

Sacred Knowing: Faith-Act and the Limitation of Form in the Poetry of
John Milton

A Thesis Presented for the
Master of Arts
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

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May 2018

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Influence is as great as it is elusive, and I would like to change that. A girl named Madeline in my undergraduate, senior seminar, “Disaster and the Environmental Imagination,” with the conviction of a saint, told me that I did not need to read John Milton, and that I had not missed much in not taking a course on him. Dr. Welch’s kindness, soft spoken humor (and criticism), and elephantine recollection of just about everything Milton convinced me that I *had* missed a great deal in not having read Milton before graduate school. His willingness to advise this intrepid project, with roots in Ralph Waldo Emerson’s “American Scholar,” has been a great gift. His open door and hospitality, even at his detriment, have not gone unnoticed. His words of encouragement spurred me on to write, read, and re-write. Dr. Coleman introduced me to Emerson’s work, and I devoured it. From her time spent answering my countless questions about the graduate program, to advising me to develop a professional identity, to sharing her thoughts with me that a divinity school or an MFA program are her recommended next steps for me, she has been an invaluable teacher and mentor. Dr. Heffernan challenged me to “get my hands in the dirt,” and to think about the things happening on the ground, not just about the magnificent art icons of an age. I plan to embrace his love of “the facts” in a future study on Christian mysticism, and cherish the independent study he conducted with me, and his friendship and mentorship. Dr. Jennings, I have accrued a lifelong debt to you these past two years. Dr. Garner, your honesty revealed to me my shortcomings, and for that, I am grateful. Dr. Commander, that serendipitous meeting in May 2017, when you mentioned the Fulbright, might just have been providence. Dr. Haddox, your mentorship and course have not only strengthened my scholarship, but also my faith. I owe Redeemer Church of Knoxville a great deal for prompting me to think meta-critically about the discipline of literary scholarship, and to think ecclesiastically and theologically about Milton. You have widened the narrow path by shrinking me down to size. Thank you, Mom and Dad, for “filling up our fridge,” when you came into town. Your acts of generosity have done so much for Rachel and me. Your gift is giving, and mine, perhaps, must be receiving. Rachel, my wife, I would like to thank you for standing beside me these past two years. Your grace softens my seriousness. My doubts find rest in your Trust. Whatever happens next, we will go together with Jesus.

ABSTRACT

The thesis is interested in the relationship between Milton's Christian faith and the physical and spiritual modalities of his poetry, and how his faith-act corrupts and purifies these entanglements. In chapter 1, I define key concepts such as faith-act and poetics of knowing and designate their purchase in the arc of my thesis, and then I frame my reading of Milton's later poems. In chapter 2, I explore how the end of Milton's poetic career shows Milton's faith-act provocatively saying that poetry can get him neither his wants, nor his needs, but testifies *that* he wants and needs. In that vein, *Paradise Regained* becomes a poem in doubt of Christian poetic idiom. Dismantling poetic form, *Paradise Regained* highlights Milton's turn away from the office of poet and towards the office of priest. In seeking a new poetics to express Christian liturgy and sacrament, *Paradise Regained* does not undermine the material sacraments, but underscores them. Praxis and poetics are not Milton's sacraments for God, but Milton's sacrifices to him. In chapter 3, I inquire into the consequences of Milton's faith-act. The conflict Milton faces at the outset of *Paradise Lost* is neither "man's first disobedience," nor his "justify[ing] the ways of God to men," but is the contradiction in terms, as he perceives it, of reconciliation and poetics. On the one hand, poetry, as *Paradise Lost* shows, *might* bear the paradox of the Fall's burden, and humanity's uninhibited joy. On the other hand, through its poetics, *Paradise Lost* exposes its limitations to render God's salvific presence in the world. Of his later poems, *Paradise Lost* is the first shadow of Milton's doubt to descend on the practice of reconciliatory poetics. In chapter 4, I demonstrate Milton's skepticism of systematic theology's ability to reveal the God-head, and suggest that *Paradise Lost* might be a more illuminating form to understanding God's nature. While a current in *Paradise Lost* focuses on Christian worship through Adam's and Eve's sacramental relationship with each other, heaven's creatures, and the earth, the current also has an undertow. Abdiel as the theologically gray angel is Milton's exegetical and eisegetical character employed inside of *Paradise Lost* so that Milton can perform his faith-act and discover the reconciliatory limitation of form. Milton senses that his poetry/poetics is not enough to save, and that his later poetry, in fact, transgresses God's will. However, he paradoxically knows that for him to write poetry is God's will. In the same way,

Abdiel falls onto the double-edged sword: God wills him to obey, and that obedience leads him into rebellion against God, and against his anointed. Milton's faith-act gives rise to the poetics of knowing. His faith-act ultimately shows him that poetry is the means to find the limitation of the written word, and the poetics of knowing then turns him outward towards the world, toward relationship, toward creation, where he can begin to live in faith.

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LIST OF CONVENTIONS AND ABBREVIATIONS

As John Milton used the Authorized King James Version of the Bible, all biblical quotations are taken from *The Holy Bible: 1611 Edition King James Version*. Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2010.

PR All references to *Paradise Regained* come from *Paradise Regained, Samson Agonistes, and the Complete Shorter Poems*, edited by William Kerrigan, John Rumrich, and Stephen M. Fallon. New York: Modern Library, 2012.

PL All references to *Paradise Lost* come from *Paradise Lost*, edited by William Kerrigan, John Rumrich, and Stephen M. Fallon. New York: Modern Library, 2008.

SA All references to *Samson Agonistes* come from *Paradise Regained, Samson Agonistes, and the Complete Shorter Poems*, edited by William Kerrigan, John Rumrich, and Stephen M. Fallon. New York: Modern Library, 2012.

OED *Oxford English Dictionary*, online (Oxford: Oxford University Press)

1.

Introduction

And Jacob said unto Pharaoh, The days of the years of my pilgrimage *are* an hundred and thirty years: few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage.

– Jacob, son of Isaac, son of Abraham, Genesis 47:9

The most recent developments of literature and theology appear to me to be an attempt to come to an agreement about the problem of faith-act and form. Published over eighty years ago, Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *Act and Being* expressed the very same issues of faith-act and form that mired John Milton in the last of his years. In *Act and Being*, Bonhoeffer challenges the prevalence of the totalizing philosophical system in systematic theology. He refutes the totality of the system on the grounds that the human subject cannot perceive God, the object, through pure cognition, and lays even further claim against the genres of the philosophical treatise and systematic theology.¹ He seeks a form capable of expressing “genuine theological concepts,” and reasons that the form must also be an “adequate concept of cognition.”² The sole focus on philosophical and theological argumentation is the strength and weakness of Bonhoeffer's *Act and Being*. He assumes in the solely transcendent existence of the “concept,” organizing pure cognition apart from material cognition.

Recent studies, however, have attempted to bridge the gap between faith-act and form, asking not *what* one thinks, but *how* one thinks, perceiving a discursive relationship between

¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being: Transcendental Philosophy and Ontology in Systematic Theology*, transl. H. Martin Rumscheidt, ed. Wayne Whitson Floyd, Jr. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 27, emphasis my own. He writes, “[At the heart of the problem of act and being] is a matter of the formation of *genuine theological concepts*, the decision one comes to between a transcendental-philosophical and an ontological interpretation of theological concepts. It is a question of the ‘objectivity’ of the concept of God and an adequate *concept of cognition*, the issue of determining the relationship between ‘the being of God’ and the mental act which grasps that being.”

² Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 27.

thought, technology, and genre.³ In his study of Milton's later poems, Marshall Grossman considers Milton's "poetry as cognitive modality," and decouples the idea that Milton has prior beliefs, and merely employs poetry as the container in which to store those beliefs.⁴ His study is an extension of the spate of skepticism from literary critics, poets, and playwrights, who argue, though they would not themselves phrase it this way, that form is epistemology, or form is theology.⁵ Grossman's argumentative shortcoming, however, is Bonhoeffer's own. They proffer that thinking is faith, and that faith is thinking, and that for one to estimate the person of God, one must find the most fitting form for expressing things about him. By Grossman's estimation, Milton has chosen poetry, and his conclusion seems fitting when reading the final lines of Milton's proem in *Paradise Lost*: "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."⁶

However, from the viewpoint of intellectual history in the late-seventeenth century, Clifford Siskin sees expressions of faith and identity going through a radical shift in genre, from "a rote form of 'logical thinking' into a method for thinking logically about the 'empirical world.'" ⁷ The shift sets faith apart from doctrine, theology, being – when being is the inward, internal expression saying, "I am" – and, I would add, poetry. Moreover, the change drives a wedge between *right thinking* and faith: neither belief, nor theology, nor denominations are faith any longer.

³ Marshall Grossman, "Belief and Poetry in *Paradise Regained*, to which is added, *Samson Agonistes*," ; Clifford Siskin, *System: The Shaping of Modern Knowledge* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2016)

⁴ Grossman, "Belief and Poetry in *Paradise Regained*, to which is added, *Samson Agonistes*," 383. He writes, "writing and reading poetry are as integral to Milton's beliefs as his beliefs are to what he wrote."

⁵ Christian Wiman, *My Bright Abyss: Meditation of a Modern Believer* (130); Suzan-Lori Parks, *The America Play and Other Works* (8-9); Nicholas Boyle, *Sacred and Secular Scriptures: A Catholic Approach to Literature* (4); Gordon Teskey, *Delirious Milton: The Fate of the Poet in Modernity* (146).

⁶ *PL* I.24-26.

⁷ Siskin, *System*, 20.

The revolution causes faith to become faith-act, best described by, though not related to, the Catholic belief of one's entire life, from the time of their birth to their death, embodied, and presented before God. Faith-act is the obliterating stroke on faith required to create things new. It is the forfeiture of faith set in stone, for faith written on volatile flesh. It is the contradiction of God calling Milton to be a world maker, and his commandment to make no idol. It is Milton loving his idol, and decimating it with one uttered syllable to his amanuensis. It is the abandonment of the pursuit of the perfect doctrine, denomination, and theology for genuine relationship with Jesus Christ. It is Milton crying out to Urania in Book VII of *Paradise Lost*, "Descend from Heav'n Urania...The meaning, not the name I call...[for] Half yet remains unsung."⁸ It is the mundane and transcendent modalities of Milton's writing process – the technologies, dreams, communities, and liturgies – colliding with his idea of the rooted Christian life, imagined most clearly in Adam's and Eve's bower.⁹

Milton's faith-act is the creation of his later poems. His faith-act does not elicit a transcendent, but a descendent approach to the Christian life. Milton does not enter into heaven, return to earth, and interpret heaven through earth; rather God enters the world, his character imbues it, and through him, Milton interprets the world. However, through their poetics, Milton's later poems show their limitations to render God's presence in the world. Milton does not write these poems so that they can bear salvation on their shoulders, but so that the temple of salvation can brick by brick crush them.¹⁰ If it is true that salvation belongs to the Lord, and that the earth

⁸ *PL* VII.1-21.

⁹ *PL* Book V-VIII.

¹⁰ David Quint, "Fear of Falling: Icarus, Phaethon, and Lucretius in *Paradise Lost*," *Renaissance Quarterly* 57, no. 3 (Autumn 2004): 878; Piero Boitani, *Winged Words: Flight in Poetry and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 108. Quint and Boitani argue the contrary point: Milton's poetry is its own form of salvation.

is his foot stool, so too is the plummeting, Philistine Temple God's means of grace for Samson, and for Milton. When, in the final lines of *Samson Agonistes*, Milton writes –

Whence Gaza mourns
And all that band them to resist
His uncontrollable *intent*,
His servants he with new acquist
Of true *experience* from this great *event*
With peace and consolation hath dismiss,
And calm of mind all passion *spent*.¹¹

– he rhymes the words “intent,” “event,” and “spent,” generating the discordant rhythm of satisfaction and disappointment he felt at the end of his career, and portraying the competition between the introspective, intellectual faith (“intent”) and action (“event”). They are the vine of the contemplative and the active life reaching out in oscillatory confusion, trying to graft together. The words are Samson's and Milton's. They are Samson's and Milton's possessions, their poetry as doctrine, and their faith as thinking. They are the short, dangerous bursts of human impulse willing to die for one's denomination, theological disposition, or identity. However, the words “resist,” “acquist,” and “dismiss,” shield Samson's and Milton's faith from inward and transcendent abstraction, and do so with the “t” sound snapping, as if to rouse Samson and Milton from the grave. Christian Wiman further illuminates the words when he contrasts insight with revelation, writing, “mystery...obliterates reality by utterly inhabiting it, [it is] some insight that is still sight.”¹²

Faith-act is Samson's desired and dreaded solitude. Faith-act is his fear of uninterrupted silence's poetic soothsaying, which sows doubt into the field of his faith, and lives like cancer in his mind. Milton's later poems tell one continuous narrative, and they tell it backwards. Milton's

¹¹ SA lines 1752-58.

¹² Wiman, *My Bright Abyss*, 118.

faith begins at the end of *Samson Agonistes* precisely because it is nowhere in sight. Milton's motion from the confident assertion of *Paradise Lost*'s "eternal providence," to the stalwart obedience of *Paradise Regained*'s Jesus in the desert, to *Samson Agonistes*'s isolation is Milton's journey towards mysticism: it is the life of Samson. In Samson's lamentation that he was "as a person separate to God," the dry-bone floor beneath the preposition "to" *will* snap if it has not *already* broken, and given way to a history when he always was "a person separate [from] God."¹³ Isolation is not separation from God, but the meeting ground for him. Samson's action to "seek this unfrequented place," annihilates his faith, and every memory and person he encounters thereafter is no longer *just* his wife and betrayer, Dalila, or his father, Manoa. They are the scourge and the salve of God. The end of Milton's poetic career shows Milton's faith-act provocatively saying that poetry can get me neither my want, nor my need, but testifies *that* I want and need. Samson can ask the naked question of why I am, only after his faith-act burns the chaff of what he thought was faith:

Why was my breeding order'd and prescrib'd
As of a person separate to God,
Design'd for great exploits; *if I must dye*
Betray'd, *Captiv'd*, and both my Eyes put out,
Made of my Enemies the scorn and gaze.¹⁴

Although it would seem that the prisoner of war and militaristic metaphors prohibit faith, it is in his question, and God will meet him in his isolation. The experience of the twentieth-century Trappist monk of the Benedictine Order, Thomas Merton, who suggestively hears the voice of God and writes it down, illuminates the problem of faith-act and form. Merton:

"Therefore all the things around you will be armed against you, to deny you, to hurt you, to give you pain, and therefore to reduce you to solitude..."

¹³ SA line 31.

¹⁴ SA line 30-34.

“Everything that touches you shall burn you, and you will draw your hand away in pain, until you have withdrawn yourself from all things. Then you will be all alone.”

“Everything that can be desired will sear you, and brand you with a cautery, and you will fly from it in pain, to be alone....All the good things that other people love and desire and seek will come to you, but only as murderers to cut you off from the world and its occupations...”

“But you shall taste the true solitude of my anguish and my poverty and I shall lead you into the high places of my joy and you shall die in Me and find all things in My mercy which has created you for this end.”¹⁵

Milton’s former office of the poet leads him to the office of the priest, but only after his in-the-world faith-act of creating poetry kills him. That is the story of *Samson Agonistes*. *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* point to liturgy and sacrament, and liturgy and sacrament to God’s immanence. Regina Schwartz and Gordon Teskey correctly observe the all-consuming abyss for Milton the epic poet in the act of writing his last three poems.¹⁶ The fate of the poet in modernity, in Teskey’s case, is the transformation of the soul of the epic poet into the soul of the epic poem. Schwartz is not much different, although she renders the poet’s loss of identity and faith in distinctly Christian terms. Schwartz writes, “In Christ the work of art is also the Artist...as one in which the artist becomes indistinguishable from his art. The expression and the subject that produce it are joined inseparably: in a deep sense, we see the artist in his work.”¹⁷ And Teskey, dwelling on the epic poet’s danger, writes, “To choose the great [subject] is to tie yourself up with what you choose and almost to become it...It is to put yourself at risk, to feel at

¹⁵ Thomas Merton, *Seven Storey Mountain* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1948), 422, sic.. Merton has written the quote in italics and has inserted quotation marks in order to suggest the speaker-listener relationship between himself and God. Merton understands these words to be God’s words to him. God explains to Merton his purpose in isolating him.

¹⁶ Regina Schwartz, *Sacramental Poetics at the Dawn of Secularism: When God Left the World* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 8; Gordon Teskey, *Delirious Milton: The Fate of the Poet in Modernity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 146.

¹⁷ Schwartz, *Sacramental Poetics at the Dawn of Secularism*, 8.

once helpless and empowered...abject and elevated.”¹⁸ These are the cautionary tales of the epic poet, and Milton knew very well the breach in faith his calling would demand. However, to say, as Schwartz does, that we “see the artist in his work,” is only half of the story. Milton *is* in his later poems: we see him speak to us, like Jacob to pharaoh, “few and evil have the days and years of my life been.”¹⁹

Framing *Paradise Regained* and *Paradise Lost*

In framing *Paradise Regained* and *Paradise Lost*, I am associatively tracing a trend among literary scholars, specifically through these two works, to read poetry as constitutive of religious belief.²⁰ I myself heed to the warning that scholars who contribute to this burgeoning field should carefully wade through the estuary in which the divine integrates into the literary. At bottom, the sketch below is interested in the relationship between Milton’s Christian faith and the physical and spiritual modalities of his poetry, and how his faith-act corrupts and purifies these entanglements.

The Eucharist

In *Paradise Regained*, Satan attempts to explode all accounts of the meaning of the Eucharist to come. His temptation is slight, but over the course of Jesus’ ministry’s lifetime, the outcome is enormous. Schwartz puts what is at stake in terms of the formation of the cult of the nation, which she argues arises out of the demystification of the Eucharist:

When it is stripped of its mystical sense, even the Eucharist – the *mysterion* – is no longer about faith, hope, and charity, but refers to identity, one that forges insiders, with corporate shared values, and outsiders who do not share them. The restoration of the sacramental mystery to any substantialist vision can be a vital corrective to idolatry. This

¹⁸ Teskey, *Delirious Milton*, 146.

¹⁹ Genesis 47.9.

²⁰ Marshall Grossman, “Poetry and Belief in *Paradise Regained*, to which is added, *Samson Agonistes*,” *Studies in Philology* 110, no. 2 (2013): 382-83.

is not only a question of reviving the dead matter, or of resisting an impulse to instrumentalize objects of the world; it is also a question of the restoration of an ethics that exceeds the politics of identity, for it seems that modern universalist rationalism cannot defeat substantial logic alone.²¹

Jesus, however, discerns what is at stake in Satan's taunt, and the Eucharist remains holy. The result is this: rather than Jesus saying to his disciples on the night that he was betrayed, "Take, eate, this is my body. And he tooke the cup, and gaue thanks, and gaue it to them, saying, Drinke ye all of it: For this is my blood of the new Testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sinnes,"²² if Jesus believed even a fraction of a mustard seed of Satan's temptation, when his time came, he would command his disciples to consume *only* the spiritual reality, speaking, "Smell, this is my body...Listen, for this is my blood that I pour out."

We can come closer to an understanding for why *Paradise Regained* subtly alludes to the passion (prefigured by the Eucharist) through Allen's study of sixteenth and seventeenth century Reformed confessional statements. The Geneva Confession (ca. 1536) and the Heidelberg Catechism (ca. 1563) are by no means holistic, but are representative of the Reformed theological views of baptism. Both confessions suit the purpose of fleshing out Milton's strange choice to compose a poem about redemption based on Jesus' wanderings in the wilderness in Luke 4:1-12. While reading the excerpts, bear in mind that, in the words of William Kerrigan et al., "Milton never warmed to the subject of Christ's blood. His religious poetry (with the exception of *Upon the Circumcision*) is notably distant from the Eucharist."²³ The Geneva Confession states:

²¹ Schwartz, *Sacramental Poetics at the Dawn of Secularism*, 35.

²² Matthew 26:26-28.

²³ William Kerrigan, John Rumrich, and Stephen M. Fallon, "Introduction to *Paradise Regained*," in *Paradise Regained, Samson Agonistes, and the Complete Shorter Poems*, ed. by William Kerrigan, John Rumrich, and Stephen M. Fallon (New York: Modern Library, 2012), 31.

Baptism is an external sign by which our Lord testifies that he desires to receive us for his children, as members of his Son Jesus. Hence in it there is *represented* to us the cleansing from sin which we have in the blood of Jesus Christ, the mortification of our flesh which we have by his death that we may live in him by his Spirit.²⁴

And the Heidelberg Catechism, in its question and answer formulation, says:

Q. 69. How does holy Baptism remind and assure you that the one sacrifice of Christ on the cross avails for you?

A. In this way: Christ has instituted this external washing with water and by it has *promised* that I am as certainly washed with his blood and Spirit from the uncleanness of my soul and from all my sins, as I am washed externally with water which is used to remove the dirt from my body.²⁵

The two words “represented” and “promised” construe a sense of distance from the *actual* act of blood-washing and the *figurative* act of blood-washing. The poetics of *Paradise Regained* is a sign of Jesus’ forthcoming, redemptive sacrifice on the cross, both in the subtle allusions throughout *Paradise Regained* to the passion, and in the Reformed confessional statements concerning baptism. *Paradise Regained* beginning in the Jordan River imbues each line of the poem with Jesus’ blood-letting, sacrificial redemption through the Crucifixion.

Satan’s Insight into the Crucifixion and the Sacraments

After the proem, *Paradise Regained* turns towards Jesus’ baptism, where he receives the call to begin his ministry. The poem narrates:

...to his great baptism flocked
With awe the regions round, and with them came
From Nazareth the son of Joseph deemed
To the flood Jordan, came as then obscure,
Unmarked, unknown; but him the Baptist soon
Descried, divinely warned, and witness bore
As to his worthier, and would have resigned
To him his heav’nly office, nor was long

²⁴ Calvin, Jean. “The Genevan Confession (1536),” in *Calvin: Theological Treatises*. translated by Rev. J. K. S. Reid, ed. by John Baillie, John T. McNeill, and Henry P. Van Dusen (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1954), 30, emphasis my own.

²⁵ Cochrane, *Reformed Confessions of the Sixteenth Century*, 317, emphasis my own.

