

# *Paradise Lost* and The Origin of “Evil”: Classical or Judeo-Christian?

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Milton's *Paradise Lost* is an epic poem about the origin of evil, mixing classical and Christian forms and sources. This essay first explores whether “evil” is primarily a classical or Judeo-Christian concept, and shows that it is a product of the religious syncretism of the Hellenistic period. Yet among the poets, we meet this new sense of malignance chiefly in Virgil, especially in such a figure as Allecto. The essay then shows how Milton's language carefully discriminates among these origins, so that the imagery of Hell comes from Virgil, while the conception of evil remains principally Christian, both in the narrative and in philosophical reflection. But in the final section of the essay, we see that the being whose identity is the answer to the poem's initiating epic question (‘Who first seduc'd them to that foul revolt?’), and whose actions drive the poem into motion and inaugurate its story—Satan—is, like his daughter Sin, a complex and seductive blend of both—and this helps to explain some of the tension we feel in his presence. He is a much more complex answer than those required by the initiating questions in Homer or Virgil, and indeed it takes the whole poem to understand that answer.

John Milton's *Paradise Lost* is an epic poem about the origin of evil. In this respect as in many others the poem makes use of classical forms for Judeo-Christian concepts, to produce the last great work of Renaissance Christian Humanism.<sup>1</sup> This mixing of classical and Christian leads to a frequent tension between forms and focus. The language and techniques of classical epic bring with them their dominant subjects—warfare and the grandly adventurous journey—along with the heroic values explored or (mostly) celebrated in Homer or Virgil. Yet these values are explicitly depreciated in Milton's poem. He claims to be

Not sedulous by Nature to indite

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1. This notion has been superseded in the minds of many Miltonists. Douglas Bush made it the focus of his reading of Milton, *Paradise Lost in Our Time* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1945), but recent critics have given more stress, with Christopher Hill, *Milton and the English Revolution* (New York: Viking, 1977), to the radical Englishness of the poem's politics and theology. Joan Bennett tries to integrate these views in *Reviving Liberty: Radical Christian Humanism in Milton's Great Poems* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989).

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Warrs, hitherto the onely Argument  
 Heroic deem'd, . . . (*Paradise Lost* IX. 28–30)

insisting that the subject of his poem, though tragic, is

Not less but more Heroic than the wrauth  
 Of stern *Achilles* on his Foe pursu'd  
 Thrice Fugitive about Troy Wall; or rage  
 Of *Turnus* for *Lavinia* disespous'd,  
 Or *Neptune's* ire or *Juno's*, that so long  
 Perplex'd the Greek and *Cytherea's* Son. (IX 13–19)<sup>2</sup>

Nonetheless these heroic values remain influential throughout the poem, and Milton seems to expect his readers to think so. Even in the final book, when Adam is told about the Incarnation and the consequent Redemption of mankind, he expects single combat between his descendant, Christ the Son, and the great enemy, Satan.

Needs must the Serpent now his capital bruise  
 Expect with mortal paine: say where and when  
 Thir fight, what stroke shall bruise the Victors heel.

Adam reacts like the father of a prize-fighter: he wants front-row tickets for the big fight. Michael has to tell him differently:

Dream not of thir fight,  
 As of a Duel, or the local wounds  
 Of head or heel: not therefore joynes the Son  
 Manhood to Godhead (XII 382–89)

Michael explains that the atonement (the point of the incarnation) has to do not with destroying Satan, as Aeneas kills Turnus at the end of the *Aeneid*, but rather “his works/

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2. It is curious that these lines mention the wrath of Achilles and Turnus, but not the dramatic and problematic conclusion of the *Aeneid*, in which Aeneas butchers his defeated opponent even in his supplication. Is this the slight to Virgil that David Norbrook imagines, *Writing the English Republic* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 440? Or does it indicate Milton's sympathy for the hero's righteous anger, as Rachel Falconer suggests, *Milton Quarterly* 34 (2000), 28? Compare with this famous passage Book XI 688–99, where the days of the giants of Genesis 6. 4–5 are denounced as if they had been those of the epic heroes:

For in those dayes Might onely shall be admir'd,  
 And Valour and Heroic Vertu call'd;  
 To overcome in Battle, and subdue  
 Nations, and bring home spoils with infinite  
 Man-slaughter, shall be held the highest pitch  
 Of human Glorie.

Citations are from Roy Flannagan's recent edition, *The Riverside Milton* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1998). Reference is also made to the editions of Alastair Fowler (London: Longman, 1971; 2nd ed. 1998), Merritt Y. Hughes, *The Complete Poetry and Major Prose* (New York: Odyssey Press, 1957), and John Leonard (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1999).

In thee and in thy Seed"—and that internal victory must be won by obedience and love. Adam's problem, then, is that he is a Christian hero in a classical poem, and needs gradually to learn the difference, as does the reader.

The difference is most acute, and most troublesome, in those parts of the poem that explore the origin of evil. There are several of these, having to do with the origin of hate, of Satan, of Hell, of Sin, and of evil. I shall treat each of these issues, in each case assessing the relationship Milton establishes with the ancient world, both classical and Judeo-Christian.

The reader's problem in interpreting these episodes is not helped by the way Milton usually takes both sides of the issue (as his rhetorical training at St Paul's and Cambridge taught him<sup>3</sup>). The latent antagonism between the Judeo-Christian worldview and the classical Greek has rarely been so clearly expressed as by Milton's Christ in *Paradise Regained* IV 285–364, nor has the mutual dependence and illumination of the two cultural systems been so well exemplified as by Milton, the Renaissance Humanist, in his *oeuvre* as a whole.

### 1. Hate In Heaven

The tension of form and subject recurs in many ways throughout *Paradise Lost*, in the invocations to the "Heavenly" Muse, in the relations between husband and wife (Eve is no stay-at-home Andromache or bride-prize Lavinia), in the narration of celestial warfare or in the search for true heroism. One of the clearest sources of this immensely fertile tension is in that central question of the poem—where does evil come from? This is a philosophical-theological question, but it is hard to separate from the literary-aesthetic question—how is evil to be represented? The problem of evil itself may be Judeo-Christian, but Milton's means of representing it to the imagination are often classical. In particular Milton borrows from Virgil images of Hell, and from all the classical epics the war that follows immediately from the initial act of evil—the rebellion in Heaven. Yet if the rebellion is familiar from Hesiod, Ovid, and mythological handbooks, Milton's version leans heavily on the biblical proof-texts. This uneven mixing of classical and Christian sources is characteristic. It does not necessarily mean that Christian revelation is contaminated by pagan images, yet in a case where there is no clear statement from revealed religion (i.e., for a seventeenth-century Protestant, from the Bible)—and this is the case with the origin of evil—Milton's reader may well be troubled by the blend.<sup>4</sup>

3. The seven surviving *Prolusions*, which were published by Milton only in 1674, are made up of typical debating exercises such as "Utrum dies an nox praestantior sit" / "Whether day or night is the Most Excellent": For the Latin texts, see the Columbia edition of Milton, vol. XII, pp. 118–284. For the English, and a good discussion, see Kathryn McEuen in the *Complete Prose Works of John Milton* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953), pp. 211–306. They are reprinted in both the Hughes and Flannagan editions. See also *Prolusiones Quaedam Oratoriae* (Academic Exercises) and *Of Education*, together with the introductions by Thomas R. Hartmann, in *The Prose of John Milton*, ed. J. Max Patrick (New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1967). In his introduction to the *Prolusions* in the Riverside Milton, Flannagan refers (p. 846) to an unpublished 1968 Fordham dissertation by Sister Mary Hortense Cavanaugh, S.S.J., *John Milton's Prolusions Considered in the Light of his Rhetorical and Dialectical Education at St. Paul's Grammar School and Cambridge University*.

