

**The Paradox of Virtue:
Milton's Satan and the Anti-Hero Tradition**

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What needs my Shakespeare for his honoured bones,
 The labour of an age in pilèd stones,
 Or that his hallowed relics should be hid
 Under a star-ypointing pyramid?
 Dear son of Memory, great heir of fame,
 What need'st thou such weak witness of thy name?
 Thou in our wonder and astonishment
 Hast built thyself a live-long monument.
 For whilst to th' shame of slow-endeavouring art,
 Thy easy numbers flow, and that each heart
 Hath from the leaves of thy unvalued book
 Those Delphic lines with deep impression took,
 Then thou, our fancy of itself bereaving,
 Dost make us marble with too much conceiving;
 And so sepúlchred in such pomp dost lie,
 That kings for such a tomb would wish to die.

– John Milton, *On Shakespeare*, 1630

“Traces of nobility, gentleness and courage persist in all people, do what we will to stamp out the trend. So too, do those characteristics which are ugly. It is just unfortunate that in the clumsy hands of a cartoonist all traits become ridiculous, leading to a certain amount of self-conscious expostulation and the desire to join battle. There is no need to sally forth, for it remains true that those things which make us human are, curiously enough, always close at hand. Resolve then, that on this very ground, with small flags waving and tinny blasts on tiny trumpets, we shall meet the enemy, and not only may he be ours, he may be us. Forward!”

– Walt Kelly, June 1953

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Introduction:

Theologically Exposing the Miltonic Anti-Hero

“Woe to those who call evil good and good evil,
 who put darkness for light and light for darkness,
 who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter.”

Isaiah 5:20

Uninitiated Christian readers, upon opening for the first time John Milton’s monumental epic solemnly entitled, *Paradise Lost*, discover with bewilderment that Milton carries them almost immediately into the mind of evil incarnate: Satan. There, they find with dismay that the object of all Christendom’s hate is hardly hateful: Satan in his fallen state is heroic, virtuous, and altogether admirable. Milton’s characterization of Satan has, since the publication of *Paradise Lost*, generated controversy and an incessant stream of scholarship, much of which revolves around the question: is Satan the hero or villain of *Paradise Lost*?

Nearly four centuries later, this question remains unresolved.¹ John Leonard, in his seminal two-volume book of Miltonic criticism entitled *Faithful Labourers*, notes that John Carey, a prominent Milton critic, “believes the debate about Satan to be irresolvable” (Leonard 393). Certainly, the rich and contentious history of this debate supports Carey’s judgment, but such a fatalistic conclusion neither allows nor accounts for breakthroughs, for which the possibility seems endless, given the mutability of scholarly reception towards *Paradise Lost* with changing social mores, climates, and attitudes.

¹ An apt illustration of the sheer difficulty of resolving this question arrives through my own experience. Prior to reading *Paradise Lost*, I was certain I would be an Anti-Satanist, but after completing my first reading, I considered myself a staunch Satanist. Having now read through the entirety of *Paradise Lost* at least thrice—Books I, II, and IV probably more than ten times each—I now stand among the ranks of Anti-Satanists. It is from this perspective that I have completed this thesis.

This thesis aims to make one such breakthrough. In the classical sphere, Milton scholars have placed due emphasis on the associations between *Paradise Lost* and the epic tradition, particularly as expressed through Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* and Vergil's *Aeneid* at the expense of philosophical analyses, particularly regarding Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. In the theological sphere, Milton scholars have grappled primarily with the Fall and in comparison, have produced little major research on the theological significance of Satan's specific qualities as expressed in *Paradise Lost*. This thesis aims to address these deficiencies by endeavoring toward a singular goal: defining the Miltonic anti-hero.

In condensed terms, I define the Miltonic anti-hero as follows: a protagonist that is good from a worldly perspective and is evil from a theological perspective, who commingles good and evil to ultimately render this moral dichotomy ambiguous.

The model for the Miltonic anti-hero is, of course, Satan in *Paradise Lost*. I make my argument for this definition in the first two chapters. In the first chapter, I present an exegetical analysis of the Aristotelian virtues as expressed through the *Nicomachean Ethics*, showing that Milton's Satan accomplishes the virtuous mean in all twelve Aristotelian spheres of action and thought. I conclude from this chapter that the quintessential Miltonic anti-hero is perfectly virtuous under worldly conceptions such as the Aristotelian virtues, and qualify this conclusion by making the case that a Miltonic anti-hero need not be so perfectly virtuous. In the second chapter, I show how Satan's worldly virtuousness, coupled with his epic heroism, serves as the vehicle for Milton's elucidation of Satan's true moral quality as informed by a Christian theological perspective. I elaborate then on the theological significance of the fact that Satan becomes a fool to his own schemes; by commingling good and evil for others Satan also comes to confuse his own definitions of good and evil. I then show how Satan subverts the role of the

epic hero, ultimately making the case that Satan renders the good-evil moral dichotomy ambiguous through various mechanisms. The third chapter presents my analysis of where this definition of Miltonic anti-hero fits within the scholarly debate between Satanists and Anti-Satanists. In it, I argue that though I fail to unequivocally show that Satan is a villain, I expand our understanding of Milton's theological motivations underlying his devising a Satan that is virtuous and heroic.

Chapter I.

The Perfect Virtue of the Quintessential Miltonic Anti-Hero

Death, hell, and *Sheol*—in the Calvinist perception, they are each at heart a separation from God. This separation is the very condition that exemplifies lost paradise, as paradise in the Calvinist perception is the state of being in commune with God. To claim then, that even the most perfectly virtuous deserve death, is to say that perfect virtue falls short of the requirements to entering Paradise. In my interpretation, this is the central message of *Paradise Lost*. Even the most perfectly virtuous of characters falls short of the glory of God; despite his strivings to ascend and attain God’s glory, the end result of his struggle is eternal alienation from his presence and grace. *Paradise Lost* is the story of this perfectly virtuous one: he who “masquerades as an angel of light” (2 Corinthians 11:14)²—Satan.

The objective of this chapter is to establish the argument that Satan is in fact perfectly virtuous according to Aristotelian conceptions of virtue, for the purposes of showing in the following chapter that Satan’s place in the cosmic order as a villain despite his heroic identity in *Paradise Lost* constitutes Milton’s key intervention on a classical epic tradition of epic heroes where classical audiences were made to associate tragic flaws with tragic falls. In order to establish my argument, I perform exegetical analyses of the Aristotelian virtues as they appear in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, accompanying each analysis with corresponding passages from *Paradise Lost* that demonstrate Satan’s accomplishment of these virtues in his thoughts, words, and actions.

² All Bible verses in this paper are sourced from the New International Version.

Exegetical Analyses of the Aristotelian Virtues

Milton clearly possessed a deep level of understanding and engagement with Aristotle's works including the *Nicomachean Ethics* that not only exhibited in *Paradise Lost*, but in his earlier works and throughout his education. At the age of eleven, Milton started formal schooling at St. Paul's School, "a renowned institution of Humanist learning that offered the rare delights of intensive Greek and, even more surprising, contemporary English literature" (Beer 13). Thus from a young age, Milton encountered Classical authors "from Ovid to Cicero, from Homer to Euripides" and of course including Plato and Aristotle; moreover, it was customary for a St. Paul's student to have an "Aristotelian commonplace book" organized in "headings according to antithesis, the favoured method of the Greek logician" for the purpose of collecting "pithy quotations from his favourite authors on justice and injustice, say, or joy and sorrow" (Beer 13). Milton's Classical education, particularly with regards to Aristotle, clearly continued well past his time at St. Paul's and into his studies at Cambridge. Cambridge's curriculum, which Beer characterizes as "tedious and traditionalist in the extreme," presented Milton ample opportunities to study and perform Classical literature and expression, though Cambridge in Milton's day more enthusiastically espoused the importance of Latin (Beer 13).³ Moreover, in his 1644 polemical tract *Areopagitica*, Milton often mirrors the "progress of argument in the *Nicomachean Ethics*," and in the course of his argument, refutes Platonic epistemology and politics on Aristotelian terms (Fulton 107).⁴

³ It is worthwhile to note that in 1623, Milton wrote *De Idea Platonica quemadmodum Aristoteles Intellexit* (On the Platonic Idea, as Aristotle Understood It), an "extended joke in which John adopts the voice of a rather dim follower of Aristotle's thinking, a chap who simply can't get his head around Plato (Beer 40-1).

⁴ For more information, see Fulton, *Historical Milton: Manuscript, Print, and Political Culture in Revolutionary England*.

Thus, it is plausible that Milton intentionally imbued Satan with the Aristotelian virtues for the purpose of rendering, as I come to argue, a theological—and conceivably, Reformed Protestant—reflection on salvation and the grace of God. I provide below a table listing virtues and vices according to the Aristotelian conceptualization. I will refer to this table for the remainder of this section, and as aforementioned, I will present an exegetical analysis of each virtue, connecting specific quotes from *Paradise Lost* to elucidate Satan’s accomplishment of each virtue in his thoughts, words, and actions.

Sphere of Action or Feeling	Excess	Mean	Deficiency
Fear and Confidence	Rashness	Courage	Cowardice
Pleasure and Pain	Licentiousness/ Self-indulgence	Temperance	Insensibility
Getting and Spending (minor)	Prodigality	Liberality	Illiberality/ Meanness
Getting and Spending (major)	Vulgarity/ Tastelessness	Magnificence	Pettiness/ Stinginess
Honor and Dishonor (major)	Vanity	Magnanimity	Pusillanimity
Honor and Dishonor (minor)	Ambition/ Empty Vanity	Proper Ambition/ Pride	Unambitiousness/ Undue Humility
Anger	Irascibility	Patience/	Lack of Spirit/

		Good Temper	Unirascibility
Self-Expression	Boastfulness	Truthfulness	Understatement/ Mock Modesty
Conversation	Buffoonery	Wittiness	Boorishness
Social Conduct	Obsequiousness	Friendliness	Cantankerousness
Shame	Shyness	Modesty	Shamelessness
Indignation	Envy	Righteous Indignation	Malicious Enjoyment/Spitefulness

(Adapted from Aristotle 104).

I. Fear and Confidence

Perhaps it is in the first Aristotelian sphere, fear and confidence, that there is greatest potential for disagreement regarding whether Satan fulfills the requirements for excess or, as I argue, the mean. Certainly, the case could be made that Satan's daring to rebel against his creator cannot be construed as merely courage but goes beyond it, venturing into rashness. That being said, I find that courage as Aristotle defined it more precisely defines Satan's character. The word that Aristotle uses for courage is *andreia*, the word that his teacher Plato in *The Republic* uses to describe the virtue that ideal soldiers exemplify by their carrying out orders and facing danger without regard for personal risk. Along with wisdom (*sophia*) and moderation (*sôphrosúnê*), Plato construes *andreia* as a social quality or virtue necessary to be developed in

order for the disparate classes in his ideal city work harmoniously for the common good, thereby exhibiting perfect and true justice (Kemerling).⁵ Though Aristotle did not always agree with Plato, their shared terminology allowed their works to interact with each other in their shared culture (Price 123).

Milton's education in the Classics entailed that he would be aware of the subtle but often direct interconnections between Plato and Aristotle, and it is clear that he imbues Satan with Plato and Aristotle's definition of *andreia*, particularly in Satan's opening lines in Book I. Routed by the Son and having surveyed "The dismal Situation waste and wilde" (I. 60), Satan "Breaking the horrid silence" (I. 83) speaks to the foremost of his angels, Beelzebub: "All is not lost; the unconquerable Will, / And study of revenge, immortal hate, / And courage never to submit or yield: / And what is else not to be overcome?" (I. 106-9). Clearly, the courage that Satan mentions is akin to *andreia*, because at the heart of both is a willingness to face danger—in Satan's case, on the cosmic level—without regard for the personal risk entailed. This same version of courage appears again later in Book I when Beelzebub assures Satan that Satan's voice, "thir liveliest pledge / Of hope in fears and dangers" (I. 274-5) and their "surest signal" (I. 278) on "the perilous edge / Of battle when it rag'd" (I. 276-7), will rouse his angels to "resume / New courage and revive" (I. 279). Here, Beelzebub's words render complete a picture of Aristotelian *andreia* as Satan's courage, which serves not only to buttress Satan's own defense against self-consideration and fear for safety, but also that of his numberless hordes of angels. And indeed, when Satan does speak to his angels en masse, he arouses hope by rejecting the

⁵ For more information on *andreia*, consult Walter T. Schmid, *On Manly Courage: A Study of Plato's Laches* (Southern Illinois, 1992).

importance of—though not the existence of—danger: “For mee be witness all the Host of Heav’n / If counsels different, or danger shun’d / By me, have lost our hopes” (I. 635-7).

II. *Pleasure and Pain*

In the second sphere, pleasure and pain, the virtue of temperance—*sôphrosúnê*—is the same term that, as aforementioned, Plato uses for the virtue of moderation in his perfectly just city. The ties between Plato and Aristotle vis-à-vis *sôphrosúnê* are clear. In *The Republic*, *sôphrosúnê* describes “the subordination of personal desires to a higher purpose” particularly as it relates to the city’s common populace (Kemerling). The masses must achieve *sôphrosúnê* if they are to operate within a perfectly just society, as perfect justice demands that these people follow the just philosopher king’s guidance instead of pursuing private interests (Kemerling).⁶ Aristotle takes Plato’s conception of *sôphrosúnê* and goes one step further; temperance is not only a required condition among the masses for creating a just society, but it is also required to govern virtuous individuals’ thoughts and actions not only vis-à-vis pleasure and pain, but in all spheres of action or feeling. That is to say, every moral virtue is, as earlier elucidated, a “mean between vicious extremes” (Kemerling). Specifically with regard to pleasure and pain, however, in Book 2, Chapter 7 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle concisely explicates what he means by showing that virtue calls for temperance in pleasures “and not so much with regard to the pains;” moreover, “Persons deficient with regard to the pleasures are not often found” (Aristotle).⁷ As such, *sôphrosúnê* in Aristotelian terms primarily addresses the human proclivity and desire for pleasure and comfort, and when properly exhibited, it serves to prevent this same

⁶ For more information on *sôphrosúnê* and other Aristotelian virtues, consult F. E. Peters, *Greek Philosophical Terms: A Historical Lexicon* (NYU, 1967).

⁷ Sourced from www.constitution.org.

proclivity and desire from hindering one's efforts, which naturally entail some level of pain and discomfort (Peters 179-80).

Milton's Satan cannot be said to be licentious; though he expresses his desire for self-indulgence, *sôphrosúnê* always prevails in both his words and actions. Firstly, as he surveys the gloom of hell and contrasts it with the splendor of heaven, Satan expresses his feeling an impulse to revel in his misery: "Is this the Region, this the Soil, the Clime, / [...] this the seat / That we must change for Heav'n, this mournful gloom / For that celestial light?" (I. 242-5). We see a change in Satan's disposition as he renounces heaven—"Farewel happy Fields / Where Joy for ever dwells" (I. 249-50)—and accepts hell—"Hail horrors, hail / Infernal world, and thou profoundest Hell / Receive thy new Possessor" (I. 250-2). Exhibiting a revisionary temperance that equates heaven with hell and glories in neither, Satan chooses then to conceive of his misery as a version of heaven, stating that he is "not to be chang'd by Place or Time" as "The mind is its own place, and in it self / Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n" (I. 253-5). Satan then sees his angels—lesser beings more given to indulgence in their pain and sorrow—wallow in their loss as they "Lye thus astonisht on th' oblivious Pool" and seek to raise them up "once more / With rallied Arms to try what may be yet / Regaind in Heav'n, or what more lost in Hell" (I. 268-70). In so doing, Satan advocates for the same temperate consideration of hell among his angels.