His witness unconfirmed: on him baptized
Heaven opened, and in likeness of a dove
The Spirit descended, while the Father's voice
From Heav'n pronounced him his beloved Son.²⁶

Milton's addition to the Lukan narrative is Satan's observation of Jesus' baptism. In *Paradise Regained*, the straightforward interpretation of Satan's ensuing action is to say that he materialistically, or literally, interprets the vision of the Holy Spirit descending as "a perfect dove" and continues to assign spiritual signs a demystified significance.²⁷ Guibbory renders Satan in this way, and her explanation exemplifies most literary critics' assessments of the Satan in *Paradise Regained*.²⁸ She writes, "Satan repeatedly tempts Christ to a 'carnal,' material understanding of his mission and his kingship, while the Son maintains his spiritual, inward interpretation of these things."²⁹ The misinterpretation of signs, however, is not Satan's, but ours in our reading of Satan. Satan so thoroughly understands the sacramental implications of each sign he sees, that he, like a spy, when given the opportunity to tempt Jesus in the desert, mimics the very heart of Christian sacramental theology, of which Jesus *might*³⁰ be the culmination, depending on Satan's victory or defeat. The most accusing passage that could counter the former argument follows close in step to Satan's supposed misapprehension of the sign of the Holy Spirit. But for a moment, dwell on how the Second Helvetic Confession (ca. 1562) extends the story of Jesus' baptism at the Jordan River into the work of purifying the first Jewish converts of

²⁶ *PR* I.21-32.

²⁷ *PR* I.21-32.

²⁸ Teskey (2006), for instance, traces many of Satan's supposed blunders (159-62), remarking, in line with the general scholastic consensus, "Such a conclusion...is unremarkable" (161). The Satan of *Paradise Regained* is not insipid, and scholars should make a concerted effort to explore his intricacies in relation to the poetics of *Paradise Regained*.

²⁹ Guibbory, *Ceremony and Community from Herbert to Milton*, 219.

³⁰ Teskey (2006) reads the dramatic interest of the poem to be not whether or not Jesus will defeat Satan, but how much Satan will learn of Jesus' identity. He writes, "The dramatic interest of the temptations in *Paradise Regained* does not turn on the uncertainty whether Christ will fall; there can be no uncertainty as to that" (157).

Acts 2 in Jerusalem, and by extension, future Christian generations. “Baptism,” it announces, “was instituted and consecrated by God,” and continues:

First John baptized, who dipped Christ in the Jordan. From him it came to the apostles, who also baptized with water...And in the Acts, Peter said to the Jews who inquired what they ought to do: “Be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”³¹

The fragmentary, but massively important clue that we must focus on, is Satan’s use of the biblical phrase from the Acts of the Apostles, namely, “the way.” The way is the ideal for living the Christian life, and comes about in several contexts in the book of Acts, especially as new Jewish Christ followers listen to Peter’s command, “Repent, and be baptized,”³² after which they break bread together as a living symbol of the Eucharistic community (i.e. Acts 2).

The echo of Acts 2 in the upcoming passage from *Paradise Regained* reminds us that Milton would have conceived of the biblical progression of baptism similarly to the Second Helvetic Confession. Satan to his fiends grumbles:

Who this is we must learn, for man he seems
In all his lineaments, though in his face
The glimpses of his Father’s glory shine.
Ye see our dangers on the utmost edge
Of hazard, which admits no long debate,
But must with something sudden be opposed,
Not force, but well-couched fraud, well-woven snares,
Ere in the head of nations he appear
Their king, their leader, and supreme on earth...
...a calmer voyage now
Will waft me; and *the way* found prosperous once
Induces best to hope of like success.³³

³¹ Arthur C. Cochrane, *Reformed Confessions of the Sixteenth Century*, rev. ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 140-41.

³² Acts 2:38ff.

³³ *PR* I.91-105, emphasis my own.

Satan's use of "the way" both recalls his prior mission to tempt Eve and Adam to disobey God, and foretells of the transformation of the way of God into the way of Satan.

The next layer of Satan's strategy is the imagery of water permeating each sector of the earth, which each animal of the feast represents: land, air, and water sources. Steam flies into the atmosphere, and while in its liquid form, it channels from "sea or shore," into a continent via a "freshet," then from freshet to a more timid body of water, a "purling brook," found in the continent's recesses, and finally flushes out at the Black Sea's bay and the "Afric coast."³⁴ The poem's metaphor of water sluicing through the valleys, rivers, and oceans of the earth communicates Satan's symbolic meaning for the food he presents Jesus. Satan, through the global image of rushing water, tries to bring Jesus into a marred sacramental relationship with God's created world, so that Jesus' source of life is no longer the Father's word, but Satan's.

Milton, Radical Protestants, Liturgy, and Sacrament

Satan's attempts to compromise the legitimate place of liturgy and sacrament in the life Jesus point to Milton's own spiritual biography. Before and during the composition period of *Paradise Regained*, Milton shows interest in the roles of traditional liturgical practices and Lent. Although Thomas Ellwood frequently met with Milton, his views on the extravagancy of the sacraments do not seem to have influenced Milton's depiction of them in *Paradise Regained*. A brief intellectual history of the Quakers will provide relevant background on the question at hand. The life and influence of Hans Denck (ca. 1500-1527) brings into clearer focus Ellwood's religious-historical context. Denck among other radical reformers (e.g. Karlstadt) studied early German mysticism in an effort to retaliate against the cerebral, academic theology of the sixteenth-century, and the institutionalized Christianity of the Roman Catholic Church, as well as

³⁴ *PR* II.344-347.

the growing Lutheran and Reformed (i.e. Protestant) churches in continental Europe. Bernard McGinn's study of Christian mysticism from 1500-1650 shows that Quaker skepticism of the sacraments originates from Denck. McGuinn writes:

The Radical Reformers, as they grew more aware of divergent ways of interpreting the Bible over such issues as Christ's presence and the Lord's Supper, and as they realized that infant baptism was nowhere mentioned in the New Testament, began to insist that it was only the experience of the same Spirit who wrote the original text that could guarantee its real meaning...[I]f the Spirit gave different interpreters different meanings, what was to be done? More radically, if the Spirit within is the real witness to divine truth, is the outer word necessary at all? Denck was one of the first to pose these questions, especially with regard to baptism and the Lord's Supper... [Denck's later writings] are an early witness to a new mystical tendency within Radical Protestantism, one that was to have many later transformations, not only in Spiritualists...but also in seventeenth-century groups like the Quakers.³⁵

The denominational evolution from Denck to the Quakers, and his insistent weariness concerning the sacraments of the Lord's Supper and baptism are worth reiterating. Guibbory identifies that, "To Quakers, even the two sacraments retained by the Protestant Reformation (baptism and the Lord's Supper) were mere human inventions and thus should be discarded."³⁶ In her biographical study, Elizabeth McLaughlin reconstructs Milton's relationship with the young Quaker, Thomas Ellwood, who famously spurred Milton on to write *Paradise Regained*, after explaining to Milton, "Thou hast said much here of Paradise lost, but what hast thou to say of Paradise found?"³⁷ While she persuasively unfolds how the two men were close acquaintances, she makes no mention of the influence – over Milton – the Quaker beliefs of Ellwood held, if any.³⁸ Milton's answer to Ellwood's question is that the sacraments are central

³⁵ Bernard McGinn, *Mysticism in the Reformation (1500-1650)* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2017), 96.

³⁶ Guibbory, *Ceremony and Community from Herbert to Milton*, 16.

³⁷ Elizabeth T. McLaughlin, "Milton and Thomas Ellwood," *Milton Quarterly* 1, no. 1 (May 1967); William Kerrigan, John Rumrich, and Stephen M. Fallon, "Introduction to *Paradise Regained*," 251.

³⁸ McLaughlin, "Milton and Thomas Ellwood," 17-18.

to understanding the regaining of paradise. *Paradise Regained* undermines the possibility of a relationship between Denck's remissive attitude towards the sacraments and Milton's sacramental theology.

How Puritan is the old Milton?

Milton's fascination with sacramental theology connects with his lifelong entanglement of praise and critique for Laudianism (a centralized and conformist movement in the Church of England under the archbishop William Laud, and the ecclesiastical equivalent of a monarchy). I defend the stance that Milton opposes the politics of Laudianism, but that during the time he composes *Paradise Regained* (late 1660s), he finds the quasi-Catholic liturgy beautiful. One noteworthy critique among many from both Milton's poetry (early and late) and prose, arises out of his 1641 prose tract, *The Reason for Church Government*. In the tract, he tells of his decision to pursue the vocation of being a poet rather than a bishop, and famously says he was, "Church-outed by the prelates."³⁹ Political, economic, social, and religious fog descending from the English Civil War battlefields obscures the precise aim of his accusation. Is this the moment Milton disavows the Church of England? Or was it earlier in 1637, when in *Lycidas*, Milton charges the bishops of the Church of England with blatant disregard for the tending to their congregants' needs:

The hungry sheep look up, and are not fed,
But swoll'n with wind, and the rank mist they draw,
Rot inwardly, and foul contagion spread:
Besides what grim wolf with privy paw
Daily devours apace, and nothing said.⁴⁰

³⁹ John Milton, *The Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, ed. Don M. Wolfe, 8 vols (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953-82), 1.823.

⁴⁰ John Milton, *Lycidas*, in *Paradise Regained, Samson Agonistes, and the Complete Shorter Poems*, ed. William Kerrigan, John Rumrich, and Stephen M. Fallon (New York: Modern Library, 2012), lines 125-29.

Scholars still argue for Milton's early and late denunciation of the Church of England.⁴¹ For the scope of my argument, it is enough to identify that Milton frames *Paradise Regained* with liturgical prayer inspired by ceremonialists.

Sacramental Vision in *Paradise Lost*

Paradise Lost has many competing, and highly important themes. The challenge is not which to choose, but which to leave out. Throughout the thesis, I use the phrase, poetics of knowing, in an effort to, like a blast container, safely contain and understand the agonistic synergies of *Paradise Lost*: production and organization, creativity and stability, intuition and learning, poetry and systematization, revelation and observation, faith and empiricism, infinite and finite, transcendent and material, belief and experience, divine and human, being and thinking, community and isolation, liturgy and performance, forgiveness and sin, sacrament and salvation, and rootedness and flight.

Two interrelated examples from the twentieth-century, Marc Chagall's painting, *Over Vitebsk*, and the reflection of the Hungarian poet, András Visky, about his life as a child in a Romanian gulag in the 1950s and 60s, can help to make sense of how *Paradise Lost* uses faith-act and form to convey a dance between liturgy *and* sacrament, and a sacramental vision of the earth.⁴²

⁴¹ Nicholas McDowell, "How Laudian was the young Milton?" *Milton Studies* 52 (2011): 3-22. For the Puritan-minded Milton, see Barbara K. Lewalski, *The Life of John Milton* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008); Barbara K. Lewalski, "How radical was the young Milton?," in *Milton and Heresy*, ed. Stephen B. Dobranski and John P. Rumrich (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 49. For the Laudian-minded Milton, see Thomas N. Corns and Gordon Campbell, *John Milton: Life, Work, and Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Thomas N. Corns, "Milton's antiprelatical tracts and the marginality of doctrine," in *Milton and Heresy*, ed. Stephen B. Dobranski and John P. Rumrich (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 39.

⁴² András Visky, "András Visky's Barrack Dramaturgy," (presentation, The Library of Congress Webcasts, Washington, D.C., September 26, 2017); Marc Chagall, 1914, *Over Vitebsk*, oil on canvas, 26 3/8 x 36 1/2" (67 x 92.7 cm) (New York: Museum of Modern Art)

Marc Chagall, a Russian-French, modernist artist painted *Over Vitebsk* out of the Yiddish, expression associated with the beggar, “he walks over the houses.”⁴³ The upper, central region of the painting hosts a multi-toned, child-like, gray and dark brown outline of a bearded man. He carries a sack, a little darker than the skin of his hands, and it likely holds all that he owns. The bottom half of the painting presents itself in sheer shades of white, perhaps a little darkened with shadow, and possibly some soot from the chimneys nearby. The white snow, covering the rooftops of the houses in the bottom half of the painting, contrasts with the gray beggar, who hovers over the horizon of the townscape. Chagall presents the beggar at a downward lean towards the earth, like something one would see if a vest and cables were harnessed to the beggar, and supported his otherwise unstable tilt to envision the town below. The remarkable aspect of *Over Vitebsk* is that the beggar’s body and head do not rear upwards, towards the sky. Chagall even shades in a line from the beggar’s face to the backside of a house below him, affirming the idea that although the beggar “walks over houses,” his life is distinctly attached to human conduct in the town below. *Over Vitebsk* is a thoroughly grounded image. The image of flight in *Over Vitebsk*, as in *Paradise Lost*, means less than flight, which tend to reflect leaving familiarity for new visions of new places. Flight is not about leaving, flying away, but about returning home, seeing the cosmic in the earthly, or the sacramental in the mundane. The surprising aspect of *Paradise Lost* is not *that* the idea is present, but *when* the idea presents itself. After considering how the formation of his verse could possess him to pride like Bellerophon, whose crippling fall from Pegasus’ back disabled his eyes, and left him destitute, Milton turns his entire body – and his head – towards the earth, like Chagall’s beggar. Thereby, when Milton says, “Half yet remains unsung, but narrower bound/ Within the visible Diurnal Spheare;

⁴³ Chagall, *Over Vitebsk*.

Standing on Earth, not rapt above the Pole,”⁴⁴ he both identifies the transformation of his vision from an earth/heaven dichotomy to a heaven on earth reality (i.e. sacramentality) and affirms the role of community in realizing the vision.

Milton’s use of liturgy and sacrament in order to unveil Heaven’s presence on earth testifies to his earnestness to be a part of all of God’s created order, rather than to see *through*, or *beyond*, all of God’s created order. András Visky’s story explores the corporal and spiritual layers of the poet’s vision, whereby through imagining flight, the poet confirms the earnest vitality not of the place they travel to, but the place they remain. It would be years before the Romanian government would release Visky and his family.

In the 1950s, the Romanian dictator, Nicolae Ceaușescu, imprisoned Visky, the youngest of seven, and the rest of his family in a Romanian gulag. He speaks of being a prisoner as part of his DNA. Concepts of imprisonment, and the tension of the kinds of freedom available to a prisoner pervade his poems and plays. About sixty years later at the Library of Congress in 2017, the European division of the library invited Visky to speak about his theatrical vision, captured in the title of his book, *Barrack Dramaturgy* (2017).⁴⁵ The theme of the pervasiveness of liturgy and sacrament as a response to imprisonment carried throughout his talk, and the parallels to Milton’s later life while writing *Paradise Lost* must too be underscored, but not expounded further, in an effort to maintain the subject at hand. Living in the gulag, especially during the winter months, sharpened Visky’s sense to the presence of liturgy prisoners enacted around him. “I remember,” he says in a story-like manner, “when the snow covered up totally our barrack...It was a plain field, no trees, only these barracks, and we got covered up totally by the snow. I

⁴⁴ *PL* VII.23.

⁴⁵ András Visky, *Barrack Dramaturgy: Memories of the Body* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017).

thought for years that this was only the image of my imagination, and then I found from photography [years later] how the people are walking on their roof.”⁴⁶ The fantastic and shockingly literal encounters with the flights of people over their houses’ roofs in the gulag, Visky believed for years to be nothing more than a childhood impression, or a dream. While observing the flights, and in the future moments remembering them, the vision communicated to him a sacramental reality which coexisted with, and to some extent, interpreted the suffering of his present moment. Nothing was taken away, neither his body to some great height, nor the gulag itself, entrancing him into some kind of Elysium. To carry forward Visky’s phrase, the DNA of the gulag camp itself changed because of his seeing the prisoners’ flight. In studying John Henry Newman’s outlook on human sacramental relationship with the earth, the theologian, David Brown, supplies a helpful framework for understanding Visky’s story. He writes, “his [John Newman’s] intention was to underline how close the reality of heaven is to us: neither in the far distance, nor buried in the depths of ourselves, but, as it were, just behind a thin veil alongside us.”⁴⁷ In Book XI of *Paradise Lost*, after Michael fixes Adam’s eyes so that he can reveal to him the redemptive future “by [Eve’s] seed to come,” they descend from the on-high cliff to the Garden, where Adam and Eve “hand in hand” walk out into “The world [that] was all before them.”⁴⁸

Limitation of Form in Systematic Theology and Poetics

When set in relief to Elie Wiesel’s acclaimed account of the death of his father and his God, *Night*, *Paradise Lost* shows its hesitancy to state finite answers, and its urgency to pose

⁴⁶ Visky, 9:05-10.

⁴⁷ David Brown, “A Sacramental World: Why It Matters,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Sacramental Theology*, ed. by Hans Boersma and Matthew Levering (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 603-615.

⁴⁸ *PL* XI.411-16; XII.600; XII.648; XII.646.

questions of infinite potential, which can prompt knowing. In a north-western Romanian Jewish synagogue, a Jewish mystic named Moshe the Beadle walks over to Wiesel, a thirteen year old boy, who resiliently prays. Wiesel remembers Moshe wondering:

‘Why do you cry when you pray?’ he asked, as though he knew me well.

‘I don’t know,’ I answered, troubled.

I had never asked myself that question. I cried because...because something inside me felt the need to cry. That was all I knew.

“Why do you pray?” he asked after a moment.

Why did I pray? Strange question. Why did I live? Why did I breathe?

“I don’t know why,” I told him, even more troubled and ill at ease. “I don’t know.”

From that day on, I saw him often. He explained to me, with great emphasis, that every question possessed a power that was lost in the answer...⁴⁹

The passage highlights the misleading “common gloss of theologians” of *Paradise Lost* book V in the particular case of figuring out the truth behind angel digestion, and it also points to more. The theological questions which arise out of Adam’s and Eve’s pre-lapsarian context are more revelatory, or truth-full, than fine-tuned theological statements answering Adam’s and Eve’s questions.⁵⁰ A theologian, simply, cannot write from the viewpoint that death is non-existent, which is the marvel beheld in Milton’s Adam and Eve inside of their own story surrounding the Tree of Knowledge. The push towards Milton’s poetics of knowing comes full circle when the word, meanwhile, transitions the conversation away from the misuse of systematic theologies and towards the beautiful, naked Eve, “Meanwhile at table Eve/ Ministered naked, and their

⁴⁹ Elie Wiesel, *Night*, trans. Marion Wiesel (New York: Hill and Wang, a division of Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2017), 4-5.

⁵⁰ An example of literary critics glossing Milton’s later poems with systematic theology is Kelley Maurice, *The Great Argument: A Study of Milton’s De Doctrina Christiana as a Gloss upon Paradise Lost* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941). Book V.146 suggests that any systematic theology, including *De Doctrina Christiana*, neither represents Milton’s theology in his later poetry, nor Milton’s idea of poetry as theology: neither *Paradise Lost*, nor *Paradise Regained*, nor *Samson Agonistes*. In Wiman’s words from *My Bright Abyss*, “The purpose of theology – the purpose of anything thinking about God – is to make the silences clearer and starker to us, to make the unmeaning – by which I mean those aspects of the divine that will not be reduced to human meanings – more irreducible and more terrible, and thus ultimately more wonderful. This is why art is so often better at theology than theology is” (130).

flowing cups/ With pleasant liquors crowned.”⁵¹ How stark a transition from the heady, intellectual program of theological doctrine to Eve’s presence and alcohol, poured in their cups to the brim! The interrogative stance of Adam with Eve, Eve with Adam, and Adam with Raphael, concerning their question of evil’s origins, comes closer to the Tree of Knowledge than systematic theologies.

Sacred Knowing of *Paradise Lost*

The great twentieth-century Christian ethicist, H. Richard Niebuhr (“H. Niebuhr”) died in 1962 before he was able to complete his *magnum opus*, published posthumously by his son under the title, *The Responsible Self*. The reason for which he had not already finished and published *Responsible Self* sheds light on *Paradise Lost*’s fundamental outlook on knowledge. R. R. Niebuhr (“R. Niebuhr”) tells of how his father left the work unfinished because he “always feared once he put his ideas into print, the possibility of reinterpreting and rethinking them in the classroom would vanish.”⁵² He continues, “[I]nstead of being a dialogue with his students, his colleagues, and with the time at large, his ethical reflections would become a finished piece of business, a part of the past rather than a lively, appreciative, and critical response to the present.”⁵³ Underscoring R. Niebuhr’s explanation is his father’s view on epistemology. H. Niebuhr distinguished between the vitality of human conversation and the ossification of the printed text.⁵⁴

⁵¹ *PL* V.443-45.

⁵² R. Richard Niebuhr, “Preface,” in *Responsible Self: An essay in Christian Moral Philosophy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 2.

⁵³ R.R. Niebuhr, 2.

⁵⁴ H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self: An essay in Christian Moral Philosophy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962).

H. Niebuhr distills the question of the essence of human existence down to the conduct of oneself in communal life. He asserts that the moral philosophy he forwards is neither deontological (e.g. “ought to”), nor teleological (e.g. “goal”), rather, it is responsibility. His thinking about the interpretation of history intersects with the more theoretical problem of theology’s relationship with life. Theology, in the non-technical though widely accepted meaning of the study of God, tends towards abstract debates about the Holy Spirit (pneumatology), or Christ (Christology), or any other such topic. Illuminating the wedge that separates the ideal from the experience, he suggests that human responsibility is defined not so much by the question “What is the goal,” but rather is defined by the question, “What is happening?” and exemplifies human’s responding to complex situations from the Israelites, to the early Christians, to the Civil Rights movements of the 1960s.⁵⁵ His idea of responsibility unpacks the outlook of Adam’s and Eve’s meeting with the angel, Raphael, for was not Adam seated “in the door...Of his cool bow’r,” expecting merely a meal with Eve and rest to follow, when the archangel of God, Raphael, “Eastward among those trees, what glorious shape/ Comes this way moving.”?⁵⁶ All Adam can do, and exactly what he does, is *respond* to the descendent being from heaven, come to visit with him and his wife, by forming community, and performing the liturgy and sacrament of communal eating, all under the gauntlet of blank-verse, un-systematized, poetics. “When this monotheistic believer,” writes H. Niebuhr, speaking about Christians in general, possibly the first of whom is Adam, “tries to understand his own life, he

⁵⁵ Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self*, 67.

