

Fanshawe's anxiety demonstrates that Charles was not capable of allaying it. Fanshawe did not have great confidence in Charles. This conclusion is borne out by the stiff praise of Charles throughout the poem. The highlight of Fanshawe's flattery comes in his comparison of Charles to Augustus Caesar, renowned for his effective ruling and ushering in the *Pax Romana*. Though Fanshawe tenuously makes the point that Charles has perhaps done something comparable for Britain, the effect is belied by reality. Fanshawe's protestations that England enjoyed "Peace [...] everlasting" seem exaggerated and brittle given that in 1630, Charles had already embarked on his long series of conflicts with Parliament. He was also quite eager to become involved in the Thirty Years War being fought in the rest of Europe, undermining Fanshawe's claims that Charles was the arbiter of peace. Though these problems had not yet reached the point of becoming violent, it is an overstatement to say that Charles is "the author of peace/And *Halcyon* days." Fanshawe is trying too hard to sing Charles's praises, and the overstatement just makes it seem like they are all untrue.

There is also a frisson of unpleasantness and danger throughout the ode. Several oddities of word choice introduce undertones of tyranny and violence connected to Charles. Fanshawe

associates Charles's peace with tyranny by alluding to a tale of Jove's "exile" of the personified Peace and "ty'd her with a golden chaine/To one blest Isle." Fanshawe also remarks that Charles must "force [the nobility] to enjoy/The peace hee made." This is surprisingly unpleasant imagery for something that is so ostensibly positive. It also creates and reinforces the idea that Charles's peace was brought about only by force, force towards England and his own people. Imagery of violence also makes a surprising appearance in Fanshawe's idyllic depiction of the countryside. He predicts that for the nobles moving back to the countryside, "the country aire [will] infuse/A purer rage." In the country, "Cupid there less bloud doth [not] spill," and the nightingale "tells a tale/Of rape and blood." These gory references seem out of place in Fanshawe's attempt to persuade a skeptical audience that living in the country will be better for them and more pleasant than living in London. The imagery introduces an edge of criticism, reinforcing the sense that England is not as peaceful as Fanshawe claims.

All this is not to say, however, that Fanshawe was not legitimately loyal to the monarchy. Throughout the Civil War, he staunchly supported the cause of the Royalists. When he published *Il Pastor Fido* in 1647, he included a dedication to the deposed King Charles assuring Charles of Fanshawe's continuing loyalty. Even the title of the entire collection is a promise of Fanshawe's fidelity. Fanshawe's dedications—both of his book and to the cause—suggest an earnestness of feeling that precludes the poem from being ironic. Given that the measure was unpopular, and that the poem does not seem to be a whole-hearted endorsement of Charles, it is possible to take it as a sarcastic, satirical commentary. However, it does not seem that Fanshawe's defense of Charles and the proclamation were self-conscious in their exaggeration. It also seems dangerous to present an ironic work as a gift to a King, even one in exile. It is more sensible to interpret the poem as genuinely supportive with equally sincere reservations

embedded throughout. Though Charles did have flattering courtiers, they were not completely confident in his abilities.

Fanshawe's anxiety about Charles I continued to manifest in two poems to Charles II printed in *Il Pastor Fido*. The first, "Presented To His Highnesses The Prince of Wales, At his going into the West, Anno M. DC. XLV.," consists of advice, a series of exhortations to emulate Caesar. The injunctions, which include seeking a peaceful resolution to problems before resorting to war and keeping one's word, are practical advice. However, it is unnerving that a royal prince fighting on behalf of a king would need such advice. Fanshawe neither honors the younger Charles nor wishes for his success—he merely reveals the extent to which Charles is untried and untested. He is an unknown, and it is impossible to bestow confidence on such an enigma. Fanshawe's second poem on the subject, "Presented To His Highnesse, In the West, Ann. Dom. 1646", comments more on what Charles II is than the earlier poem, but in this poem too Fanshawe directs Charles and thereby reveals anxiety about the royal family.