Shortly following this scene, Satan speaks to his angels in Book II and makes another case for temperance in hell, contrasting this temperance with the indulgence of heaven. He says to his angels: "who here / Will envy whom the highest place [...] condemns to greatest share / Of endless pain?" (II. 26-27, 29-30). While the primary purpose of this rhetorical question is arguably to consolidate his place on hell's throne by diminishing the envy any angel might hold

for that position, Satan also contrasts the temperance of hell with the indulgence of heaven, “The happier state / In Heav’n, which follows dignity, might draw / Envy from each inferior” (II. 24-6). Satan solidifies his marriage of licentiousness with heaven and with envy as he assures that “none sure will claim in Hell / Precedence, none, whose portion is so small / Of present pain, that with ambitious mind will covet more” (II. 32-5). Thus it is plausible to conclude that Satan, in both his personal thoughts and actions and in his consideration for his angels exhibits a temperance of character that does not allow him to remain static, wallowing in misery or in the pleasure of days bygone, but through temperance he continues to drive himself and his angels forward towards a purpose that he deems justified.

III. & IV. Getting and Spending (both minor and major)

With regard to the minor and major spheres of getting and spending, congruence to Satan in *Paradise Lost* is admittedly difficult to discern. That being said, it is nevertheless important to consider in which capacities Satan does display liberality and magnificence and does not exhibit prodigality and vulgarity—proofs of excess in these spheres—or meanness or stinginess—proofs of deficiency in these spheres. Particularly for the purpose of my analyses of past inspirations and future manifestations of *Paradise Lost*,⁸ forthcoming in future chapters of this paper, it is important to first discern what Getting and Spending constitutes in Aristotelian terms, the differences between the minor and major spheres, and how Satan exhibits the mean—that is to say, virtue—even in spheres that seem hardly connected with the theme and environment of Milton’s *Paradise Lost*.

⁸ Preliminarily, these spheres are particularly important for analyses of Iago in Shakespeare’s *Othello* and Jay Gatsby in Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*.

Aristotle restricts this sphere to the giving and taking of money specifically. As he writes in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, “With regard to giving and taking of money [...] people exceed and fall short in contrary ways; the prodigal exceeds in spending and falls short in taking, while the mean man exceeds in taking and falls short in spending” (Aristotle). In other dispositions, that is to say, on a larger scale, magnificence differs from liberality as “the former deals with large sums, the latter with small ones” (Aristotle). But in each case, what the mean indicates is an awareness of what is fitting, as the excess of giving is seen to be prodigal in small quantities and vulgar in large quantities, whereas a deficiency of giving is likewise seen to be mean in small quantities, petty and stingy in large. Thus it is a matter of taste that defines whether one is liberal or magnificent: the quantities are appropriate and the causes for giving are honorable.

In *Paradise Lost*, Satan’s virtue in this sphere appears in the liberality and magnificence of his words and purported generosity to his angels. At the council where the foremost among these fallen angels discuss how they might “claim our just inheritance of old” (II. 38), Satan concludes the debate with a kingly sacrifice as, in a parody of the Son’s offering himself as the sacrificial lamb for mankind, he offers himself to be the one to “seek / Deliverance for us all” (II. 464-5). In his speech, Satan refers to the throne he sits on and how it would be inappropriate for him to “assume / These Royalties, and not refuse to Reign, / Refusing to accept as great a share / Of hazard as of honour” (II. 450-3), much in the same way that, in Satan’s characterization, God does. The result for his angels is that they, “though fall’n,” may “intend at home” (II. 457), “ease / The present misery, and render Hell / More tolerable” (II. 458-9) and slack the pain / Of [their] ill Mansion” (II. 461-2). In so doing, Satan grants a generosity to his angels whereby they do not need to suffer the pains of this quest for reclamation of their old glory. In the universe that Milton presents in *Paradise Lost*, one where liberality and magnificence cannot be construed in

terms of monetary wealth, Satan expresses the sublime in these virtues by giving of himself for what he and his angels believe to be a worthy cause. Of course, it remains that his act of sacrifice is a parody of the truly just act of Christ, but if we as readers are to refrain from Christian doctrinal assumptions regarding who is just and who is not and constrain our analysis to merely the Aristotelian virtues, it is undeniable that here, Satan does display the Aristotelian mean in the sphere of getting and spending, as opposed to the excess—which may have manifested as an overbearing imposition of his position over the other angels—or deficiency—which have manifested as calling upon his angels to accomplish Satan’s own motives.

V. Honor and Dishonor (Major)

As in the sphere of getting and spending, there are two levels in the sphere of honor and dishonor, in both of which Satan again, achieves the Aristotelian mean. In consideration of both, it is important to examine Milton’s Satan in consideration of only the excess and the mean, as Milton’s Satan is in no imaginable analysis pusillanimous or unambitious. Aristotle calls the mean vis-à-vis large honors “magnanimity,” *megalopsychia* or greatness of soul, whereby a person knows himself or herself to be worthy of great honors; the excess of honor is vanity or conceit, where one overestimates his or her self-worth. I find that the key difference between the two in this analysis of Milton’s Satan is the fact that a magnanimous individual does not take excessive pleasure in his/her honors, while a conceited individual relishes it excessively.

While the case could be made that Satan’s rebellion arose out of his vanity—in other words, a belief that he was in fact the rightful king of heaven and wholly deserved to rule in God’s stead—closely examining Satan’s reasoning for his rebellion shows otherwise. We must take care to analyze separately Satan’s virtue and Satan’s fallen spirit, as the two seemingly

incompatible qualities are married so thoroughly in Satan so that Satan at times appears a completely different being from how he appeared but a few lines beforehand. Such a scene occurs in Book IV as Satan, in prospect of Eden, is filled with remorse and with grievous sighs, he laments: “Ah wherefore! he deservd no such return / From me, whom he created what I was / In that bright eminence, and with his good / Upbraided none; nor was his service hard” (IV. 42-5). Here, we see how Satan knows his place as being worthy of great honor, but then, he acknowledges the effect of his fallen state on his thoughts: “yet all his good prov’d ill in me, / And wrought but malice; lifted up so high / I sdeind subjection, and thought one step higher / Would set me highest” (IV. 48-51). It is certainly not the case that Satan does not know his place relative to God, as he understands that he owes a “debt immense of endless gratitude” (IV. 52) that he believes he is “still to ow” (IV. 53), but he experienced a moment of weakness, where he found himself shaken from temptations from within and uncharacteristic ambition that he finds, to this moment long after his Fall, perplexing.

In the course of this soliloquy, Satan shows how despite the fact that Satan clearly knows that it is not his place to sit in God’s throne, he fails to repent—but this time, not necessarily due to his fallen state but due, in fact, to his magnanimity, whereby he knows his place and struggles to place himself in a position inferior to it. When he cries, “O then at last relent: is there no place / Left for Repentance, none for Pardon left?” (IV. 79-80), Satan shows possibility of redemption, but what turns him from repenting is his self-forbiddance of “*Disdain*” and his “dread of shame” among his angels (IV. 82). Satan understands that he is culpable for seducing them “With other promises and other vaunts” (IV. 84); moreover, he also understands himself; he knows that if he were to obtain his former state, his fallen state would take him over once again: “how soon / Would high recall high thoughts, how soon unsay / What feign’d submission swore: ease would

recant / Vows made in pain, as violent and void” (IV. 94-97). Thus, contained within Satan’s magnanimity is a tragic self-knowledge that prevents him from idealistically seeking forgiveness and reinstatement to God’s kingdom.

VI. Honor and Dishonor (Minor)

With regard to smaller honors and dishonors, Satan again achieves the mean between empty vanity and undue humility—proper pride—and extreme ambition and lack of ambition—proper ambition. Given the strong interconnectedness between proper pride and magnanimousness, it is important now to examine the question of ambition in Satan. Again, it is necessary to separate Satan’s virtues from his fallen state so as to examine whether Satan exhibits an ambition that goes far beyond his grasp or an ambition reasonably within his grasp.

Satan’s internal struggle as expressed in the soliloquy discussed in the previous section regarding his magnanimity also offers insights regarding Satan’s ambition. It was the greatness that God granted him that served as the spark to his ambition; from his limited and far from omniscient viewpoint, Satan could imagine how he, greatest among the angels, with the force of half of heaven’s hosts might reasonably topple God’s regime and rule heaven. Satan speculates that “had his powerful Destiny ordaind / Me some inferiour Angel, I had stood / Then happie; no unbounded hope had rais’d / Ambition” (IV. 58-61). As such, it was the proximity of greatness that rendered his high hopes existent. It would be incongruent with the idea of proximity to construe Satan’s ambition, then, as extreme; if Satan had been a lesser cherub, then it would have been justifiable to consider his ambition extreme, but as he was the closest among all creation to God’s glory, it is fair to think of his ambition as, at the least, less extreme than had any other angel possessed it.

In his soliloquy, Satan eventually comes to the conclusion that hope for redemption is unreasonable and resolves on a new path: to hold “Divided Empire with Heav’ns King” (IV. 111). It follows to question whether the ambition exhibited by his resolve is extreme or not. I argue that this ambition is far from extreme, given that first, Satan’s hopes of holding a divided empire is a far smaller ambition from his initial one of toppling God—and I have already established that this initial ambition was, in fact, a reasonable one—and second, according to Calvinist theology, we live in a world where Satan’s ambition is realized. This point deserves greater attention. In chapter fourteen in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Calvin acknowledges: “Satan is called the god and ruler of this world” (Calvin). This statement provides Calvin’s interpretation of 2 Corinthians 4:4, which reads, “The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” (2 Corinthians 4:4). Ephesians 6:12 shows how this god is, in fact, Satan: “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Ephesians 6:12). Thus, if Satan rules the world today, then it would be wrong to think of his declaration to rule half the world as excessively ambitious. As such, though Satan may be on the wrong side of the cosmic order, it still stands that he is nevertheless perfectly virtuous—at least in Aristotelian terms.

VII. Anger

Satan’s place in the sphere of anger, where its mean is patience or good temper whereas its excess is irascibility and its deficiency is unirascibility, is easily discernible throughout *Paradise Lost*. Satan is not given to irascibility or needless rage, but neither does he stand mute

at a severe offense. He shows righteous anger in Book II when Death, not yet revealed to Satan as his son, calls him a “Traitor Angel” (II. 689) and “False fugitive” (II. 700) and castigates him with insulting words: “Reck’n’st thou thy self with Spirits of Heav’n, / Hell-doom’d, and breath’st defiance here and scorn / Where I reign King, and to enrage thee more, / Thy King and Lord?” (II. 696-699). Death’s scornful words strike at Satan’s magnanimity—earlier discussed as one of Satan’s virtues—and so if Satan did not respond with anger to Death’s statements, it would be proof of his lack of spirit, or deficiency of anger. Satan, however, is rightfully “Incest with indignation” (II. 707) and confronts Death in battle.

And yet, when Abdiel defies Satan in Book V, Satan does not respond with anger but instead, with a reasoned—albeit a badly reasoned—treatise. Abdiel calls Satan “ingrate” (V. 811), the exact word that the Father uses to describe Adam in Book III, line 97—thus likening Satan to fallen humanity—and calls his argument “blasphemous, false and proud” (V. 809), and otherwise “impious” (V. 813) and “Flatly unjust” (V. 819). Abdiel, making the argument that “by his Word the mighty father made / All things, ev’n thee, and all the Spirits of Heav’n / By him created in thir bright degrees” (V. 836-8), urges Satan to “Cease [...] [his] impious rage” (V. 845) and seek pardon from the Father. Personally insulted and called upon by a lesser angel to repent, it is conceivable that Satan might rightfully have charged at Abdiel as he did at Death, or had the hordes of angels at his disposal smother him. Satan, however, shows some measure of respect to Abdiel and by extension, good temper, as he responds to Abdiel with a haughty rebuttal of his argument: “That we were formd then saist thou? [...] We know no time when were not as now; / Know none before us, self-begot, self-rais’d / By our own quick’ning power” (V. 853, 859-61). Thus Satan shows that he is capable of both anger and patience, and in so doing, Milton constructs him as again, a virtuous character in the sphere of anger.

VIII. Self-Expression

It is undeniable, however, that Satan's argument regarding his and his angels' self-engenderment is untrue, both in the Miltonic Christian perspective and in the Satanic one. Reading Satan's soliloquy in Book IV—particularly lines 42 to 45—in light of Satan's argument to Abdiel shows that Satan either realized that he was not self-begotten sometime between his rebellion⁹ and his Book IV soliloquy, or Satan lied to rebuff Abdiel. I will not entertain the first idea as it is neither defensible nor falsifiable; the second idea, however, problematizes Satan's achievement of the mean in the Aristotelian sphere of self-expression, where its mean is truthfulness and its excess is boastfulness.

On first glance, it seems clear that Satan exhibits a preponderance of boastfulness through his interaction with Abdiel; however, I argue that while Satan is not necessarily the most truthful of characters, he is not a boaster either. Aristotle writes of self-expression thus: “the intermediate is a truthful sort of person and the mean may be called truthfulness, while the pretence which exaggerates is boastfulness and the person characterized by it a boaster, and that which understates is mock modesty and the person characterized by it mock-modest” (Aristotle). Satan is not a boaster; he is an artist of words. Where a boaster would misconstrue words for the purpose of self-fulfillment or at the least, the illusion of self-fulfillment, Satan misconstrues words for the purpose of rousing his angels' spirits. It is difficult to conceive of anything Satan could say in response to Abdiel's reprimands that would first, be truthful, and second, not dampen the spirits of his angels. By his response to Abdiel, Satan lifted up his angels' morale, as

⁹ It is worthwhile to note here for clarity that Satan and Abdiel's interaction in Book V come chronologically earlier than Satan's soliloquy in Book IV.

is evident from Milton's indication that "the sound of waters deep / Hoarse murmur echo'd to [Satan's] words applause / Through the infinite Host" (V. 872-4).

To find other examples of where Satan twists the truth for a noble purpose, one needs go no further than his speeches in Book I of *Paradise Lost*. I find that the central clause in Satan's first speech to Beelzebub is: "All is not lost" (I. 106). Having been thoroughly routed by the Son and doomed to eternity in alienation from God, it would seem for Satan's armies that all indeed was lost, but Satan twists Beelzebub's perception of reality to convince him that there is a reason to not only keep living, but also keep striving "To wage by force or guile eternal Warr / Irreconcilable, to our grand Foe" (I. 121-2). Moreover, in order to afford some measure of dignity to his armies, Satan misrepresents the rout of the Son by telling Beelzebub that "the angry Victor hath recall'd / His Ministers of vengeance and pursuit / Back to the Gates of Heav'n" (I. 169-71). There were no ministers of vengeance to be recalled as no one pursued Satan and his angels as they fell; in Book VI, the Son alone routs Satan and his angels out of heaven and in fact, Satan's armies, fearful of the Son and the "terrors" and "furies" pursuing them—but only to the "bounds / And Chrystal wall of Heav'n" (VI. 859-60), throw themselves down from heaven: "headlong themselves they threw / Down from the verge of Heav'n" (VI. 864-5).¹⁰ And yet, Satan revises history, presenting a picture of God's armies pursuing and driving Satan and his angels down to hell—a picture that not only allows Satan and his angels to think of themselves as more beset by misfortune, but also shows God's armies to be unfairly overwhelming.