4. Perhaps the clearest statement of this problem is still Harold R. Swardson's chapter on

The problem is posed acutely in the following passage. Adam and Eve listen to the angel Raphael's story about the rebellion and war in heaven which launched time and history as we know them. Having heard the story, Adam and Eve are filled

With admiration and deep Muse to heare  
Of things so high and strange, things to thir thought  
So unimaginable as hate in Heav'n,  
And Warr so near the seat of God in bliss. (VII 52–55)

That luminous phrase "hate in Heav'n" contrasts two words which the alliteration nonetheless requires us to breathe together, like other apparent opposites: devils/deities, hell/heaven, Son/Satan, Eve/evil. The rhetorical figures of antithesis and paradox are here (as often in the seventeenth century) raised to metaphysical proportions. Evil becomes a cosmic, not only a human problem. And one which is said to be *unimaginable* to the first audience of the story.

"Admiration and deep Muse" might well be the listening postures for all of us at such a time, reproducing for the poem as a whole what Adam and Eve do for their epic-within-the-epic. Nonetheless, both words derive from classical tradition and may not be wholly fitting as a reaction to the desperately serious narrative of the origin of evil. *Admiration*, according to the *OED*, usually links wonder with approbation, while *Muse* means "meditate." For this meaning, the *OED* cites one of those marvellous Skeat etymologies: he connects the word with "muzzle," and makes it signify an attitude like that of "a dog sniffing the air when in doubt as to the scent." There may also, as the *OED* allows in its more sober mood, be some overlap with the concept of the Muses. Arguably these words signal that not only Adam and Eve, but the innocence of classical Greek culture, could not comprehend the sheer malevolence of Satan. After all, as Milton well knew, Plato's response to a similar problem, strife and battle among the Homeric gods, had been to have his Socrates, in a famous passage of the *Republic* (II 377e-80), reject the stories as untrue.<sup>5</sup> So Adam's problem may rather be

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Milton in *Poetry and The Fountain of Light: Observations on the Conflict Between Christian and Classical Traditions in Seventeenth-Century Poetry* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1962), pp. 104–153. In an excess of modesty, Swardson claims he would not have published had he seen John Peters, *A Critique of Paradise Lost* (New York, 1960), while he was writing. On the war episode and its Renaissance epic background, the definitive study is Stella Purce Revard, *The War in Heaven: Paradise Lost and the Tradition of Satan's Rebellion* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980).

5. For Plato's criticism of poetry (esp. Homer and tragedy) see the convenient edition by Penelope Murray, ed., *Plato on Poetry*. Ion; Republic 376e-398b9; Republic 595–608b10, ser. Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics (Cambridge, New York, and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1996), here pp. 52–6, 138–45. (Murray's book was reviewed in *IJCT* 6 [1999/2000], pp. 271–73 by S. Halliwell.) For Milton's Plato, see Irene Samuel, *Plato and Milton* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966); she claims that Milton "gave to Plato a position far above any other author, pagan or Christian, save the authors of the Bible" (p. 20). He was the only author to whose works Milton accorded the (conventional) epithet "divine" (in the *Apology against a Pamphlet*, Yale edition of Milton's Prose, vol. 1.891, where he also cites the passage about Homer from the *Republic*). And in his efforts to tempt Christ in *Paradise Regained*, the first part of Athens to which Satan points is "the Olive Grove of Academe, / Plato's retirement" (IV 244–5). In *Tetrachordon*, though, Milton refers to "Plato . . . in his heathenism" (in fact he is in complete agreement with him, and is encouraging

that he is a classical hero in a Christian poem, and fails (till too late) to learn the difference.

Milton's Adam and Eve do at least have a more reflective reaction than Socrates: the narrator of the story is after all not a lying classical poet but an angel. But Adam's reaction (with his consorted Eve) is not horror. They are innocent creatures, and have listened, like children, to a fearful story with a happy ending. There may well, then, be some irony in the poet's description of the next stage of their reaction. They have heard, he says, about war so near the peace of God, but

the evil soon  
 Driv'n back redounded as a flood on those  
 From whom it sprung, impossible to mix  
 With Blessedness. Whence Adam soon repeal'd  
 The doubts that in his heart arose: and now  
 Led on, yet sinless, with desire to know  
 What neerer might concern him, how this World  
 Of Heav'n and Earth conspicuous first began. (VII 56–63)

The dramatic irony is fairly clear: nothing concerns Adam more nearly than the story he has just heard of the origin and present existence of Satan. Yet Adam quickly puts aside his doubts because of the happy ending.<sup>6</sup> He immediately asks the angel to switch from a narrative based on classical epic with all its blood and terror (Book VI), to a narrative that will reproduce the first chapter of the Book of Genesis (Book VII). The reaction shows that he has not understood the point of the war narrative, which was to show him that the same enemy is now threatening him. And this in spite of Raphael's explicit warning that Adam is to "beware / Of what is past"; therefore he has told the story of

. . . *Satan*, he who envies now thy state,  
 Who now is plotting how he may seduce  
 Thee also from obedience . . .  
 . . . Remember and fear to transgress. <sup>7</sup> (VI 894–12)

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Christians to do at least as well, Yale 2.593), and in *Areopagitica*, he has a wonderful put-down of the late Plato's tendency to authoritarian legislation: Plato, he says, "a man of high authority indeed, but least of all for his Commonwealth, in the book of his laws, which no City ever yet receiv'd, fed his fancie with making many edicts to his ayrie Burgomasters, which they who otherwise admire him, wish had bin rather buried and excus'd in the genial cups of an Academick night-sitting. By which laws he seems to tolerate no kind of learning, but by unalterable decree, consisting most of practicall traditions, to the attainment whereof a Library of smaller bulk than his own dialogues would be abundant. And there also enacts that no poet should so much as read to any privat man, what he had writt'n, until the Judges and Law-keepers had seen it, and allow'd it": *The Prose of John Milton*, ed. J. Max Patrick (New York: Anchor Doubleday, 1967), p. 293 (pp. 15–16 in the 1644 ed). In *Paradise Regained*, Christ replies to Satan's blandishments by saying simply that Plato "to fabling fell and smooth conceits" (IV 295).

