

Renaissance or Reformation: *Paradise Lost* as Cultural Mirror

The twenty-first century mind is inundated by rapid shifts in culture, political power, and ideology. “The mind is its own place,” says John Milton, “and in itself / Can make a Heav’n of Hell, a Hell of Heav’n” (Milton 1.233-234). The cognitive atmosphere of the Reformation period, in which Milton penned this phrase, is a sort of predecessor to that which we inhabit now. The recent influx of intertextual and media responses to *Paradise Lost* and other Reformation literature is evidence of this psychosocial parallel. In 2013 rap artist, Eminem, used transcripts and images from *Paradise Lost* in his music video for the song “Rap God.” In 2018 folk-rock band, Mumford and Sons’ released “Darkness Visible,” a reference to Milton’s depiction of hell. In 2019 the television show, *The Good Place*, based an entire episode, entitled “Pandemonium,” on Milton’s epic. In the episode we learn that Chidi tricked Eleanor into reading *Paradise Lost*, saying that “Satan was totally [her] type.” The idea that Satan might be Eleanor’s type and the fact that she did read *Paradise Lost* when he told her is indicative of a culture in which the everyman has more in common with the sympathetic antagonist than the epic hero. This presentation challenges emerging notions that the world is in a ‘New Renaissance,’ arguing instead that the New Renaissance has already passed. Generations have become shorter than ever before, thus we are in the New Reformation. By analyzing the characterization of Satan in *Paradise Lost* alongside the identity of John Milton, we can better understand the what and why behind the radical and rapid changes between millennial and gen z ideology and that of their predecessors.