Fanshawe was not alone in his praise or implicit reservations about Charles I. For example, Abraham Cowley, during the Civil War, wrote propaganda much like Fanshawe's poems that expressed perhaps an even greater degree of whole-hearted loyalty. The chief of these efforts was his unfinished long poem, *The Civil War*, an account of Charles's campaign against the Parliamentarians that Cowley produced as the fighting occurred. The entire extant text of the poem was not discovered until 1973, but Cowley referred to the poem as being abandoned in 1656⁸. As Calhoun, Heyworth, and Pritchard note in their commentary to *The Collected Works of Abraham Cowley*, "it would have been quite contrary to [Cowley's] purposes to have admitted even a hint or doubt or criticism in *The Civil War*"⁹. In the language of the

⁸ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

⁹ Page 367.

poem, Charles could do no wrong. This attitude is not limited just to the monarch, but extends to the whole Royalist war effort. It is difficult to reconcile this idealistic view with the historical reality of the Civil War. These difficulties manifest in Cowley's poem in his omission of defeats and mistakes the Royalists suffered.

This conflict is also evidence in some of Cowley's mythical imagery. These excursions are full of contradictions in several ways. Cowley draws figures from both Classical and Judeo-Christian stories and gives them agency in the poem. The appearance of figures from several different pantheons, including the Christian God, Alecto and other Furies, Beelzebub, and at least one Muse, leaves it unclear who really has responsibility over human affairs, despite Cowley's assertions that the Civil War is a visitation of "Gods wrath" upon England (Book III, line 214). With the exception of the Muse, these figures all represent forces of evil. It seems that Cowley is presenting supernatural interference as the cause of Charles's problems, at the same time he refuses to admit that the problems really exist. His figures are of unnecessary strength given the uncompromising propagandist tone of the poem.

Cowley's introduction of various fiends also ushers in a moment of political reflection. In a device borrowed from Torquato Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata*, the "Stygian Tyrant" "calls below a dreadful Parliament" of fiends in hell in order to give them their instructions for creating chaos and difficulty for the Royalist cause¹⁰. This description, first of all, marks another instance of mixing between Greek and Christian mythos. More importantly, the fiendish mirror of English politics presents a critical commentary of both Parliament and, presumably unintentionally, of Charles. Cowley does not extend the discussion of the parallels between the English Parliament and the Parliament in Hell, but the image nonetheless presages Milton's use of the same device in *Paradise Lost*. During this council of the demons in Hell, Satan maintains

¹⁰ Book II, line 506.

control over the assembly, giving the massed fiends violent tasks and sending them off to complete them: “what hee spoke was soone obeyd”¹¹.

As Cowley surely intended, the device serves to demonize the English Parliament. Cowley’s language makes the link between the two unmistakable, especially after Satan explicitly declares his enmity for Charles: he specifically mentions “The ills of Charles his dull and godly raigne”¹². In life as well as in the fictionalized hell, Parliament was Charles’s main adversary. By presenting Charles’s opponents as the Christian embodiment and source of all evil, Cowley not only provides an excuse for the relative weakness of the Royalists, he also abandons all hope of reconciliation. There is no peace to be had with opponents whom are completely malignant—they must simply be eradicated. This commitment to the fight represents a shift away from Fanshawe’s praise of Charles’s peace-keeping abilities, but it takes on a similar defensive tone.

Charles’s heroism throughout Cowley’s poem is questionable. The poem is an account of the Civil War, not of Charles, but the monarch remains at a surprisingly low level of visibility. He finally appears in person in the capacity as leader of the Royalist troops in Book III in order to make a speech to his men and subsequently lead them into battle. In this scene, he speaks eloquently and cuts an inspiring figure. However, Cowley avoids depicting any particular exploits—his usual tactic for concealing the fact that there are none. The actual work of heroes is left to Charles’s advisors and generals, including Cowley’s favorite, Falkland. The completed part of the poem ends with Cowley’s extended elegiac treatment of Falkland’s death, placing him in a position of prime importance. This effect was no doubt unintentional on Cowley’s part as

¹¹ Book III, line 1.

¹² Book II, line 531.

Cowley intended the poem to continue, but it does still serve to highlight Charles's relative unimportance to the story.

In *The Civil War*, as in Fanshawe's treatment of Charles, Cowley's endorsement of Charles as a ruler and as a leader-hero is ardent. However, the effect is undercut by the reality of Charles's ineffectuality. Despite the poets' best efforts to obscure it, their anxiety about Charles and his leadership abilities manifests in subtle ways, contributing to a struggling, hollow cult of personality around Charles.