6. The first part of this quotation suggests, as often, free indirect discourse; it is Adam's thought about the narrative as well as the narrator's summary of its ending.
7. The switch throughout Raphael's narrative from singular to plural audience and back is one sign among several that Milton leaves it unclear what Eve actually hears: "warne / thy

Adam does not shift from the mode of wonderment at hate in heaven, to the mode of fear for hate on earth. Raphael has failed of the purpose given him by God, to get across a warning of the true situation, and Milton thus raises the question whether his own audience will do any better. He hopes, he says, that he will "fit audience find, though few" (VII 31)—and this just some thirty lines before he represents the inadequate reaction of Adam, Raphael's audience, to his own version of classical epic.

## 2. *The Problem of Evil In The Ancient World*

From the historical point of view, it may be better to conceive of Adam as a classical hero in a Christian poem. It is not so much the representation of evil as war, but rather the origin of evil in heaven that he cannot grasp. Indeed evil as a metaphysical principle is usually regarded by historians of ideas as of Judeo-Christian rather than classical origin. The Greek words for evil, for example, are not exact: *to kakon* is the closest, especially in tragedy, but it means so many things, including both cowardice and base birth (concepts of heroic origin), and is so often plural or merely particular; *to aischron* means rather shameful or disgusting; *to aischron* is usually opposed to *to kalon* as ugliness to beauty or vice to virtue; *poneria* covers any defects or blemish, moral or otherwise. No one Greek word covers all of what we mean by the concept *evil*, and there was no such thing as what theologians call "the problem of evil."<sup>8</sup>

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weaker" (VI 908–9) suggests Eve was not there to hear Raphael's warning, but above we just saw that she was present.

8. The fullest discussion is Friederich Billicsich, *Das Problem des Übels in der Philosophie des Abendlandes, I. Von Platon bis Thomas von Aquino*, 2nd enlarged ed. (Wien: Söxl, 1955), who argues that Plato, abandoning the Socratic insistence on ignorance, came close to a metaphysics of evil in matter (*Polit.* 273ff), then in a famous passage at *Laws* X 896a ff. he even implies the idea of an evil world-soul. But the notion that the late Plato espoused a metaphysical evil entity such as the World-Soul is refuted in Fritz-Peter Hager, *Gott und das Böse im antiken Platonismus*, *Elementa* 46 (Amsterdam: Rodopi; Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1987). See also n. 55 below. Aristotle rejected any idea of matter as evil (*Metaph.* IX 9 1011a 15), insisting that the bad, *kakia*, lies potentially in human freedom (*Eth. Nic.* III 7 1113b 6). The most thorough investigation in the Greek-Hellenistic tradition is that of Plotinus, for whom evil, as usual, is a lack or absence of good (Billicsich, pp. 56–97). Harold F. Cherniss, "The Sources of Evil according to Plato," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 98 (1954), pp. 23–37 (repr. in Id., *Selected Papers*, ed. L. Tarán [Leiden: Brill, 1977], pp. 253–60), shows that evil does not become a problem until the mystery religions dominate. Extended discussion is to be found in Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (10 vols., Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1951–76), or its German original *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1933–79), s.v. *kakos*, *poneros* (respectively W. Grundmann and G. Harder, vol. 3 [1965], pp. 469–87 and vol. 6 [1968], pp. 546–66 in the English, vol. 3 [1938], pp. 470–87 and vol. 4 [1959], pp. 546–66 in the German edition) and in Keith Grayston, "Evil," in Alan Richardson, ed., *Theological Word Book of the Bible* (London: SCM Press, 1950), pp. 73–4. — The English word *evil* is of Teutonic origin, cognate with *übel* and Dutch *euvel*. It is thought to derive from a theoretical word *ubiloz*, cognate with *up* or *over*, and thus the etymology of *evil* connects it with the concepts of *too much*, *exceeding due measure*, *over limits*, what used to be thought of as *hubris*. The *OED* has various definitions, but the important distinction is between those uses that are synonyms of 'weakness' or 'affliction', and those that retain the much stronger sense that makes people reluctant to use it, restricting it to the Nazi holocaust or similarly extreme events such as the recent genocides in Rwanda or Kosovo; for what it is worth I

The problem, certainly, was anticipated by Epicurus (341–270 BC), who put it thus as a part of his argument that the gods pay no attention to our world:

God either wishes to take away evils, and is unable; or He is able, and is unwilling; or He is neither willing nor able, or He is both willing and able. If He is willing and is unable, He is feeble, which is not in accordance with the character of God; if He is able and unwilling, He is envious, which is equally at variance with God; if He is neither willing nor able, He is both envious and feeble, and therefore not God; if He is both willing and able, which alone is suitable to God, from what source then are evils? or why does He not remove them?

This passage survives because it is quoted (in Latin) by Lactantius (AD 260–340) in his newly Christian context.<sup>9</sup> It poses the terms of the problem in the way the Christian world was beginning to face it. Indeed in discussing this early form of the dilemma, the contemporary Christian theologian John Hick admits that “No argument, it seems, could be simpler or clearer than this.”<sup>10</sup> Quite so. As a theist, Hick is obliged to answer the argument, but he admits he cannot do so without making things very complicated indeed. Occam’s razor, one might suppose, would destroy theodicy<sup>11</sup>, that is, the extraordinarily bold attempt “to justify the ways of God to man.” Nevertheless when Epicurus formulated the dilemma, he appears to have used the plural (Lactantius’ *mala*), and does not refer to a singular “evil.” This singular abstraction seems to appear not in classical Greek contexts but concomitantly with the developing idea of the Devil in Jewish apocalyptic and then spectacularly in Christian contexts.

### 3. Pseudomorphosis

It is not easy to measure the extent of the gap crossed from pagan classical to Judeo-Christian culture in thinking about “evil.” A strong form of the argument has it

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endorse the view of David Pocock, “Unruly evil,” in David Parkin, ed., *The Anthropology of Evil* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985), p. 52, that this strong sense of *evil*, far from being obsolete when used of people, is reserved for those who are barely regarded as human. This is the sense in which we are exploring the concept in this essay, with the addition that the word implies a metaphysical, not simply a powerfully moral, reality.