Regardless of whether Satan is or is not a boaster, it still stands that Satan is a liar, which precludes him from achieving the Aristotelian mean, truthfulness, vis-à-vis the sphere of self-

¹⁰ William Blake's watercolor illustration of VI. 864-6 is particularly helpful in visualizing this scene: https://www.dartmouth.edu/~milton/reading_room/graphics/blake/pl06.shtml

expression. I argue, however, that as aforementioned, if we analyze Satan according to the Aristotelian virtues independent of where he stands in the cosmic order, then Satan fulfills the Aristotelian mean of truthfulness. Satan lies because the dichotomous cosmic order of *Paradise Lost* demands that Satan lie. Though, as the Satanist faction among Milton scholars find, Satan's virtue and heroism problematizes this dichotomy, it stands that within a Christian—particularly Reformed—theological conception of the cosmic order, cosmic battle rages between two uncomplicated sides: good vs. evil. As such, because God is good and Satan is his enemy, Satan by his place in this cosmic dichotomy must always reside in evil. Moreover, God and “[his] word is truth” (John 17:17), whereas Satan, according to John 8:44, from the beginning did not hold to the truth “for there is no truth in him;” as such, “When he lies, he speaks his native language for he is a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44). In other words, Satan cannot speak the truth as truth is good, so a lack of virtue cannot be the culpable factor in rendering him a liar. As such, it is only apt to conclude that either Satan does achieve the Aristotelian mean of truthfulness in self-expression as he is true to himself, or this sphere must be ignored in our analysis of whether Satan constitutes a perfectly virtuous being.

IX. Conversation and X. Social conduct

It is not only the case that the spheres of social conduct as Aristotle presents them are intrinsically associated, but in Satan, virtue vis-à-vis these two spheres are married. Let us discuss social conduct first. The mean in this sphere is friendliness; as such, a person with a deficiency in amiability is considered “quarrelsome and surly” (Aristotle). On the other hand, one who is too eager to please others is either obsequious or a flatterer: “the man who exceeds is an obsequious person if he has no end in view, a flatterer if he is aiming at his own advantage”

(Aristotle). The easy criticism that some scholars have made is that Milton's Satan is a flatterer, and his flattery is nowhere more evident than at the end of Book III as he, taking the form of a "stripling Cherube" (III. 636), speaks to the archangel Uriel to ascertain the planet upon which humans are. In the following paragraph, I present my refutation of their characterization as thus.

Though it is true that Satan says uplifting words to Uriel, it is not proper to designate him a flatterer based on two considerations: first, everything that Satan says to Uriel that come across as flattery is true; second, Satan's flattery reflects the proper form of social conduct among the angels and thus, he could not have acted in any other way lest Uriel notice immediately that he is not who he says he is. Satan calls Uriel "gloriously bright" (III. 655), the "Eye" of God (660), and "Brightest Seraph" (667). As God's "Eyes / That run through all the Heav'ns or down to th' Earth" (651), Uriel can most certainly justifiably be called the eye of God. As the archangel who stands "nearest to [God's] Throne" (649) and is the "Regent of the Sun" (690), it is imaginable that he would be not only gloriously bright but also be the brightest among the seraphs; as such Satan makes no flattering lie in calling Uriel thus. Later, as Satan bows low before taking his leave of Uriel, Milton indicates that his action is appropriate to the hierarchical customs of heaven, "Where honour due and reverence none neglects" (III. 738). As such, to characterize Satan as a flatterer when his words were true and could also be seen as mere adherence to custom is a stretch of analysis and it would be much more apt to characterize him as friendly, at least insofar as it is possible to be in his position in Milton's cosmic order.

With regard to sphere of conversation, where again, excess is determined in terms of being too eager to please—buffoonery is the vice of being too eager to give amusement—and deficiency, boorishness, is determined by lack thereof, Satan achieves the mean, wittiness, in a similar way as he achieves the mean in social conduct. It is not necessary the case that Satan is

witty, but he is certainly not particular to give amusement to any character, nor is he boorish. Satan achieves moderation and tact at least insofar as he understands when to speak and what to say while he also listens to others carefully, pleasing—instead of amusing, as in Aristotle’s original framework regarding this sphere—those around him with tact, and not with deprecating or illicit humor. Key to Satan’s tactfulness is his ability to listen, as he does in Book II, gauging the perspectives of his angels to effectively intervene with his decision to be the one to carry out the mission of the fallen angels. By doing so, he “prevented all reply” (II. 467) and caused his angels to bend toward him “With awful reverence prone; and as a God / Extoll him equal to the highest in Heav’n” (478-9) and rejoice “in thir matchless Chief” (487). Satan manipulates thus the council to hold “Firm concord” between “Devil with Devil damn’d” (II. 496-7). It is fair to say then, that Satan is indeed witty, not in the sense that he is able to tactfully humor others, but in that he is able to tactfully please them and render accord through conversation.

XI. Shame

Though he does not consider shame a virtue, Aristotle extends praise to the modest man, who feels shame only when it is appropriate. Satan is neither shameless nor is he “the bashful man who is ashamed of everything” (Aristotle), and his expressions of shame are most cogent in his oft-quoted soliloquy in Book IV. Satan knows and believes in his heart that it was wrong of him to war against his creator, and he is willing to admit his shame as he cries, “What could be less then to afford him praise, / The easiest recompence, and pay him thanks, / How due!” (IV. 46-8). He understands that his cause was unjust; he bemoans that he “quit / The debt immense of endless gratitude, / So burthensome, still paying, still to ow; / Forgetful what from him I still received” (51-4). It is interesting here to consider how in lines 46-47, Satan considers the debt

easy to pay, and yet it becomes much more burdensome in lines 53-54, as “still” should be interpreted as “always.” The duality of this seemingly contradictory statement reveals two things about Satan’s disposition: first, he knows and feels in his heart that it would have been the logical and easy thing to worship God instead of rebel against him, and second, he knows that his reasons for worshipping God abound and thus his rebellion is worthy of even greater shame.

It is clear then that Satan does know when it is appropriate to feel shame and his shame nearly drives him to repentance, but as earlier discussed, his fallen state—indeed, the shame associated with that fallen state—prevents him from doing so. Against his desire to repent, Satan believes in his shame that even if he were reinstated to his former state, “high” would soon “recall high thoughts” and he would “soon unsay / What feign’d submission swore;” moreover, “ease would” cause him to “recant / Vows made in pain” (IV. 95-7). Satan mentions that “wounds of deadly hate have peric’d so deep” so as to engender a “worse relapse / And heavier fall” (99-100); however, it is not his hate that is his primary deterrent from repentance. Rather, It is the fact that God, his “punisher,” knowing that Satan would not truly repent, is “as farr / From granting hee, as I from begging peace” and as such, “All hope [is] excluded thus” (103-5). Satan’s misgivings is most appropriately construed as a heavy shame that causes him to rationalize that he does not have the goodness in him to repent and does not allow him to imagine a future where God would possibly forgive him. Given the gravity of his actions, I would argue that this shame is appropriate, thus indicating Satan’s modesty, even in the midst of his proper pride and magnanimity.

XII. Indignation

The last of Aristotle's spheres is indignation, where the mean, righteous indignation, lies "between envy and spite," which are "concerned with the pain and pleasure that are felt at the fortunes of our neighbours" (Aristotle). In the Aristotelian sense, "the man characterized by righteous indignation is pained at undeserved good fortune" and is neither envious, who "is pained at all good fortune," nor is he spiteful, and "falls so far short of being pained" at fortune that he rejoices at all fortune (Aristotle). The confusing terminology in Aristotle's designation of the excess and deficiency in this sphere requires further elucidation. It seems incredible that Aristotle would say that a spiteful person, someone lacking sufficient indignation, would rejoice when others fare well when, by definition, a spiteful person would rejoice in others faring badly (J.O. Urmsen, *Aristotle's Doctrine of the Mean*, 167). But it is the Aristotelian definition of envy and spite that we find Milton adhering to in his characterization of Satan.

The primary impetus to Satan's rebellion was God's appointing his Son as the Lord of all angels. Milton writes that Satan "fraught with envie against the Son of God [...] could not beare / Through pride that sight, & thought himself impaired" (V. 661-2, 664-5). It follows to discuss whether Satan's "envie" indicates an excess or appropriate amount of indignation. It follows to discern, then, whether Satan's resentment indicates envy or righteous indignation. For such a study, we must once again eschew religious biases whereby we consider the position of Satan according to his place in Milton's cosmic order and instead, judge him only by the character he displays vis-à-vis Aristotelian notions of virtue. Restricting our analysis to the empirical, then, we find that Satan's justifications for his rebellion exhibit not a preponderance of envy but of what Aristotle would consider righteous indignation.

The heart of Satan's argument strikes at questions of equality, appealing to the angels' sensibilities that God's exaltation of the Son is unjust because it is undeserved. Satan begins his

speech—which very much resembles a republican treatise—by naming and elevating his angels: “Thrones, Dominations, Princedoms, Vertues, Powers” (V. 772). He then proceeds to argue that these titles are “Not merely titular” (773) and to “submit [...] necks, and chuse to bend / The supple knee” (787-8) is inappropriate. The heart of Satan’s argument arrives in the following lines:

if ye know your selves
 Natives and Sons of Heav’n possest before
 By none, and if not equal all, yet free,
 Equally free; for Orders and Degrees
 Jar not with liberty, but well consist. (V. 789-793)

Through these lines, Satan expresses an indignation at being usurped when his and his angels’ definitions granted by God afford them certain equality, especially regarding their freedom. As such, God’s placing his son to rule over them deserves their righteous indignation: “Who can in reason then or right assume / Monarchie over such as live by right / His equals, if in power and splendor less, / In freedome equal?” (794-797). In conclusion, Satan’s anger is not an envy where he is pained by all good fortune, but it is a righteous indignation, at least in his and his angels’ rationalizations, at the underserved usurpation of God’s son over the angels.

Conclusion

Without qualification, it seems that I have made stringent requirements for what constitutes an Miltonic anti-hero, but it is important to remember that I consider Satan, who accomplishes the virtuous mean in all twelve of Aristotle’s spheres of thought and action, as the quintessential Miltonic anti-hero. As such, it is not a requirement that a Miltonic anti-hero be so

perfectly virtuous under any definition or framework. That said, I believe it is worthwhile to note that any Miltonic anti-hero must be, at least under some vague conception, good. Otherwise, it is impossible for this anti-hero to engage in the commingling of good and evil that is so central to the office of, specifically, the Miltonic anti-hero. I elaborate on the necessity of this requirement in the following chapter.

Chapter II

The Doom of Nonsense: Satan as Miltonic Anti-Hero

Introduction

A critical irony problematizes the existence of a perfectly virtuous Satan. Satan exists within *Paradise Lost*'s Manichean framework: he is the *infimum malum* to serve as foil to God, the *summum bonum* (Werblowsky x-xii). Thus, Satan who is perfectly virtuous under the Aristotelian definition constitutes, under the Christian definition, the archenemy of the perfect good and therefore must be evil.¹¹ As I come to argue, the conflict between these two definitions of Satan strikes at the heart of Satan's function in *Paradise Lost*—in other words, Milton's theological motivations for rendering Satan the literary protagonist of his poem. For Milton, the crux of the matter is that God's omniscient eyes see Satan as evil, but the confused eyes of this corrupted world see Satan as good.

What Satan accomplishes over the course of *Paradise Lost* is an adulteration of Manichean definitions, a commingling of good and evil. I aim to establish in this chapter that the foregoing is the office of the Miltonic anti-hero. My argument is tripartite. First, I provide my interpretation of the well-established designation of Satan as epic hero, in light of my comments on his Aristotelian virtues in the preceding chapter. I argue that Milton insists upon Satan's virtuousness and idealizes his perfect epic heroism to show how Satan's nobility is tainted with evil. Second, I make the case that Satan does not merely impose evil onto existent good but truly commingles it, as he is the first to fall prey to his own commingling of good and evil—a

¹¹ Strong's Concordance provides the following translation of "Satan," a Hebrew word: "an opponent, especially (with the article prefixed) Satan, the arch-enemy of good:—adversary, Satan, withstand" (H7854).

commingling that borders on redefinition. And third, I contend that Milton makes Satan the epic hero of *Paradise Lost* to subvert epic tradition by constructing a model of behavior for man as he is, and not as he should be.

Good Means for Evil Ends

While the plethora of scholarship analyzing the ties between Milton and classical epic amounts to a veritable embarrassment of riches, regrettably no scholarship to date consider these ties concurrently with Satan's exhibition of the Aristotelian virtues. It would be remiss, however, to ignore that, in drawing the lines between Milton and the epic tradition, many scholars—prominent among them John Dryden, Neil Forsyth, Davis Harding, David Quint, John Leonard, John Steadman, Michael Wilding—have at least touched on Satan's heroism as exhibiting a specifically classical nobility. Having established in the preceding chapter the premise that Satan does in fact exhibit the virtuous mean in all twelve Aristotelian spheres of action or feeling, I build upon this premise to elucidate the apparent virtuousness of Satan's epic heroism, ultimately drawing a sharp contrast between how we see Satan's virtuous heroism from an isolated classical perspective, and how we see it from a holistic theological perspective.

Heroic but Ignoble Exhortations

Milton describes Satan in heroic terms and makes extensive use of the good that we perceive in Satan in order to idealize him as a consummate epic hero. Milton presents him in heroic terms from the outset of the poem, rendering a typical epic hero "fighting against great odds, refusing to give in" (Wilding 15). His Aristotelian courage is the first Satanic quality we notice, as in his first speech in Book I, Satan establishes himself in the "grand heroic tradition"

(Wilding 15) by upholding the “courage never to submit or yield” (I. 108). In doing so, Satan accomplishes a classic text for the “we will not give in” theme. Wilding analyzes in depth other elements in this key speech that establishes Satan’s epic heroism: for instance, the “sonorous, rolling emphatic ‘All’ sets the tone of the immensities of noble heroism, leading on to the declaration of the refusal to surrender—‘th’unconquerable Will’” (Wilding 15).

It is important that we do not, however, ignore that Milton places at the center of Satan’s noble cries for heroic defiance a craftily concealed evil and ignobility. Sandwiched between “resonant noble cries” of grand heroism—“All is not lost; th’unconquerable Will” (I. 106) and “courage never to submit or yield” (I. 108)—is, in line 107, the “ignoble ‘immortal hate’, the inglorious ‘study of revenge’” (Wilding 16). Wilding claims that it is possible to interpret the interplay between these lines in two ways: either Satan, in typical Satanic fashion, uses his “traditionally heroic rousing cries” to interweave “his own corrupt sentiments among them,” or the “defiance slips so naturally into the cruelly vengeful hatred, there is the suggestion that heroic gestures of fortitude are of the same order as such ignobility” (Wilding 16). According to this second interpretation, heroism is, in fact, a “cruel and corrupt concept” (Wilding 16).