William Davenant encodes similar double-edged praise of Charles I in his unfinished epic, *Gondibert*. Though Davenant self-consciously avoids telling a narrative about Charles, the work echoes the anti-war sentiments found in the poetry overtly about Charles. Davenant, in *Gondibert*, also espouses an appreciation of monarchy. The most striking instance of this is the thinly veiled allegory in Davenant's unusually sympathetic portrayal of the stag being hunted for sport by the royal court. Davenant describes the stag as a majestic creature, the hunters as brutish, and the scene serves as an allegory for the persecution of King Charles as monarch in particular and the system of nobility in general. In his 1971 introduction to *Gondibert*, David F. Gladish makes a case for the latter, saying that the fate of the stag is only "suggestive" of Charles's¹³. However, Davenant's language allows for a stronger assertion of analogy, and the death of the stag offers duplication, not just suggestion, of Charles's own execution.

The first sign that all is not usual in the chase of the stag is Davenant's description of the hunters as being "Busily concern'd in showe/As if the world were by this Beast undone,/And they against him hir'd as Nature's Foe"¹⁴, which implies that the hunter's motives are somehow suspect. The scene continues with Davenant's further expostulations against "Murdrous Man."

¹³ Page xv.

¹⁴ Page 73.

Davenant also praises the stag in royal terms; the stag is not “it,” but “he,” and he is “the most successful of his kinde,/Whose Foreheads oft his Opposers prest,/Whose swiftness left Persuers shafts behinde”¹⁵. This particular stag is the foremost stag, important enough to have “Opposers,” rather than the natural predators, much like a king. Davenant makes this parallel more explicit when he says “We blush to see our politicks in Beasts,/Who Many sav’d by this one Sacrifice.” This observation overtly draws a connection between politics and the hunt he is describing, and the sacrifice for many is reminiscent of the duties of a king. In case the associations to the English monarchy are still not clear enough several stanzas later, Davenant makes the connection inescapable by describing “Destructive Man” as the “Monarch Murderer”¹⁶. Davenant explicitly identifies the stag as a monarch and makes it clear that the hunt and death of the stag are meant to be an allegory for the exile and 1649 execution of Charles.

Though Davenant’s portrayal is sympathetic and even mournful, it still detracts from the strength of the cult of personality surrounding Charles I. Presented in the guise of a stag hunted by more-powerful humans, Charles becomes easy prey. Though not completely defenseless, the futility of the stag’s attempts to defeat the hounds and the failure of the flight present a powerful picture of Charles as an impotent coward. He certainly is not a strong leader-hero. The idea of Caesar, Aeneas, or even Pompey being victimized in such a manner is inconceivable. However, the image fits with the tone of the rest of the work. Though Davenant promises “An Heroick Poem”, it is populated with bland, undistinguished characters. It is understood the heroes are good fighters and presumed to be virtuous. However, they lack personal appeal, and Gondibert is far from being a strong leader-hero. Davenant does not use scenes of internal reflection, nor

¹⁵ Page 73.

¹⁶ Page 75.

are there extensive interactions with others that are not rigidly formal or oriented around combat. Davenant does not take advantage of the opportunity to deformatize the characters by depicting interactions with followers of lower social rank and status.

These omissions in particular hide the dimensions of Gondibert's personality connected to being a leader of men. Gondibert is passive and in love; he has no desire for honor, nor does he have a strong sense of responsibility to lead a group of people. Gondibert and the collection of supporting characters may be an allegorical representation of English politics, as Gladish suggests, but Gondibert does not seem to be a recapitulation of Charles¹⁷. Nonetheless, the general lassitude of the hero suggests that any inspiration from which Davenant borrowed was not a figure of a strong, active leader-hero. The opening lines of the poem are devoted to describing the aged King Aribert, who seems to have cut a more heroic figure in his youth. At the beginning of the poem, he wishes to pass kinship to Gondibert by marrying him to the Princess Rhodalind. Gondibert neither wishes to be king nor to marry Rhodalind—he falls in love with another woman. Davenant summarizes Gondibert neatly when he says Gondibert “wants Ambition for his guide”, suggesting that Gondibert has no driving aims. Though known as a fighter, he prefers to avoid fighting, refusing to press his advantage or even finish either of two notable fights in Books I and II. The poem is unfinished, so it is impossible to draw conclusions about Gondibert's ultimate character development, but whether or not he gains a deeper drive to act like a leader-hero, he has already been established as unmotivated.