9. H. Usener, *Epicurea* (Leipzig & Berlin: Teubner, 1887, repr. Stuttgart: Teubner, 1966), frag. 374, p. 252–3, in Lactantius, *De ira Dei* 13.19, translated as *On the Anger of God*, ch. 13.20–21, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. VII (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1985, American reprint of the Edinburgh edition), p. 270; see the discussion in the ‘Sources Chrétiennes’ series, *La Colère de Dieu*, ed. Christiane Ingremeau (Paris: Editions Cerf, 1982), p. 310, for the parallel citation, but with a different ordering of the hypotheses, from Sextus Empiricus (*hypot. pyrrh.* 3.10s). See also Wolfgang Schmid, “Epikur,” in *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum* V (1962), p. 786 (= Idem, *Ausgewählte philologische Schriften*, ed. H. Erbse and J. Küppers [Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1984], pp. 238f.). Milton refers to Lactantius explicitly, and this passage will have been known to him; see Kathleen Hartwell, *Lactantius and Milton* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1929).
10. John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), p. 5.
11. A term apparently invented, after Milton’s poem was written, by his (much) younger contemporary Leibniz.

that the concepts of Greek and "Eastern" systems of thought are so different that even when there is apparent overlap, this is an illusion. For this illusory phenomenon, which is characterized by the use of Greek forms for oriental conceptions, Oswald Spengler coined the useful term *pseudomorphosis*.<sup>12</sup> The metaphor derives from mineralogy and refers to the geological phenomenon that occurs when one crystalline structure in a rock-formation is emptied out, leaving a hollow, and another quite different structure comes in, after a time, to fill the gap. "Disintegrating" Greek thought is the older crystal, Eastern thought the new substance forced into its mould. The observer risks being misled into taking the new for the older crystal, but once he carries out a chemical analysis, the difference becomes clear.

An example will help understand the idea. In many religious systems of late antiquity, including several that overlapped with Christianity, there was a widespread idea that spirit is good but matter is evil. In the Manichaean religious system, which was perhaps the most widespread of the Gnostic systems which the Church fathers opposed, and which has especial importance for Christianity because it attracted the young Augustine for nine years,<sup>13</sup> two arch-principles of Light and Darkness oppose each other from all eternity. In the Persian language sources of this international religion (which spread as far as China), the Dark principle is personified as *Ahriman*, following the Zoroastrian tradition; the Arabic sources call it *Iblis*, or Arch-Devil, a corruption of the Greek *diabolos*. But the Greek sources generally call it by the name *Hyle*, and the Greek word is used even in Latin or Syriac versions of Manichaean teaching. Indeed Mani himself, who wrote mostly in Syriac, still used the Greek term *Hyle*. Now *hyle* is the conventional Greek word for matter. Alexander of Lycopolis, a pagan opponent of Manichaeism, well trained in philosophy and writing in Egypt one generation after Mani, distinguishes Mani's *Hyle* from the *hyle* of Plato and Aristotle,

12. Oswald Spengler, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes. Umriss einer Morphologie der Weltgeschichte*, vol. 2, *Welthistorische Perspektiven* (München: Beck, 1922), pp. 227 ff., Engl. tr. by C.F. Atkinson, *The Decline of the West* (London and New York: Knopf, 1926), vol. 2, pp. 209 ff. See the discussion in Hans Jonas, *Gnosis und spätantiker Geist*, Teil I (2nd. ed., Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1954), pp. 73–4, and the abridged and updated English version, *The Gnostic Religion* (Boston: Beacon, 1963), p. 36–7, and Martin Hengel, *Judentum und Hellenismus, Studien zu ihrer Begegnung unter besonderer Berücksichtigung Palästinas bis zu Mitte des 2 Jh.s. v. Chr.* (Tübingen: J.C.B.Mohr, 1969; 2nd. ed. *ibid.* 1973), p. 4, Engl. tr. by J. Bowden, *Judaism and Hellenism*, vol. I (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974), p. 3.
13. Manichaeism as a Gnostic system, see Gedaliahu Stroumsa, *Another Seed: Studies in Gnostic Mythology* (Leiden: Brill, 1984), pp. 145–67. For the relation with Augustine see Neil Forsyth, *The Old Enemy. Satan and the Combat Myth* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), pp. 390–427, and Edwin Lee Kam-Lun, *Augustine, Manichaeism, and the Good* (Bern and New York: Peter Lang, 1999). The Coptic Nag Hammadi texts contain further evidence: see for example 'The Hypostasis of The Archons', NHC II, 4, 94, and 'The Origin of the World', NHC II, 5, 98–99, in James M. Robinson, ed., *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* (Leiden: Brill, 1977; New York: Harper and Row, 1981), p. 158 and pp. 162–63, respectively. They make it clear the concept of Matter as an opposing and original force is by no means exclusive to the Iranian type of Gnosticism. See also Carl-A. Keller, 'Das Problem des Bösen in Apokalyptik und Gnostik', in Martin Krause, ed., *Gnosis and Gnosticism. Papers read at the Seventh International Conference on Patristic Studies (Oxford, September 8th–13th, 1975)*, Nag Hammadi Studies 8 (Leiden: Brill, 1977), and Kurt Rudolph, *Die Gnosis. Wesen und Geschichte einer spätantiken Religion* (Leipzig: Koehler & Amelang, 1977 = Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978), pp. 80–82 = *Id.*, *Gnosis. The Nature and History of an Ancient Religion*, tr. R. McL. Wilson (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1983), pp. 73–74.



and Jonas summarises his argument as follows: "Mani ascribes to it powers, movements, and strivings of its own which differ from those of God only by being evil: its movements are 'disorderly motion,' its strivings 'evil lust,' and its powers are symbolized in the 'dark consuming fire'. So far is Matter here from being the passive substratum of the philosophers that the Darkness with which it is identical is even alone the originally active of the two opposed principles, and the Light in its repose is forced into action only by an initial attack of the Darkness."<sup>14</sup> That is to say, *Hyle* here functions not as a philosophical concept, but as an active mythological figure, even as a "round," i.e., fully developed character, rather than a "flat" background figure, to borrow E. M. Forster's terms for novelistic fictions.<sup>15</sup> This use of the word *hyle* represents not a development of the original Greek classical conception, but a wholly new "crystalline structure" forced into the mould of a disintegrated concept.

The mould was created by a world-view (the classical) which admired and often revered the order of created things. Plato's *Timaeus* provides an apt illustration of this outlook: when Timaeus introduces his description of creation, he begins with the firm statement that the creator "was good; and in the good no jealousy about anything can ever arise. So, being without jealousy, he desired that all things should come as near as possible to being like himself" (29e). Aristotle, similarly, begins his *Nicomachean Ethics* by saying:

Every art and every inquiry, and likewise every action and practical pursuit, is thought to aim at some good: hence it has rightly been said that the Good is that at which all things aim.