I do not find these interpretations mutually exclusive, but ultimately, it is the second interpretation—that Satan commingles good and evil, heroism with villainy—that provides continuity with the larger theological framework of *Paradise Lost*. As Wilding argues, we cannot deny that Satan is heroic but we “must not be deluded by ascribing a simple moral worth to his heroism” (Wilding 16). That is to say: classical heroism does not preclude theological villainy. In lines 106-108, Milton places an “ambiguous balance” between the “noble heroic” and the “obviously depraved,” and the suggestion is that “the two are inseparable” (Wilding 16). It follows to interpret that just as Satan commingles good and evil, he commingles heroism and

villainy in such a way that is largely hidden from his angels and from us, as we laud his classical heroism and apparently, fail to see its underlying theological villainy. This “continual ambiguity” constitutes a moral problem (Wilding 16). We must judge Satan’s nobility in the “larger moral context” of his “ignoble, destructive purpose” (Wilding 24); only then are we engaging in a theologically informed reading of Milton’s Satan where, as aforementioned, Satan is the adversary of the good and therefore must be evil.

Satan’s Shield and the Moon

For the purpose of elucidating Satan’s commingling of good and evil, Milton continues to associate Satan with the epic tradition as he describes Satan leaving the burning lake. Wilding points out that Milton uses the “traditionally sustained epic simile,” with each aspect of the simile making significant associations for an epic evaluation of Satan’s heroism (Wilding 16):

his ponderous shield

Ethereal temper, massy, large and round,

Behind him cast; the broad circumference

Hung on his shoulders like the Moon, (I. 284-87)

Satan’s “ponderous shield” (I. 284) relates him to Goliath and Achilles (Wilding 16), respectively a Biblical champion¹² and classical epic hero, but sets Satan greater than them as his shield is not only “massy, large and round” (I. 285) but hangs “on his shoulders like the Moon” (I. 287).

This association between Satan and the moon, however, offers insight into Satan’s transitory and dependent glory. The seventeenth century worldview in the field of cosmology

¹² In the following subsection entitled “Satan’s Spear, Polyphemus, and Goliath” I elaborate on the significance of Satan’s connection to Goliath.

held on to medieval perspectives, which saw the moon as a “sphere of transitory, changeful things, a sphere subject to chance” on account of its controlling the sphere of the universe closest to Earth, where man inhabits (Wilding 17). Satan, “Shorn of his Beams” (I. 596) and fallen from glory, no longer belongs to heaven. He has fallen to the moon’s capricious sphere. In accordance, his heavenly glory—once stable and thought immutable—starts to change and fade (Wilding 17). Furthermore, the existence of Satan’s glory depends on God, just as the moon’s light is dependent on the sun. To elaborate, in Book X, Milton shows that Satan retains only “what permissive glory since his fall / Was left him” (X. 451-52). Thus his glory is “permissive” (Wilding 17), dependent on God’s permitting in the same way that the moon shines only by “borrowing her Light” from the sun (VII. 377).¹³

Satan’s association to the moon also provides insights into his true, dark, and blemished character. Milton connects Satan’s shield—the emblem of his epic heroism—with the moon as the “illumination of night [...] the pervasive image and setting for Hell and sinfulness” (Wilding 17). Just as the moon illuminates the darkness, Satan’s epic heroism as symbolized by his shield reveals his sinfulness. Following the simile depicting Satan’s shield as the moon, Milton continues:

whose Orb

Through Optic Glass the *Tuscan* Artist views

At Ev'ning from the top of *Fesole*,

Or in *Valdarno*, to descry new Lands,

Rivers or Mountains in her spotty Globe. (I. 287-291)

¹³ It is worthy to note here that Milton shows that Satan’s actions—specifically in this case, his movement through heaven and earth—depends also on God’s “permissive will” (III. 685).

Through the “Optic Glass” (I. 288) or telescope, the artist is able to comprehend to a greater extent the titanic expanse of the universe—a universe that Satan traverses with ease. As such, the telescope reminds us of Satan’s size and grandeur but also shows us a “spotty Globe” (I. 291)—the spots, craters, and imperfections on the moon. Thus we find that Satan’s shield is “appropriate to his fallen condition” (Wilding 17); it is not only fading as earlier discussed but it is also spotty. Milton in Book V equates spots to blame, marks of evil: “Evil into the mind of God or Man / May come and go, so unapprov’d, and leave / No spot or blame behind” (V. 117-19). Therefore, as Wilding interprets, the spots on Satan’s shield are marks of evil; as such, his “accoutrements are heroic, but simultaneously marks of his corruption and degradation” (Wilding 17).

Satan’s Spear, Polyphemus, and Goliath

Milton places particular emphasis on another such accoutrement, Satan’s spear, which makes a similar moral comment on him.

His Spear, to equal which the tallest Pine

Hewn on *Norwegian* hills, to be the Mast

Of some great Ammiral, were but a wand,

He walkt with to support uneasie steps (I. 292-295)

This description of Satan’s spear derives from the “description of Polyphemus in the *Aeneid*” (Wilding 17) when he, “high on a hill among his herd, / His great bulk moving toward the shore he knew— [...] / A pine log led his hand and braced his steps” (*Aeneid* III. 656-59). Thus Satan guides his steps with his spear, but we find that it is so colossal that “the Mast / Of som great Ammiral, were but a wand” (I. 293-94)—a comparison that hearkens to the comparison of

Polyphemus's club to a ship's mast found in the *Odyssey* (Wilding 17, Harding 63). Balachandra Rajan contends that in order to properly judge the impressiveness of Milton's comparisons in this passage, we must not only find their origin in Homer's presentation of Polyphemus but also "trace the image in its descent through Tasso and Ariosto to Du Bartas's description of Goliath," followed by Sylvester's couplets and Cowley's seminal rendition (Rajan 122):

Brass was his helmet, his boots brass; and o're
 His breast a thick plate of a strong brass he wore,
 His spear the trunk was of a lofty tree,
 Which nature meant some tall ships mast should be. (p. 146, l. 391-94)

As Rajan finds, Milton's epic simile employs these time-honored properties "heroically" and establishes the style of *Paradise Lost* in continuity: not only in epic tradition but also in its closer and similarly heroic European inheritance (Rajan 122-23). It is clear, then, that Milton places Satan within an enduring "poetical tradition of the epic heroic" by making implicit allusions to the classical epic poets Homer and Virgil and connecting these allusions to the tradition established by the Renaissance writers Tasso, Ariosto, Sylvester and Cowley (Wilding 17).

Milton's adherence to epic and poetical tradition in this passage is significant because the spear signifies more than Satan's size and grandeur. Polyphemus in the *Aeneid* is a cruel ogre, and Goliath is the Philistine, pagan enemy of the God-fearing Israelites in 1 Samuel 17. I reiterate for the sake of clarity that Milton draws connections between Satan and Polyphemus vis-à-vis both the *Aeneid* and the *Odyssey*. Harding argues that by amalgamating and magnifying details from both epic poems, Milton is able to unleash a "whole new flood of relevant associations" (Harding 63). Of particular importance is the fact that in the *Aeneid*, Polyphemus's bloodthirsty deeds are known second hand through the medium of Achemenides, and as Harding

relates, the “full dramatic horror of the tale [...] is never quite realized” (Harding 63). It is the *Odyssey* that provides a first hand account of Polyphemus’s deeds and thereby affords us a fuller knowledge and capability to appraise them. We must make two connections. First, Milton’s allusion to the *Aeneid* provides a partial picture of the size and grandeur of the spear and the following allusion to the *Odyssey* provides a fuller picture of its size and grandeur. And second, we find that Milton accompanies his second allusion with a note that Satan uses this great spear to “support uneasy steps” (I. 295). Thus, we come to understand not only the greater size of the spear but also its futility; it might as well be a “wand” (I. 294) as its grandeur is wasted on a fallen Satan. The “full dramatic horror of the tale” (Harding 63) of Polyphemus as expressed through the *Odyssey*, then, is equal to our underwhelming dramatic horror at finding how far Satan has fallen.

The connection between Satan and Goliath that Rajan elucidates adds to the foregoing deduction: Satan fell far because of his grandeur—that is, his epic heroism. The story of David and Goliath as detailed in 1 Samuel 17 exhibits epic themes—David, the hero, defeats the giant Goliath in spite of overwhelming odds. The irony is that despite Satan’s similar epic heroism against the insurmountable God, Milton likens Satan to the antagonist: Goliath, whose “spear shaft was like a weaver’s rod, [...] its iron point weigh[ing] six hundred shekels” (1 Samuel 17:7). Goliath, who stands high above his adversaries with a height of “six cubits and a span” (1 Samuel 17:4), falls to David, who is “little more than a boy” (1 Samuel 17:42). Given his theological education, Milton would have undoubtedly been aware of the logical interpretation of verses 48-49:¹⁴ that Goliath fell because of his trust in his physical strength and grandeur. Milton

¹⁴ ⁴⁸ As the Philistine moved closer to attack him, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet him. ⁴⁹ Reaching into his bag and taking out a stone, he slung it and struck the Philistine on

alludes, then, to this Biblical account because it allows us to see that Satan fell because of his glory and “bright eminence” (IV. 44)—in my analysis, his epic heroism. The crux of the matter is that for all his heroic grandeur, Satan fell short of the glory of God because he sat on the side of evil; he dared to act as Goliath, the “uncircumcised Philistine that [...] [defied] the armies of the living God” (1 Samuel 17:26).

Satan and Turnus

In order to establish, then, that by ennobling and revealing his virtues, Milton discredits Satan, I examine in this section one more epic allusion. When Milton describes Satan heroically rallying his troops, he ennoble him as an epic hero by alluding to Turnus in Book VII of the *Aeneid*.

he above the rest
 In shape and gesture proudly eminent
 Stood like a Tower; his form had yet not lost
 All her Original brightness, nor appear'd
 Less then Arch Angel ruind, and th' excess
 Of Glory obscur'd: As when the Sun new ris'n
 Looks through the Horizontal misty Air
 Shorn of his Beams, or from behind the Moon
 In [dim](#) Eclips disastrous twilight sheds
 On half the Nations, and with fear of change

the forehead. The stone sank into his forehead, and he fell facedown on the ground. (1 Samuel 17:48-49).

[Perplexes Monarchs](#). Dark'n'd so, yet shon

Above them all th' Arch Angel: ... (I. 589-600)

Milton writes that Satan “above the rest / In shape and gesture proudly eminent / Stood like a Tower” (I. 589-91): a description that recalls Virgil’s description of Turnus: “Turnus moved back and forth along the front, / Beautiful, armed, a head above the others” (*Aeneid* VII. 783-84).¹⁵ As Harding argues, the “verbal and structural likeness to the first unit of Milton’s description” is “too close to be coincidental” and as such, evidences Milton’s indebtedness to Virgil in these lines (Harding 45). Moreover, it is probable that Virgil’s second line provided the inspiration for Milton’s simile “Stood like a Tower” (I. 591).

The significance of Milton’s associating Satan with Turnus’s strength and beauty not only lies in the fact that Milton thus renders “Satan’s physical presence more glorious than ever” but also associates Satan with the “false standards” to which Turnus’s strength and beauty were “so irrevocably committed” (Harding 45-6). Turnus in the *Aeneid* embodied a way of life and mode of thinking that were “outworn and dying” (Harding 46). Thus, Milton extends his epic simile to include in his reader’s mind this “chastening reflection” that implies by analogy the “deficiencies of the code to which Satan himself subscribes” and moreover, reassures his ultimate defeat via parallelism. In other words, just as Turnus at the close of the *Aeneid* pays his “vicious blood in payment for [his] crime” (*Aeneid* XII. 949) against Pallas and his “indignant soul [flies] down to Hades” (XII. 957), Satan in Book X suffers downfall yet again:

supplanted down he fell

A monstrous Serpent on his Belly prone,

Reluctant, but in vaine: a greater power

¹⁵ See Harding *The Club of Hercules*, p. 45.

Now rul'd him, punish in the shape he sin'd, (X. 513-16)

Therefore, Milton's ennobling Satan through this allusion to Turnus is, in fact, part of his "grand strategy" to covertly discredit him in the process (Harding 46).

Conclusion

This grand strategy follows a pattern of insisting upon Satan's virtuousness and idealizing his epic heroism only to show that this virtuousness and heroism are tainted; they ultimately display in sharper relief Satan's fallen state and cause us to question any future iteration of Satan's goodness. At the heart of Milton's "repudiation of the heroic" in *Paradise Lost* is the realization that "[b]ravery, courage, defiance are too easily misapplied and used for immoral or ignoble purposes" (Wilding 24). Satan's moral ambiguity renders him his true place in the cosmic order, where he confounds our perception of what is right and wrong by appealing to us as an angel, and by his twisted light we mistake the good for evil and the evil for good. In my interpretation, then, Satan's heroics are nothing more than a masquerading of what seems good in the place of what actually seems good—the problem is that we fall for this masquerading, allowing our designation of Satan as an epic hero cross over into the territory of moral heroism, a territory that Satan, due to his place in the cosmic order, cannot enter.

The term "masquerading," however, appears to presume that Satan very intentionally confounds our perceptions of good and evil, while understanding the truth himself. Lewis's argument that Satan is "more a Lie than a Liar, a personified self-contradiction" (Lewis 97) retaliates against such an interpretation. I examine the conflict between these two schools of thought regarding Satan's intentionality in the next section of this chapter. I seek to discern whether Milton's Satan, despite all his virtues, is a conniving villain seeking to subvert our

understanding of good and evil, or despite all his intelligence, is a fool who falls to his own devices: the first individual to believe that good is evil and evil is good.

To Make Good His Evil

Is Satan a villain or is he a fool? In the preceding section we have established that Satan, for all his Aristotelian virtues, is ultimately evil: the *infimum malum* to serve as the counterpoint to God's *summum bonum*. Nevertheless, Lewis establishes that "mere Christianity commits every Christian to believing that 'the Devil is (in the long run) an ass'" (Lewis 95). For certain, evil and foolishness are not mutually exclusive. That being said, Satan cannot simultaneously be a lie and a liar; if he believes in his evil he is a lie, and if he does not, he is a liar. I find this question to be central to our consideration of what constitutes the Miltonic anti-hero, because the designation of Satan as either critically mutates our perception of him. If Satan is a fool, then the Miltonic anti-hero is acts according to a personal conviction in a morally ambiguous dichotomy of good and evil—a deluded Hamlet seeking to avenge his father—and if Satan is a villain, then the Miltonic anti-hero is nothing more than a nefarious Iago, seeking destruction for destruction's sake and lacking little to no other intelligible intent.

While these Shakespearean comparisons provide a cogent and immediately relatable characterization of Satan, ultimately I find that neither captures the fullness of Satan's persona as Milton intended. Milton's theological mind is not so unidimensional that he would create a Satan that fails to exhibit both the past glory of a Paradise forgone, and the degeneration that sin imposes on this first sinner in whom the wages of sin must manifest in all its ostentation. As I come to argue then, initially, Satan as the Miltonic anti-hero does not believe in his lies without qualification. However, he comes to believe in his own lies, effectively turning himself into a

fool by commingling good and evil in his own mind. In order to make this argument, I first analyze Satan as Iago, then Satan as Hamlet, and finally, Satan as the Miltonic anti-hero.