⁵⁶ *PL* V.309-10.

finds that it is a life lived less under universal law and less in pursuit of a universal ideal than a life of responsibility in universal community.”⁵⁷

In the bower, Raphael’s friendship with Adam and Eve is an uncanny break away from scholastic theology of and before Milton’s lifetime (ca. 1608-1674). The fracture displays systematic theology’s and metaphysics’s alienation from life. In *Paradise Lost*, Adam’s, Eve’s, and Raphael’s *experience* of friendship inside of the bower emblemizes the source of genuine knowing. The bower in the poem is the key locus where community, liturgy, sacrament, and belief transform into a singular, condensed, living faith-act.

Milton senses that his poetry is not enough to save and that his later poetry, in fact, transgresses God’s Will, but he also knows that, paradoxically, for him to write poetry is God’s will. His faith-act gives rise to the poetics of knowing. His faith-act ultimately shows him that poetry is the means to find the limitation of the written word, and the poetics of knowing then turns him outward towards the world, toward relationship, toward creation, where he can begin to live in faith.

⁵⁷ Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self*, 89.

2.

Before the Throne: The Crucifixion and the Poetics of Paradise Regained

[It] was often the Reformers who were most eager to condemn the doctrine of transubstantiation, including John Milton, who clung to the mystery most fervently. What was at stake with the loss of the mystery of the host? Not so much: just a vision of a redeemed world, eternal life, justice, participation in a community constituted by consent rather than by rule, and by even more – love.

– Regina Schwartz, *Sacramental Poetics*

Introduction

*Paradise Regained*⁵⁸ restores the sacral/liturgical immensity and mystery of the Eucharist – although not quite like John Milton’s Catholic peers would have understood it. The Anglican/Catholic liturgical calendar is surprisingly central to his restoration of the Eucharist. As a young man in 1629, Milton wrote his “Nativity Ode”⁵⁹ based on the liturgical season of Christmas. Forty years later, his short epic poem, *Paradise Regained*, explores the season of Lent and the Christian’s austere expression while waiting for God, and for their own redemption. Following many biblical examples, a series of forties set the religious-historical precedence for the Eucharist’s redemptive work and inform Milton’s sacral/liturgical vision for *Paradise Regained*. The Israelites had wandered in the desert for forty years, waiting for the day God would allow them to enter the Promised Land. Jesus had fasted in the wilderness for forty days – God, in that time, preparing him for his divine mission to save humanity. Moreover, Milton had awaited redemption’s coming for forty years, more or less, from January of 1630 through

⁵⁸ John Milton, *Paradise Regained*, in *Paradise Regained, Samson Agonistes, and the Complete Shorter Poems*, ed. by William Kerrigan, John Rumrich, and Stephen M. Fallon (New York: Modern Library, 2012), 255-318. I subsequently abbreviate it, *PR*.

⁵⁹ John Milton, “The Passion,” in *Paradise Regained, Samson Agonistes, and the Complete Shorter Poems*, ed. by William Kerrigan, John Rumrich, and Stephen M. Fallon (New York: Modern Library, 2012), 31-33.

September 10, 1670, when Thomas Tomkyns entered *Paradise Regained* in the Stationer's Register.⁶⁰

The orientation of *Paradise Regained* around the liturgical season of Lent prepares and defends the way for the anticipated arrival of the Eucharist. Milton's infatuation with the Hebraic tradition illuminates his own life, represents his literary affinity for the sacred times on the liturgical calendar, and spearheads the idea that *Paradise Regained* shares in the Lenten liturgical tradition. Lent is the logical addition to an already uncanny series of redemptive associations Milton has written into his own life with the number forty. Milton would have known of the Christian tradition of Lent, in part through his study of the Church Fathers, such as Aurelius Ambrose, Archbishop of Milan (ca. 340-397), who, as many of the Fathers did, found biblical precedence for the tradition in the moment following Jesus' baptism.⁶¹ *Paradise Regained* seems surprisingly aware of the Lenten season since the poem begins with Jesus' baptism. Milton did not have to begin his short epic poem at the Jordan River: he could very well have retold the story of human salvation through Jesus defeating Satan and temptation *only* in the desert.

At an early age, however, Milton, through two poems, shows his interest in the liturgical calendar, the Eucharist, and other sacraments. On Christmas day of 1629, he began to write "On the Morning of Christ's Nativity,"⁶² (referred to as "Nativity Ode") and close to the time of Epiphany in January of 1630 until just before Easter, he composed, "The Passion," a poem in search for poetic expression sufficient for the Crucifixion. "The Passion" is an example of

⁶⁰ William Kerrigan, John Rumrich, and Stephen M. Fallon, "Introduction to *Paradise Regained*," in *Paradise Regained, Samson Agonistes, and the Complete Shorter Poems*, ed. by William Kerrigan, John Rumrich, and Stephen M. Fallon (New York: Modern Library, 2012), 251-54, esp. 252.

⁶¹ Aurelius Ambrosius, "Luke: Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New Testament," ed. by Arthur A. Just and Thomas C. Oden, Vol. III., (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2003).

⁶² John Milton, "Nativity Ode," in *Paradise Regained, Samson Agonistes, and the Complete Shorter Poems*, ed. by William Kerrigan, John Rumrich, and Stephen M. Fallon (New York: Modern Library, 2012), 18-30.

Milton's inspiration from the liturgical season of Lent, and *Paradise Regained* continues to contemplate the implications of "The Passion." Indeed, *Paradise Regained* continues to rehearse and revise the language and imagery from "The Passion." Reflecting on "The Passion," *Paradise Regained* reworks the theme of abortion in order to amplify Jesus' unnatural death and meditate on Lent. Through a mythical reference to Ixion ravaging a cloud and fathering the centaur race, the "race of mourners on some pregnant cloud," in "The Passion," alludes to the Crucifixion.⁶³ The cloud purging the centaurs out of itself, down to the earth below, is the obscure representation of the Crucifixion Milton redistributes into *Paradise Regained*. Jesus' Satanic prompted dream in Book IV shows:

Both ends of heav'n, the clouds
 From many a horrid rift *abortive* poured
 Fierce rain with lightning mixed, water with fire
 In ruin *reconciled*⁶⁴

Biblically, "abortive" recalls Herod's decree, in Matthew 2, to "[slay] all the children that [are] in Bethlehem;" the dragon, in Revelation 12, who "stood before the woman which was ready to be deliuered, for to deuoure her childe as soone as it was borne;" and the false prophet and beast of Revelation 19 being "cast alieue into a lake of fire burning with brimstone."⁶⁵ Theologically, the transformation from pregnant to abortive suggests Satan's attempts to maim God's redemptive plan of saving the lost and gathering them in his throne room and New Eden (Rev. 4; 19-22) for worship. The dream also turns the redemptive work of "reconciled" on its head, for "reconciled" does not mean humanity's restored relationship with God, but the antithetical

⁶³ Kerrigan, Rumrich, Fallon, *Paradise Regained and Samson Agonistes and the Complete Shorter Poems*, 33.

⁶⁴ *PR* IV.410-3, emphasis my own.

⁶⁵ Matt 2:16; Rev 12:4; Rev 19:20, respectively.

collision of “water with fire.”⁶⁶ The poem emphasizes the destruction of “reconciled” with the strategically placed prepositional phrase, “In ruin reconciled.”⁶⁷ The deconstruction and revamping of Christian poetic idioms exemplifies the poetics of *Paradise Regained*.

Critics, however, divide themselves over the question of to which theo-sacral-historical direction Milton turns in *Paradise Regained*: toward the sacred or the secular; or toward a sacramental poetics or an Enlightenment ideology. In Milton’s lifetime (ca. 1608-1674), the sacraments were a vigorously contested site for the sacred/secular debate. Theologian and social theorist, John Milbank, in *Theology and Social Theory*, adamantly puts forth that the secular is a distinct creation that comes from human society’s rejection of Christian orthodoxy.⁶⁸ His view on the secular invokes the question of whether or not Milton bears witness to either the passing away, or continuation of, both a sacral view of history and sacral relation to the world. He disagrees with the idea that the secular is a truer version of reality. He also writes against the narrative that the secular is the natural coming of age of Judeo-Christianity. Through its rendering of *Paradise Regained*, Gordon Teskey’s *Delirious Milton* critiques Milbank by showing that Milton transfers the sacred from God to the purely human-man, Jesus. Teskey affirms the view that *Paradise Regained* envisions the swan song for God’s being in the world. However, Teskey does not seem to praise the ending of *Paradise Regained*, but merely calls our attention to it: “The lesson of taking divinity into oneself is not a lesson that will lead to anything that would be easy to rejoice in, since it entails the negation of a transcendent, caring Lord.”⁶⁹

⁶⁶ PR IV.412.

⁶⁷ PR IV.413.

⁶⁸ John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2006), 9.

⁶⁹ Gordon Teskey, *Delirious Milton: The Fate of the Poet in Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 179.

Regina Schwartz, by contrast, sees Milton facing the opposite direction, toward God's continual presence in the world, but casts a shadow of doubt over the kind of presence in which he still remains. Teskey, through his interpretation, almost mourns God's departure and the idea of the liberated, deified self, whereas Schwartz, perhaps, relishes the infinite intellectual and spiritual mystery the present, but unknowable God offers human culture, in its broadest and most liberal sense. In their summations that the passion is absent from *Paradise Regained*, they have sought after Milton's vision of regaining paradise in ways distinct from liturgy, sacrament, and worship form.

The poetics of *Paradise Regained*, however, frames Lent, centralizes the passion, culminates in Revelation-like worship, represents the liturgy of the sacraments, and defends the sacraments' sanctity as the source of redemption. Though subtle in its presentation, *Paradise Regained* fixates on the salvific, theological weight of the cross in redemptive history. However, the issue of the Crucifixion (or its absence) in *Paradise Regained* has divided, and continues to divide, literary critics. On the one hand, literary critics have tended to reiterate the point that *Paradise Regained* mostly, if not entirely, avoids the Crucifixion.⁷⁰ On the other hand, a smaller and more sporadic camp of literary critics have found Crucifixion imagery imbedded within *Paradise Regained*.⁷¹ For Milton in *Paradise Regained*, the gospel of John is an imagistic and

⁷⁰ Ira Clark, "'Paradise Regained' and the Gospel according to John," *Modern Philology* 71, no. 1 (August 1973): 13; Laura Lunger Knoppers, "Paradise Regained and the Politics of Martyrdom," *Modern Philology* 90, no. 2 (Nov. 1992): 214; Achsah Guibbory, *Ceremony and Community from Herbert to Milton: Literature, Religion, and Cultural Conflict in Seventeenth-century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 219; Schwartz, *Sacramental Poetics at the Dawn of Secularism*, 83. Gordon Teskey, *The Poetry of John Milton* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), 8. Representative of the above scholars, Teskey writes, "Milton's poem about the redemption of humanity by Jesus Christ, *Paradise Regained*, is startlingly not about the Crucifixion."

⁷¹ Northrop Frye, "The Typology of 'Paradise Regained'," *Modern Philology* 53, no. 4 (May 1956): 227-238; Barbara K. Lewalski, "Theme and Structure in 'Paradise Regained,'" *Modern Philology* 57, no. 2 (April 1960): 216; Reisner, Noam. "Spiritual Architectonics: Destroying and Rebuilding the Temple in *Paradise Regained*." *Milton Quarterly* 43, no. 3 (2009): 166.

theological source for his imagination.⁷² Where the debate has focused on the argument that the gospel of John is a key source for the poem, my article focuses on the interplay between the reconciliatory shortcomings of the poetics of *Paradise Regained* and the redemptive role of the Crucifixion in *Paradise Regained*.

Paradise Regained looks both forward to Christian sacramental and liturgical worship and backward to “The Passion.” Milton seeks a new form of poetics to express Christian liturgy and sacrament so that his work fully preserves and envisions the sanctity of the passion and its purpose, and in that search, he turns to Lent. Thomas Talley, in his expansive, historically rooted study of Lent, discusses the role of sacrament in the redemptive aim of Lent. In one sweeping sentence, he writes, “[The major concern of Lent is that] in the face of that promise...all who have learned in faith that both new birth and reconciliation are but sacraments pointing to realities that rush towards us from the future, all alike know the time that moves toward Pascha [Passover] as the time of metanoia [conversion].”⁷³ Lent, according to the liturgical calendar, is the forty-day period for Christian asceticism, which leads the Christian to reflect on future redemption. The ascetic Christian is exactly the image Milton renders in *Paradise Regained*. Depending on his theological dispensation, Jesus both not yet achieving and having achieved humanity’s redemption privately returns “unobserved / to his mother’s house.”⁷⁴ Gordon Teskey believes that “‘The Passion’ tries to build upon something too easily taken for granted...the

⁷² Clark, “*Paradise Regained* and the Gospel according to John,” 1; Stella P. Revard, “The Gospel of John and *Paradise Regained*: Jesus as ‘True Light,’” in *Milton and Scriptural Tradition: The Bible into Poetry*, edited by Leland Ryken (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1984), 146-148; Reisner, “Spiritual Achitectonics,” 170-171.

⁷³ Thomas J. Talley, *The Origins of the Liturgical Year* (New York: Pueblo Publishing, 1986), 224-25.

⁷⁴ *PR* 4.638-39.

depths of the poet's commitment to poetry."⁷⁵ However, *Paradise Regained* is a poem in doubt of Christian poetic idiom. Through its stark poetics, *Paradise Regained* shows the agony of John Milton in a nearly impossible faith-act⁷⁶ disavowing his lifelong cultivation of the English language's best poetics and praxis. Dismantling poetic form, *Paradise Regained* highlights Milton's turn away from the office of poet and towards the office of priest: Milton's poetic practice does not undermine the material sacraments, but underscores them. *Paradise Regained* provocatively contends that the true worship of God follows from the Christian living in the expectation of Christ's second coming, through the Christocentric church calendar, and in their reception of the Eucharist and baptism. Praxis and poetics are not Milton's sacraments for God, but Milton's sacrifices to him.

The Crucifixion in *Paradise Regained*

Rather than come into direct contact with the Crucifixion through his mind's eye, Milton through Jesus intonates Johannine verses, thereby alluding to Jesus' impending death. One particularly important theological idea developed in the gospel of John is the virtue of laying down one's life so that another may live. At the heart of laying down one's life is the dissolving of power, and in that dissolution, the one who releases power, paradoxically, gains it. Satan, however, poses the problem of laying down one's life as an utter failure to achieve what one set out to do. Thus, Satan counters Jesus' idea of self-sacrifice with the idea of self-aggrandizement.

⁷⁵ Gordon Teskey, *Delirious Milton: The Fate of the Poet in Modernity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 139.

⁷⁶ I am exploring the intersection of faith creation/(re)generation/decimation and poetics in greater detail in a book-length project. Milton's faith-act is the creation of his later poems. His faith-act does not elicit a transcendent, but a descendent approach to the Christian life. Milton does not enter into heaven, return to earth, and interpret heaven through earth; rather God enters the world, his character imbues it, and through him, Milton interprets the world. However, through their poetics, Milton's later poems show their limitations to render God's presence in the world. Milton does not write these poems so that they can bear salvation on their shoulders, but so that the temple of salvation can brick by brick crush them.

“Great acts,” Satan concludes with verbal poise, “require great means of enterprise.”⁷⁷ Throughout *Paradise Regained*, Satan offers Jesus forms of power in “honors, riches, kingdom, glory,” to which at the end of book II, Jesus disavows the temptation to rule in exchange for the freedom to give up his life.⁷⁸ To Satan, Jesus asserts, “Besides to give a kingdom hath been thought/ Greater and nobler done, and to lay down/ Far more magnanimous, than to assume.”⁷⁹ Jesus’ rebuttal upholds the Johannine theme of life through death.

Indeed, looming in *Paradise Regained*, though not on its horizon, but at its center, is the Crucifixion. One such example is Milton’s subtle crucifixion image found towards the end of book IV. To preface the reading, take the tall pines and wide oaks that bend under gale force winds for an analogue of the medium upon which the Messiah Jesus will one day die: the cross. Thus Milton:

...nor slept the winds...
But rush’d abroad...
And fell
On the vexed wilderness, whose tallest pines,
Though rooted deep as high, and sturdiest oaks
Bowed their stiff necks, loaden with stormy blasts.⁸⁰

If only to draw attention to one personification, perhaps with tendrils stretching into the gospel of John, the physiognomy Milton chooses to embellish within the image is the trees’ neck “bowed”.⁸¹ So too does the gospel of John arrive at the death of Jesus with the words, “‘It is finished,’ and he bowed his head, and gaue vp the ghost.”⁸² In book I, Jesus searched through the scriptures in order to find out his identity. Surely in his inquiry Jesus read the sober Isaiah 53

⁷⁷ *PR* II.412.

⁷⁸ *PR* IV.536.

⁷⁹ *PR* II.481-3.

⁸⁰ *PR* IV.413-8, emphasis my own.

⁸¹ *PR* IV.418.

⁸² John 19:30.

passage that sheds light on how God will hoist his judgment upon him, and how “it pleased the Lord to bruise him.”⁸³ Isaiah’s propitiatory language would explain Jesus’ the scene in *Paradise Regained* when Jesus says that he is “work[ing] redemption for mankind, [their] sins’/ Full weight must be transferred upon [his] head.”⁸⁴

In book I of *Paradise Regained*, Jesus searches the law and the prophets to see if they reveal him as the true Messiah. And indeed, they do. Thus, led by the Spirit into the wilderness, and following his remembrance of Mary’s recounting God’s salvific history and her confession, “Thy father is the eternal King,” Jesus sets his mind to find out what this could even mean, and what role he plays.⁸⁵ “This having heard,” he continues, having remembered Mary’s words:

...straight I again revolved
The law and prophets, *searching* what was writ
Concerning the Messiah...
And soon found of whom they spake
I am; this chiefly, that my way must lie
Through many a hard assay even to the death.⁸⁶

To take Jesus at his word that he read the “law and prophets” is to indicate that he read Isaiah 53 and many other Old Testament texts. To probe this point a little further, Milton’s iambic pentameter blank verse and his syntax emphasize “death,” first in Jesus’ foreknowledge of how he will die, and later in Satan’s appeal that all Jesus’ life could amount to is “death.”⁸⁷ Essentially, the lines stack up as such:

Through many a hard assay even to the death⁸⁸
Violence and stripes, and lastly cruel death⁸⁹

⁸³ Isaiah 53:10.

⁸⁴ *PR* I.266-7.

⁸⁵ *PR* I.236; I.229-58.

⁸⁶ *PR* I.259-64, emphasis my own.

⁸⁷ *PR* I.264; IV.388.

⁸⁸ *PR* I.264.

⁸⁹ *PR* IV.388.

One strange Miltonic feature is worth mentioning, though hopefully the mentioning renders the feature under a new light. Up to this point, the allusions to John 12 and Isaiah 53 could be some of the images Milton bears in mind while, in *Paradise Regained*, he deeply explores the theological precedence of the passion in history, the art of poetry, and one's conduct in the right worship of God. In doing so, however, he seems to have (once again) avoided direct mention of Jesus on the cross. It is a strange fact of Milton's life that in it, he could not compose poems whose images *directly* convey the Crucifixion.

Paradise Regained, however, navigates the perimeter of the passion scene much akin to the disciple John, who as witness of Jesus' death stood nearby Jesus' mother on Golgotha, received Jesus' command to care for Mary, and "tooke her vnto his owne home."⁹⁰ The moment unfolds:

Now there stood by the crosse of Iesus, his mother, and his mothers sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene. When Iesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loued, he saith vnto his mother, Woman, behold thy sonne. Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother. And from that houre that disciple tooke her vnto his owne home.⁹¹

If anything, the silence and privacy of that moment, encapsulated in a single sentence just before Jesus' death and his defeat over sin, perhaps captures some of the theological nuance vested in the poetics of *Paradise Regained*, particularly in its final line, "he unobserved/ Home to his mother's house private returned."⁹²

Another such example of Milton quietly centralizing the Crucifixion in *Paradise Regained* can be found in his aural punning in Book IV with reference to the two similes in Isaiah 53. In his study of Isaiah 53, once again, the first simile Jesus would have noticed

⁹⁰ John 19:26-7.

⁹¹ John 19:25-27.

⁹² *PR* IV.639.

compares the Messiah to a maturing plant in a desert land: “For he shall grow vp before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a drie ground.”⁹³ Thus, the mighty oaks and tall pines, “though rooted deep as high,” crashing to the wilderness’ hard plot, as if they are as fragile as a shallow rooted stem in the desert, binds the wooden imagery of the cross to the life force of the Messiah on the cross.⁹⁴ The second simile Jesus would have noticed is the simile that he one day will be “as a sheepe before her shearers is dumme.”⁹⁵ Isaiah’s simile is intended to sharpen the injustice of killing what is perfect, essentially preparing Jewish exiles in Babylon for the arrival and subsequent murder of the perfect Messiah. With Isaiah’s Messiah-like-a-sheep simile in check, the pun is ready. As Milton delivers the reason for the trees’ fall, such that they, like the sheep before the slaughter were “torn up sheer,” the mimetic sounds “sheer” and “shearing” come to mean the Crucifixion.

John 12 complements the poetics of *Paradise Regained*, in that it erects all at once the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. In John 12, Jesus stands on the precipice of his ultimate mission: to create a new true worshippers of God. Much to the extent that John 12 is a multi-layered, temporal narrative, so too is *Paradise Regained*. The past, present, and future are always simultaneously informing the other. Jesus’ past mission is to seek the lost people of Israel. In John 12, all three temporalities converge in the present when Andrew and Philip address Jesus to let him know that “certaine Greeks” would like to see him.⁹⁶ Jesus would stray away from his God-ordained mission if he met with the Greeks in his present, unglorified, un-crucified state. Thus, he dismisses the Greeks’ sought-out counsel. There is an order to God’s redemptive plan

⁹³ Isaiah 53:2.

⁹⁴ *PR* IV.417; John 19:30.

⁹⁵ Isaiah 53:7.

⁹⁶ John 12:20.

in the world, and Jesus mindfully keeps the straight and narrow path. John makes the temporal convergence explicit in Jesus' slight, but poetically charged phrase, "The houre is come, that the Sonne of man should be glorified."⁹⁷ In John 12, Jesus, forecasts the transition of his redemptive mission from the Jews to his future mission of incorporating the Gentiles (Greeks) through his death. Jesus reveals to Andrew and Philip his coming death in a context that is otherwise customary. Surely, Andrew, Philip, and the rest of the disciples are well-acquainted with men and women seeking out Jesus' company. Instead, to his disciples, Jesus foretells:

Uerely, verely, I say vnto you, Except a corne of wheat fall into the ground, and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. He that loueth his life, shall lose it: and hee that hateth his life in this world, shall keepe it vnto life eternall...Now is the iudgement of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted vp from the earth, will draw all men vnto me.⁹⁸

In the same way, the Jesus in *Paradise Regained*, is made aware of his future murder on the cross.