Even in reflecting on tragedy in the *Poetics*, Aristotle maintains that happy endings are the best, and that what goes wrong therein is *hamartia*. This innocent notion, which is best translated as "error" or "missing the mark," derives ultimately from the Socratic argument that sin is error, which in turn is caused by ignorance.<sup>16</sup> Moderns in general, Christian or post-Christian, and so suffering from pseudomorphosis, have had trouble with the rather amoral notion of *hamartia*, so that it often becomes *flaw* or *fault* or even *sin* in various translations of the *Poetics*.<sup>17</sup> Tragedy may well have been, from a mod-

14. Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion* (Boston: Beacon, 1963), p. 211.

15. E.M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (1927; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962), pp. 75–82.

16. Kierkegaard, heir of the much more pessimistic Christian worldview, and so of the cosmic idea of evil, famously puzzles about this Socratic optimism, in *Sickness Unto Death* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954), p. 218.

17. English translations of the *Poetics* are often influenced by the fact that *hamartia* is the ordinary New Testament word for *sin* (G. Stählin shows that *hamartia* is almost always a matter of "offense in relation to God with emphasis on guilt," in Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary*, vol. I, s.v. *hamartano*, *hamartema*, *hamartia*, p. 295 [Engl.] and p. 297 [Ger.]). But see S.H. Butcher, *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art* (1894, 4th ed., New York: Dover, 1953), pp. 317–19: he translates *hamartia* in Ch 13. 3 as "some error or frailty"; Gerald F. Else, *Aristotle's Poetics: the Argument* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1957, 1963), p. 376, and Walter Kaufmann, *Tragedy and Philosophy* (New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1968), pp. 70–71, all of whom argue for "error" as the correct translation, even if "flaw" and "error" are not in fact so easy to keep apart in Greek. In the view of Stephen Halliwell, *Aristotle's Poetics* (London: Duckworth, 1986), pp. 215–37, citing the work of T.C.W. Stinton, "Hamartia in Aristotle and Greek Tragedy," *Classical Quarterly* n.s. 25 (1975), pp. 221–54, *hamartia* has a

ern perspective, the Greek way of thinking about how to face evil,<sup>18</sup> but that is not how Aristotle presents it to its own audience.

The actual term *hyle* was first used by the Peripatetics in developing a theory of Matter which distinguishes Aristotle's ontology sharply from his master, Plato's. The term was conventionally used thereafter to mean the basic substance of visible reality, even in discussions of the theories of the Pre-Socratics.<sup>19</sup> When the term *Hyle* appears in the works of Mani however, it has an entirely different "crystalline structure," as Alexander of Lycopolis demonstrated. It derives its meaning not from the Greek tradition at all, but from the Gnostic revision of Iranian dualism. The Greek word is used because much of the Gnostic re-interpretation of traditional teachings, whether Persian, Greek, Hebrew, Babylonian, or Egyptian, was carried out in the medium of the Greek language, the prestigious *koine* of the ancient world. But instead of the reverence for cosmic order demonstrated by classical Greek philosophy, a large and extremely influential spiritual movement has come to hate that order. No longer is the visible universe equated with order, beauty, and harmony, all of which are implications of the Greek word "cosmos" within its classical context: rather it has become the visible aspect of a malign and vicious jailer, the repressive "law and order" of a hated tyrant. And his chains are *Hyle*, matter.

Of course, not all aspects of the new religions are examples of "pseudomorphosis." Some of the concepts adapted by Christianity and its rivals derive directly from classical philosophy. The trick is to know which is which. Where would we place the

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range of meanings including ignorance, error, fault, and should be made consistent with the idea that a relatively good man may fall innocently into misfortune.

18. Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil* (Boston: Beacon, 1967), pp. 211–31, makes this case well. The original French work is *La Symbolique du mal*, vol. 2 of *Finitude et Culpabilité* (Paris: Auber Montaigne 1960). This work has been influential in philosophical circles, especially in the "History of Religions" school associated with the University of Chicago. It is extensively cited, for example, in the *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade (New York: Macmillan, 1987) in the article on *evil*. But one may take issue, while admitting the usefulness of the typology he presents, with the implied progression that Ricoeur's Protestantism appears to espouse from supposedly primitive and ritually based defilement to communal sin to individual sin (and guilt); see e.g. Donald Taylor, "Theological thoughts about evil," in Parkin, ed., *The Anthropology of Evil*, pp. 31–2. My own view is that Ricoeur is wrong to accord priority to *symbols* of evil over the narrative contexts, usually *myths*, in which these symbols appear. But in this respect he follows a long tradition of folklorists, for whom, in the pre-structuralist world, the *motif* always had priority over the *tale*. In *Le mal: un défi à la philosophie et à la théologie* (Genève: Labor et Fides, 1986), however, Ricoeur appears to change his position on this issue.
19. See for example Plutarch, *De Prim. Frig.* 7, 947F, cited as No. 146 in G. S. Kirk and J. E. Raven, *The Presocratic Philosophers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), p. 148: ". . . or as Anaximenes thought of old, let us leave neither the cold nor the hot as belonging to substance (*ousia*), but as common dispositions of matter (*hyle*) that supervene on changes." See generally Heinz Happ, *Hyle. Studien zum aristotelischen Materiebegriff* (Berlin & New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1971). For the inability of later philosophers, including Aristotle, to understand the point of view of the Pre-Socratics because of fundamental terminological and conceptual changes, see Heidegger's essay on "The Anaximander Fragment" in *Early Greek Thinking*, translated by David Farrell Krell and published in *Arion*, N. S., No. 4 (1975), pp. 576–626. But see also W.C.K. Guthrie, "Aristotle as a historian of philosophy," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 77 (1957), pp. 35–41.

Johannine *logos*,<sup>20</sup> for example, or the even more various concept of *gnosis*?<sup>21</sup> Spengler's metaphor may best be used to isolate the anti-cosmism of the transcendental religions, alien to classical Greece, but not as a blanket term to cover all Oriental influence. To the extent that Christianity was itself influenced by this new anti-cosmism ("the world, the flesh, and the devil"), it shares in the phenomenon of "pseudomorphosis." Yet its relation to the genuine and continuous classical tradition was equally strong, as such thinkers as Origen and Augustine demonstrate. That tradition may have distorted its origins, but its origins were clearly in Greece, not Persia.<sup>22</sup> Paradoxically, even if evil as a separate principle is alien to classical thought, the idea of the goodness of God is not: Plato's *Timaeus* is only one of many witnesses.

#### 4. Satan and pseudomorphosis

The boundary between that which is genuinely classical and that which appears in the Greek of the New Testament and the early Fathers only through "pseudomorphosis" may be drawn even more clearly by the figure of Satan, the Prince of this World. Despite the many classical allusions with which the later tradition, and Milton, dignified the character of Satan, his genesis and his role in the Christian scheme put him outside the classical Greek legacy. The historical equivalent of chemical analysis demonstrates that he appears as the Greek "*diabolos*" only by virtue of "pseudomorphosis." Indeed, if the reference in I Chronicles 21.1 (the only time where an independent Satan with no definite article appears in the Old Testament) is influenced by Persian dualism, then he would even be outside the genuine Hebrew tradition also.<sup>23</sup> All his associations are with the radical dualism or anticosmism of the religious environment within which he "grew up."