Satan as Iago

In 1695, Patrick Hume, conceivably the “first systematic commentator on *Paradise Lost*” (Lynch), argued that Milton would not construct a Satan that would fail to know the sinfulness of his actions, as readers in the 17th century would be accustomed to think of Satan as a liar, but would not necessarily dismiss him as a fool (Leonard 395). Satan’s soliloquy in Book IV lends textual credence to Hume’s argument. On Mount Niphates, Satan admits that his case is unjust: “all his good prov’d ill in me / And wrought but malice” (IV. 48-49), and proceeds to lament the fact that he “Chose freely what it now so justly rues” (IV. 72), considering if there is “no place / Left for Repentance, none for Pardon left” (IV. 79-80). B.A. Wright writes that Satan speaks from the heart in these lines, which signifies first that Satan indeed possesses a heart, which in turn entails that he possesses a free-thinking conscience (Leonard 394). As such, Satan, in adherence to Hume’s argument, knows the sinfulness of his actions full well, but regardless of this knowledge, Satan ultimately chooses evil. At the end of this soliloquy, Satan explicitly rejects the existent Manichean moral dichotomy where good is good and evil is evil by saying, “Evil be thou my Good” (IV. 110). Satan, despite knowing that his actions are evil, consciously decides to take evil as his good and, importantly, act on that conviction, propagating this lie wherever he goes—thus, we find in this passage a Satan who is fully culpable for his sin as he executes evil in spite of his full knowledge that his actions are evil.

Insofar as Satan knows that his purposes are evil and destructive, he resembles Iago as Iago covertly elucidates his nefarious plans in his infamous soliloquy near the close of *Othello*

Act II. Iago associates his plans with the machinations of devils as, “When devils will the blackest sins put on, / They do suggest at first with heavenly shows, / As I do now” (II. 3. 371-73). Thus, he equates himself to these devils, cleaving to an evil “Divinity of hell” (II. 3. 370) that leaves no space for doubt with regards to Iago’s culpability in executing his evil plans. In short, Iago, like Satan, knows the sinfulness of his actions full well. It is important to consider also that Iago’s destructive aims are very similar to the Miltonic anti-hero’s primary aim. Iago seeks to “turn [...] virtue into pitch, / And out of [...] goodness make the net / That shall enmesh them all” (II. 3. 380-82). The Miltonic anti-hero on a larger scale works to commingle and render ambiguous good and evil, thus causing us as readers to mistake his evil as good and the good as evil.

The problem with this analysis is that Iago does not consider even for a moment turning away from his evil plans, thus problematizing the question of whether he possesses a conscience capable of properly weighing good and evil. If he did have a conscience, then Iago would display some inkling of doubt based on morality in whether he should carry out his aims; Iago displays no inkling of doubt whatsoever. It is also important to note that Iago’s motivations enduringly remain ambiguous to us, thus suggesting that Iago has no intelligible motivation apart from his driving compulsion to bring Othello, Cassio, and Desdemona to ruin. Given Iago’s doubtlessness and the enduring ambiguity of his motivations, then, I find it likely that Iago does not have a functional conscience. As such, we cannot characterize Satan as an Iago—simply a villain propagating lies for the sake of evil—because Satan is more complex than Iago; he has a conscience and ironically, exhibits more human qualities than Iago. To construe Satan as an Iago would preclude the virtuous elements of Satan that render him heroic and allow him to commingle good and evil in such a way that we as readers find convincing. In other words,

without a conscience, Satan loses the parts of him that are good, in which case Satan cannot commingle good with evil as he would know only evil and be unable to comprehend good. And critically, Satan the disgraced archangel is not so fallen from God's glory that he is unable to comprehend the good.

Satan as Hamlet

Is it possible, however, to see Satan, who consciously rejected what he knew to be good for evil (IV. 110), as a moral successor to Hamlet, who believes that his aims are just? We have already established that Satan, possessing a functional conscience, understands that his aims are evil. Moreover, his exclamation "How due!" (IV. 48) provides for the deduction that Satan during his Mount Niphates soliloquy does not believe that his evil aims are just. Yet, there is some credence to the association between Satan and Hamlet. As I come to argue, Satan comes to believe that his evil is, indeed, good in the course of *Paradise Lost*; that is to say, Satan becomes a product of his own plans to commingle good and evil. In this way he comes to resemble Hamlet as they both toil for what they—arguably deluded in their minds—believe is just.

Over the course of *Paradise Lost*, Satan increasingly cleaves to a "doom of Nonsense" (Lewis 97), leading us to deduce that Satan falls prey to his own commingling—he confuses good with evil and evil with good. Milton sets the stage for this "Satanic predicament" in Book I as he shows Satan declaring that he suffers from a "sence of injur'd merit" (I. 98) on account of the anointment of the Messiah as the head of the angels. Satan "thought himself impaired" (V. 665) when, as Lewis describes, a being undoubtedly "superior to himself in kind, by whom he himself had been created—a being far above him in the natural hierarchy—had been preferred to him in honour by an authority whose right to do so was not disputable" (Lewis 96). No one

actually committed any wrong against Satan, and in God's flawless Paradise, Satan "could find nothing to think of more interesting than his own prestige" and he thought himself impaired (Lewis 96). Worthy of note is the fact that the same hand that grants the superior prestige of the Messiah confers Satan's own prestige. By rejecting the Messiah's superiority and insisting on his own prestige, then, Satan entangles himself in contradictions whereby he seeks to saw off "the branch he is sitting on" in this "quasi-political sense" and the sense that "a creature revolting against a creator is revolting against the source of his own powers—including even his power to revolt" (Lewis 96-97).

From the outset, then, we find that Satan has the tendency to blind himself to reason—a tendency that allows for the possibility of Satan believing his own false propaganda. It is possible, then, that when Satan claims that the "terror of [his] Arm" (I. 113) caused God to doubt his empire, lies to his angels that Night and Chaos, "jealous of thir secrets fiercely oppos'd / [His] journey strange, with clamorous uproar / Protesting Fate supream" (X. 477-80),¹⁶ and seeks to "maintain the heresy [...] at the root of his whole predicament" (Lewis 97) in his debate with Abdiel that he and his angels are "self-begot, self-rais'd / By our own quick'ning power" (V. 860-61),¹⁷ Satan actually believes in his lies because he has become blind to reason. As such, when Satan makes evil his good (IV. 110) he allows himself to make nonsense his sense, thus falling prey to his commingling of good and evil (Lewis 99). Lewis summarizes cogently when he states that "What we see in Satan is the horrible co-existence of a subtle and incessant intellectual activity with an incapacity to understand anything" (Lewis 99).

¹⁶ Neither Night nor Chaos offered any opposition to Satan. In fact, in Book II, Chaos offered Satan the direction he could (II. 999-1009).

¹⁷ Chronologically, Satan proclaims later in his Mount Niphates soliloquy that God "created what I was" (II. 43), thus casting particular doubt on whether Satan believed he was self-begot or not.

I synthesize, then, that Satan does not commingle good and evil simply out of malice, nor does he fail to understand that evil is evil and good is good, but he eventually comes to believe in his lies. This progression parallels the progression of sin, which at its height and outset exhibits a melodramatic “Godlike imitated state” but eventually intoxicates the sinner, strangling her ability to reason (Lewis 100). In other words, evil recoils on itself. Milton provides a cogent parallel in the philosophic discussion of the devils in Book II, which come to “no end, in wandring mazes lost” (II. 561). As Wilding finds, this maze is a double-edged sword: not only does it “confuse people [and] obscure the true faith,” it also confuses the devils themselves (Wilding 37). In this element of evil, then, we find a compelling justification for the argument that Satan falls to his own deceptions.

I argue then, that Milton’s Satan resembles Hamlet insofar as they both believe in the justness of their cause. In his soliloquy at the close of Act II, Hamlet proclaims that he is “Prompted to [his] revenge by heaven and hell” (II. 2. 613). He entertains the idea that “The spirit that I have seen / May be a devil, and the devil hath power / T’assume a pleasing shape” (II. 2. 627-29) but ultimately disregards his misgivings. Much later in the play in Act IV, Hamlet decides that “all occasions do inform against me / And spur my dull revenge” (IV. 4. 34-35), and as he forces the King to drink poison after stabbing him, Hamlet censures him as “thou incestuous, murd’rous, damnèd Dane” (V. 2. 356), thus showing that to the last he believes that his cause is just.

Where Hamlet as an analogy for Satan as the Miltonic anti-hero fails is in the fact that Hamlet’s justification comes from without, while Satan’s justification comes from within. This is a critical difference because Satan’s internal justification entails that he blinds himself to the facts and to reason—an action that is tied to his fall in sin. A Satan that, like Hamlet, does not

need to blind himself and finds all justification—regardless of how skewed it is by chance happenstance—is inadequate for showing the effects of sin on a once-glorious archangel.

Conclusion: Satan as Miltonic Anti-Hero

Neither Iago nor Hamlet as analogies for Satan is sufficient: Satan is not simply evil, lacking conceptions of what is good, but neither are his flawed justifications imposed from without; they are self-imposed. Satan does not believe in his lies without qualification; he knows initially that they are lies but comes to believe in them as a result of his degeneration from sin. Thus it is difficult to decide whether Satan is more a villain or fool; he is both, but in the convoluted way this section has elucidated. Ultimately, Satan as a Miltonic anti-hero commingles good and evil in such a way that it confuses others and confuses himself—only then can Satan truly accomplish his aims of twisting the world's definitions of good and evil.

It follows to ask: why is it important that the Miltonic anti-hero commingle good and evil for himself and for others? The crux of the matter is that this confusion is the wage of sin—evil manifested in the world. It is theologically inconsistent to claim that Satan could impose his commingling of good and evil on others without subjecting himself to this confusion himself. Thus Satan in *Paradise Lost* reflects the state of fallen man, which is, to circle back to the argument of the first chapter, problematic given that Satan is perfectly virtuous. Moreover, we cannot deny that Satan holds the role of epic hero in *Paradise Lost*. Regardless of whether we see the evil behind his goodness and recognize that Satan commingles good and evil, inevitably his place within *Paradise Lost* problematizes our interpretation of the epic genre as a whole and we must now consider Milton's message in placing this living paradox—perfectly virtuous, evil in the cosmic order, exemplary of sin—at the heart of *Paradise Lost*. The questions we must ask

are as follows: if Satan is indeed an epic hero, are we to adhere to epic tradition and look to him as a model of human behavior? By virtue of his position as epic hero in *Paradise Lost*, should we venerate him as the ideal hero, the figure we should admire?

Subverting the Epic Tradition

Traditionally the hero of the epic poem is a character to be admired, “a figure on whom to model human behavior” (Wilding 30), but under Christian conceptions of good and evil, it would be wrong—even heretical—to admire Satan as an ideal and seek to emulate him. The mere concept that Satan could be ideal is repugnant. Ironically, in the preceding chapter I established that Satan embodies the ideal vis-à-vis the Aristotelian virtues. But as I have argued in this chapter, Milton’s perfectly virtuous Satan in the Aristotelian spheres is hardly perfect in the Christian sphere as he commingles good and evil and therefore renders ambiguous these Manichean terms. Assuming Milton’s explicit intent in placing Satan as the epic hero of *Paradise Lost*, we may interpret Satan’s heroic position in two ways. Either Satan is to be admired for his Aristotelian virtues and mourned for the flaws or circumstances that engineered his fall, or he is unworthy of our admiration on account of the evil that motivates his virtue.

The first approach requires that we distance ourselves from the arguments made in the first part of this chapter detailing the salient associations between Satan’s virtues and the more sinister evil that underlies them. Doing so would discredit Milton’s intentionality in making the epic similes that constituted the main body of my argument. Moreover, it is important to make the distinction between Satan and the classical tragic hero. The definition that Aristotle provides in the *Poetics* is as follows: the tragic hero is “a man who is neither a paragon of virtue and justice nor undergoes the change to misfortune through any real badness or wickedness but

because of some mistake” (Aristotle 38). First, Satan is in fact a paragon of virtue; to reiterate once again the thesis of my first chapter: he attains the virtuous mean in all twelve Aristotelian spheres of thought and action. Second, Satan does not come upon misfortune because of some tragic flaw or mistake. While determining the certain cause of Satan’s fall is the subject of much scholarship and debate, to hold one specific cause culpable would disavow the complexity of Satan’s character—that is, unless, this specific cause is sin. It is indeed possible to hold sin solely culpable for Satan’s fall, but doing so forces us to confront once again the recently argued associations between Satan’s virtues and the evil that steers them. Thus, we have come full circle and are unable to make a coherent argument in favor of this first approach.

The second approach, which determines that Satan is unworthy of our admiration because he is evil, requires us to qualify Satan’s position as epic hero in *Paradise Lost*. To rephrase, we must consider whether it is possible to hold Satan as both epic hero and unworthy of admiration. The crux of matter is that Milton’s epic hero is not some who “ought to be” admired, but regrettably is admired (Wilding 30). Milton’s chosen poetical form presents a “terrible” and “tragic irony” where his epic hero, traditionally “a figure on whom to model human behavior,” is instead a model of behavior for what is, not what should be (Wilding 30). Wilding summarizes best when he writes, “Milton shows in Satan [...] the activities, thoughts, behavior, even virtues, of fallen man” (Wilding 30). Or, as Goethe remarked, “What one admires in Milton’s Satan, is the human” (Goethe I.xi.211, quoted from Wilding 30).

Ultimately, Milton’s intention in placing Satan as the epic hero of *Paradise Lost*, is to demonstrate his commingling of good and evil in yet another sphere. I have thus far discussed how Satan’s commingling causes us as readers to find his virtues and heroism admirable despite the evil underlying them, and how Satan too falls to this Satanist trap where he can no longer

properly judge between what is good and what is evil. Now we find that Satan subverts and corrupts the epic tradition—in the place of one who is admired sits one who should not be admired, and yet, by virtue of his position we admire him regardless.

Conclusion

Milton intends for us to read *Paradise Lost* informed with Christian understandings of good and evil. C.S. Lewis judges that *Paradise Lost* is “overwhelmingly Christian,” and “dogmatically its invitation to join in this great ritual *mimesis* of the Fall is one which all Christendom in all lands or ages can accept” (Lewis 92, emphasis provided). If we scrutinize Satan’s Aristotelian virtues through the lens of Christian theology, we find that, as according to John Leonard’s claim, “Satan’s vices often resemble virtues” (Leonard 394). That is to say, many of Satan’s Aristotelian virtues are in fact vices. For instance, his “most conspicuous characteristic” in Leonard’s imagination, pride, is unequivocally a vice in the Christian conception while it is a virtue in the Aristotelian one (Leonard 394). It seems, then, that Aristotelian definitions adhere to a worldview that is in some cases in direct conflict with the Christian one. In other words, God’s divine order, which considers the world in terms of absolute good vs. absolute evil, is usurped by a worldly order dominated by moral ambiguity, in which certain vices become virtues and certain virtues become vices.

This adulteration of Manichean definitions is the office of the Miltonic anti-hero. Not only do we fall as readers to this adulteration, but so does the adulterator himself. Collectively, Satan and his readers present a clear picture of sin, which makes the good seem bad and the bad seem good, and anyone who propagates it cannot be immune to it. I conclude this chapter with a reflection on what true heroism in the Miltonic definition is. In Book IX, Milton explicitly

disavows Satan's heroic by showing how Satan's heroic course leads to his corrupting Adam and Eve. He recommends a better model for heroism: the Son's selfless sacrifice, which to us, tainted by Satan's adulteration of our perceptions of good and evil, does not at first seem very heroic. Indeed, the Son does not attain the Aristotelian mean in all twelve spheres of thought and action; nor does Milton relate him to classical epic and emblems of strength and grandeur. The Son, in fact, is the veritable picture of humility, and it is through such humility and grace that we ironically find a true heroism—one that is not tainted by evil intentions and fixes our twisted perceptions of good and evil to their original Manichean form.