The poetic constellation of Jesus' life in John 12 either consciously, or unconsciously influenced the poetics of *Paradise Regained*. Jesus makes clear his entire life's history and days remaining on earth, a stylistic, theological feat Milton might have noticed in his life and regurgitated in the poetics of *Paradise Regained*. At the most, how the Jesus in *Paradise Regained* embraces his future murder on the cross can be seen in a matter of a few sentences.⁹⁹ At the least, the image of wheat falling into the earth assumes that the yellow wheat decays, then that the earth swallows wheat's decay so that new life might generate. In John 12, stocked in Jesus' simple metaphor are life, death, and resurrection. John 12 thus leaves a vast, theological imprint on the Jesus of *Paradise Regained* since imagistic highways and imaginative byways,

⁹⁷ John 12:24.

⁹⁸ John 12:24-32.

⁹⁹ John 12:24-32.

like a theatrical stage with a decorated translucent screen, set in relief both of the texts' theological discussions of the passion, future glorification, and purified Church's exaltation of Jesus.

That *Paradise Regained* is conversant with the gospel of John, especially with John 12, stakes out the possibility not only that a passion narrative is embedded within the poetics of *Paradise Regained*, but also in the same instance, that Isaiah's Old Testament prophecy of the passion enlivens its poetics. Indeed, Satan tries to tear asunder the welded, complete narrative of the suffering *and* the future glorification of Jesus. Satan poses to him:

Now contrary,
If I read aught in heav'n...
Give me to spell,
Sorrows, and labors, opposition, hate,
Attends thee, scorns, *reproaches*, injuries,
Violence and *stripes*, and lastly *cruel death*.¹⁰⁰

One can read Satan's second proposition as if he says, "I read many of heaven's signs, and heaven writes many things of fate through its vast, starry cosmos, and what I learn from the heavens is that your fate will be full of sorrows, hard work, hate, injuries, whippings, and death." The word "stripes" and vague impressions of "sorrows," "stripes," "reproaches," "violence," and "cruel death" recall Isaiah 53. Observe:

He is despised and reiected of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with griefe...yet we did esteeme him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was vpon him, and with his *stripes* we are healed...he is brought as a lambe to the slaughter, and as a sheepe before her shearers is dumme, so he openeth not his mouth.¹⁰¹

However, the Satan of *Paradise Regained* can only tell us of the Messiah's pain, but cannot show us. His style of language is one of the witness, not of the poet. The opaque language with

¹⁰⁰ *PR*, IV.382-8, emphasis my own.

¹⁰¹ Isaiah 53:3-7, emphasis my own.

which Satan communicates to Jesus causes one to wonder what it is Satan saw/sees in the cosmos. As slight as Satan's imaginative impressions of Jesus' future suffering are, he gathers enough to illuminate the mind of Jesus to Isaiah's prophecy. Satan tries to crop out the entire corpus of Isaiah's prophecies, and to isolate the mortifying images of immolation in Isaiah 53 in order to ensure crystal clear narrative of hopeless death. Importantly, Isaiah 54 (among the texts Satan tries to blind Jesus from) contains hope, and imagines a burgeoning kingdom, thriving because of the Messiah's sacrificial death. Isaiah 54 foretells:

Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtaines of thine habitations: spare not, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes... For the mountaines shall depart, and the hilles be remoued, but my kindnesse shall not depart from thee, neither shall the couenant of my peace be remoued, saith the Lord, that hath mercie on thee.¹⁰²

Isaiah 53 & 54, unlike the Satan of *Paradise Regained*, cements the prophesied Messiah's death to the future hope of a kingdom where God's redeemed people might properly worship him.

Paradise Regained reenacts the Crucifixion through at least the two texts of Isaiah 53 and John 12: for Isaiah, through the association of "stripes," as well as other textual indications; for John, through the theology of laying down one's life. Further, John 12 directly references Isaiah 53, establishing Jesus as the God-crushed Messiah.¹⁰³ Thus, the intertextual work of John 12 evinces Jesus' claims to future suffering, to crucifixion through the image of being "lifted vp from the earth," and to future glory through communal worship, in that his death will "draw all men vnto me."¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Isaiah 54:2, 10.

¹⁰³ John 12:38; cf. Isaiah 53:1.

¹⁰⁴ John 12:32.

Theology of the Cross

If the argument stands that *Paradise Regained* quietly animates Jesus' life and death, then Luther's "Theology of the Cross" (*Theologia Crucis*) hangs as a centerpiece of *Paradise Regained*, and stands in direct contrast to the sixteenth and seventeenth-century Catholics' "Theology of Glory" (*Theologia Gloriae*).¹⁰⁵ In the theology of the cross, the Christian is content with God showing up in humility, not in majesty, for in his full majesty, he will destroy them. Whereas in theology of glory, the Christian defines God how they are, such that wealth, power, and knowledge are key for establishing the Christian's name, not humility, meekness, and mercy. The Jesus of *Paradise Regained* perfectly reflects the theology of the cross and Satan the theology of glory.

The most pressing site of conflict of the theology of the cross in contention with the theology of glory is book III, for in that book, Milton uses the word "glory" twenty-eight times. If the purpose of the theology of the cross is to demonstrate how God descends to humanity's plane in a form that is intelligible, yet awesome, to the human mind, heart, and soul, the theology of glory, then, renders the human into a nature unintelligible to God. Jesus begins, disputing Satan,

This is true glory...when God
Looking on the earth with approbation marks
The just man, and divulges him through Heav'n
To all his angels.¹⁰⁶

What makes the man just is that he has neither "swell[ed] with pride," nor has been "titled [among the] gods," nor has been "worshipped with temple, priest, and sacrifice," and chiefly, nor

¹⁰⁵ See Walter von Loewenich, *Luther's Theology of the Cross*, trans. by Herbert J. A. Bouman (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1976).

¹⁰⁶ *PR* III.60-3.

has been “deformed.”¹⁰⁷ At stake in these two positions is the worship of self or the worship of God. Thus Jesus argues for the evil ends of self-worship:

They err who count it glorious to subdue
By Conquest far and wide, to over-run
Large Countries, and in field great Battels win,
Great Cities by assault: what do these Worthies,
But rob and spoil, burn, slaughter, and enslave
Peaceable Nations...
Then...
Rowling in brutish vices, and deform'd,
Violent or shameful death thir due reward.¹⁰⁸

Through the negative amplification of what the theology of the cross is not, Jesus summarizes history through a metanarrative of the theology of glory, his point being to demonstrate what right worship is not so that what right worship *is* might stand in relief.

How then does the poetics of *Paradise Regained* conceive of worshiping God aright? First and foremost, Milton models the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness on the Lukan and not the Matthean account so that the climactic temptation occurs in Jerusalem, the Jewish center of worship.¹⁰⁹ Earlier in book IV, Satan and Jesus debate over right and wrong worship of God, the word “worship” appearing four times in their exchange.¹¹⁰ The gospel of John also cultivates a nascent theology of true worship further elaborated in John the Apostle’s later writing of Revelation.¹¹¹ In John, Jesus testifies to a theology of worship, remarking:

The houre commeth when ye shall neither in this mountaine, nor yet at Hierusalem, worship the Father. Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for saluation is of the Iewes. But the houre commeth, and now is, when the true (ἀληθινοί)

¹⁰⁷ PR III.81, 83-4, 86.

¹⁰⁸ PR III.71-87.

¹⁰⁹ Luke 4:1-12; Matthew 4:11.

¹¹⁰ PR IV:166-92.

¹¹¹ John 4:23-4; Rev. 19-22.

worshippers shall worship (προσκυνήσουσιν) the Father in spirit, and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him.¹¹²

Later in Revelation, John's theology of worship contrasts with theology of glory, for he writes the iterations of worship in the context of those who "worshipped (προσκυνοῦντας) his [the Beast's] image."¹¹³ Like Milton's Jesus, John also depicts wrong worship so that right worship might stand in relief. John's angel guide in revelation ensures that he knows which theology of worship God approves, three times repeating, "These are the true (ἀληθινοὶ) sayings of God."¹¹⁴ The eschatological trajectory of John's poetic theology influences the redemptive purpose of the sacraments in *Paradise Regained*, made evident through the angels' first proclamation, "true," in the context of their worship. In such a way as this are the sacraments and the Crucifixion manifested in the Johannine scene of angels worshipping the "True image of the Father," a line that if only as a passing notion, acknowledges, then sets itself apart from, the false worship of the beast's image in Revelation 16:2 and 19:20.¹¹⁵ As for John the Apostle, so for Milton in *Paradise Regained*. The right worship of God is the chief end of man. *Paradise Regained* in its quiet, subtle, poetics shows that only by way of the institution of the Christian sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist with the passion of Christ as a model for the liturgical calendar can man achieve his greatest aim.

Worshipping God Aright

The poetics of *Paradise Regained* examine sacramental theology's role in redemption. One outright objection, however, might be raised: the poem has *very little* to do with redemption because, first, it ends before Jesus institutes the Eucharist at the Last Supper, and therefore, it

¹¹² John 4:21-3.

¹¹³ Rev. 16:2; 19:20.

¹¹⁴ Rev. 19:9; 21:5; 22:6.

¹¹⁵ *PR* IV.596.

disregards the fundamental Christian theme of salvation through the cross. The poem *does* surprisingly dwell on the passion scene of Jesus. Certainly, the poem's silent ending on the matter of redemption is alarming, for Jesus "unobserved/ Home to his mother's house private returned,"¹¹⁶ but its poetics articulates a path towards humankind's redemption through humankind's adherence to the liturgical calendar and liturgical forms of worship.

The opening lines of *Paradise Regained*, through the praying of two obsecrations, evidence Milton's affinity for the Church of England: its sacraments and liturgical seasons. In providing two obsecrations, *Paradise Regained* models "ceremonialist"¹¹⁷ ordered prayer so that it can answer the need for humanity's redemption, set out in *Paradise Lost*. In his book *Everyman's History of the Prayer Book*, Percy Dearmer defines obsecrations as "entreaties that we may be delivered by the power of Christ."¹¹⁸ Obsecrations are a Christian's plea for divine intervention, inciting God and beginning their prayer with the preposition "by."¹¹⁹ At their deepest level, obsecrations call upon Jesus to restore a Christian's spiritually destitute state of existence so that the Christian can be in perfect communion with God. Dearmer outlines the order of a litany common to the Church of England – our focus being the second section, "the suffrages," and specifically the subsection, "the obsecrations."¹²⁰ His example, which begins, "By the mystery..." has implications for us to read sacramentally *Paradise Regained*.¹²¹

¹¹⁶ *PR* IV.638-9.

¹¹⁷ Guibbory (1998) provides a helpful two-part distinction of the two dominant religious ideologies in Reformation/Restoration England: ceremonialists and puritans (3).

¹¹⁸ Percy Dearmer, "The Litany," in *Everyman's History of the Book of Common Prayer* (London: A. R. Mowbray & Co., Ltd., 1912), 171.

¹¹⁹ Dearmer, "The Litany," 171.

¹²⁰ Dearmer, "The Litany," 171.

¹²¹ Dearmer, "The Litany," 171.

In the first book of *Paradise Regained*, the poem invokes Jesus' aid through two obsecration-like subordinate clauses. The obsecration clause, *by*, appears in italics. "By one man's disobedience lost," the prayer commences,

...now sing
Recovered Paradise to all mankind,
By one man's firm obedience fully tried
Through all temptation, and the tempter foiled
In all his wiles, defeated and repulsed,
And Eden raised in the waste wilderness.¹²²

The prayer announces the first line of *Paradise Lost* ("Of man's first disobedience"), but with a liturgical twist. The regenerative force of the obsecration thrusts Adam's disobedience into the presence of the poet's sacramental poetics, which opens the Christian to see God's handiwork in the world. The prayer utilizes the dual meaning of raised: it reverses the meaning of "raised" as destroyed in "the waste wilderness" to "raised" as built out of "the waste wilderness." Entrapped within these semantics is Milton's idea of restoration, an idea quite different from the political restoration imagined by high church congregants with the return of Charles II to the English throne in 1660 (which begins the English Restoration). Through liturgical prayer that recalls Jesus' holiness (contrasted with Adam's "disobedience") and redemptive work (in the act of resisting "temptation"), *Paradise Regained* envisions Jesus restoring old Eden's shattered riggings of "waste wilderness" after Satan's bombardment. The poetics of *Paradise Regained* thus recalls and restores *Paradise Lost*: Satan's deception of a third of heaven's angels in book V; the war in heaven in book VI; and Satan's tempting Eve in book IX). The two obsecrations

¹²² *PR* I.4-7, emphasis my own.

demonstrate that the focus of the poetics of *Paradise Regained* amazingly centers on questions of liturgy, liturgical seasons, and sacramentality.¹²³

The first lines of *Paradise Lost* foreground the problem of redemption, and the poetics of *Paradise Regained* imaginatively resolves the problem by reflecting ceremonialist liturgy. *Paradise Lost* orients the Reformed view of human depravity alongside the expectation of forgiveness in its opening lines:

Of one man's 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
Restore us, and regain the blissful seat.¹²⁴

We can begin to trace how *Paradise Regained* restores the "blissful seat" through its intertextual associations with one Church Father's exegesis on redemption in light of the sacrament of baptism. When one compares *Paradise Regained* to Ambrose's imaginative association of Adam's and Eve's exile to Jesus' return from the desert, one can realize a space of admiration in Milton's poetics for high church liturgy. Held in relief to Ambrose, *Paradise Regained* shows its attention to the Christian sacrament of baptism. Ambrose comments on Luke 4:1-2 that Jesus' retreat back into the wilderness gains back paradise. Just as Ambrose keeps in mind Adam's and Eve's fall in the garden as he comments, "It is fitting that it be recorded that the first Adam was cast out of Paradise into the desert, that you may observe how too the second Adam returned

¹²³To address Milton's Laudian or Puritan lean is outside of the scopes of this article. For reference in the debate over Milton's denominational predilection, see Nicholas McDowell, "How Laudian was the young Milton?" *Milton Studies* 52 (2011): 3-22. For the Puritan-minded Milton, see Barbara K. Lewalski, *The Life of John Milton* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008); Barbara K. Lewalski, "How radical was the young Milton?," in *Milton and Heresy*, ed. Stephen B. Dobranski and John P. Rumrich (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 49. For the Laudian-minded Milton, see Thomas N. Corns and Gordon Campbell, *John Milton: Life, Work, and Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Thomas N. Corns, "Milton's antiprelatical tracts and the marginality of doctrine," in *Milton and Heresy*, ed. Stephen B. Dobranski and John P. Rumrich (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 39.

¹²⁴ *PL* 1.1-4.

from the desert to Paradise,” so too does Milton have in his mind Adam’s and Eve’s fall, captured in the opening lines of *Paradise Lost*, “Of man’s first disobedience...,” and Jesus’ return from the desert to paradise, shown in the final lines of *Paradise Regained*, “Home to his mother’s house.”¹²⁵ In the context of Ambroses’ commentary, we might also remember that John the Baptist just baptized Jesus in the Jordan River. Because Milton begins his redemption narrative with reflection on the Christian sacrament of baptism, we have a reason to investigate how the poetics of *Paradise Regained* transforms Christian liturgical/sacramental practices.

Preserving Sacramental Theology

The Satan of *Paradise Regained* displays for Jesus not just a banquet, which – like Paul – clearly distinguishes “The Lord’s Table” and “the devil’s table,” but – unlike Paul – shows an entire revolution against the poetics of *Paradise Regained*. Satan strategizes to sanctify worldly things in order to convince Jesus that he is a human *being* God, rather than God *being* a human. He aims to convince Jesus to view the secular things as *actual* sacred objects and practices – the word things purposely being used to display the expanse of Satan’s purpose. The complexities of Schwartz’s reference to 1 Corinthians 10:21 must be explored, and in doing so, a few questions about the banquet scene in *Paradise Regained* must be raised. Schwartz rightly finds that “The entire banquet scene dramatizes the succinct verse from I Corinthians: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord’s table and the table of the devils,” but she does not overturn the stone hiding Satan’s more religiously provocative and subtle attack on Jesus.¹²⁶ Through Jesus’ denial of the banquet, *Paradise Regained* questions the puritan division of light/dark, heaven/hell, and soul/body,

¹²⁵ Ambrose, *Luke: Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture. New Testament*, 73.

¹²⁶ Schwartz, *Sacramental Poetics at the Dawn of Secularism*, 73.

summarily expressed in the words of the seventeenth-century puritan, William Prynne, from his critique of the immorality of English theatre, *Histrio-Mastix*:

...because Christians cannot drinke the Cup of the Lord, and the Cup of Devils: they cannot be partakers of the Lords Table, and the Table of Devills: for what fellowship hath Righteousnesse, with Unrighteousnesse? What communion hath Light with Darkenesse? What concorde hath Christ with Belial? what part hath hee that Beleeveeth with an Infidell? or what agreement hath the Temple of God with Idols?¹²⁷

Interestingly, either through Prynne or some other means, Schwartz turns towards the I Corinthians passage Prynne quoted in order to enhance her point that the banquet scene dramatizes not redemption through food (and its correlative, the Eucharist), but obedience to God's will.¹²⁸ Teskey, unlike Schwartz, who claims that obedience to God's will is true heroism, suggests that, in fact, true heroism in *Paradise Regained* is "patience" and "martyrdom."¹²⁹ Teskey is closer to the essence of true heroism in *Paradise Regained* than Schwartz, but his definition of martyrdom is not broad enough. He defines martyrdom in the Greek sense of the word, meaning to bear witness, but when Satan confronts Jesus, more than Jesus' witness to the truth is at stake. True heroism in *Paradise Regained* is martyrdom in the sense of bearing witness (i.e. Teskey) and dying out of obedience to God's will. The aspect of dying is significant with respect to any discussion regarding *Paradise Regained*, because the poetics of *Paradise Regained* rehearse the season of Lent, the passion narrative, and the Crucifixion. At his table, Satan extends to Jesus the chance to enter his imagination and *live*, and let all others *die*. When Jesus to Satan says, "Thy pompous delicacies I contemn,/ And count thy specious gifts no gifts but *guiles*," the etymology of the word guile, its aspect of imagination, suggests just that Satan to

¹²⁷ William Prynne, *Histriomastix* (New York: Garland Publishers, 1974), 33.

¹²⁸ Schwartz, *Sacramental Poetics at the Dawn of Secularism*, 73. Prynne's Calvinism distinguishes him from the later Milton. However, Milton taps into mainstream Protestant thought in seventeenth-century England through widespread Protestant tropes, motifs, and rhetoric.

¹²⁹ Teskey, *Delirious Milton*, 152.

Jesus insinuates just that much – *live*, and let all others *die*.¹³⁰ A sacrifice will appear on either table. On the Lord's Table, Jesus is the sacrifice; on the devil's table, all of human and created kind are. Jesus' refusal of Satan's imagination is his acceptance of the Crucifixion, and his commitment to the redemptive work his body and blood will do through the Eucharist. The shadows of I Corinthians 10:21, which *Paradise Regained* shines light on, leads to a few questions. In Milton's later life, what distinguished the Eucharist from a sacrifice to idols? How could he discern the Lord's Table from the devil's? And more mysteriously, could the Lord's Table transform into the devil's, could the devil's table transform into the Lord's? At the heart of the questions is the critical debate over which direction Milton faces in *Paradise Regained*: towards the dawn of the enlightenment, or the eclipse of a sacral view of history and the world.

Satan promulgates an all-earth-encompassing form of sacramental secularism by marring Jesus' relationship to the Lord's Table so that he can distort the Eucharist, thereby, burning one bridge to redemption. In-line with his plan, Satan presents Jesus animal meat from the land, from the air, and from the sea.¹³¹ Observe the movements around the earth:

Our Saviour lifting up his eyes beheld
 In ample space under the broadest shade
 A Table richly spread, in regal mode,
 With dishes pil'd, and meats of noblest sort
 And savour, Beasts of chase, or Fowl of game,
 In pastry built, or from the spit, or boyl'd,
 Gris-amber-steam'd; all Fish from Sea or Shore,
 Freshet, or purling Brook, of shell or fin,
 And exquisitest name, for which was drain'd
 Pontus and Lucrine Bay, and Afric Coast.¹³²

¹³⁰ "guile, n.". OED Online. January 2018. Oxford University Press.
<http://www.oed.com.proxy.lib.utk.edu:90/view/Entry/82339?rskey=XIDRJn&result=1&isAdvanced=false> (accessed February 19, 2018); *PR* II.390-91. See *OED*, "guile," n.1&2.

¹³¹ *PR* II.342-344.

¹³² *PR* II.338-47.

Satan's banquet has the potential to invert the Christian path to redemption. In Christian orthodoxy, the Eucharist symbolizes one man's death so that all may live, but Satan's banquet represents all creatures' death so that one may live. The reversal is none other than his attack on the poetics of *Paradise Regained* through a perversion of the Eucharist. Satan's table displays all the earth's creatures sacrificed for Jesus' life. The poetics of *Paradise Regained* not only puts at stake who Jesus receives life from (namely, God the Father), but also questions the kind of God Jesus is. Will Jesus consume his creatures/creation in order to appease his carnal desire of hunger? The question centers on the nature and action of God's wrath. Or, will Jesus defer his hunger in order to prolong the life of his creatures/creation? The question associates with the concern over God's judgment. The poetics of *Paradise Regained* is not so much about Jesus receiving his life source from Satan, so much as it is about parsing the universal significance of Jesus' fidelity to God's word, and bringing into the light the implicit suspense of Satan's temptation. If Jesus obeys Satan, the banquet becomes the table for Jesus to remember the death of all his creatures, rather than all his creatures to remember his death.

3.

Shadow Descending: An Etymological Study of the Poetics of *Paradise Lost*

The most recent developments in theology appear to me to be an attempt to come to an agreement about the problem of act and being.

- Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*

Flight

The conflict Milton faces at the outset of *Paradise Lost* is neither “man’s first disobedience,” nor his “justify[ing] the ways of God to men,”¹³³ but is the problem of reconciliatory poetics. Why is poetry the medium for Milton to display God’s judgment and redemption of humanity? A partial answer is found through the metaphor of flight throughout *Paradise Lost*. But even flight illuminates the potential that the poet and the literary critic alike foolishly trust in the sole means of transcendence implied by poetic flight. I quote from David Quint’s incredibly learned article, “Fear of Falling: Icarus, Phaethon, and Lucretius in *Paradise Lost*,” in order to draw out one distinction about how poets talk about reconciliation and how critics talk about how poets talk about reconciliation. Quint:

In the world of both physical and spiritual death after the Fall, where it is impossible for the faithful to stand, much less ascend, unless upheld by grace (3.174-80), where, by the end of the poem, Adam and Eve are walking downhill toward the “subjected plain” (12.640), the only flight above the fallenness of things may be the imaginative flight of poetry. The soaring elevation of Milton’s verse approximates the Icarus-like Milton to the Phaethon-like heroism of the Son, and poetry offers him its own kind of salvation.¹³⁴

The formula that Quint follows is a familiar one. First, Quint explains that Milton, the poet, flies away from the sodden earth into the pure state of the heavens. Second, Quint, the literary critic,

¹³³ Milton, *PL* I.1, 26.

¹³⁴ David Quint, “Fear of Falling: Icarus, Phaethon, and Lucretius in *Paradise Lost*,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 57, no. 3 (Autumn 2004): 878.

reasons that Milton's poetic flight through his "verse" into the heavens signals a salvation narrative through poetry. But another interpretation of Milton's flight metaphor is available, one that considers flight in the opposite direction in which Quint relates Milton's verse travels. The lines of *Paradise Lost* do leave the earth, but they do not forsake the earth.

In the first twenty-six lines of Book I, what appears to plainly be Milton's hubris to "assert eternal providence," is questioned at key turns in his verse. It is true that Milton elevates himself above "Oreb," where Moses received the Ten Commandments from Yahweh, and that he soars over the "Aonian mount," home to Greek muses, transcending their inspiration. However, these rehearsals of the spirited meanings of poetry quickly halt. The verse from lines 1 to 18 soared like an arrow takes flight, and then, when Milton turns his attention to the Holy Spirit, he tersely, as if considering his words, for they can only be few, and therefore, must be precise, says, "Instruct me."¹³⁵ What happened? His flight has halted. His confrontation with the Holy Spirit hovering over all there is to know, all that will be, all of matter ready for God to vivify, stunts him. What he thought he knew from flight – from transcending the law of Horeb, or the grace of the hill of Zion – coming into the presence of God's Holy Spirit revealed to him his deficiency, captured in the succinct phrase, "for thou know'st."¹³⁶ The verse of *Paradise Lost* could only bring Milton so close to salvation without confronting the Holy Spirit of God. In the short phrase is the unavoidable comparison between Milton and his God. Importantly, the comparison is spatial, and to that end, inspirational, in the sense of receiving creative vision. To say that the androgynous image of the Holy Spirit is mysterious is partial at best. The immensity of the image is the beast in need of a name. In order to describe the Holy Spirit, we must describe

¹³⁵ *PL* I.19.

¹³⁶ *PL* I.19.

the abyss on which it broods. The word abyss stems from the Hebraic tradition, envisioning the belief of a subterranean, world-wide flood of water, both pre-existing before creation and later responsible for Noah's flood.¹³⁷ The boundaries, in this sense, are prescribed. Abyss, in another sense, infinitely spans horizontally and downwardly, but not towards the realm of heaven, where Milton flew four lines before his meeting the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit broods with "mighty wings outspread," but does not fly away; rather, it remains productively attached to the substance that will make the future earth and cosmos. Milton is there too, lower than he once was, learning the meaning of the Holy Spirit "brooding," and imagining the origins of thought itself. Although the *OED* traces the first reference of "brooding" as contemplation to after *Paradise Lost*, Milton's seeking counsel from the Holy Spirit, who quietly "sat'st brooding on the vast abyss," strikes a middle-ground between the morbidity of the late nineteenth century and the sentimentality of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.¹³⁸ The image of the dove-like Holy Spirit exerts its humongous, grounded girth across the abyss, and Milton is beside it. Why? It is not because through his verse he imagines salvation, as Quint suggests, but because he subordinates himself through the verse of his poetry to the liturgy and the sacraments of God. In the words of liturgical theologian, David Fagerberg, "Sacraments reassemble and restructure matter towards its liturgical end, as seen in the book of Revelation, and they capacitate us in our liturgical identity as cosmic priests".¹³⁹

¹³⁷ "abyss, n.". OED Online. January 2018. Oxford University Press.
<http://www.oed.com.proxy.lib.utk.edu:90/view/Entry/860?rskey=fGQE0W&result=1> (accessed February 20, 2018).
 See *OED*, "abyss," n.1.b; *PL* I.15.

¹³⁸ "brood, v.". OED Online. January 2018. Oxford University Press.
<http://www.oed.com.proxy.lib.utk.edu:90/view/Entry/23740?rskey=DiZVBB&result=1&isAdvanced=false>
 (accessed February 20, 2018). See *OED*, "brood," v.II.5; "brood," v.I.4.b, II.7.a, II.8.b; compare II.6, II.7.b.

¹³⁹ David Fagerber, "Liturgy, Signs, and Sacraments," in *The Oxford Handbook of Sacramental Theology*, ed. Hans Boersma and Matthew Levering (Oxford UP, 2015), 463.

Liturgy and sacrament represented through flight in *Paradise Lost* are not means to escape earth, but are hermeneutics that interpret the range of experience of life *on* earth. Flight is not about leaving, flying away, but about returning home, seeing the cosmic in the earthly, or the sacramental in the mundane. The surprising aspect of *Paradise Lost* is not *that* the idea is present, but *when* the idea presents itself. After considering how the formation of his verse could possess him to pride like Bellerophon, whose crippling fall from Pegasus' back disabled his eyes, and left him destitute, Milton turns his entire body – and his head – towards the earth, like Chagall's beggar. Thereby, when Milton says, "Half yet remains unsung, but narrower bound/ Within the visible Diurnal Spheare; Standing on Earth, not rapt above the Pole,"¹⁴⁰ he both identifies the transformation of his vision from an earth/heaven dichotomy to a heaven on earth reality (i.e. sacramentality) and affirms the role of community in realizing the vision. Milton's use of liturgy and sacrament in order to unveil Heaven's presence on earth testifies to his earnestness to be a part of all of God's created order, rather than to see *through*, or *beyond*, all of God's created order. Milton's theme of flight traverses the rooted image of the Holy Spirit and the grounded image of himself on earth in Book VII, thereby reinforcing Adam's and Eve's liturgical and sacramental relationship in the world.

Poetics

Milton's poetics is a poetics of knowing. Although it is easy to conjure a studious image of Milton, shoulders perched, and back hunched over his candle-lit desk, Milton's formulation of knowing is neither merely cerebral, nor intellectual. The late Marshall Grossman, in thinking about the degree of revelation possible due to the constraints of genre, paraphrases the complex issue in the term "poetry as a cognitive modality," or as the editor puts it in the abstract, "poetry

¹⁴⁰ PL VII.23.

as thinking.”¹⁴¹ The interplay of poetry and belief, which to Grossman means rational thinking, is the theme he explores across the “dramatic arc” of Milton’s later poems.¹⁴² I step alongside Grossman in this article in order to unveil the idea of poetry as knowing in *Paradise Lost*, and integrate faith, theology, and community into knowing’s working definition.

The distinction to follow between knowledge and knowing sets the stage for the surrounding conversation through which literary critics have thought about Milton’s poetics. In the 1660s, knowledge, even though it is a derivation of knowing, constructs its sense of learnedness in the confines of “that which is known” or “the sum or what is known”.¹⁴³ While the definition is certainly expansive, it does not allow for revelation of any kind, and treats knowledge as if it is a permanent fixture hanging above the earth, and all one must do is look up, see it, and thereby gain all of “that which is known.”¹⁴⁴ The reason to approach skeptically a wholesale metaphor of knowledge in *Paradise Lost* comes from heaven’s angel, Raphael, communing with Adam and Eve in Book VII. His warning them in line 126, “But knowledge is as food,” has the potential to describe knowledge not only as contained, but also entirely consumable. However, the broader context of his warning reasserts that the poetics of knowing in *Paradise Lost* synthesizes Milton’s Christian beliefs,¹⁴⁵ divine revelation through Heaven and earth, and the intersections and distinctions of Heaven’s and earth’s communities into an ethics

¹⁴¹ Marshall Grossman, “Poetry and Belief in *Paradise Regained*, to which is added, *Samson Agonistes*,” *Studies in Philology* 110, no. 2 (2013): 382-83.

¹⁴² Grossman, “Poetry and Belief in *Paradise Regained*, to which is added, *Samson Agonistes*,” 385.

¹⁴³ “knowledge, n.”. OED Online. January 2018. Oxford University Press.
<http://www.oed.com.proxy.lib.utk.edu:90/view/Entry/104170?rskey=QJk8qY&result=1> (accessed February 19, 2018), emphasis my own. See OED, “knowledge,” n.1.9.b.

¹⁴⁴ See OED, “knowledge,” n.1.9.b.

¹⁴⁵ In this article, I do not venture to argue for the definitive substance of Milton’s Christian belief (e.g. Socinian, Arian, or Orthodox) because I take for granted the assumption that first, Milton’s beliefs are in flux, and second, that faith is the more stable, transcendent idea through which to talk about the relationship of poetics and knowing.

of liturgy concerning the sacraments, prayer, and worship. The broader context reconstitutes dehydrated knowledge through its associations with the word know:

Enough is left besides to search and *know*.
But knowledge is as food, and needs no less
Her temperance over appetite, to *know*
In measure what the mind may well contain,
Oppresses else with surfeit, and soon turns
Wisdom to folly, as nourishment to wind.
Know then...¹⁴⁶

Search and *know*. *Know* in measure. *Know then*. The three-fold repetition of the word “know,” in conjunction with its twice emphatic position first, at the end, and then, at the beginning of both line and sentence in Milton’s blank verse opens up the sense of knowledge beyond “that which is known” to that which *can be* known.¹⁴⁷ Christopher Hill is right in remarking, “Milton got his ideas not only from books but also by talking to his contemporaries.”¹⁴⁸ The scene presents the life cycle of knowing through the relationship of Heaven’s and earth’s creatures.

On the one hand, the distillation above – of poetics, knowledge as knowing, and community – into the ethical command of God is not engaging in the same set of questions asked by mid-twentieth century scholars such as C. A. Patrides, and twenty-first century scholars such as David Urban and Peter C. Hermann.¹⁴⁹ Their primary question concerns Milton’s denominational affiliation: Is he heterodox? Orthodox? Nominal? Anglican? Puritan? On the other hand, it has become a commonplace to perceive the religious beliefs of seventeenth-century

¹⁴⁶ *PL* VII.125-31.

¹⁴⁷ See *OED*, “knowledge,” n.I.9.b, emphasis my own.

¹⁴⁸ Christopher Hill, *Milton and the English Revolution* (New York: Viking, 1977), 5.

¹⁴⁹ David V. Urban, “Speaking for the Dead: C. S. Lewis Answers the New Milton Criticism; or, “MiltonMinistries” Strikes Back.” *Milton Quarterly* 45, no. 2 (May 2011): 95-106; David V. Urban, “The Acolyte’s Rejoinder*: C. S. Lewis and the New Milton Criticism, Yet Once More,” *Milton Quarterly* 46, no. 3 (2012): 174-181. Peter C. Herman, “C. S. Lewis and the New Milton Criticism,” *Milton Quarterly* 45, no. 4 (December 2011): 258-266; C. A. Patrides, *Milton and the Christian Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966).

authors such as John Donne as metonymic of political ideology.¹⁵⁰ In both cases, literary critics have not resolved the conflict between poetics, faith, doctrine, theology, and community, but muted it. Brian Cummings has identified one of the escalating realities in twentieth and twenty-first century literary criticism: the politicization of the reading of early-modern texts.¹⁵¹

Concomitant to Cummings' previous observation is his implicit critique of the fiction of objective literary criticism. Catherine Gimelli Martin frames the criticism through specifically identifying the preference literary critics show toward decoupling faith from early-modern literature.¹⁵² Their criticisms belong to a trend among early-modern scholars in particular, and humanities scholars in general, who anticipate, and perhaps even precipitate, the dawn of the relatively recent discourse on the post-secular.¹⁵³

But the post-secular is a novel trend among humanities scholars in the relatively young twenty-first century, and the movement, rather than explain to Miltonists, or early-modern critics alike, the meaning of *Paradise Lost*, might in fact mirror something peculiar about some of the most urgent questions of our own time. Gordon Teskey asks about this phenomenon from two angles – ontological and epistemological – but his questions necessarily looks through both angles at the same time, like the two eyes of microscope: “(1) Why is it that when writing about *Paradise Lost* we end up writing about our modernity? (2) Why is it that to write about modernity we feel it necessary to conduct that writing through the text of *Paradise Lost*?”¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁰ Brian Cummings, “The Protestant and Catholic Reformations,” in *The Oxford Handbook of English Literature and Theology*, ed. by Andrew Hass, David Jasper, and Elisabeth Jay (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 89-90.

¹⁵¹ Brian Cumming, “The Protestant and Catholic Reformations,” 89-90.

¹⁵² Catherine Gimelli Martin, Review of *Milton's Angels: The Early-Modern Imagination*, by Joad Raymond. *Literature and Theology* 27, no. 1 (March 2013): 119. <https://doi-org.proxy.lib.utk.edu:2050/10.1093/litthe/frs066>

¹⁵³ For instance, google scholar returns twelve mentions of the term “post-secular” from the year 1980 to 1999, and only two sources come before the year 1995.

¹⁵⁴ Teskey, *Delirious Milton*, 62.

Cummings, Martin, and Teskey are each speaking about the very same issue that enlivens the polarities within Milton's poetics of knowing. Seen through Raphael's partial metaphor that "Knowledge is as food," Cummings gives the sense that modern literary critics, to use Milton's words, throw some victuals of knowledge away for their preferred viands. Martin, then, forwards the idea that the scholar is responsible for a truthful representation of the author and their work. And Teskey, although he does not put it in these terms, I would suggest, imagines Milton's *Paradise Lost* to be impervious to (satisfying) literary criticism/analysis.¹⁵⁵ He therein gestures, although does so unaware, towards the poetics of knowing – an approach to the total sum of life.

What would it mean to immerse oneself in the story of *Paradise Lost*? Or, to *transgress* God's commands, as Kimberly Johnson argues of Raphael, whom she claims exaggerates God's command by excessively expounding the story of the war in Heaven?¹⁵⁶ The image of the bower throughout *Paradise Lost* is central to Milton's poetics of knowing. The bower represents all of cosmic being unfolding on earth through the intimacy of relationship and story exchange between Heaven's and earth's inhabitants. The entrenched image of the bower sets itself apart from Teskey's later reading of *Paradise Lost* as understood through "transcendental engagement," or the "struggle on behalf of the good in this world by means of philosophical abstraction, isolating principles for study."¹⁵⁷ In the most apt respect, the bower is the host of several fronts of criticism of scholastic theology and metaphysical philosophy mounted by Raphael and Adam, eating, drinking, and speaking in communion. Where Teskey envisions

¹⁵⁵ Teskey, *Delirious Milton*, 54.

¹⁵⁶ Kimberly Johnson, "Raphael's 'Potent Tongue': Power and Spectacle in *Paradise Lost*," *Milton Quarterly* 46, no. 4 (2012): 205-218. Johnson, in her article, "'Raphael's 'Potent Tongue': Power and Spectacle in *Paradise Lost*," writes, "Far from being an 'ideal school master,' however, Raphael proves to be perhaps too much the 'sociable Spirit' (5.221); his vivid and entertaining depiction of the War in Heaven works implicitly against the task he's been set" (206).

¹⁵⁷ Teskey, *The Poetry of John Milton*, 8.

Milton as poet, who flies both upwards and downwards between Heaven and earth, the bower unveils the radically rooted version of Milton the poet. Teskey does, however, pick up on the importance of flight to one aspect of knowing – namely, storytelling – in *Paradise Lost*.¹⁵⁸ Teskey's summation circulates around a question of Milton's poetics. Ida Langdon frames the issue of Milton's poetics by asking with what form Milton would have written a book on poetics, asking, "How would he have been most likely to present this theory [of poetry] for himself?"¹⁵⁹ Milton's book on poetics is *Paradise Lost*.

Scholars, however, have interpreted Milton's poetics in manifold ways. In 1979, "Milton's monk," as Roy Flannagan fondly calls the eminent Miltonist, Joseph Wittreich, published *Visionary Poetics*, in which he situates Milton within an apocalyptic/prophetic literary tradition.¹⁶⁰ The next version of Milton's poetics, Michael Lieb's *Poetics of the Holy*, argues that Milton's *Paradise Lost* is a "numinous" poem that acts as a hierophant (ancient interpreter of symbols, e.g. priest), thus leading its readers into the presence of the holy.¹⁶¹ Thirteen years later, Mindele Treip, in *Allegorical Poetics & the Epic*, expands the definition of allegory according to the Renaissance literary tradition in order to argue that *Paradise Lost* is allegorical.¹⁶² In 2003, Susannah Mintz's *Threshold Poetics*, through psychoanalytic theory, studies the relational dynamics in *Paradise Lost* and *Samson Agonistes* in order to further understand the selfhood/the

¹⁵⁸ Teskey, *The Poetry of John Milton*, 27.

¹⁵⁹ Ida Langdon, *Milton's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art: An essay with a collection of illustrative passages from his works*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1924), vii.

¹⁶⁰ Roy Flannagan, review of *Visionary Poetics: Milton and His Legacy*, by Joseph Anthony Wittreich. *Milton Quarterly* 14, no. 1 (March 1980): 23; Wittreich Jr., Joseph Anthony Wittreich Jr., *Visionary Poetics: Milton's Tradition and His Legacy* (Kingsport Press, 1979), 213.

¹⁶¹ Michael Lieb, *Poetics of the Holy: A Reading of Paradise Lost* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Chapel Hill Press, 1981), 328.

¹⁶² Anne Treip Mindele, *Allegorical Poetics & the Epic: The Renaissance Traditions to Paradise Lost* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky).

self.¹⁶³ Then, Susanne Wood, in *Milton and the Poetics of Freedom*, situates her analysis of Milton's poetics within the multiplex of liberty, free will, conscience, and agency, calling Milton's art, "invitational poetics."¹⁶⁴ Their studies broadly cover the camps of criticism, whose spectrum ranges from the strictly literary, to the religious, to the theoretical, and to the political.

The poetics of *Paradise Lost*, however, are built upon the premise that what is known and can be known is given by the creator God through the experience of relationship with Him *and*, not to be confused with, *by the means of*, the external and embodied, sacramental world. If Milton ever wrote a statement of faith, it is *Paradise Lost*. In his book *Ascent*, the philosopher of literature Tzachi Zamir develops the theme of knowledge/known in *Paradise Lost* through the meta-critical angle seen before in the works of Grossman and Teskey. *Ascent* attempts to "underscore the differences between philosophy and literature, rather than their synergy."¹⁶⁵ Through an exploration of the intersectionality of philosophy, religion, and literature, he reads *Paradise Lost* in an effort to explore the uncanny "silence" their intersection produces. The silence, he claims, challenges "superficial interdisciplinary sentiment."¹⁶⁶ In a word, his contentions about authentic forms of knowing, which scholars and general readers alike attribute to logical, systematic deductions of God's ways, his ways with humanity, assents to the argument that *Paradise Lost* is, in fact, doing something quite different. The central theme of *Ascent* is that within *Paradise Lost*, there is an interplay of "genuine" and "distorted" forms of knowledge.¹⁶⁷ He argues that the epic, *Paradise Lost*, "explicitly dons an overly artificial

¹⁶³ Mintz, Susannah B. Mintz, *Threshold Poetics: Milton and Intersubjectivity* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2003).

¹⁶⁴ Susanne Woods, *Milton and the Poetics of Freedom* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne UP, 2013).

¹⁶⁵ Tzachi Zamir, *Ascent: Philosophy and Paradise Lost* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 1.

¹⁶⁶ Zamir, *Ascent*, 2.

¹⁶⁷ Zamir, *Ascent*, 5.

anthropomorphic cloak,” and thereby renders its pursuit of fundamental knowledge more epistemologically humble than philosophical (and we could also add, theological) treatises.¹⁶⁸

Milton could not have left theo-philosophical abstractions (i.e. Zamir) and “struggle[d] on behalf of the good in this world by means of philosophical abstraction,” as Teskey puts it.¹⁶⁹ The two scholars have reached an impasse on the premise of if and to what extent the poetics of *Paradise Lost* mines theo-philosophical arguments in order to explain the process for knowing the fundamental undercurrents of the universe: how humans relate to God, to each other, to their community, and to the world. The poetics of knowing dictates that the choice is to side with Zamir. *Paradise Lost* is a theo-existential poem that tethers one’s experience with God to their life experience. The great twentieth-century ethicist, H. Richard Niebuhr puts it this way, “The establishment of this friendship [reconciling men to each other and to their world] is to me the key problem in human existence.”¹⁷⁰ Raphael tackles metaphysical questions in Book V-VII, and importantly does so in the context of the bower. After listening to Raphael, Adam concludes that “to know/ That which lies before us in daily life,/ Is the prime wisdom; what is more, is fume.”¹⁷¹ His point begs the question: Why is Milton’s *De Doctrina Christiana* not considered Milton’s masterpiece? What does pointing to the poetics of *Paradise Lost*, as an answer to the question, conceal from us? Knowing, as Milton conceives of it, is one possible response. Milton sets out a view of theology that grounds itself in life-sharing communities. For further clarity, we might recall H. Richard Niebuhr’s reason for not publishing his writings, “[I]nstead of being a dialogue with his students, his colleagues, and with the time at large, his ethical reflections

¹⁶⁸ Zamir, *Ascent*, 60-2.

¹⁶⁹ Teskey, *The Poetry of John Milton*, 8.

¹⁷⁰ H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self: An essay in Christian Moral Philosophy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 44.