This special and isolated origin of Satan within the tradition of Judeo-Christian writings is scrupulously followed in Milton's story of the rebellion in which Satan takes his origin. Of course, the rebellion among the gods is a narrative paradigm with strong precedents in several mythologies of the ancient near-east (we now know), and Milton knew the version told in Hesiod's *Theogony*. But the story as there told is so murky, and so palpably designed to protect Zeus himself from the accusation of being the rebel (logical enough, since his opponents are the older Gods), that it is a very peculiar version indeed. Milton often alludes to the *Theogony*, but not for the rebellion itself.<sup>24</sup> Nor has anyone ever found a close parallel in any other of the various apocryphal and medieval texts that tell the story of the Devil's origin. In Milton's highly

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20. For the question whether the Septuagint translation of Proverbs 8.22–31 or Greek cosmological speculation is more important, see Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition - Id., The Christian Tradition 1* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), pp. 186–93.
  21. See Neil Forsyth, *The Powers of Darkness Bound* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1976), pp. 502–16, and more briefly, *The Old Enemy*, pp. 325–6.
  22. For a broad discussion see C. N. Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture: a Study of Thought and Action From Augustus to Augustine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1940, 1957), and Jaroslav Pelikan, *Christianity and Classical Culture: The Metamorphosis of Natural Theology in the Christian Encounter with Hellenism* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1993).
  23. Jacob M. Myers, *I Chronicles* (New York: Doubleday, 1965), pp. lxxxvii–ix.
  24. Philip Gallagher, "Paradise Lost and the Greek Theogony," *English Literary Renaissance* 9 (1979), pp. 121–48.

original story, Satan comes into being in Raphael's narrative quite simply in reaction to God's word. Suddenly he is there, not as Lucifer, his earlier name, but as the enemy, as he who disobeys. That is what Milton dramatizes in this part of *Paradise Lost*, in fact all in one line around one of the most expressive caesurae in all poetry, at the earliest chronological episode of the poem. God announces to the assembled angels that he has decided to elevate his Son to a position of pre-eminence above the angels:

This day I have begot whom I declare  
 My onely Son, and on this holy Hill  
 Him have anointed, whom ye now behold  
 At my right hand; your Head I him appoint;  
 And by my Self have sworn to him shall bow  
 All knees in Heav'n, and shall confess him Lord:  
 Under his great Vice-gerent Reign abide  
 United as one individual Soule  
**For ever happie: him who disobeyes,**  
 Mee disobeyes, breaks union, and that day  
 Cast out from God and blessed vision, falls  
 Into utter darkness, deep ingulft, his place  
 Ordaind without redemption, without end. (V 604–615)

In the speech itself, since God's word is itself productive, creative, instigative, Satan is called into being as the disobedient one at the very moment God proclaims the eternal happiness of all. God's speech, in other words, suggests that he knows there will be trouble. Poor Satan, we may well feel, walks into the trap that God's words open for him, stepping forward, as it were, to fill the perennially vacant seat at the left hand of God.<sup>25</sup>

In spite of the later pronouncements by Michael during the war that Satan himself is the "author of evil, unknown till thy revolt" (VI 262), a careful reading of the above passage shows that God's creative word has called him into being at the same moment as he announces the elevation of the Son. Strictly speaking, perhaps, Satan and his

25. On the *sinister* implications of Satan's pairing with the Son, see the anthropologically fascinating discussions in Rodney Needham, ed. *Right and Left* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), including the Moslem *hadith* which enjoins the faithful neither to eat nor drink with the left hand, which is Satan's manners; for the point of view of comparative mythology, see Alan Watts, *The Two Hands of God* (New York: George Braziller, 1963). The Latin word *sinister* connects *left* and *evil* via augury. The relation of *left* and *north* is widespread. Walter W. Skeat connects North with Umbrian *nertru*, "on the left"; Skeat, *An Etymological Dictionary of the English Language* (new, revised ed., Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910, repr. 1974), s.v. The link of the North with enemies and with the devil is biblical: Is. 14.13, Job 26.6–7, Jer. 1.14–15, Hab. 1.5–11, Nah. 2.2–10, 3.1–3, Ecclesiasticus 43.22; see Brevard S. Childs, "The Enemy from the North and the Chaos Tradition," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 78 (1959), pp. 187–98, Richard J. Clifford, *The Cosmic Mountain in Canaan and the Old Testament* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972). On the Christian symbolism, see D.M. Hay, *Glory at the Right Hand: Psalm 110 in Early Christianity* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1973). S. Shahar, "Le Catharisme et le début de la cabale," *Annales* 29 (1974), pp. 1185–1210, shows the links of left, north and evil in the Kabbalah. Left-handed people were well aware of the traditional suppression of one term in a pair before deconstruction made the idea fashionable.

cohorts are “self-tempted, self-deprav’d,” (III 130) in the sense that they are free not to react in this way, yet we would have to imagine a defective speech of God if what it here predicts did not happen.<sup>26</sup>

God’s speech is preceded by a narration (V 577–599) which sets the scene in Heaven using Platonic ideas of a “great year,” “ten thousand thousand” angels all with heraldic emblems, and even an imperial summons, all terms with strong classical resonance.<sup>27</sup> But God’s speech itself has no such reference. It is instead made up entirely of biblical allusions, chiefly to those texts which had long been used as proof texts for the Son’s adoption (Psalm 2.6) and his superiority to the angels (Hebrews 1.5). Actually these references complicate the picture that God’s apparently simple speech presents.<sup>28</sup> In particular, the advancement of the Son through the notion that he is “begotten” is a source of confusion—and of Satan’s resentment. But, however confusing, the language is definitely biblical not classical. For his originating moments Milton’s Satan, like the Satan of the Christian tradition, owes nothing to Greece.