Chapter III

Entering into the Satanist v. Anti-Satanist Debate

Introduction

The Satanist v. Anti-Satanist debate has a long, illustrious, and controversial history of Miltonic criticism. Reviewing this history in light of the moral dichotomy that is central to our argument shows that scholars fail to come to a longstanding agreement regarding Satan's heroism and villainy. Scholars find that Satan often appears as a hero only to say a line or commit an action that intermittently switches our perspective of him. Conversely, Satan also often appears as a villain to suddenly become heroic in our sight.

My intervention in this debate consists of my definition of the Miltonic anti-hero. To reiterate the main points of the previous chapters, Satan, as the quintessential Miltonic anti-hero, is perfectly good according to a worldly definition. And yet it is this worldly good that serves as the vehicle for evil; more specifically, Satan commingles good and evil by appearing good while executing evil intentions, falls to his own machinations of rendering the good-evil moral dichotomy ambiguous, and subverts the time-honored role of the epic hero by resembling not what readers should admire, but regrettably do admire. These points provide my defense for my definition of the Miltonic anti-hero, which I recall from my introductory section: a protagonist that is good from a worldly perspective and is evil from a theological perspective, who commingles good and evil to ultimately render this moral dichotomy ambiguous. This definition that I have provided offers valuable insight into the arguments scholars have made over the course of this debate. In this chapter, I first further examine the composition of the Miltonic anti-

herom, showing how this new definition offers valuable insight into and commentary on the longstanding Satanist v. Anti-Satanist debate.

The Miltonic Anti-Hero

With regards to the ever cogent question of whether Satan is the hero or villain of *Paradise Lost*, then, I offer that he is neither, as he is an anti-hero. The Miltonic anti-hero, as a character that is virtuous in the world's sight, yet evil in heaven's, and whose primary role is to confound and flip heavenly notions, rendering the good evil and the evil good, is a character of contradictions and its existence is intended by Milton to raise and terrify our imaginations (Leonard 398). Consider *Paradise Lost* I. 589-98, which C.S. Lewis considers "the stellar triumph of Miltonic sublimity" (Quoted from Leonard 398) where it is clear that Milton draws on Augustinian distinctions between "the excellence of Satan's Nature" and "the perversion of his will" (Lewis). The excellence of Satan's nature allows him to, with his perverted will, confound heavenly definitions of good and evil. Nowhere is this clearer than in Satan's convincing the angels to side with him against God. John Clarke, on the grounds of probability, concludes that it is ridiculous for Milton to create elevated intellectual Powers stupid enough to conceive of dethroning God—that is, unless their logic has been confounded by a revised and twisted notion of good and evil. Satan thus shows the full extent of his craftiness—he is a Miltonic anti-hero because he is virtuous enough to confound legions of angels, elevated intellectual beings that they are, and yet he drives them to what is unambiguously evil according to a heavenly worldview. Thus, it makes sense that "Clarke is appalled that Satan is so bad" while "Shelley will be enthralled that he is so good" (Leonard 400). But it is crucial to remember

that both Clarke and Shelley think that Satan “subverts the poem’s preferred morality” (Leonard 400).

In consideration of Bentley’s fascinating reading of XI. 101-3, in which God tells his angels to guard the tree of life lest “the Fiend / Or in behalf of Man” (XI. 101-3) accomplish his purposes, we find that Milton shows that mankind has fallen to Satan’s conception of good and evil as now Satan apparently works with some measure of goodwill on mankind’s behalf. It is because mankind has fallen to Satan’s redefinitions that we are able to better understand Milton’s demons than God as he appears in *Paradise Lost*. James Paterson (1744) makes the case that because God is infinite, incomprehensible, and ineffable in every respect (Job 11:7), Milton represents the devils better and more coherently. Carefully considering Paterson’s words causes me to arrive at the conclusion that we, having fallen to Satan’s redefinitions, can now comprehend absolute evil and rationalize it, but have difficulty seeing God’s infinite grace and goodness.

Robert Thyer’s note in Newton’s edition of *Paradise Lost* is central to this argument (Leonard 404). Satan’s redefinitions have won over many, but there is a Miltonic irony to this, as indicated by the line: “The mind is its own place” (I. 254). Thyer thus argues that Milton purposefully shows that Satan’s machinations are in our own minds and not in reality. In other words, God’s heavenly order of good and evil is real, and Satan’s is not, though to our minds, it feels more real. IV. 89-92, where Satan seeks to take comfort in the fact that he is supreme in misery, epitomizes how Satan’s logic is flipped: it takes good as bad, and bad as good.

Let us explore further what constitutes the Miltonic anti-hero. As earlier intimated, the question of whether Satan is a hero, anti-hero, or villain in *Paradise Lost* continues to beleaguer critics to this day. Nevertheless, it is important to consider the complexity of Milton’s Satan,

necessitated by a Manichean view of the moral universe (Carey 160) yet seldom representative of pure evil (Kaiter and Sandiuc 452). As Jung has elucidated and I have iterated throughout this thesis, Satan exists within the Manichean disposition as the *infimum malum* necessitated by a *summum bonum*, that is, God (Werblowsky x-xii). Milton, in spite of isolating evil to a single, punishable individual (Carey 160-161), encapsulated within him a duality of meanings where Satan is “both hero and villain, revolted against tyranny and tyrant, preacher of freedom and prisoner of his own egocentrism” (Kaiter and Sandiuc 453). As such, he is worthy of our, often reluctant, admiration, yet deserving of our unambiguous disapprobation.

In reductionist terms, the Miltonic anti-hero subverts our perception of the ideal protagonist and the Manichean norm of the good as heroic. Clarence Boyer’s definition of the Elizabethan villain-hero aptly describes the Miltonic anti-hero insofar as his subversion of the ideal protagonist model:

We may say, then, that a villain is a man who, for a selfish end, wilfully and deliberately violates standards of morality sanctioned by the audience or ordinary reader. When such a character is given the leading role, and when his deeds form the centre of dramatic interest, the villain has become protagonist, and we have the type play with the villain as hero. (Boyer, Quoted from McIntyre 874)

His violation of the Manichean norm, on the other hand, comprises depth: a drawing of the complete individual, which entails a certain ambivalence of character—an ambivalence that reflects the reader’s own incompleteness as a Manichean hero. It follows to conclude, then, that the Miltonic anti-hero appears very human and thus, “the reader who pities his misfortunes can have familiarity and sympathy with him” (Kaiter and Sandiuc 453).

On account of its ambivalence of character, it is difficult to label the Miltonic anti-hero as completely and essentially evil. Milton portrays Satan as “a creature of dynamic tensions” as conflicting passions tear his reasoning apart (Kaiter and Sandiuc 454). In prospect of Eden, Satan falls into doubt with himself:

“Me miserable! Which way shall I fly
 Infinite wrath and despair?
 Which way I fly is Hell, myself am Hell,
 And in the lowest deep a lower deep
 Still threat’ning to devour me opens wide,
 To which the Hell I suffer seems a Heav’n.” (IV. 73-78)

With seemingly honest remorse, he questions if any possibility for redemption remains: “Is there no place / Left for repentance, none for pardon left?” (IV. 79-80) But, upon determining that repentance and restoration “[b]y act of grace” (IV. 94) would do him no good: “How soon / Would heighth recall high thoughts? How soon unsay / What feigned submission swore?” (IV. 94-96), he appropriates himself to evil: “All good to me is lost. / Evil, be thou my good” (IV. 109-110).

The foregoing ambivalent thought processes as induced by conflicting passions assist in creating a more comprehensive and thereby commiserative picture of Satan by achieving layers of depth in his readers’ perceptions through various mechanisms, but arguably the most prominent and controversial of them all is his natural and very human tendency to love. This seemingly uncharacteristic tendency sets him apart from villains, who are generally driven more by hatred or ambition devoid of love, thereby separating themselves in the reader’s imagination

from human qualities.¹⁸ Carey concisely summarizes the anti-hero's amative proclivity in his analysis of Milton's Satan when he writes: "Beauty and delight are his natural element. Hatred is an effort of his will" (Carey 168).

Readers of *Paradise Lost* are naturally surprised when they encounter a Satan with the capacity to love, which Satan verbalizes when he first sets eyes on Adam and Eve. With wonder and grief, he beholds the "Creatures of other mold, earth-born perhaps, / Not spirits, yet to Heav'nly spirits bright / Little inferior" (IV. 360-362). He professes that his thoughts pursue them "With wonder" and that he feels that could love them. His reasons for being able to love them, however, are even more surprising: they are beautiful because "so lively shines / In them divine resemblance and such grace / The hand that formed them on their shape hath poured" (IV. 363-365).

Satan exposes his natural tendency to love most potently, however, in Book Nine of *Paradise Lost*, when he beholds Eve in all her beauty and, for a moment, becomes good. Having arrived in the Garden of Eden to find "his purposed prey" (IX. 416), Satan fulfills his hopes of encountering Eve alone, but finds "Her Heav'nly form / Angelic but more soft and feminine," and takes such pleasure in her beauty that:

"Her graceful innocence, her every air
Of gesture or at least action overawed
His malice and with rapine sweet bereaved
His fierceness of the fierce intent it brought." (IX. 457-462)

¹⁸ Consider the following villains: William Shakespeare's Claudius in *Hamlet* and Edmund in *King Lear*, Victor Hugo's Javert in *Les Misérables*, J.R.R. Tolkien's Sauron in *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, C.S. Lewis's the White Witch in *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe*, Roald Dahl's Agatha Trunchbull in *Matilda*, and J.K. Rowling's Voldemort in the *Harry Potter* series.

As he is stripped of this “fierce intent,” he is “abstracted” of his own evil “and for the time remained / Stupidly good, of enmity disarmed, / Of guile, of hate, of envy, of revenge” (IX. 462-465). Satan’s appreciation of Eve’s beauty induces within him a certain sacrificial love, as he momentarily and inadvertently considers relinquishing his mission to preserve that which he finds beautiful.

The previous two properties discussed concerns elements that rendered would-be villains heroic. In contrast, physical beauty mainly concerns the “anti” of “anti-hero,” signifying the more sinister characteristics of Satan, hearkening to the Christian theology that informed the construction of the Miltonic anti-hero. As the Apostle Paul’s Second Letter to the Corinthians reads, “¹³For such boasters are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. ¹⁴And no wonder! Even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. ¹⁵So it is not strange if his ministers also disguise themselves as ministers of righteousness. Their end will match their deeds” (2 Corinthians 11:13-15).

The serpentine form in which Milton’s Satan first appears before Eve is breathtakingly beautiful. Milton describes him as thus: His head / Crested aloft and carbuncle his eyes / With burnished neck of verdant gold erect / Amidst his circling spires that on the grass / Floated redundant” (IX. 499-503). Milton presents his beauty as “never since of serpent kind / Lovelier” (IX. 504-505), and it is in this alluring shape that Satan bows “His turret crest and sleek enameled neck, / Fawning, and licked the ground whereon she trod” (IX. 525-526) and upon gaining her attention, begins “His fraudulent temptation” (IX. 531). The purpose behind Satan’s beautifying himself is for his evil deception; as such, beauty for evil’s sake designates the Miltonic anti-hero as well. Thus, it is clear that the Miltonic anti-hero is one who is not only virtuous but is also beautiful and admirable in other ways but all of these positive attributes are

pointed towards evil, particularly that of confounding our moral definitions regarding what constitutes good and evil.

To elaborate specifically on the theme of degradation, there is scholarly disagreement regarding whether Satan is degraded from within or without, or whether this degradation even exists. A.J.A. Waldock (1947) and William Empson (1961) argue that Satan is degraded from without. Either Milton or God imposes this degradation on him; as such, this degradation is cruel and capricious (Leonard 472). Despite his staunch Anti-Satanist convictions, the prominent Milton scholar Stanley Fish (1969) responds to their arguments by claiming that “degradation is a critical myth” (Leonard 472). My definition of the Miltonic anti-hero is inconsistent with both views. The Miltonic anti-hero is degraded from within, due to its imposition of moral ambiguity. By being an agent for change via moral commingling, the Miltonic anti-hero eventually succumbs to his intended redefinitions, regardless of any prior accurate knowledge or understanding vis-à-vis a Manichean moral dichotomy. Thus, this degradation is cruel and capricious only to the extent that the anti-hero himself makes it cruel and capricious.

Conclusion

In summary, I have shown that Satan is perfectly virtuous according to the Aristotelian virtues by achieving the Aristotelian mean in every sphere of thought or action, and have presented the reason why Milton would render Satan so virtuous and by extension, admirable. Specifically in this chapter I have made the case that Satan is perfectly just according to his confounded definition of good and evil, which the world has adopted. This is my intervention on the Satanist v. Anti-Satanist debate. I hold that Satan, a Miltonic anti-hero, one who is virtuous and good according to a corrupted, worldly sense of the good, but is not virtuous and good

according to a heavenly one, seeks to confound heavenly notions of good and evil and replace it with a corrupt one, where good is considered evil and evil is considered good. Thus according to my analysis Satan cannot be the true hero of *Paradise Lost*. Nevertheless, it would be remiss to call in the villain, as Satan himself falls to his own corruption.

Conclusion

Ironically it seems that by castigating the Miltonic anti-hero's commingling of good and evil, I have rendered Manichean interpretations of Satan problematic. The place of the Miltonic anti-hero in the longstanding debate between Satanists and Anti-Satanists is to ultimately show that we cannot and should not reduce Satan to merely a hero or a villain. If indeed the office of the Miltonic anti-hero is to subvert Manichean definitions of good and evil by embodying a commingling of good and evil, then we cannot state that he is either definitively good or definitively evil. Milton thus provides a complicated, but accurate picture of ourselves and the world. We are sinners made in the image of God, and the world, once made perfect, is now corrupt but retains elements of its original sublimity. Perhaps by connecting us to Satan, Milton wishes to advance the idea that the true nature of Satan is that he is a morally ambiguous sinner—not for the purpose of entertaining the notion that Satan could be saved, but for informing us that we do not have the right to castigate Satan as the *infimum malum* when we ourselves are equally evil.

I believe it is apt to conclude by reflecting on a particularly valuable experience of my own that lends value to further exploration of Milton. In late April of 2016 I entered for the first time the awe-inspiring Long Room of Trinity College Dublin's Old Library Building. Upon entering, my eye was drawn immediately to the seemingly countless marble busts lining the monumental hallway. By chance or Providence I first wandered down the South side of the room, examining the busts in order: Shakespeare, Bacon, Milton. Across from Milton on the North side sat none other than Plato, following Homer and Socrates. The curators of this library and exhibit believe it is of longstanding worth to reserve this honored seat for our blind epic

poet. Undoubtedly, there is something—or rather, many things—to be venerated in Milton's *Paradise Lost* that sets this work on the same plane of significance as the philosophical works of Plato. I have provided insight into one definite object of admiration: the insight that Milton provides into moral ambiguity and what it means vis-à-vis the way we view ourselves, others, and our world.