¹⁷¹ *PL* VII.192-94.

would become a finished piece of business, a part of the past rather than a lively, appreciative, and critical response to the present.”¹⁷² Milton does not disavow learning, or literature, either in the person of Adam in *Paradise Lost* (VII.125-31), or Jesus in *Paradise Regained* (II.286-364); those who read these two poems are witnessing the collision of Milton’s faith and poetics, the dynamic reconstruction of his ideas about the essence and location of genuine knowledge.

Knowing the World Inside of the Atom

The poetics of knowing shows the world inside of the atom, and the atom inside of the world. David Fagerberg stresses that liturgy permeates the sacraments and that the sacraments permeate liturgy. His main idea is that “liturgical life is lived around sacrifice and sacrament,” which mirrors the worship taking place before the throne in Heaven.¹⁷³ He therefore argues that two liturgies, one through the Church on earth, and one through the saints in Heaven, is a false representation of the reality of liturgy and sacrament. His uniting vision of liturgy and sacrament will make clear how the poetics of *Paradise Lost* represents a holistic image of life in the scene of Adam and Eve communing with Raphael in the bower. The holistic image extends not only a sacramental imagination, but to be more precise, also a sacramental epistemology completed in the chaotic integration of theology with life, existentialism, and ethics. Fagerberg’s idea of sacrament and liturgy necessitates the striking multiplication of theology and existentialism since the Church’s liturgy on earth is immersed in Heaven’s liturgy before the throne. The contours of his argument, which reject phenomenological, sociological, anthropological, and ritological lenses for studying Christian liturgy and sacrament, confirm the words of the twentieth-century

¹⁷² R. Richard Niebuhr, “Preface,” in *Responsible Self: An essay in Christian Moral Philosophy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 2.

¹⁷³ Fagerburg, “Liturgy, Signs, and Sacraments,” 465.

French theologian, Jean Daniélou, that Christian liturgy and sacraments are “multi-dimensional symbol[s].”¹⁷⁴

The poetics of knowing integrates liturgy into sacrament, and sacrament into liturgy so that it can further know the substance of Christianity. In the 1660s, Milton is writing on the cusp of the emergence of some of the Enlightenment’s most prodigious philosophers (i.e. Locke). Of less importance to the argument that follows is the content of their thought,¹⁷⁵ and of great import is Clifford Siskin’s insight that in the late seventeenth-century on through the twentieth-century, incredible transformations in writing genres were taking place.¹⁷⁶ *Paradise Lost*, in one respect, resists the genre transformations underway in the late seventeenth-century, and thereby, through human to angel and angel to human dialogue, namely community, grounds knowing (epistemology) and what can be known (knowledge) inside of Adam’s and Eve’s bower.

Concerning genre, Clifford Siskin’s *System* calls for a new direction of studying Enlightenment philosophers in order to understand, not so much *what* they thought, but *how* they thought.¹⁷⁷ Through the lens of Siskin’s idea of system, which has its conceptual roots in Galileo Galilei’s observations about the three moon’s orbiting Jupiter, to view *Paradise Lost* (VII.119-78 in which Raphael tells Adam about the workings of the universe) as a sophisticated example that converts discourse from the essay to the system is incorrect. Siskin’s study offers to *Paradise Lost* a negative definition. *Paradise Lost* is, importantly, not systematic. A clue from the beginning of Adam’s conversation with Raphael partially validates the point: “And to their

¹⁷⁴ Daniélou quoted in Fagerberg, “Liturgy, Signs, and Sacraments,” 459.

¹⁷⁵ Stephen M. Fallon, *Milton Among the Philosophers: Poetry and Materialism in Seventeenth-Century England*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991).

¹⁷⁶ Clifford Siskin, *System: The Shaping of Modern Knowledge* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2016), 29-42.

¹⁷⁷ Siskin, *System*, 20.

viands fell, nor seemingly/ The angel, nor in mist, the common gloss/ Of theologians.”¹⁷⁸ Milton not only critiques the systematic theologian’s erudition, but also frames their flawed thinking in penetrating the depths of the Christian life. The critique of the “common gloss” anticipates the hair-splitting analysis of the literary critic¹⁷⁹ and brings the literary critic into contact with the uncomfortable realization that they may not have fairly represented the text.

The gravitas of liturgy and sacrament in the poem of *Paradise Lost* and their entailment with the poetics of knowing prepares an encounter with “the nameless graces,” to use Alexander Pope’s phrase.¹⁸⁰ Nameless, because who can adequately describe *Paradise Lost*’s instruction? The poetics of knowing in *Paradise Lost* traverses further and descends deeper into the longstanding questions of who I am, and why I am here than does the “common gloss.”¹⁸¹ In the “Introduction” to *Literature and Theology*’s special issue, “Poetry and Belief,” Thomas Day figures the problem on these terms, asking, “Does...not the expression of truth in poetry, be that of the nameless graces or of God’s, derive largely from its capacity to convey...something which could not, or could only inadequately, be paraphrased or glossed in prose?”¹⁸² On the one hand, Day represents the interdisciplinary work of thinking about literature theologically. On the other hand, A. J. Nickerson stands in for the interdisciplinary study of philosophy and literature.¹⁸³ The problem Day and Nickerson both are facing is the question of the form of literary criticism: they are asking a question about genre. They are also asking a separate, but thematically interrelated

¹⁷⁸ *PL* V.434-36.

¹⁷⁹ Kelley Maurice, *The Great Argument: A Study of Milton’s De Doctrina Christiana as a Gloss upon Paradise Lost* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941).

¹⁸⁰ Pope, Alexander Pope, *An Essay On Criticism: [Two Lines In Latin]*, (London: printed for W. Lewis, and sold by W. Taylor, T. Osborne, and J. Graves, 1711), 10.

¹⁸¹ *PL* V.435.

¹⁸² Thomas Day, “Introduction,” *Literature and Theology* 25, no. 1, Poetry and Belief (March 2011): 7.

¹⁸³ Nickerson, A. J. Nickerson, “On The Philosophy of Poetry, ed. John Gibson.” *Philosophy and Literature* 40, no. 1 (April 2016): 311-12.

question about *what* meaning is, and *where* meaning is. In other words, if *Paradise Lost* unveils the substance of Christianity *through* its medium, what is the result when the medium is broken apart in the literary-critical essay? The question attempts to bridge Siskin's meta-historical study of system as knowledge generator with the contemporary introspection about what knowledge the literary-critical (not to be confused with the literary essay) conveys and conceals, and creates and destroys. Quintessential to the makeup of *Paradise Lost* are belief and faith: poetics as belief, or poetics as faith.¹⁸⁴ *Paradise Lost* locates meaning in its poetics, and its poetics is more than its formal, aesthetic features; liturgy and sacrament are the atoms of *Paradise Lost*, which contain the entire world.

But even the move away from system, or systematic theology, and towards the argument that Milton uses narrative to answer timeless theological questions such as the origin of evil (Diana Benet¹⁸⁵), or how an immutable God acts in a time and space-bound world (Samuel Fallon¹⁸⁶), leaves a strikingly large gap in what literary critics have meant by narrative. Benet's argument of the origin of evil is three-fold: Sin's, Satan's, and Raphael's story. As she unfolds her argument, "coherence" and "plausibility" come to mean that Raphael's narrative rests more so on *how* evil originates, rather than the *why*.¹⁸⁷ Narrative, in her case, means chronological storytelling. In Fallon's view, he reasons that narrative in *Paradise Lost* is always a horizontal exchange between earthly beings.¹⁸⁸ Narrative, in other words, relies on time, and heaven (and God) transcend time, and thus, narrative does not exist in heaven. In the case of Fallon and

¹⁸⁴ In the line of inquiry of poetry as belief, see Grossman, "Poetry and Belief in *Paradise Regained*, to which is added, *Samson Agonistes*;" and *Literature and Theology's* special issue (2011), "Poetry and Belief."

¹⁸⁵ Diana Treviño Benet, "The Fall of the Angels: Theology and Narrative," *Milton Quarterly* 50, no. 1 (2016): 1-13, esp. 2.

¹⁸⁶ Samuel Fallon, "Milton's Strange God: Theology and Narrative-Form in 'Paradise Lost,'" *ELH* 79, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 33-57, (esp. 35-6, 52).

¹⁸⁷ Benet, "The Fall of the Angels: Theology and Narrative," 6.

¹⁸⁸ Fallon, "Milton's Strange God: Theology and Narrative-Form in 'Paradise Lost,'" 52.

Benet, narrative is a time-bound form of communication peculiar to the earth and its creatures. The issue with their use of narrative is not that they have misidentified *transcendence*, but *descendence*. Raphael's communing with Adam and Eve in the bower from Book V-VIII stands as the primary example of descendence, and is also the centerpiece of the poetics of *Paradise Lost*. The proposed description of narrative hearkens back to Fagerberg's idea of sacrament and liturgy: liturgical life is the holistic view of humanity's relationship to the divine, through which the genre of worship and sacrament on earth, realized through poetry (in the case of *Paradise Lost*), enjoin the reality of worship in heaven, as revealed in John's *Revelation*. The prominent estimation of liturgy and sacrament in *Paradise Lost* treats Milton neither as a poet of the transcendent,¹⁸⁹ nor the sublime, but as a poet of sounding, as a poet of descent.

Knowing the Atom Inside of the World

The metaphor of sounding comes alive in the poetics of *Paradise Lost* through a study of the etymology of three interrelated, nautical terms: sails, sound, and bower. These terms somewhat relate and support Teskey's idea of "transcendental engagement," but with a slight, and important caveat.¹⁹⁰ He explains that transcendental engagement is "a dialectical movement from here [earth] to there [heaven] and back again: out of history and into myth, and then out of myth and into history."¹⁹¹ The metaphor of sounding, however, particularly in the nautical images of sails, sound, and bower, displays God revealing himself in relationship to the human, and supposes that God immerses the human in heaven's divinity. In this sense, *Paradise Lost* forecasts neither Adam, nor Eve justly rising to God,¹⁹² rather, it shows God descending to them,

¹⁸⁹ Schwartz, *Sacramental Poetics at the Dawn of Secularism*, 6, esp. 79.

¹⁹⁰ Teskey, *The Poetry of John Milton*, 8.

¹⁹¹ Teskey, *The Poetry of John Milton*, 8.

¹⁹² Eve's dream in Book V. 28-94.

and admitting them, who live on earth, into heaven's life.¹⁹³ Philip Edwards's study of sixteenth and seventeenth-century authors, specifically his chapter, "That fatall and perfidious Bark," traces the relationship of hope and nautical metaphors.¹⁹⁴ In *Paradise Lost*, a poem that begins and ends with the Fall, images of journeying, safe harboring, and anchoring, each imply a top-down direction from the surface to the water's depths, or from heaven to the earth.

In Book V, the multi-dimensional meaning of the verb, sailes, comes into full view when Raphael lights away from heaven, and flies down to Adam's and Eve's bower. The sentence of his flight begins with the urgent word, "Down," immediately bringing to attention the direction of the angel's flight, and in the background, supplying further support for the liturgical and sacramental orientation of heaven manifested for Adam and Eve.¹⁹⁵ "Down thither prone in flight," harnesses the acute descent and immeasurable speed of the angel, creating a rather sharp image, like a needle threading through leather.¹⁹⁶ "Down thither prone in flight/ He speeds, and through the vast Ethereal Skie/ Sailes between worlds and worlds" is the picture of the angel's approach.¹⁹⁷ As expected, the verb "sailes" from as early as the ninth-century signifies any kind of water vessel skirting across the surface of a body of water, powered by "any means other than oars."¹⁹⁸ Shortly thereafter, speech assimilated the technology of the sail into its meaning of sailing, such that the verb designated the mechanical advantage of wind propelling the water

¹⁹³ See Raphael's meeting with Adam and Eve in Book V-VIII, and Michael's revealing to Adam the way, in the biblical sense, in Book XI-XII.

¹⁹⁴ Philip Edwards, *Sea-Mark: The Metaphorical Voyage, Spenser to Milton* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1997), 179.

¹⁹⁵ *PL* V.266.

¹⁹⁶ *PL* V.266-7.

¹⁹⁷ *PL* V.266-8.

¹⁹⁸ "sail, v.1". OED Online. January 2018. Oxford University Press.

<http://www.oed.com.proxy.lib.utk.edu:90/view/Entry/169807?rskey=ABqIne&result=5> (accessed February 19, 2018). See *OED*, "sail," v.1.a.

vessel through a wind-catching device.¹⁹⁹ Beginning in the late fourteenth-century, the seemingly divine motion of these crafts hovering above the water must have inspired centuries of poets, for William Langland is the forerunner of poets (and per the *OED*, Milton follows him) who, in *The vision of William concerning Piers the Plowman*, uses the verb sails to describe the motion of the soul.²⁰⁰ At the same time in the late fourteenth-century, and this is the point alluded to neither by commentators of *Paradise Lost*, nor the *OED*, sailing starts to represent leaving “the place of anchorage,” which in terms of nautical metaphors implies safe harbor, sure waters, or sound epistemology. Raphael’s descent is like the chain of an anchor that has been dropped from a ship. His vertical descent evokes the implication of the nautical verb and noun, sound. His descent leads him to Adam’s and Eve’s bower, another word for an anchor, which will be explored later on. The implication of Raphael’s sailing from heaven to earth is that the liturgical and sacramental life in heaven couples itself to the life of Adam and Eve on earth. Raphael’s descent is the revelation of the poetics of knowing in *Paradise Lost*.

The etymology of sound further unpacks the meeting of heaven with earth in *Paradise Lost*. From as early as the fourteenth-century, the verb sound, garnered the meaning of to pierce, which conveys one object diving into another, like Raphael from heaven to the bower in Book V.²⁰¹ By the fifteenth century, a nautical use of sounding came into the English language when seamen associated the idea of piercing particularly with the ocean.²⁰² To sound thereby describes the act of tossing a measuring line over the side of a sea vessel in order to ascertain the ocean’s

¹⁹⁹ See *OED* “sail,” v.2.”

²⁰⁰ See *OED*, “sail, v.4.a.”

²⁰¹ “sound, v.2”. *OED Online*. January 2018. Oxford University Press.

<http://www.oed.com.proxy.lib.utk.edu:90/view/Entry/185130?rskey=esiXrv&result=9&isAdvanced=false> (accessed February 19, 2018). See *OED*, “sound,” v.2.1.

²⁰² See *OED*, “sound,” v.2.2.a.

depths. The spatial imagery of top to bottom has started to set in. At the turn of the sixteenth-century, seamen began to need to know, not only how deep a particular body of water was, but also if the body of water was safe to set anchor.²⁰³ In this slight transformation of the word sound is the epistemological root crucial to understanding the angel, Abdiel (Book V) and the bower (Books V-VIII).

The fundamental difference between sounding and transcending is in the direction of inquiry. Both sounding and transcending imply an object of vast dimension and limitless mystery. Sounding and transcending are hermeneutical tools of the poet for probing more of the mystery of their object. Where transcending implies a departure from earth towards some unseen, celestial body, sounding dives deeper into the objects of the universe already on display. The metaphor of sounding is to say that the mystery is already in front of the poet's eyes, and their task as poet is to go deeper and deeper into the matter. It is a metaphor adequately tuned for harmonizing with Milton's monist materialism. The metaphor multiplies Milton's image of the abyss – its Hebraic root and its uncircumscribed, horizontal and downward boundaries discussed in the above section, Flight. Gradually becoming Milton's discursive faith-act,²⁰⁴ the metaphor of sounding anneals the image of the abyss, with the use of abyss (which paradoxically contains the

²⁰³ "sound, n.1". OED Online. January 2018. Oxford University Press.

<http://www.oed.com.proxy.lib.utk.edu:90/view/Entry/185122?rskey=t4cXmj&result=1&isAdvanced=false> (accessed February 28, 2018). See *OED*, "sound," n.1.II.4.a.

²⁰⁴ I am exploring the intersection of faith creation/(re)generation/decimation and poetics in greater detail in a book-length project. Milton's faith-act is the creation of his later poems. His faith-act does not elicit a transcendent, but a descendent approach to the Christian life. Milton does not enter into heaven, return to earth, and interpret heaven through earth; rather God enters the world, his character imbues it, and through him, Milton interprets the world. However, through their poetics, Milton's later poems show their limitations to render God's presence in the world. Milton does not write these poems so that they can bear salvation on their shoulders, but so that the temple of salvation can brick by brick crush them.

limitlessness of knowing), and with the gospel of John's mysticism,²⁰⁵ represented in Jesus' robust, yet pithy phrase, "Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me" (John 14:11). In *Paradise Lost*, the abyss and the metaphor of sounding necessarily lead back to God, and more specifically, to his body. Teskey weighs in on the problem of God's body and genuine knowledge in these terms, "As a concept, God's body is not a body at all but a substance that extends to infinity."²⁰⁶ The metaphor of sounding shows the world in the atom, and the atom in the world. In *Paradise Lost*, the objects sounded are Abdiel and the bower, and since it is their correlative, so too is God's body.

Imagine Satan approaching Abdiel. They are standing face to face when Satan seeks out where Abdiel's allegiance lies by peeling back every single layer of Abdiel's being, and sees that Abdiel is not only obedient to Satan's commands, but also is *like* him. In Abdiel, he finds a safe harbor to expose his plans for rebellion. The scene unfolds:

So spake the false Archangel, and infused
 Bad influence into th' unwary breast
 Of his associate; he together calls,
 Or several one by one, the regent powers,
 Under him regent, tells, as he was taught,
 That the most high commanding, now ere night,
 Now ere dim night had disencumbered Heav'n,
 The great hierarchal standard was to move;
 Tells the suggested cause, and casts between
 Ambiguous words and jealousies, to sound
 Or taint integrity; but all obeyed
 The wonted signal, and superior voice
 Of their great potentate...²⁰⁷

²⁰⁵ Clark, "Paradise Regained and the Gospel according to John;" Revard, "The Gospel of John and *Paradise Regained*: Jesus as 'True Light;'" and Reisner, "Spiritual Architectonics: Destroying and Rebuilding the Temple in *Paradise Regained*."

²⁰⁶ Teskey, *Delirious Milton*, 88.

²⁰⁷ *PL* V.694-706.

In this passage, the sentence in which Satan's action, "to sound," appears is opaque. However, sound is the axis of the passage, and requires further examination that builds upon the *OED*'s work. The *OED* has not sufficiently considered the valences and complexities of the above passage. To define sound as "to investigate," as does the *OED*, falls short of the needle-like probe with which Satan examines Abdiel's conscience in order to confirm that Abdiel is a secure angel in whom he can divulge his plans.²⁰⁸ Perhaps Milton strangles his syntax from lines 694-706 so that he can represent the paradox of an evil mutiny in heaven; the syntax signaling that sound's obvious meaning of investigation, in this context, is not going to be the case. Investigation leads to the simple conclusion of facts already in place, whereas sound penetrates the depths of the human, or in the case of Abdiel, the angelic heart. To sound comes into contact with the heart so that it can test the heart's reliability, like a plumb line gouging the ocean floor. It probes Abdiel's depths of being in an effort to see the fidelity, or infidelity, of Abdiel's heart to God's liturgical designs. Abdiel in leaving, not only follows Satan, but also turns his back on the worship of the Father and the Son in heaven, summarized in these stark terms: Satan "resolved with all his legions to dislodge, and leave/ Unworshipped, unobeyed the throne supreme."²⁰⁹

The verb, "sound," not only estimates the depths and quality of the ocean's floor (and angel's heart), but also projects ideas of activity and rest. From around the ninth-century, sound connoted the exhibition of one's power through swimming.²¹⁰ However, around the fourteenth-century, at the same time as sound begins to signify to sink to great depths of the ocean, to sound

²⁰⁸ See *OED*, "sound," v.2.6.b; compare v.2.7.

²⁰⁹ *PL* V.668-70.

²¹⁰ See *OED*, "sound," n.1.1.1.

becomes synonymous with rest.²¹¹ Within the fourteenth-century, sound, meaning the act of resting, had also split from a verb into a noun. Sound had started to represent the swimming bladder of a fish, which helps the fish preserve its energy by maintaining an advantageous altitude in the water.²¹² Meanwhile, the sense of safe dwelling in sound was going through a simultaneous transformation through seamen naming geographical locations as safe passages, dwellings, and harbors.²¹³ Seamen had called a safe passage of water between two lands a sound, underscoring the previous qualities of measuring and evaluating the ocean's depth so that they can decide if they should, in fact, drop anchor, and rest. *Paradise Lost* certainly uses this definition of sound. In Book VII in the creation narrative, Milton narrates, "Forthwith the sounds and seas, each creek and bay/ With fry innumerable swarm."²¹⁴ Jesus calling forth the sound in creation emphasizes the senses of temperance and safety inherent in creation, the feelings finding their expression once more in Adam's and Eve's pithy phrase, they "know to know no more."²¹⁵

In *Paradise Lost*, the bower is a symbolic container of reliable knowledge. But how and why did Milton arrive at this construction of the bower? The word bower in the mid-seventeenth-century was undergoing a shift in literary culture and in maritime usage. Consider how the word bower in the mid-seventeenth-century evolved, and how that bares on Adam's and Raphael's conversation with respect to Milton's poetics of knowing. As early as the eleventh-century, that the word bower is a literary, poetic word connoting a thicket of idyllic trees, whose shade covers its inhabitants, and whose covering possibly even serves as a pastoral shelter is more or less its

²¹¹ See *OED*, "sound," v.2.2.a; compare n.1.II.4.b.

²¹² See *OED*, "sound," n.1.I.2.

²¹³ See *OED*, "sound," v.2.2.a; compare n.1.II.4.a.

²¹⁴ *PL* VII.399-400.

²¹⁵ *PL* IV.775.

common usage.²¹⁶ While Milton certainly employs this definition of bower in Book V, his use of bower is much more complex than the first definition allows.

We should, therefore, explore the other definitions of bower. The second definition of bower, also in use from as early as the eleventh-century, embellishes experience of one inside of the forested enclave, for example, pictorializing a private, set apart room that distinguishes the strangers from family.²¹⁷ The sense of privacy is what is important here, and markedly presents itself in Book IV. Adam and Eve retire to their bower once night arrives in order to make love. Milton relates,

This said unanimous, and other rites
Observing none, but adoration pure
Which God likes best, into their inmost bow'r
Handed they went...nor turned I ween
Adam from his fair spouse, nor Eve the rites
Mysterious of connubial love refused²¹⁸

The bower in this instance is a place for Adam and Eve to sound one another in their marital rites, and by extension, is a place of rich intimacy, where acquaintances may gather under its roof, secluded from the rest of Eden's society, in order to ascertain wisdom with regard to God and life.