### 5. Rome: Hell’s Fury

So far we have followed the strong argument for a radical difference between classical and Christian concepts as sources of the idea of evil. But we have also confined the “classical” to what Greece represented. If we now extend the classical tradition to include Rome, we get a different view. Not only is *malum* closer to the modern senses of *evil*, it is the word used in Jerome’s Bible for several of those disparate Hebrew and Greek words, and indeed for the most influential discussions of the problem of evil, notably Augustine’s.<sup>29</sup> In Horace and Juvenal there are instances of

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26. Theologians and Miltonists, even Milton’s God, spend some energy denying that his prediction actually causes something to happen: “they themselves / Decreed thir own revolt, not I; if I foreknew, / Foreknowledge had no influence on thir fault” (*Paradise Lost* III 116–8). The best discussion of the theology is Georgia Christopher, *Milton and the Science of the Saints* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), pp. 92–115, but see also William Empson, *Milton’s God* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1961), pp. 81–89, 95–97, and the various replies by Dennis Danielson in *Milton’s Good God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).
27. Fowler, *ad loc.*, shows how Milton “navigates around the Platonic doctrine that time, a moveable image of eternity, is generated by the heavenly bodies” (*Tim* 37e–38e), and invokes Plato’s *great year* of 36,000 years, implying that the cycle of deterioration begins now, leading to the loss of the Golden Age. But this is the earliest chronological event in the poem, and so it is strange for quasi-military “standards and gonfalons” (V 589) to stream in the air; even if these are understood as purely ecclesiastical emblems, it is odd that they “bear imblaz’d / Holy memorials, acts of zeal and love, / Recorded eminent” (V 592–4). These lines cannot but recall the famous words of Virgil’s *Eclogue* IV 5, *magnus ab integro saeculorum nascitur ordo*, where the notion of the *great year*, as well as Sibylline prophecies, is also present. Shelley rewrites the lines for the final chorus of his drama *Hellas*, “The world’s great age begins anew, / The golden years return.” Milton is unusual in making this idea the occasion of the cosmic fall.
28. For further discussion, see “Rebellion in *Paradise Lost*: Impossible Original,” *Milton Quarterly* 30 (1996), pp. 151–62; online edition: <<http://voyager.cns.ohiou.edu/~somalley/online/forsyth.html>>. On the use of Psalm 2.6–7 in the argument for an adoptionist Christology in Hebrews 1.5 (as well as Justin and Tertullian) see also the succinct comments by Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition* (see n. 20 above), p. 190.

that “motiveless malignancy” that Coleridge identified in Iago. In Virgil’s *Aeneid*, there are certain features that point to a new sense of the universe as malevolent, especially the poignant beginning of the second, Italian half of the poem. And there is also, of course, the realm of Dis.

Allecto introduces and virtually presides over the second, Italian part of the *Aeneid*, and she is representative of this new sense of malignance in Virgil. The poet signals how different she is by inviting comparison with Juno’s first intervention in Book I, when she invoked the god of the winds, Aeolus, to oppose Aeneas’ destiny. Having failed in that Homeric venture, the vindictive Juno now goes beneath the forces of nature for very un-Homeric weapons, and invokes the aid of Tartarus.<sup>30</sup> She summarizes this escalation of the war in a line that Freud used, with somewhat different connotations, as the epigraph for *The Interpretation of Dreams: flectere si nequeo superos, Acheronta movebo* (VII. 312) / “If I cannot bend the powers above, then I will arouse hell.”<sup>31</sup> Even without Freud’s signal, we could see that Juno’s decision is a radical departure from previous tradition. She summons Allecto, a Fury whom even her sisters abhor, to incite frenzy in the Italians and thus oppose Aeneas’ efforts to install himself peacefully in Latinus’ territory. Allecto goes first to Lavinia’s mother, Amata, maddening her by means of a snake that crawls its poison unnoticed through her body, then to Turnus himself (who first rejects her in her disguise as an old priestess, but is overcome by the snakes she hurls at him). She then incites the hunting hounds to chase the pet stag which Iulus promptly shoots, unaware that it is a pet: *nec dextrae erranti deus afuit* (VII.498) / “Some god did not allow his faltering hand to fail.” Finally she sounds the trumpet of war, and returns to Juno, mission accomplished.

This splendid invention of Virgil’s certainly has precedents in Greece: Hesiod’s Eris (Strife) and Night (Allecto, like the Dira of XII, is *virgo sata Nocte* VII 331 / “virgin born of Night,” cf. XII 846, 860) among those originary and earlier monsters who now

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29. A Latin pun is what made the fruit of the garden, not identified in Genesis, into an *apple* (whereas had the language of Jerome been French, the fruit would no doubt have become a peach). Milton is very careful about the word, allowing it only to Satan, first when he identifies the fruit at IX 585 as “these fair Apples,” and thus trivializes it for Eve’s benefit, and then when he makes fun of God and mankind to his fellow devils: “Him by fraud I have seduc’d / . . . , and the more to increase / Your wonder, with an Apple; he thereat / Offended, worth your laughter, hath giv’n up / Both his beloved Man and all his World” (X 485–9). Milton probably knew the schoolroom Latin joke *malo malo malo malo*, “I would rather be / Up an apple tree / Than a naughty boy / In adversity,” as it becomes in the mouth of that evil little boy Miles in Benjamin Britten’s opera *The Turn of the Screw* (quoted by Frank Kermode, “The Midrash Mishmash,” *New York Review of Books*, April 23, 1998, p. 45). Milton certainly deploys the various senses of the Latin word around the notion of evil. *malum* also means “mast” and in one simile Satan’s spear is compared to “the tallest pine / Hewn on Norwegian hills to be the mast / Of some great ammiral” (I 292–94). And since *malo* also means “I prefer” it may be significant that Milton has his Satan deliberately choose evil, in that famous phrase “Evil, be thou my good” (IV 110).
30. For a good discussion, see Victor Pöschl, *Die Dichtkunst Vergils*, 2nd ed. (Wien: Rohrer 1964), pp. 48–56 (= 3rd. ed. [Berlin & New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1977], pp. 26–33) = Id., *The Art of Vergil*, trans. G. Seligson (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1962), pp. 24–29.
31. *Aeneid* quotations are from the text of R. D Williams (Basingstoke: Macmillan/St Martins, 1972); translations are lightly adapted from Allen Mandelbaum (New York: Bantam, 1972).

inhabit Tartarus, the Gorgon myth for the poisonous snakes in the hair (VII 341–48), and above all the Fury or Erinys and her sisters Tisiphone and Megaera.<sup>32</sup> (These creatures have in fact already appeared at the entrance to Virgil's underworld, *Aen.* VI 280–1.) But Hesiod's monsters have been overcome by Zeus, while the Greek Furies, in their best-known appearance in Aeschylus' *Eumenides*, are, despite their horrific appearance, servants of justice. They are to avenge the murder of Clytemnestra, not initiate an unprovoked and bloody war. Virgil's creature is an embodiment of *furor* in its darker sense of an uncontrolled and obsessive power, and opening with her lends the whole of the second, Iliadic and Italian part of the *Aeneid*, a distinctly un-Homeric aura. Even though she works with qualities already present in the psyche of the victim, as Macbeth's weird sisters call up his "black and deep desires," the very fact that she is given separate existence and free rein to work her sadistic will risks detaching her from any larger world of values. She acts as, and has all the poetic power of, an independent being.