This peculiarity of character does not represent a failure on Davenant's part to create a proper epic because that was not Davenant's intention, as he explains in his lengthy preface to the poem. The preface takes on an unusually prominent role in the poem, totaling forty pages out of 265 in a modern printing. The preface was originally published alone about a year before

¹⁷ Gladish, Introduction, xv.

the completed three books of the poem appeared. In the preface, Davenant lays out a set of standards for epic poetry and an explanation of his choices regarding *Gondibert*. He does not address the merits of leadership as a heroic characteristic, but he avows an interest in love and ambition rather than heroics. Davenant also finds fault with Lucan for his choice of subject matter in *De Bello Civili*. He does not critique any other aspects of Lucan's poetry, but neither does he seem to have adopted any prominent features of Lucan's style. Indeed, he goes so far as to invert Lucan's choices. Davenant consciously avoids placing the story in a recognizably contemporary historical or political context, and as we have seen, he also neglects to include leadership qualities in his hero.

One characteristic that *Gondibert* does share with *De Bello Civili*, as well as Cowley's *The Civil War*, is the incompleteness of the poem. It makes sense that *The Civil War* would be incomplete because the actual Civil War did not end the way Cowley wished it to, making it difficult to keep up the propagandist tone of the poem. Similarly, Lucan's death while *De Bello Civili* was incomplete meant that it would stay incomplete (until another poet like Thomas May chose to continue it). *De Bello Civili* also shares with *The Civil War* a problem in the inevitability of defeat. Pompey, as the central hero of *De Bello Civili*, cannot prevail against Caesar because he did not historically, which raises philosophical problems for the structure of the work. There are fewer overt reasons for the unfinished nature of *Gondibert*, and the coincidence is intriguing. Given Davenant's Royalist politics, perhaps his efforts, too, suffered from the inevitability of defeat that also plagued Lucan and Cowley.

With hindsight, it is too easy to assess the outcome of any war as inevitable. Nonetheless, given the depictions of Charles I in Royalist writings during the Civil War, it is not surprising that he was not victorious. He is not portrayed as a strong leader capable of uniting

his people against an internal threat and bringing them to victory. Rather, in poetry, at least, he is a victim, a weak, absent provoker of anxiety, unable to control Parliament and with difficulties managing the nobility. Charles I is not the hero of his own story.

The Restoration and *Paradise Lost*

Though Charles I cannot be said to have won the English Civil War, given the temporary defeat of his cause after he was beheaded, the Parliamentary victory was also at best tenuous and temporary. After the Restoration, which marked Charles II, Charles I's son, reclaiming the throne of England, Parliamentary figures, including writers, were prosecuted and punished by the reestablished monarchy. One such Parliamentary figure was John Milton, who was a prolific writer of pamphlets on behalf of the Parliamentary cause and the author of *Eikonoklastes*, a defense of the regicide of Charles I. He is also best known as the author of *Paradise Lost*, first published in 1664, four years after the Restoration. Though *Paradise Lost* is a version of the Biblical story of the Fall of Man, it is also a subtly-encoded reaction to the English Civil War and the Restoration.

The central figure in *Paradise Lost* is Satan, a controversially sympathetic and dynamic leader and anti-hero. In one of his great demonstrations of leadership ability, he initiates and moderates a debate among the fallen angels in Hell that is strongly reminiscent of the image of a fiendish Parliament Cowley borrowed from Tasso. Milton describes the discussion as a "council" in his summary of the argument of Book II, but the format of various speakers taking the floor to voice an opinion directly mimics the format of the English Parliament. Milton is thereby associating Satan and Hell with the Parliament, just as Cowley does; however, Milton is using the trope in a subversive manner. Though Satan is the embodiment and source of evil, he is nonetheless a highly appealing character, as befits Milton's Parliamentary and democratic ideals. Similarly, the grand but distant and uninvolved God of *Paradise Lost* recapitulates the Royalist portrayal of Charles I in the poetry written before and during the English Civil War.

However, Satan's appeal detracts from God's, and *Paradise Lost*, while borrowing Royalist tropes, reverses the conventional thinking behind those tropes.

Milton's subversion of Royalist imagery is a brilliant way to encode his own opinions in a format that is not immediately offensive to Royalist sensibilities and at the same time completely opposes them. It is also a subtle documentation of history. The inevitability of Satan's inferiority to God is a nod to the historical reality of the Restoration. However, Satan's partial success in poisoning the human race with knowledge suggests optimism about the lasting effects of England's brief experiment with a monarch-less and more democratic form of government. It is remarkable that Milton was able to publish *Paradise Lost* at all; he would not have been able to had he actually served the lengthy prison sentence to which he had been consigned. *Paradise Lost* is a testament to the Parliamentarians' continued influence and strength.

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