Addendum:

Continuing the Narrative of *Paradise Lost*

In the initial drafting of this thesis, I sought to produce a comparative work, tracing the character of Satan to Shakespeare's anti-heroes—namely, Hamlet, Macbeth, and Iago—and showing how Milton's critical intervention on a longstanding anti-hero tradition through the character of Satan revolutionized this tradition and transfigured it into a genre that continues to pervade literature to this day, presenting cross-comparisons between Milton's Satan and the anti-heroes of the modern American novel. I discovered that merely defining the term "Miltonic anti-hero" would require painstaking research and at least a thesis's worth of writing; moreover, I realized that engaging this term from a unique classical-theological lens might incur what Leonard characterizes in the opening of his seminal chapter on Satan as—dare I say it—a breakthrough (393).

Whether or not I have succeeded in defining the Miltonic anti-hero or intervening in the longstanding debate between Satanist and Anti-Satanist Miltonic scholars is not the subject of this addendum. I believe it is worthwhile to briefly return to my originally intended subject and provide the term paper I wrote for Dr. Marc Conner's English 368: The Modern American Novel course. Entitled "A False Paradise: *The Great Gatsby's* Intervention on *Paradise Lost*," this paper makes a claim that without exception, my student colleagues in the Washington and Lee English Department find eyebrow-raising. I argue that Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* is a reinterpretation of *Paradise Lost*.¹⁹ Fitzgerald employs parallel characters—most significantly,

¹⁹ I must note that I did not come up with this idea myself; Dr. Conner gave a lecture entitled "Introducing F. Scott Fitzgerald and *The Great Gatsby*" on February 9, 2016 in which he explicitly noted the parallels between *Paradise Lost* and *The Great Gatsby*. His lecture inspired me to write this paper, for which I consulted Dr. Conner for advice on potential scholarly sources, in which he suggested Matthew Bruccoli's seminal biography and Joan Allen's *Candles*

Satan as Jay Gatsby—and parallel themes—prominent among them the search and endeavor for lost paradise—to render a version of *Paradise Lost* that perhaps speaks closer to the hearts of his contemporaries and readers, particularly of the American variety, today.

This paper presents the functioning heart of an argument that could include many more cross-comparisons of *Paradise Lost* and *The Great Gatsby*. In consideration of the page limit, I excluded from this paper several ideas that would contribute greatly towards tying these two great works together. For instance, I did not expound at all on the Miltonic significance of the common analysis that T.J. Eckleburg signifies God. Neither did I elucidate the ties between Myrtle Wilson and Eve, George Wilson and Adam, Michaelis and the Archangel Michael, the setting of *The Great Gatsby* and Pandaemonium, and most interestingly in my mind, Nick Carraway and the Christian reader as Milton perceived her. In short, my analysis merely scrapes the surface of the wide possibility of analyses that can be made regarding *The Great Gatsby* as a reinterpretation of *Paradise Lost*.

As such, I include this paper in this addendum for three primary reasons: first, to show that the Miltonic anti-hero, who commingles good and evil, reappears in a prominent work of modern literature; second, to further evidence and justify my reasons for defining the Miltonic anti-hero as such, and third, to suggest an area of scholarship that may provide further breakthroughs vis-à-vis the scholarly debate between Satanists and Anti-Satanists.

and Carnival Lights, two sources that I deeply engaged in this paper. It is also worthy of note that Dr. Conner has written an unpublished paper on this selfsame topic—a paper that, to date, I have not yet read.

A False Paradise: *The Great Gatsby's* Intervention on *Paradise Lost*

Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard
 Are sweeter; therefore, ye soft pipes, play on;
 Not to the sensual ear, but, more endear'd,
 Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone:
 Fair youth, beneath the trees, thou canst not leave
 Thy song, nor ever can those trees be bare;
 Bold Lover, never, never canst thou kiss,
 Though winning near the goal yet, do not grieve;
 She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,
 For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair!
 — John Keats, *Ode on a Grecian Urn*, l. 11-20

For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the
 whole world, and lose his own soul?
 — Mark 8:36 (King James Version)

The Great Gatsby as a reinterpretation of *Paradise Lost* imparts a bitter message:

paradise does not satisfy. The preponderance of parallels between F. Scott Fitzgerald's seminal work, carefully named "the perfect novel" by at least one scholar of modern American literature (Conner), and John Milton's monumental epic, anticipates a wealth of scholarship analyzing these compelling relationships. Regrettably, no such scholarship exists in publication. It is the purpose of this paper, then, to begin a conversation regarding Fitzgerald's startling intervention on Milton's conception of the Fall: what it constitutes, what it means in twentieth century America, and what it challenges vis-à-vis the ubiquitous and critical search for meaning that permeates society to this day.

Fitzgerald redefined the Fall. What was for Milton, as according to the Calvinist notes in his theology, alienation from God, was for Fitzgerald the attainment of a paradise that does not satisfy—that is to say, a paradise that is not Paradise, but a mere construction of the mind, whose thoughts and expectations do not align with realities and experiences. When Gatsby attains Daisy, his paradise—that which "He had been full of the idea so long, dreamed it right through

to the end, waited with his teeth set, so to speak, at an inconceivable pitch of intensity” (92)—he finds that his “orgastic” (180) green light becomes “again a green light on a dock” (93) and nothing more. Gatsby’s bathetic realization begs the question: does Fitzgerald mean to analogically express his skepticism of Christian Paradise or his criticism of materialism, that is to say, American paradise?

Drawing the correlations between the intergenerational lives of Fitzgerald and Milton suggests that Fitzgerald is capable of considering theological perspectives, but it is difficult to justify that any theological inclinations would overshadow his reasons for delivering social commentary. As such, a holistic analysis of his life and motivations yields the conclusion that Fitzgerald employs the theology of *Paradise Lost* in order to issue contemporary social criticism. The crux of my argument, then, is that Fitzgerald emulates Milton’s Satan in Jay Gatsby, whose pursuit of a false paradise carries Fitzgerald’s social criticism of modern American society into the limelight.

The Significance of Fitzgerald's Fatalistic Childhood

His first credited word was “up” at ten months.
— Matthew J. Bruccoli, *Some Sort of Epic Grandeur*, p. 13

Though Fitzgerald as a child did not know John Milton or his *Paradise Lost*, the education and experiences of his childhood prepared him for an intensely commiserative relationship with Milton's Satan. Matthew Bruccoli's seminal biography records that Fitzgerald was “histrionic” and “eclectic” as a child (16), displaying a strong proclivity for melodrama, imitation, and a desire to lead (18). In 1902, a young Fitzgerald would orate from the back of a grocery wagon: “Friends, Romans, countrymen...” (16), and in 1903, he was “boastful and bossy” and “found it difficult to tolerate the unwillingness of others to acknowledge his superiority (18). Most strikingly, however, Fitzgerald as a boy sympathized deeply with the conceptual underdog, as he later wrote in his unpublished first novel, *The Romantic Egoist*:

First there was a book that was I think one of the big sensations of my life. It was nothing but a nursery book, but it filled me with the saddest and most yearning emotion. I have never been able to trace it since. It was about a fight that the large animals, like the elephant, had with the small animals, like the fox. The small animals won the first battle; but the elephants and lions and tigers finally overcame them. The author was prejudiced in favor of the large animals, but my sentiment was all with the small ones. I wonder if even then I had a sense of the wearing-down power of big, respectable people. I can almost weep now when I think of that poor fox, the leader—the fox has somehow typified innocence to me ever since. (PUL. Ch. I, pp. 21-22. Quoted from Bruccoli 18).

The resemblance of this unnamed novel to Book VI of Milton's *Paradise Lost* is uncanny. This book records the first conflict between the Father and Satan—alogically, the fight between the large animals and small animals. Though Satan's armies do not win the first day of battle, on the second day, they give themselves an initial advantage by using cannons. Michael and his angels, however, thwart them by throwing mountains to bury Satan's angels and their artillery, and the rebellion falls on the third day when God sends out his Son to drive them out of heaven. Finally, just as the author of the nursery book was “prejudiced in favor of the

large animals,” Raphael, who recounts Satan’s rebellion to Adam, favors by nature the armies of God and as such, narrates the tale from his biased perspective.

Assuming that Fitzgerald’s account in *The Romantic Egoist* is true, it lends credence to the hypothesis that Fitzgerald, upon reading *Paradise Lost*, would approach it in the same way as he approached this nursery book. In other words, he would engage its parallels with Milton’s epic and thereby commiserate with Satan: the fox leading his small animals to inevitable defeat. Indeed, it is difficult not to feel sorry for Satan, who never had the slightest chance at victory as God ordained to the Son “that the Glorie may be thine / Of ending this great Warr (VI. 701-2). As such, it is plausible that, in Fitzgerald’s perspective, Satan too typified innocence through his naïve, but unyielding heroic ambition.

If young Fitzgerald’s beloved nursery book predisposed him to sympathize with Satan, his perception of Edmund Fitzgerald, his father, predisposed him to admire Satan—in many ways, Edmund’s antithesis. What we know of Edmund Fitzgerald shows him to be the polar opposite of Milton’s Satan in character: where Edmund was cautious, Satan is daring; where Edmund falls despondent, Satan rises unshaken; most importantly, where Edmund loses purpose, Satan holds unwavering to his hope of toppling God’s regime (20). When Edmund Fitzgerald lost his job with Procter & Gamble in March 1908, eleven-year-old Scott Fitzgerald²⁰ returned to his mother the quarter she had given him to go swimming, presumably out of a lack of confidence that his father would keep the family financially afloat (20). When his father came home later that day, Scott “tried to make him feel important by asking him who would be the next president” (20)—an action that demonstrates Scott’s capacity to make socially conscious observations, this time regarding his father’s weak personality. Twenty-eight years following this

²⁰ Brucoli often refers to F. Scott Fitzgerald as simply “Scott” or “Scott Fitzgerald,” presenting that “Scott Fitzgerald [...] was never called Francis or Frank” (13).

incident, Scott would record the disappointment he felt towards his father: “That morning he had gone out a comparatively young man, a man full of strength, full of confidence. He came home that evening, an old man, a completely broken man. He had lost his essential drive, his immaculateness of purpose. He was a failure the rest of his days” (Michel Mok, “The Other Side of Paradise,” *In His Own Time*, p. 296. Quoted from Brucoli, 20).

It is also important to note that Fitzgerald would not only sympathize with and admire Satan but he would also empathize profoundly with Satan; that is to say, he would see much of his childhood self in Satan’s leadership and ambition. Earlier I recorded that Fitzgerald in his earliest years was histrionic (16) and in all situations, sought to lead (18). Such tendencies continued to pervade Fitzgerald’s character and his perceptions of others throughout his schooling at St. Paul Academy. At St. Paul, Scott struggled for recognition and admiration, and his proclivity to show off compelled the school paper, the *St. Paul Academy Now and Then*, publish in 1909: “If anybody can poison Scotty or stop his mouth in some way, the school at large and myself will be obliged” (1, 4 (Easter 1909). The note is signed by Sam Kennedy. Quoted from Brucoli, 23). But despite his “boasting and officiousness,” Fitzgerald gathered a large group of friends and admirers (23), with whom Fitzgerald organized secret clubs, of which he always felt the need to lead (27). Scott also continued to think of himself as different, with “larger—if inchoate—ambitions,” with “some rare fate [...] reserved for him” (29). Moreover, as he later elucidated through the persona of the autobiographical Amory Blaine in *This Side of Paradise*, Fitzgerald in these formative years held a certain kind of ambition focused solely on attainment: “It was always the becoming he dreamed of, never the being” (Fitzgerald, (New York: Scribners, 1920), p. 19. Quoted from Brucoli, 29).

An Exercise in Emulation: Fitzgerald's Recreation of Satan as Jay Gatsby

When I like men I want to be like them—I want to lose the outer qualities that give me my individuality and be like them. I don't want the man. I want to absorb into myself all the qualities that make him attractive and leave him out. I cling to my own innards.

— F. Scott Fitzgerald, *Notebooks*, #938.

Neither Fitzgerald's anthologized writings nor Brucoli's biography explicitly indicate that Fitzgerald ever encountered Milton's *Paradise Lost*. But given his affections for the leader of a doomed insurrection in a nursery book extraordinarily similar plot-wise to Book VI of *Paradise Lost*, his disappointment towards his father's defeatism and lack of purpose, his pronounced need to lead, and his ambition to primarily become as opposed to be, it is probable that Fitzgerald would find within Milton's Satan a formulaic attractiveness. Satan, a visionary but underprivileged leader epitomizing stalwart ambition and grandiose purpose, unfazed in both hope and action by the impossibility of realizing his aspiration to become the ruler of heaven, would understandably capture Fitzgerald's imagination. After all, Satan fulfilled the model of leadership introduced by the fox of Fitzgerald's cherished nursery book and unfulfilled by Edmund Fitzgerald. Furthermore, Scott would hear echoes of himself in reading Satan's declaration to Beelzebub in Book I: "Better to reign in Hell, then serve in Heav'n"²¹ (I. 263) because Fitzgerald, too, always felt the "need to be a leader of any activity he participated in" (Brucoli 27).

As the epigraph of this section shows, Fitzgerald often conflated admiration and liking with idolization, and idolization with imitation. The crux of the matter is that the convincing parallels between *Paradise Lost* and *The Great Gatsby* urges our serious consideration of

²¹ I note, for the purpose of clarity, that this statement is comparative. Gordon Teskey's edition reads: "Better to reign in Hell *than* serve in Heaven!" (I. 263, emphasis my own).

whether *The Great Gatsby* was, in fact, an imitative exercise. In other words, did Fitzgerald present his own interpretive rendition of *Paradise Lost* through *The Great Gatsby*? And assuming—with considerable evidence—that Fitzgerald did not plagiarize but offered an interventional reinterpretation of Milton's epic, what is the substance of his intervention, and how does it change the way we think of both *The Great Gatsby* and *Paradise Lost*?

Nowhere are the correlations between these two works clearer than in the central characters Satan and Jay Gatsby. Contained within Gatsby is Satan's aforementioned formulaic attractiveness. Just as Satan is underprivileged in his rebellion against God and quest to regain Paradise—a twisted form of Paradise where he is not reunited with God but he switches places with God in the cosmic order—Gatsby, too, is underprivileged as he quests for his own paradise, where he attains Daisy's love and switches places with Tom Buchanan, her husband.²² Satan's unwillingness to yield and foolhardy hope manifests in Gatsby when he expresses his hope that “the power of his romantic visions will convince Daisy to return to him” (Batchelor 143). As Nick, the narrator of *The Great Gatsby*, takes note: “[Gatsby] wanted nothing less of Daisy than that she should go to Tom and say: ‘I never loved you.’ After she had obliterated four years with that sentence [...] they were to go back to Louisville and be married from her house—just as if it were five years ago” (Fitzgerald 109). Modern cultural historian Bob Batchelor editorializes in *Gatsby: The Cultural History of the Great American Novel* that the “overpowering,” “lethal scent” of Gatsby's ambition, his “vision of hope and possible fulfillment despite all the odds stacked against him is the essence of [Gatsby's] greatness” (143).