For the third definition of bower to be viable, it relies on Milton's familiarity with neologisms, which he undoubtedly was. In the middle of the seventeenth-century, seamen ascribed the word bower to their ships' anchors.²¹⁹ The literal purpose of an anchor is to force a ship to stay in place in an ever changing tide. The verb, discerned, first given to Adam (V.299)

²¹⁶ "bower, n.1". OED Online. January 2018. Oxford University Press.
<http://www.oed.com.proxy.lib.utk.edu:90/view/Entry/22215?rskey=jlfeSQ&result=1&isAdvanced=false> (accessed February 28, 2018). See OED, "bower," n.1.1.a.

²¹⁷ See OED, "bower," n.1.2.a.

²¹⁸ PL IV.736-43.

²¹⁹ See OED, "bower," n.4.1&2.

and then to God (V.711), is a weighty verb that signifies knowledge's substance. With that, Milton conjures the image that "Adam discerned, as in the door he sat/ Of his cool bow'r," with the adjective cool implying both a stability of mind and permanence of place, not an erratic mind and volatile state.²²⁰ The implications for Milton's views on epistemology are close at hand. The bower's purpose is to represent the sure epistemology of the poetics of knowing.

The poetics of *Paradise Lost* cycles through the metaphor of sounding through characters such as Adam, Eve, and Raphael entering the bower. The fact that Milton examines epistemology in the context of community and storytelling in the bower, where Raphael recounts the rebellion in Heaven, the fall of Satan, and the creation of the universe, and that Satan stalks the bower's periphery, reveals Milton in the process of producing a spectrum of knowledge. To be inside of the bower, in the midst of community and narrative, is to know most fully; to be outside of the bower is not to know fully.

Community

Milton's view on *living* communally, sacramentally, liturgically, and poetically, and *thinking* theologically, doctrinally, and scientifically have been the topics of the essay, for they are the critical points of inquiry in *Paradise Lost*. You will notice, and perhaps wonder why, poetically resides closer to sacramentally and liturgically, than it does to theologically. The list transforms from ways of *being* in the world to *organizing* one's thinking about the world. On the one hand, being, in Milton's view, means reproduction and regeneration, in essence, newness entering the world and awaiting its revelation and discovery. Being is the charismatic prayer of Adam and Eve, who "neither various style/ Nor holy rapture wanted they to praise," and being is

²²⁰ *PL* V.299-300.

the immanence of God saturating the earth with new and everlasting vitality.²²¹ Adam and Eve experience his immanence in three-fold relationship through their work in the garden (IX.205-386), with each other (IV-V), and in communing with the divine (both God in the garden, and Raphael in the bower). The division between being and organizing marks an uncanny outlook on Milton's learning/learnedness, but perhaps summarizes the logical conclusion to his monist materialism.

On the other hand, the prominence of Francis Bacon's new science in the seventeenth and eighteenth century commandeered the concept of organizing, which enveloped philosophy, and even theology, under its umbrella. In his essay, "A short history of knowledge formations," Peter Weingart traces the history of the creation of the academic discipline, and the evolution of academic specialization.²²² The central question of the new science is whether the scientist produces or arranges knowledge. Where Baconian scientists view knowledge as complete, but disorganized, and thus in need of their systematizing, Adam, Eve, and Raphael in the bower represent Milton's view of knowledge as limitless, open to revelation, and contrived through not only observation, but experience. Milton's place among the Baconian scientists is still a pressing concern among literary critics, such as Catherine Martin. From twentieth century critics such as Arthur Lovejoy and Kester Svendsen, to only list two, Martin reclaims the version of Milton, whom, she argues, is not only well-versed in, but also contributes to, rather than critiques, the new science emerging in the seventeenth-century. She sets Adam's and Raphael's conversation in Book V within the context of scientific empiricism so that she can contrast inspiration with

²²¹ *PL* V.146-47.

²²² Peter Weingart, "A Short History of Knowledge Formations," in *The Oxford Handbook of Interdisciplinarity*, ed. Jose Antonia Lopez Cerezo, Wolfgang Krohn, William Newell, Nancy Tuana, and Peter Weingart, 3-14 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 4-5.

observation.²²³ She thus explains Raphael's rejection of scholasticism as a result of the history of science. In thinking about creation through Satan's deceptive, revelatory spark, however, Martin has not accounted for the underlying competitions in the late seventeenth century between creation and organization. Knowledge, when seen through the lens of *Paradise Lost*, is too stable, closed, and demarcated for Milton. *Paradise Lost* contrives his deeper sense of knowledge – knowing – through the prevalence of creative, living beings hosting one another through community, liturgy, sacrament, and poetry. Roger Scruton's comparison of doctrinal statements to poetry illuminates one of the shadows, which otherwise remains dark, in Book V of *Paradise Lost*.²²⁴ The light his statement shines on the shadow is that human relationships with the divine are essential to constructing genuine knowledge, to use Zamir's phrase.²²⁵ The poetics of *Paradise Lost* puts doctrine to the test through the hospitality that Adam and Eve show Raphael in the context of the bower.

The poetics of *Paradise Lost* questions the epistemological integrity of systematic theology and doctrinal creed. Hence, to seek after Milton's theology as distinct from his poetry is as illuminating as it is deceptive. Such studies broach the tip of Milton's theological iceberg because they do not consider the viewpoint that Milton, through his later poems, arrests himself away from systemization. The veritable epistemology of metaphysics and systematic theologies comes into question in the wake of Adam's utterance of his life experience with respect to God's will and the Tree of Knowledge. Adam to Eve relates:

²²³ Catherine Gimelli Martin. "'What if the Sun Be Centre of the World?': Milton's Epistemology, Cosmology, and Paradise of Fools Reconsidered," *Modern Philology* 99, no. 2 (2001): 239.

²²⁴ Roger Scruton, "Poetry and Truth," in *The Philosophy of Poetry*, ed. by John Gibson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015): 157.

²²⁵ Zamir, *Ascent*, 62.

He who requires
From us no other service than to keep
This one, this easy charge, of all the trees
In Paradise that bear delicious fruit
So various, not to taste that only Tree
Of Knowledge, planted by the Tree of Life,
So near grows death to life, whate'er death is,
Some dreadful thing no doubt.²²⁶

In Milton's Eden, there is one Tree of Life, and one Tree of Knowledge. If Milton ascribed to the Platonic metaphysics of the Forms, in his description in Book V, he would have planted a singular Tree of Life in Heaven, more perfect than the Tree of Life planted on Earth in the Garden of Eden. He does not do so, however. In Book V, the host of heaven, abiding in exuberant worship of the Son of God, "Dispersed in bands and files their camp extend/ By living streams among the trees of life."²²⁷ In other words, Milton reverses the model of Forms so accustomed to Platonic thought. For Milton, the singular good on Earth is a multiplicity of good in Heaven. Milton ventures into timeless theological issues through a poetics of knowing in order to re-imagine where stable epistemology, or the substance of Christianity, can be found.

The three displays of community (heaven's, heaven's and earth's, and earth's) in *Paradise Lost* linearly traces Milton's approach to the substance of Christianity from heaven to earth, and thereby foregrounds heaven's liturgy in the substrate of Adam's and Eve's life. First, in turning to heaven's community, the word, meanwhile, comes into focus. The word "Meanwhile" in Book V line 711 is the dam that separates the pool of Satan's "ambiguous words" and "Abstrusest thoughts" from the river of genuine knowledge, which *Paradise Lost* fashions in the Father's community with the Son.²²⁸ In the bower in Book V, Raphael's critique

²²⁶ *PL* IV.419-26.

²²⁷ *PL* V.651-652.

²²⁸ *PL* V.703; V.712.

of the erudite, philosophical ploys of Satan's plans to rouse Beelzebub from sleep and route a third of heaven's angels north in rebellion "to dislodge, and leave/ Unworshipped, unobeyed the throne supreme", highlights the deeper, more robust, sense of knowing shared within the community of the Father and the Son.²²⁹ Raphael's censure of Satan's theo-philosophical thought stems from God's own lambaste. God identifies Satan's epistemology as the "Abstrusest," the word carrying a rich philosophical history, and being more precise than its synonyms, obscure and recondite. The definition of abstruse ironically signifies the certainty of being uncertain, and further discovers the widening chasm separating Satan's niche, unstable epistemology and God's communal, enduring epistemology. God's declaration and Satan's deception occur in the contrasting setting of God's flame lit throne room and Heaven's gray, twilit atmosphere. Milton caches Satan's deception in "the dusky hour/ Friendliest to sleep and silence," in order to hone in on the isolation of Satan's thought from God's.²³⁰

From heaven's community to heaven's and earth's shared community, the communion Adam and Eve share with Raphael differs from the community of the Father with the Son only in degree, but not in kind. The scene in Book V of Adam, Eve, and Raphael all gathered in the bower to share a meal together is critical to understanding a revelation of genuine knowledge. Concurrent with the scene in Book V, the word, "meanwhile," also cements the idea that Milton does not intend for scholars merely to intellectually engage with *Paradise Lost*, organizing erroneous concepts such as Milton's theology on any given theological topic (e.g. Milton's view of the Son).²³¹ In this vein, Milton portrays,

²²⁹ *PL* V.669-70.

²³⁰ *PL* 668-69.

²³¹ On heterodox readings of Milton, see John Rumrich, *Milton Unbound: Controversy and Reinterpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 4; J. Martin Evans, "Critical Responses, recent," in Milton in

So down they sat,
 And to their viands fell, nor seemingly
 The angel, nor in mist, the common gloss
 Of theologians, but with keen dispatch
 Of real hunger, and concoctive heat
 To transubstantiate.²³²

Transubstantiation, in this case, is neither a cause for theological debate among seventeenth-century Roman Catholics, Anglicans, and Protestants in England, nor is it, in this case, a reference to Christ, the Eucharist, or any other such doctrinal issue that would end up inside of a systematic theology, or doctrinal book. Milton most intends transubstantiate neither to adhere to Catholicism,²³³ nor any other doctrine, but intends it to mean to the digestion of an angel. The narrator, in the above passage, undercuts the use of systematic theologies as proof texts for genuine theology by undermining the supposed signification, admittedly in a humorous way, of the doctrine of transubstantiation.

The hosting scene provides one explanation for the purpose of knowledge, with broader implications for a reading of the entire poem. In that vein, to read the *De Doctrina Christiana* as his theological urtext misinforms the scholar, since the act misinterprets Milton's views on

Context, ed. Stephen B. Dobranski (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 144-45; Neil Forsyth, *The Satanic Epic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), I; Peter C. Herman, "Paradigms Lost, Paradigms Found: The New Milton Criticism," *Literature Compass* 2, no. 1 (January 2005): 14; Michael Bryson, *The Tyranny of Heaven: Milton's Rejection of God as King* (University of Delaware Press, 2004), 23; William Poole, "Theology," in *Milton in Context*, ed. Stephen B. Dobranski (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 477-78. On orthodox readings of Milton, see Stanley Fish, *Surprised by Sin: The Reader in Paradise Lost* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967); C. S. Lewis, *A Preface to Paradise Lost* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961); Malcom Guite, "Holy Light and Human Blindness: Visions of the Invisible in the Poetry of Henry Vaughan and Milton," in *Faith, Hope, and Poetry: Theology and the Poetic Imagination* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 125-144; David V. Urban, "Speaking for the Dead: C. S. Lewis Answers the New Milton Criticism; or, 'MiltonMinistries' Strikes Back." *Milton Quarterly* 45, no. 2 (May 2011): 95-106.

²³² *PL* V.433-8.

²³³ *Catholic Encyclopedia: Revised and Updated Edition*, ed. Robert C. Broderick (Nashville: Nelson Publishers, 1986), 583. Its definition of transubstantiation: "As defined by the Council of Trent, transubstantiation is 'a singular and wondrous conversion of the total substance of wine into the blood of Christ, the external appearances only remaining unchanged.'"

knowing through community, liturgy, sacrament, and poetry.²³⁴ In this line of thought, Zamir argues that *Paradise Lost* demonstrates that “genuine knowledge” comes through the “ethics of hosting.”²³⁵ He distinguishes two divisions within knowledge.²³⁶ Curiosity for unnecessary knowledge, especially when that curiosity contends with the human’s relationship with the divine, is the lowest form of knowledge. Community is among, if not the, highest form.²³⁷

Lastly, coming into the view of the human community, Milton’s narrative, through the subtle transition word, “meanwhile,” calls attention away from the idea that *Paradise Lost* is a system of ideas hidden from the non-fit reader, and towards the idea that *Paradise Lost* is, in fact, Milton’s attempt to integrate life, faith, theology, and doctrine. Adam’s and Eve’s response to God’s created order in Book V as they awake from their night’s repose illustrates Milton’s synthesis. Of Adam and Eve, Milton relates:

Lowly they bowed adoring, and began
Their orisons, each morning duly paid
In various style, for neither various style
Nor holy rapture wanted they to praise
Their Maker, in fit strains pronounced or sung
Unmeditated, such prompt eloquence
Flowed from their lips, in prose or numerous verse,
More tuneable than needed lute or harp
To add more sweetness.²³⁸

The passage straddles the partisan lines of seventeenth-century Anglican and Puritan order of prayer in order to stress the importance of the theological truth vested in the living liturgy and sacrament of a community obedient to God, and not in fruitless arguments over a denomination’s claim to orthodoxy. As Milton navigates the bewildering haze of theological and denominational

²³⁴ Maurice, *The Great Argument: A Study of Milton’s De Doctrina Christiana as a Gloss upon Paradise Lost*.

²³⁵ Zamir, *Ascent*, 18.

²³⁶ Zamir, *Ascent*, 38-9.

²³⁷ Zamir, *Ascent*, 40.

²³⁸ *PL* V.144-52.

factionalism in England in the late seventeenth century, he also leads Adam and Eve to worship God alone, and no other form of religious order, whether they be the Protestant, “holy rapture,” or the Anglican, “various styles” (V.147; V.146). After their prayers, and Milton’s transition to God’s commanding Raphael to warn Adam “to beware/ He swerve not too secure.../...by deceit and lies,” Milton centralizes the bower as a place of intimacy and sure epistemology once again.²³⁹

But the passage does more than express liberty in worship or frame fundamental questions of the life of faith. The passages point to the limitations of scholastic and systematic theology to provide answers to a believer’s most basic questions, such as, “Why do I pray?” The integration of life, the world, and everything in it becomes more of a burden than scholastic and systematic theologians and metaphysicians are prepared to bear. The point taken, we now return to the primary problem and question established at the beginning of the essay: the problem of reconciliatory poetics; and the question of why Milton displays God’s judgment and redemption of humanity through poetry. Poetry, as *Paradise Lost* shows, *might* bear the burden of humanity’s Fall, and the joy of their freedom. Of the later poems, *Paradise Lost* is the first shadow of Milton’s doubt to descend on the practice of reconciliatory poetics.

²³⁹ *PL* V.237-43.

4.

The Gray Angel: Poetics of Transgression and Pardon in *Paradise Lost*

In Book VI of *Paradise Lost*, we must ask why God commends the archangel Abdiel for his short participation with and later rejection of Satan and his apostate angels since Abdiel's innocence and merit are not quite as straightforward as scholars suppose.²⁴⁰ In part, the answer lies in Milton's poetics of narrative theology – a theology born out of a community of storytellers. In the bower, Raphael tells Adam of Abdiel's fall to glory. A fall to glory, in the case of Abdiel, means that God glorifies Abdiel as an example of servanthood and faithfulness, despite Abdiel's partial reluctance to maintain complete obedience to him. Abdiel as the theologically gray angel is Milton's exegetical and eisegetical character employed inside of *Paradise Lost* so that Milton can perform his faith-act and discover the reconciliatory limitation of form.

Milton senses that his poetry/poetics is not enough to save and that his later poetry, in fact, transgresses God's Will, but he also knows that, paradoxically, for him to write poetry is God's will. In the same way, Abdiel falls onto the double-edged sword: God wills him to obey, and that obedience leads him into rebellion against God, and against his anointed. Milton's faith-act gives rise to the poetics of knowing. His faith-act ultimately shows him that poetry is the means to find the limitation of the written word, and the poetics of knowing then turns him

²⁴⁰ Allan H. Gilbert, "The Theological Basis of Satan's Rebellion and the Function of Abdiel in 'Paradise Lost,'" *Modern Philology* 40, no. 1 (Aug. 1942): 19-42; Stanley Fish, *Surprise by Sin*, 186; Francis C. Blessington, "Abdiel and Epic Poetry," *Milton Quarterly* 10, no. 4 (Dec. 1976), 108-13; Charles W. Durham, "To stand approv'd in sight of God": Abdiel, Obedience, and Hierarchy in "'Paradise Lost,'" *Milton Quarterly* 26, no. 1 (Mar. 1992): 15-20.; Diana Treviño Benet, "The Fall of the Angels: Theology and Narrative," *Milton Quarterly* 50, no. 1 (2016): 1-13, esp. 10.

outward towards the world, toward relationship, toward creation, where he can begin to live in faith.

Commentators typically point out the name Abdiel, meaning, “servant of God,” is proof enough for his steadfastness in the wake of Satan’s rebellion. The name itself comes from an obscure genealogy in 1 Chronicles 5:15. Abdiel’s place as the father of the chief of a Hebrew household carries very little, if any, significance into the action of exalting Jesus in Book V and VI. Milton’s plucking of Abdiel, however, from Chronicles indicates his participation with a long tradition of the Church Fathers naming angels from these genealogies.²⁴¹ For further proof of Abdiel’s obedience, commentators need only to read the end of Book V. Speaking with Adam in the bower, Raphael frames Abdiel as a seraph of “whom none with more zeal adored/ The deity,” and in doing so, points Adam towards the action of his story, the praise of Jesus.²⁴² The thread of Abdiel glorifying Jesus becomes thicker when one considers that the epic narrator integrates Psalm 69 and John 2 through the four uses of the word “zeal” to describe Abdiel (V.805, 807, 849, 900). Zeal recalls the Psalmist’s prophetic utterance, “Zzeale of thine house hath eaten mee vp,” which John redistributes to justify Jesus’ unblemished, messianic identity within the context of Jesus driving the sacrifice salesmen out of the temple with a whip (Psalm 69:9; John 2:17). Following these intertextual relationships typologically aligns Abdiel with the Psalmist, and even more so, with the Messiah.²⁴³ For further evidence of Abdiel’s allegiance,

²⁴¹ *Paradise Lost, 1668-1968: Three Centuries of Commentary*, ed. Earl Miner, William Moek, and Stephen Edward Jablonski (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2004), 233, line 805.

²⁴² *PL* V.805-6.

²⁴³ Phillip Donnelly, *Milton’s Scriptural Reasoning: Narrative and Protestant Toleration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 114-15. Donnelly argues that Milton models the scene in Book V of Abdiel on Psalm 2, in bringing into focus the final judgement anticipated in Abdiel’s speech and at the end of Psalm 2.

scholars have pointed to Abdiel's speech at the end of Book V.²⁴⁴ Abdiel is the chief accuser of Satan's false theology, authority, and identity. After Satan censures God's law and espouses his rebellious factions' freedom, Abdiel opposes Satan's argument, calling it "blasphemous (theology), false (authority), and proud (identity)".²⁴⁵

Commentators also tend to view Abdiel's defiance of Satan as distinctly Miltonic,²⁴⁶ by which they mean Milton tends to envision himself, amongst heretics, as the faithful one, whose choices demand eternal memorialization. They find evidence for the Miltonic-Abdielic relationship in two places. First, at the end of Book V, Abdiel stands and defies the law-breaking horde only to be "faithful found,/ Among the faithless, faithful only he".²⁴⁷ In this case, Milton's stark image contrasts the beacon of light Abdiel is in the inherent darkness of Satan's and his crews' deceit. Second, at the beginning of Book VI, God in everlasting words, after Abdiel's confrontation with Satan, declares to Abdiel,

Servant of God, well done, well hast thou fought
The better fight, who single hast maintained
Against the revolted multitudes the cause
Of truth.²⁴⁸

Abdiel is the only angel to speak directly with God in *Paradise Lost*, and Milton, perhaps, seizes the opportunity to point out that Abdiel upheld his obedience to God singlehandedly. Stanley Fish exemplifies the heroic reading of Abdiel. He quotes H. R. Swardson's question – "Does Milton really think he is singing 'the better fortitude of Patience and Heroic Martyrdom' (IX.31-

²⁴⁴ Fish, *Surprised by Sin*, 180-96; Gilbert, "The Theological Basis of Satan's Rebellion and the Function of Abdiel in 'Paradise Lost,'" 19-42; Blessington, "Abdiel and Epic Poetry," 108-113; Durham, "To stand approv'd in sight of God": Abdiel, Obedience, and Hierarchy in "Paradise Lost," 15-20; Benet, "The Fall of the Angels: Theology and Narrative," 10.

²⁴⁵ *PL* V.809.

²⁴⁶ *Paradise Lost* 1668-1968, 235, line 899; Teskey, *The Poetry of John Milton*, 336, "we may venture to call Abdiel a self-portrait."

²⁴⁷ *PL* V.896-97.

²⁴⁸ *PL* VI.29-32.

2)?²⁴⁹ Where? What space and prominence does he give it?” – in order to frame the issue of Milton’s inclusion of Abdiel in *Paradise Lost* (quoted in Fish, 181). Fish responds to Swardson’s question, claiming, “The answer that immediately suggests itself is Abdiel, lauded by Raphael in terms unmistakably Miltonic. Undoubtedly, Abdiel is the exemplar of a better heroism ...but he is not a figure whose actions...can properly serve as a counterpoint to the false heroism”.²⁵⁰ In Fish’s term heroism, he also vests the concept of theology. Heroism, for Fish, is obedience to God. Thus one could read his statement as claiming that Abdiel represents only true theology and does not reach across the aisle to explore false theology. Although Fish suggests that Milton’s earlier poetry foreshadows Milton’s and the reader’s vicarious involvement in the character of Abdiel, his argument fastens tightly to *Paradise Lost*. With a broader stroke, we will also consider *Samson Agonistes*, in addition to Milton’s nineteenth sonnet and “Ad Patrem.”²⁵¹ We will first turn to the nineteenth sonnet.