²² I write this with a caveat: Tom Buchanan does not take the place of God in *The Great Gatsby*. I elucidate the place of God in *The Great Gatsby* and its correlations with God in *Paradise Lost* in the next section: *A Theology of Woman*

The essence of Gatsby's greatness is identical to that of Milton's Satan, whose stalwart vision and struggle against immeasurable odds have captured the admiration of generations of Milton scholars designated "Satanists," due to their reception of Satan as the real hero of *Paradise Lost*. John Leonard, in his two-volume book entitled *Faithful Labourers*, traces the criticism and reception of *Paradise Lost* from 1667 to 1970, and devotes a dense 83-page chapter to the critical reception of Satan vis-à-vis the ongoing and unresolved debate regarding his identity as Milton's hero or villain. For the purposes of this paper, Edmund Burke's scholarship in his *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* is notable for justifying Satan's ambition. Burke acclaimed Satan's ambition as a distinctively human characteristic: "God has planted in man a sense of ambition, and a satisfaction arising from the contemplation of his excelling his fellows in something deemed valuable among them. [...] It has been so strong as to make very miserable men take comfort that they were supreme in misery" (Burke 30-1. Quoted from Leonard 406). And Burke was not alone in seeing Satan's ambition as "a divine"—and therefore sublime—"spark" that, interestingly, finds its purpose in distinguishing Satan from "his fellows in something deemed valuable" (406). Inasmuch as Gatsby's audacious vision and ambition epitomized his greatness and set him apart from others—a sentiment that recalls Fitzgerald's own perception that he was different from his peers due to his "larger [...] ambitions" for "some rare fate [...] reserved for him" (29)—Satan's inexorable ambition designated him as divine and also distinguished him from his angels.

Additionally, it is worthwhile to mention Samuel Taylor Coleridge's assertions regarding what constituted Satan's sublimity, noting that his remarks are applicable to Fitzgerald's Gatsby. Coleridge writes that Satan's character is "the character so often seen *in little* on the political stage" exhibiting "all the restlessness, temerity, and cunning which have marked the mighty

hunters of mankind” and “these great men [...] must act from some great motive” which for Satan is his “intense selfishness, the alcohol of egotism, which would rather reign in hell than serve in heaven” (Coleridge, *Collected Works*, 5:1.427. Emphasis provided. Quoted from Leonard 414). Leonard interprets that Coleridge’s italicized “*in little*” in order to indicate that “the mighty hunters of mankind” are little Satans. It is clear that Gatsby is one of them as the motive driving his life is singular, and is constituted by the same “intense selfishness” and egotistical fantasy that the world and its wealth is purposed for him to attain his paradise in the form of Daisy Fay. In summary, both Satan and Gatsby exhibit “a singularity of daring” for their respective paradises, “a grandeur of sufferance” in striving for that paradise, and “a ruined splendour, which constitute[s] the very height of poetic sublimity,” as both heroically pursue a goal that they are destined to never reach (Leonard 414).

In Satan, then, we find several precedents for Gatsby’s most iconic attributes, attributes that arguably extend from Fitzgerald’s own life as an inexorably ambitious child craving leadership. For the purposes of this paper, however, mere precedents are hardly sufficient; thus, I conclude this section by reflecting on undeniable echoes of Milton’s Satan in what I deem the thematic heart of *The Great Gatsby*:

... One autumn night, five years before, they had been walking down the street when the leaves were falling, and they came to a place where there were no trees and the sidewalk was white with moonlight. They stopped here and turned toward each other. Now it was a cool night with that mysterious excitement in it which comes at the two changes of the year. The quiet lights in the houses were humming out into the darkness and there was a stir and bustle among the stars. Out of the corner of his eye Gatsby saw that the blocks of the sidewalks really formed a ladder and mounted to a secret place above the trees—he could climb to it, if he climbed alone, and once there he could suck on the pap of life, gulp down the incomparable milk of wonder.

His heart beat faster and faster as Daisy’s white face came up to his own. He knew that when he kissed this girl, and forever wed his unutterable visions to her perishable breath, his mind would never romp again like the mind of God. So he waited, listening for a moment longer to the tuning-fork that had been struck upon a star. Then he

kissed her. At his lips' touch she blossomed for him like a flower and the incarnation was complete. (110-1)

This passage presents all but endless possibilities for Miltonic commentary. For my argument, however, what must be analyzed are Gatsby's contemplation of transcendence and the symbolic significance of the kiss.

Inalienable from *The Great Gatsby* and *Paradise Lost* is the theme of ascension, which goes far beyond mere ambition and extends into the metaphysical. Milton's Satan perpetually sets his gaze above, not only in his ambition to transcend God but also in his physical actions. At the end of Book II, Satan, having "Tamefully endur'd a Bridge of wondrous length / From Hell continu'd reaching th' utmost Orbe / Of this frail World" (II. 1028-30), sets his gaze to heaven as he "Weighs his spread wings, at leisure to behold / Farr off th' Empyrean Heav'n [...] With Opal Towers and Battlements adorn'd / Of living Sapphire, once his native Seat" (II. 1046-1050). In addition, in Book III, Satan "Ascending by degrees magnificent / Up to the wall of Heaven a Structure high" (III. 502-503) gazes upon "The work of a Kingly Palace Gate" (III. 505) exhibiting "The Stairs were such as whereon *Jacob* saw / Angels ascending and descending" (III. 510-1). Satan fatalistically believes that ascension would give him back his Paradise; in the same way, Gatsby believes that ascending the sidewalk "ladder" to the secret place above the trees, as alone as Satan in his ascension, he would be able to find his Eden in a "sacramental [...] act" (Allen 110) and "suck on the pap of life, gulp down the incomparable milk of wonder" (Fitzgerald 110), that is, in Miltonic terms, attain paradise. It is important, however, to consider that once attained, paradise is, in essence, lost, as it can no longer be attained, much as a flower blossoms once and dies and an incarnation—Christ's incarnation, that is—tragically manifests only once.

The substance of Gatsby's intervention on *Paradise Lost*, then, is that paradise is lost when it is attained. Gatsby knows that after kissing Daisy, "his mind would never romp again like the mind of God" (Fitzgerald 110), in Miltonic terms: revolve "In circuit, undetermined square or round" (II. 1048) about the "Empyrean Heav'n" or survey "Round [...] and well might," (III. 555), "from Eastern Point / Of *Libra* to the fleecie Starr that bears / *Andromeda* farr off *Atlantic* Seas / Beyond th' *Horizon*" (III. 557-60), or wind "with ease / Through the pure marble Air his oblique way / Amongst innumerable Starrs" (III. 563-5). And yet, Gatsby "stayd not to enquire" but for a moment (III. 571, Fitzgerald 110) and chooses to ascend, much as "The golden Sun in splendor likest Heaven / Allur'd Satan's eye" (III. 572-3). With the incarnation complete, neither Gatsby nor Satan can wander; they are forever affixed to their paradise and "Thither [their] course [they bend] / Through the calm Firmament" (III. 573-4).

A Theology of Woman

Gatz plainly imagined himself a Christ—one of the anointed—born of earthly parents but actually a son of God. This is what Fitzgerald sought to convey in establishing that 'Jay Gatsby of West Egg, Long Island, sprang from his Platonic conception of himself.' That conception moved him to seek out goodness and beauty—certainly a prostituted goodness and beauty, but goodness and beauty nevertheless.

— David F. Trask, "A Note on Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*."

Gatsby's quest for his paradise, of course, is inextricable with his philosophy regarding the paradise itself, that is, Daisy. Fitzgerald's life during his time at the Newman School partly provides the basis for his associating *Paradise Lost* with New York City, its symbol and paradise: "the girl" (Brucoli 31). At Newman, Scott continued to be "bossy and boastful" (31), but in his "unpopularity and unhappiness," he discovered and "was infected by the enticement of New York" (31). Brucoli records that Fitzgerald's trips to the theaters of Broadway "excited his craving for metropolitan glamour" (31). His first symbol for New York was a ferry boat moving

from the Jersey shore at dawn, but at the age of fifteen, after he saw Ina Claire in *The Quaker Girl* and Gertrude Bryan in *Little Boy Blue*, Fitzgerald composed a second symbol for New York: the girl (31). In an essay entitled “The Crack-Up” published in *Esquire* magazine in February 1936, Fitzgerald documents the sentiments compelled by Claire and Bryan: “Confused by my helpless and melancholy love for them both, I was unable to choose between them—so they blurred into one lovely entity, the girl. She was my second symbol of New York. The ferry boat stood for triumph, the girl for romance” (“My Lost City,” *The Crack-Up*, p. 23. Quoted from Bruccoli, 31). Moreover, Fitzgerald conflated the symbol of the girl with covetousness and possession; in 1912, he wrote in *Notebooks*, #938: “When I like women I want to own them, to dominate them, to have them admire me” (*Notebooks*, #938. Quoted from Bruccoli, 33).

Fitzgerald’s experiences at Princeton University, however, shattered his conception of the woman as the ideal. There, his studies—though uninspired and mediocre—synthesized with his past life, his religious education, and Princeton’s social milieu, ultimately rendering complete Fitzgerald’s vision of *Paradise Lost* in the 20th century, to appear in the form of *The Great Gatsby*. Bruccoli records that “Presbyterian Princeton was still a strait-laced university” and as such, “organized Christianity was a strong force on campus” (41). While at Princeton, Fitzgerald remained a practicing but not devout Catholic (51). He continued, however, to correspond with Father Cyril Sigourney Webster Fay, who he had met in November 1912 during his time at Newman (33, 51). Fitzgerald held Fay in high regard; he was “Fitzgerald’s ideal priest—a romantic, intellectual figure who made the Church seem glamorous” (33). Their shared egotistical qualities facilitated self-analytical conversations in which Fay encouraged Fitzgerald to “think of himself as one of the brilliant young men who would make American Catholicism

socially and intellectually respectable” (Brucoli 35) and held up St. Augustine as a model to demonstrate that “the Church had produced great and even glamorous men” (Allen 4).

Augustine considerably influenced Fitzgerald’s philosophy, as his musings at Princeton show. Joan M. Allen, in *Candle and Carnival Lights: The Catholic Sensibility of F. Scott Fitzgerald*, records that in Fitzgerald’s preparations for receiving the sacraments, he encountered Augustine’s tenet that “the entire world from beginning to end has, as its end, the constitution of a holy society” (Allen 5). This holy society, that is, Augustine’s heavenly city, stood in opposition with the earthly city. Learning this doctrine gave Fitzgerald the capability to understand the world in terms of antithetical dualities, whereby “love of the world and the flesh and love of God and the spirit, tempestuousness and serenity, the wicked and the just, disorder and order, rivalry with God and submission to God, Babylon and Jerusalem” exist in cosmic struggle (7). Contained within this dualistic philosophy was the Augustinian view of sexuality and women, whereby women “pull down from their spirituality men who strive for purity,” and sex “is legitimate only for purposes of procreation and even within marriage sex is essentially shameful, for it is a thing of privacy and darkness” (6). Fitzgerald, who “retained a strong sense of evil and sexual corruption” at least throughout his freshman year at Princeton, evidently held on to his Augustinian views of women (Brucoli 51). He castigated “blatant sexuality”—despite being, in Brucoli’s words, “a connoisseur of kisses” (51)—as, upon seeing two classmates walking off with two pick-ups, he proudly declared “That’s one thing that Fitzgerald’s never done!” (51).

Falling in love with Ginevra King in his sophomore year, however, altered his views. While Fitzgerald did not relinquish his Augustinian view of women, he developed a conception of the ideal, most desirable woman: “beautiful, rich, socially secure,” and most importantly,

“sought after” (Brucoli 54). For Fitzgerald, the ideal girl “was one pursued by many men; there had to be an element of competition” (54). Ironically, it was King’s “wealth and her need for constant attention from many men”—the very attributes that made King so attractive to Fitzgerald—that periodically caused him to fall into despair (Allen 50). Reflecting on his fading relationship with King, Fitzgerald wrote in his Ledger: “Poor boys shouldn’t think of marrying rich girls” (Quoted from Allen 50). King nevertheless became “an indelible part of his concept of Woman,” which Fitzgerald, in *Josephine: A Woman with a Past*, names “a sensation and a scandal; [who] had driven mature men to a state of disequilibrium” (Fitzgerald). Thus, Fitzgerald married his Augustinian views and admiration for King to formulate the model of woman as a desirable but deadly “vampiric destroyer,” taking the role of the heroine in his stories and the Jazz Age.

It requires little reflection to see that Daisy embodies the role of this *femme fatale* in *The Great Gatsby*, but what must be analyzed is the significance of her role vis-à-vis *The Great Gatsby* as an interventional reinterpretation of *Paradise Lost*. I have already argued that Daisy constitutes Gatsby’s paradise—a paradise that Gatsby fails to fully attain, but strangely, does not seem to fully appreciate when he does temporarily hold it within his hands. As Nick narrates, Gatsby exhibits this sudden diminishment of emotion after he shows Daisy his series of shirts and mentions to her the green light at the end of her dock: the “orgastic” (180) green light, once “as close as a star to the moon,” once attained, was now only “a green light on a dock. His count of enchanted objects had diminished by one” (93).

If, as I argued in the previous section, paradise is lost when it is attained, the intrinsic nature of this fleeting paradise is worthy of questioning. In Miltonic terms, Daisy is a false paradise—one that symbolizes the beauty of a materialistic world. As Allen argues, Gatsby

“pursues an ideal, a mystical union, not with God, but with the life embodied in Daisy Fay” (Allen 104). Daisy, who Fitzgerald often characterizes with the color white, at the end is unwilling to uphold her integrity, demanding through inaction that Gatsby take responsibility for her transgressions. As such, she serves as an analogy for “corruption masked by the semblance of innocence whose true nature is signaled by her insensibility and the sterile ornaments of this society’s false values which she wears” (106). Fitzgerald extends his desire for the desired through Daisy, who is significant in the book “only insofar as she functions as a symbol for Gatsby, a commodity made more valuable for having been desired by many other men” (110). But she inevitably is a snare for the unsuspecting, and is in truth “poisonous to love” (111).

Conclusion

Thus, *The Great Gatsby* as an interventional reinterpretation of *Paradise Lost* conveys a social message: that false paradises—idols in the form of women, false values, and desirable commodities—do not satisfy and, in fact, serve to destroy. Jay Gatsby is not only Satan, but he is also a reflection of Fitzgerald; moreover, our admiration of Gatsby reflects our seeing ourselves in him. In other words, Fitzgerald means to tell us that we, his readers, are Gatsby, and the paradise that the world offers—according to an Augustinian view: flawed, in disorder, and serving to alienate us from God—can only destroy us. It may be a stretch, however, to conclude with an inherently Christian moral message; it is more justifiable to state that Fitzgerald employed his training in Christian theology to present secular social criticism. Elucidating the exact nature of this social criticism, however, requires far more research and reflection. But given his portrayal of New York City—its opulent colors standing in stark contrast with its grey, ashen backdrop—as congruent with Daisy’s two-sided duplicity, along with the rise of

materialism via an increasing preponderance of advertising melding “the idea of the American Dream [...] with the desire to consume” (Batchelor 174), it follows to place the weight of Fitzgerald’s criticism on American materialism, which Fitzgerald marries with corruption in *The Great Gatsby*. As such, I posit that Fitzgerald meant to criticize New York as a pandemonium thinly masked as paradise, in the same way that Daisy Fay is a false, deadly paradise masked in the bleached wrappings of paradise. But regardless of what it is that Fitzgerald truly wished to criticize, it is clear that *The Great Gatsby*’s social criticism is inseparable from its correspondence with *Paradise Lost*, whose writer incidentally held powerful republican views—provocative views, which undoubtedly radiated from his works.

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