Since previous critics have interpreted the sonnet as peculiarly Abdielic, Milton’s nineteenth sonnet is worth stopping at, pausing, and asking if Abdiel is indeed a replica of Milton, or if Abdiel serves some other purpose.²⁵² In 1652, the year Milton lost his sight, or a few years after, Milton composed the nineteenth sonnet in order to lament and valorize his untapped poetic talent. On the one hand, the sonnet itself, if brought into the company of *Paradise Lost*, critiques the constant work of angels, those “Thousands at his bidding [who] speed/ And post o’er land and ocean without rest”.²⁵³ On the other hand, critics have argued that

²⁴⁹ Swardson, H. R. Swardson, *Poetry and the Fountain of Light* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1962), 143, quoted in Fish, *Surprised by Sin*, 181.

²⁵⁰ Fish, *Surprised by Sin*, 182.

²⁵¹ Fish, *Surprised by Sin*, 180-84.

²⁵² Fish, *Surprised by Sin*, 183.

²⁵³ Milton, “Sonnet 19,” lines 12-13.

the sonnet's imagery of stagnancy and performance is akin to Abdiel. The impulse of the sonnet, with its image of those who "also serve who only stand and wait," almost hearkens for Abdiel to be included in the sonnet's pronoun "they," reading "They also serve".²⁵⁴ But Abdiel does not only stand and wait as the sonnet's subject does. He flew north. Abdiel, unlike Milton, is a part of the rabble who "post o'er land and ocean".²⁵⁵ Fish compares Abdiel to a sedentary version of Milton cooped up in his study, and reasons, "Abdiel is a hero because he says, 'Shalt thou give Law to God?' ...and he would have been a hero still had he said it to himself in the privacy of his study, as Milton does in the sonnet 'When I consider'".²⁵⁶ Abdiel's haste, however, to meet every beckon call disqualifies Fish's metaphor that compares Abdiel to Milton through Sonnet 19.

That Abdiel stands apart from apostate angels and that he receives glory from God for doing so is still at best only a partial reading of Abdiel, and tenuously suggests a correlation from Abdiel to Milton. Three more images of men alone withstanding tests through obedience are worth mentioning from *Paradise Lost*. One can argue for the commonplace that Milton peppers instances of characters' singlehanded combat for truth throughout *Paradise Lost*, and that in that combat, we see Milton himself: for instance, Abdiel in Book VI, Noah in Book XI, and the Messiah in Book XII perform exactly to that point. The argument's flaw is that it does not consider how reproach operates in *Paradise Lost* and does not operate in several of Milton's relevant earlier poems. Of Abdiel, God continues to say:

And for thy testimony of truth hast borne
Universal *reproach*.²⁵⁷

²⁵⁴ Milton, "Sonnet 19," line 14.

²⁵⁵ Milton, "Sonnet 19," line 13.

²⁵⁶ Fish, *Surprised by Sin*, 183.

²⁵⁷ *PL* VI.33-4.

Of Noah, Michael overlooking Eden's boundaries, makes clear to Adam the:

One man except, one son of light/
In a dark age, against example good,
Against allurements, custom, and a world
Offended; fearless of *reproach* and scorn".²⁵⁸

And of the Messiah, Michael, still with Adam, relates that:

Thy punishment He shall endure by coming in the Flesh
To a *reproachful* life and cursed death,
Proclaiming Life to all who shall believe
In his redemption.²⁵⁹

Reproach in these three passages related to Abdiel, Noah, and the Messiah goes through an entire life cycle. Reproach is first "borne" by Abdiel, then seen in the future of Noah who is "fearless" of what will come, and lastly reproach lives an entire life from the moment of the Messiah "coming in the Flesh" to the gasp of his "death" (VI.33-4; XI.811; XII.404-5). In each passage, abhorrent crews lash reproach onto these three men because of their obedience to God. But Milton is not so fast as to offer a simple reading of reproach because of one's obedience to God.

Milton's poem, "Ad Patrem," is an earlier poem from the 1630s that shows Milton navigating the dilemma of reproach from his father and the possibility of limitless fame. Milton, instead of attending law school or joining the bishopric, stayed home to write poetry. In the beginning of the poem, Milton profusely thanks his father for his generosity that allows him to stay home. Towards the poem's end, the gripping scene of "snake-bearing jaws" is reminiscent of the demonic creatures in *Paradise Lost*. The "savage Calumny" in "Ad Patrem" echoes Satan's infamous speech in Book V, when out of his mouth he grinds the authoritative images, "Thrones, Dominations, Princedoms, Virtues, Powers," mocking God's own authoritative words

²⁵⁸ *PL* XI.808-11.

²⁵⁹ *PL* XII.404-8.

from earlier, in which God heralds the inauguration of his Son, pronouncing to the throng of Heaven, “Thrones, Dominations, Princedoms, Virtues, Powers.”²⁶⁰ The vipers below young Milton in “Ad Patrem” anticipate the possibility of his demise should he fall from his “walk above the viperous stroke,” perhaps even in a fashion not too different from Abdiel, considering that Abdiel’s objection to Satan’s speech could have cost him his life.²⁶¹ The comparisons from *Paradise Lost* to “Ad Patrem” are not meant to be succinct. In “Ad Patrem,” Milton clearly exhibits a sense, absent in *Paradise Lost*, of fear that his poetry will not survive the test of time. The image of Milton tight rope walking above a pit of vipers formulates a kind of reproach akin to poetic ambition never realized. To his father, he writes, “Safe in an untroubled heart, I shall walk above the viperous stroke”.²⁶² Milton then offers his father the possibility that his name will forever be remembered if Milton’s poem to his father is memorialized.²⁶³ Milton’s dreams die, however, if he falls in “Ad Patrem,” whereas Abdiel’s soul is forfeit if he remains “encompassed round with foes”.²⁶⁴ Reproach is a matter of Milton’s imagination in “Ad Patrem,” and a matter of hostile reality for Abdiel.

Moreover, the formula reproach as a result of obedience to God neither falls in line with Milton’s later tragedy, *Samson Agonistes*, nor his two earlier poems, sonnet 19 and “Ad Patrem.” In *Samson Agonistes*, Dalila (Milton’s version of Delilah) comes to the blind, chained, and tormented Samson. Bedeviled with shame from scandalizing her husband, she wants to nurse Samson, and believes that Samson with broken body and soul will allow her. Receiving

²⁶⁰ *PL* V.772; V.601.

²⁶¹ John Milton, “Ad Patrem,” in *Paradise Regained, Samson Agonistes, and the Complete Shorter Poems*, ed. William Kerrigan, John Rumrich, and Stephen M. Fallon (New York: Modern Library, 2012), lines 111-13.

²⁶² Milton, “Ad Patrem,” 113.

²⁶³ Milton, “Ad Patrem,” 114-120.

²⁶⁴ *PL* V.876.

Samson's forgiveness is her secondary priority. Dalila bids Samson forgive her, to which Samson responds:

That malice not repentance brought thee hither,
By this appears: I gave, thou say'st, th' example,
I led the way; bitter reproach, but true,
I to my self was false e're thou to me.²⁶⁵

Samson accuses Dalila of seeking after his harm and not his good. To paraphrase Samson's reply, he says, "Before you deceived me, divulging me of my secret, and gave my secret to the Philistines, I deceived myself. I brought shame upon myself because I was not true to my God."²⁶⁶ *Samson Agonistes* fleshes out the issue of obedience, colorfully on display in the standoff between Abdiel and Satan, and disobedience, silently spreading across Book V through the character Abdiel. As some commentators understand him, the dour Samson could be one more self-portrait of Milton.²⁶⁷ Samson's provocative blindness to God's will, if we follow the idea of Samson as Miltonic replica, symbolically shatters the solid, epistemological ground on which Milton, in clear-sighted Abdiel, stands, that is, if we follow the lead of past commentators. On the one hand, from a literary-historical perspective, scholars suggest that Samson shares Milton's disenchantment at the fall of Cromwell and the rise of Charles II: Milton sees himself as a martyr figure, though the Samson of *Samson Agonistes* would never claim such a title for himself. On the other hand, to see Milton in Abdiel in *Paradise Lost*, and then to turn a blind eye to Milton in Jesus *Paradise Regained* and in Samson in *Samson Agonistes* is to assert a caricature of Milton's theology.

²⁶⁵ SA lines 821-24.

²⁶⁶ SA lines 819-42.

²⁶⁷ For scholars who view Samson as a stand-in for Milton, see Frank Kermode, "Milton in Old Age," in *An Appetite for Poetry* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 59-78; Mary Ann Radzinowicz, *Toward "Samson Agonistes": The Growth of Milton's Mind* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 3-7.

Abdiel's Fall and Rise

At Adam's and Raphael's afternoon juncture away from the heat, where they can rest in the cool of the bower, the three major topics Raphael discusses with Adam are the apostasy of a third of Heaven's angels, the Great War in heaven, and the creation of the world. Strangely, the densest expression of these three topics can be found in the character of Abdiel, not in the character of the exalted Son, or the Father. Abdiel, for a time, falls with the rest of the apostates. Then later, he resurges his faith, warring in words with Satan over the issue of one's being created. Abdiel's witness of God in the deluge of traitors illustrates Milton's idea of theological testing. Abdiel will listen to, and to a degree, believe in the false theology of Satan. Abdiel is the angel closest to Mammon's sin of idolizing Heaven's creations instead of the Creator. Heaven's creations, in this case, do not include the lustering gold that distracted Mammon's praise; rather Heaven's creations simply mean God's angels. The face of Lucifer, the morning star, mesmerizes, perhaps even intoxicates, the lost angels and Abdiel, like Adam's and Eve's inebriation the very second after they eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge. Raphael accounts for this all from Books V to VII, whereon at the outset of Book V, he descends on earth from Heaven out of strict adherence to God's command of him: go and warn Adam "to beware / He swerve not too secure".²⁶⁸ His narrative offers several sightings of Abdiel when one considers Abdiel's association with Satan and his legion.

The intratextual precedence suggests that Abdiel is not set apart from, but fundamentally in agreement with the thrust propelling each rebel angel north. Throughout *Paradise Lost*, Milton symbolically uses the north in order to depict God's enemies (I.351-5; V.689; V.726; V.755). In Book I, the north is inhospitable to reproduction, whereas Eden, by contrast, is luscious,

²⁶⁸ *PL* V.237-8.

flamboyantly primed for life. Milton conjures the image of the fallen angels rising from hell's sulfur as "A multitude, like which the populous north/ Poured never from her frozen loins".²⁶⁹ The image and its story suit the context. The frozen loins capture the reality that there will be no more angels who rebel against God, and that treasonous angels cannot have offspring. Is it not odd that Abdiel convinces not even one angel to return with him to God, after flying with them in an angel swarm, whose vast dimensions will be a rebellious deluge on the plains of Heaven before God's throne, whose girth supposes the brotherhood of shoulder to shoulder formation both on Heaven's grounds and the north's realm, *these* angels with whom he has lived with and served by? His speech fails because he earlier failed. Sterility passes on to Abdiel, lynching the redemptive end of his encounter with Satan and the apostates. Commenting on Milton's unusual invention of Abdiel, Allan Gilbert writes, "Part of the force of the seraph's conduct lies in its initial improbability. A large number of angels might have refused to follow Satan, but one is not likely to have done so...He does not influence any of Satan's followers".²⁷⁰ Gilbert correctly identifies the improbability of Abdiel's defiance of Satan. His observation ends with the fact that Abdiel does not reproduce. But Abdiel's words, so much in the vein of an evangelist, cannot reproduce because of his prior assent to Satan.

By rushing the apostate angels north, Milton uses the biblical and patristic spatial imagination in order to imply that Abdiel is one of God's enemies. The most poignant biblical example comes from Isaiah 14:12-14, that famous moment when Isaiah prophecies the fall of Lucifer. Thus Isaiah:

²⁶⁹ *PL* I.351-5.

²⁷⁰ Gilbert, "The Theological Basis of Satan's Rebellion and the Function of Abdiel in 'Paradise Lost,'" 39-40.

How art thou fallen from heauen, O Lucifer, sonne of the morning? how art thou cut downe to the ground, which didst weaken the nations? For thou hast said in thine heart; I wil ascend into heauen, I wil exalt my throne aboue the starres of God: I wil sit also vpon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the North. I wil ascend aboue the heights of the cloudes, I wil bee like the most High.²⁷¹

And among the Fathers, Pope Gregory I's *Commentary on Job* illustrates the trope of northern settlements being hostile towards God.²⁷² *Paradise Lost* uses the word north in much the same way we might expect. The north symbolizes hostility, darkness, cold, deceit, hate, and most of all, pride. The north also becomes synonymous with the liberty of exile: Satan and his host choose to amputate themselves from God. After Raphael tells Adam why the angels followed Satan north, God and the Son make no distinction between the horde, Satan, and Abdiel: they are all "foes" and "rebels" (V.735; V.742). Raphael relates his narrative through the things the "eternal eye" of God saw while Satan gathered his forces to head north. Without distinguishing Abdiel from the rest, the Omniscient eye first witnessed that Satan "Drew after him a third part of Heav'n's host," then noticed "rebellion rising," tracking how "multitudes/ Were banded to oppose his high decree".²⁷³ There is no gray area in God's sight. Abdiel and the host falter.

Ultimately, it is Satan's resolve to "leave / Unworshipped, unobeyed the throne supreme" that spurs the angels and Abdiel north.²⁷⁴ Satan's action follows God's exaltation of the Son, and subsequent decree of punishment for those who deny him their worship. God declares:

Him who disobeys
Me disobeys, breaks union, and that day
Cast out from God and blessed vision, falls
Into utter darkness, deep engulfed, his place
Ordained without redemption, without end.²⁷⁵

²⁷¹ Isaiah 14.12-4.

²⁷² St. Gregory the Great, *Morals on the Book of Job*, trans. John Henry Parker, 1844 (Lectionary Central, <http://www.lectionarycentral.com/gregorymoraliaindex.html>), 17.24.

²⁷³ *PL* V.710; V.714-17.

²⁷⁴ *PL* V.668-9.

God's pronouncement is black and white. Abdiel, however, offers a new interpretation of his decree at the end of Book V. When Satan taunts Abdiel to fly away before he and his crew attack him, Teskey reads Abdiel's response as one who is delighted to avoid the wrath of God they have not deserved. "He is happy to fly," writes Teskey, "not for fear of Satan, however, but for fear that God's wrath upon Satan and his rebel angels will accidentally strike him, too".²⁷⁶ Another way to read Abdiel's pardon speech is that he gladly flies, not for fear that he might be caught in God's crossfire, but that he, in fact, is God's target. God's decree is simple, whoever disobeys the Son, incurs eternal punishment on themselves.

The second Psalm, many commentators correctly note, elucidates Abdiel's speech (V.877-95).²⁷⁷ The first Psalm, however, garners much less attention, especially with respect to Abdiel and his flight north. The psalm meditates on the way of the righteous and of the wicked man. The Psalm begins:

Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsell of the vngodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornfull.²⁷⁸

The psalm's main focus is the righteous man's avoidance of the gatherings of the ungodly. The psalm's images suggest the degrees one might participate in unrighteous acts, and condemns each degree. The parallel to Abdiel is straightforward. The motion of walking is the angelic form of flight, whereby Abdiel flies north with the wicked. In Heaven's northern realm, Abdiel stands in the company of sinners, himself included, and with them, awaits Lucifer's speech.

²⁷⁵ *PL* V.611-5.

²⁷⁶ Teskey, *The Poetry of John Milton*, 335.

²⁷⁷ Donnelly, *Scriptural Reasoning*, 114-15; Gilbert, "The Theological Basis of Satan's Rebellion and the Function of Abdiel in 'Paradise Lost,'" 19-20.

²⁷⁸ Psalm 1.1.

Perhaps standing in the way of sinners prompts Abdiel to pass through some kind of prelapsarian conversion, a moment in which he, not unlike Adam and Eve in the garden, could solidify his allegiance to God, and stand as a contradiction to Satan's arguments, most especially Satan's hostility towards the worship of God and the Son (V.782-4). Through his northern journey, he learns of sin, reinterprets God's law from earlier in Book V, and receives a revelation that there is pardon from sin. Through Abdiel's witness of himself in a nearly fallen state, and through his observation of vice ravaging the angelic legion, he learns of God's forgiving nature. Before Abdiel's speech, forgiveness never existed, for in the entirety of Heaven's eternal existence, neither angel, nor creature, nor anything with life had yet sinned. Abdiel, to the throng of angels in the north, pleads:

Cease then this impious rage,
And tempt not these; but hasten to appease
Th' incensed Father, and th' incensed Son,
While pardon may be found in time besought.²⁷⁹

What is pardon before pardon exists? It is astonishing to consider that Abdiel bares the idea of pardon, and implores them to act in the light of pardon for one reason. He testifies to pardon because he received pardon. That lingering sense that there is more than meets the eye when reading about Abdiel is true.

Abdiel is the reference point for the three major acts of sin in *Paradise Lost*. Abdiel first calls Satan and the apostate angels to repentance for their sin of rebellion against God. Second, Abdiel aims his repentance speech both at the rebels and at himself. In a hyper-dramatic fashion, inside of an huge, hostile crowd of apostate angels, Abdiel pleads with himself to go and appease God and the Son while forgiveness is available. Third, Raphael frames the story of Abdiel in

²⁷⁹ PL V.845-8.

such a way that Abdiel's call to seek pardon, and his example of doing so, communicates to Adam what he and Eve must do when they eat of the fruit. It is doubtful that God's austere judgement that he shares with Raphael left Raphael with a sense that Adam and Eve will overcome Satan's temptation. Remind him, God says to Raphael earlier in Book V:

To beware
He swerve not too secure: tell him withal
His danger, and from whom, what enemy
Late fall'n himself from Heav'n is plotting now
The fall of others from like state of bliss...²⁸⁰

Through Abdiel's example, Raphael does more than God asks of him. Abdiel, aware of his sin, and of his sought for and newfound forgiveness, flies away from the reaches of the north, away from the intratextual, biblical, and patristic allusions to the enemies of God. His course ends in the "empyrean" region of heaven near God's throne, where he receives God's commendation for his action. Adam and Eve will mirror his action of falling in Book IX, and flight towards pardon in Book X. Where else would Adam learn of pardon, if not through Abdiel? Thus distraught, almost hopeless, Adam to Eve suggests:

What better can we do, then to the place
Repairing where he judg'd us, prostrate fall
Before him reverent, and there confess
Humbly our faults, and pardon beg.²⁸¹

What can we make of God's praise of Abdiel in Book VI, which surely clears Abdiel of any and all blame? The answer according to Abdiel is the answer according to Adam and Eve. The fundamental change point is when they ask for pardon. God thus says to Abdiel,

Well done...who single hast maintained

²⁸⁰ *PL* V.235-45.

²⁸¹ *PL* IX.1086-9.

Against the revolted multitudes the cause
Of truth, in word mightier than they in arms.²⁸²

When does Abdiel withstand the revolted multitude? The moment he speaks. Abdiel's silence incriminates him to the extent of Adam's and Eve's. When does Abdiel know of pardon, and receive it? The moment his posture transitions from one who stands in the way of rebels, to one who acknowledges his and their rebellion, and speaks against it. When can Abdiel, Adam, and Eve return to the worship of God? After they receive pardon.

Pardon and worship are inextricably knotted together in *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*. Worship (and its shattered image, idolatry) is the most important action in Books V, VI, and I. In this order, these books tell the story of man's flight from worship through "disobedience" and God's restoration of man to worshipping him aright (I.1). At stake in *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* is redemption and the right liturgical practice of the worship of God. From *Paradise Regained* to *Paradise Lost*, the idea of accursed grounds the essentials of Milton's argument about the right worship of God. In *Paradise Lost* Book V in the north, realizing that God ostracizes the horde and him, Abdiel cries for theirs and his isolation from God, lamenting, "O alienate from God, O spirit accursed".²⁸³ His lamentation is both immediate and prescient, for in the moment, he and the horde all disdain God, and later on, Adam and Eve will too. *Paradise Regained* backfills Abdiel's foresight in which he sees Satan's successful temptation of Eve in the garden. To Satan, Jesus asks:

And dar'st thou to the Son of God propound
To worship thee accurst, now more accurst
For this attempt bolder then that on Eve.²⁸⁴

²⁸² *PL* VI.29-32.

²⁸³ *PL* V.877.

²⁸⁴ *PL* IV.178-180.

Perhaps alluding to Abdiel's declamation, Jesus' word "accurst" describes the potential for worship to rot. The word accursed further fortifies Abdiel's purpose of being an exegetical and eisegetical character who examines the creation of false and true theology because of its biblical context. In Galatians, St. Paul denounces the false teachers who proclaim a gospel contrary to the one he delivered to the Galatians. With the passion of an Abdielic lament, St. Paul writes to the Galatians, "But though we, or an Angel from heauen, preach any other Gospel vnto you, then that which wee haue preached vnto you, let him be accursed."²⁸⁵ Luther explains that the word accursed (in Greek, anathema) comes from the "Hebrew [word] *Herem*, [which] signifieth a Thing accursed, execrable, and detestable: Which hath nothing to do, no Participation or Communion with God."²⁸⁶ If the right worship of God is the chief end of man, the true gospel is the avenue to worshipping God aright. *Paradise Regained* explains Abdiel's fall and rise in *Paradise Lost*. *Paradise Lost*, through its poetics of narrative theology, uses the liturgy of the converted heart in order to instruct man in the right worship of God. *Paradise Regained* then focuses on the liturgy of the sacraments through the right understanding of the Passion narrative. *Paradise Lost* as seen through *Paradise Regained* sets forth that one's redemption or damnation rests upon their conduct of worship.

²⁸⁵ Galatians 1:8.

²⁸⁶ Martin Luther. *A commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians, Wherein is most excellently set forth, the Glorious Riches of God's Grace, and Power of the Gospel, With The Difference between the Law and the Gospel, And Strength of Faith declared, to the joyful Comfort and Confirmation of all true Christian Believers; Specially Such as being inwardly afflicted and grieved in Conscience, do hunger and thirst For Justification in Christ Jesus: For whose Cause this Book is most chiefly translated and printed, and dedicated to the same. Written by The Famous Champion for the Faith of Christ, Dr. Martin Luther.* London, M.DCC.LXXIV. [1774]. Eighteenth Century Collections Online. Gale. University of Tennessee Libraries. 22 Feb. 2018
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