Thus her powerful presence in the narrative, like Satan's in Milton's, needs to be held in check by explicit moral assertion. Virgil's Juno brusquely tells her upon her return that Jupiter will not allow her to wander freely in the upper air and she must return to the world of Dis:

*te super aetherias errare licentius auras  
haud pater ille velit, summi regnator Olympi.  
cede locis.* (VII 557–9)

The lord of high Olympus will not let you wander free about the upper air.  
Be gone from here.<sup>33</sup>

The result is one of those splendid Virgilian descriptions of landscape as the Fury returns to Tartarus through a hole in the Earth's crust.

*his specus horrendum et saevi spiracula Ditis  
monstrantur, ruptoque ingens Acheronte vorago  
pestiferas aperit fauces, quis condita Erinys,  
invisum numen, terras caelumque levavit.* (VII 568–71)

Here appears a horrid cave, one of the breathing vents of savage Dis, and a huge abyss where Acheron bursts through opens its infectious jaws. Into this the Fury hid her hated power and relieved earth and sky.

Virgil then intervenes in his own voice, a rare occurrence in the poem, to condemn the war that Allecto begins:

32. The parallels are explored in Wolfgang Hübner, *Dirae im römischen Epos*, Spudasmata 21 (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag: 1970), pp. 34–42.

33. This is obviously one source, by inversion, of the language in Milton's insistence that "by high permission of all-ruling heaven" Satan is left "at large to his own dark designs" (*PL* I 212–13). Milton's God, that much more powerful than Virgil's, can afford to leave a being like Allecto-Satan free in the world of humanity (the upper air or *aither*). That at least is the explanation most Christians have usually plumped for (God's mysterious ways making it all right in the end).

*ilicet infandum cuncti contra omina bellum,  
contra fata deum perverso numine poscunt.* (VII 583–4)

At once, against the omens, all men demand unholy war, against the signs of divine will, under a malign influence.

Virgil apparently feels the need to remind us of the values we supposedly share with him (as Milton does more often), in this case that these men call for war under a malign influence, that the impulse that makes them do so is perverse.<sup>34</sup>

The word *numen* obviously refers here to supernatural interference like Allecto's, although Page took it as the collective and misdirected will, and cited Lucretius 4.179. To cite Lucretius in order to distinguish supernatural from natural impulses is itself a loaded and perhaps perverse impulse, but the very fact that commentators may disagree about these matters (and so about Virgilian religion) is significant. It shows how far we are from the world of Homer, even of Hesiodic Tartarus, or classical Greek culture in general. This is rather the world of Roman (or at least Hellenistic) syncretism, of religious turmoil and doubt and apocalyptic expectation, where divine forces are imagined as battling for the world, as Virgil's gods do for Troy and Italy, and where the relation of those supernatural events to human action is philosophically problematic.<sup>35</sup> We may wonder, on rereading these Virgilian passages, whether the bald assertion of Jupiter's supreme power does much to counteract the cumulative effect of poetic darkness. In this literature we certainly find a more pervasive and familiar sense of something recognizably evil. Thus it is apt that the poem ends with a new Fury or Dira released this time by Jupiter himself, and with the pathos of Turnus' death. Aeneas has finally succumbed, despite all his efforts throughout the poem, to *furor*, to the malign influence of the furies (*furiis accensus et ira terribilis*, XII 946–7). The absence of the Homeric reconciliation scene between the hero and his dead victim's relatives is itself a comment on the world that is coming into being in this poem. Greco-Roman rationalism has almost yielded to the mythological imaginings of the new religions and mystery cults, to their insistence on the unintelligibility of the world outside the closed circle of believers, and thus to a recognition of evil not as a means to an end but as an end in itself.<sup>36</sup> Virgil sails very close, in the conclusion of the poem which he wished destroyed, to acknowledging those powers of darkness that were being released all over the world of the ancient mediterranean, and of which Gnosticism and its rival, "orthodox" Christianity, are such powerful signs.

34. On the rarity of Virgil's own voice in the *Aeneid*, see Gordon Williams, *Technique and Ideas in the Aeneid* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), p. 215. On "Perversity" see further section 12 below, pp. 546-48.

35. See Devorah Dimant in Michael Stone, ed., *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), pp. 533–5 for discussion of this issue as it affects our reading of the Dead Sea Scrolls and apocalyptic in general. See generally John J. Collins, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*, vol. 1: *The Origins of Apocalypticism in Judaism and Christianity* (New York: Continuum, 1998). The gods' struggle for Troy and its implications in Virgil are briefly discussed in Neil Forsyth, "Heavenly Helen: Hell in *Dr Faustus*" in *Etudes de Lettres* Oct-Dec, 1987, pp. 11–22.

36. W.R Johnson, *Darkness Visible* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), p. 144. E.R. Dodds' Sather Lectures, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley: UC Press, 1951), certainly



The most explicit use of these Virgilian originals by Milton is probably in *Paradise Regained*, in a passage which shows the sheer inner strength of Christ. Satan is by now at his wit's end since all his efforts to tempt him have proved futile. After the temptation of classical learning (*PR* IV 221–364; cf. above, n. 5), he returns Christ to the wilderness and has him pass through a dark night of the soul. The winds (imitating those of Aeolus) rush at him, there is a clear reference to the World Tree<sup>37</sup> of *Aeneid* IV 441–47 whose roots reach down to Tartarus, and then come the Ghosts and Furies from Virgil's Hades.

nor slept the winds  
 Within thir stony caves, but rush'd abroad  
 From the four hinges of the world, and fell  
 On the vext Wilderness, whose tallest Pines,  
 Though rooted deep as high, and sturdiest Oaks  
 Bow'd their Stiff necks, loaden with stormy blasts,  
 Or torn up sheer: ill wast thou shrouded then,  
 O patient Son of God, yet only stoodst  
 Unshaken; nor yet staid the terror there,  
 Infernal Ghosts, and Hellish Furies, round  
 Environ'd thee, some howl'd, some yell'd, some shriek'd,  
 Some bent at thee thir fiery darts, while thou  
 Sat'st unappall'd in calm and sinless peace. (*PR* IV 413–26)

The trees are the literal context for Christ's unruffled calm, but they are also allusions to Homeric tree-similes and Virgilian imitations: Christ resists the buffeting of the storm as Aeneas does the appeals of Dido's sister Anna.<sup>38</sup> Both are like sturdy trees in

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made our thinking about "rationalism" in Greece more *nuancé*, by calling attention to the non-rational world represented both in popular culture and in literature (cf. H. Lloyd-Jones, "Psychoanalysis and the Study of the Ancient World" [1985], repr. in Id., *Greek in a Cold Climate* [Savage, MD: Barnes & Noble, 1991], pp. 179, 187–195). But our view of the Greek belief in man's ability to think his way through his problems was never materially affected by what Dodds uncovered in his marvellous book. On the contrary it made the philosophers' achievement even more extraordinary, by revealing the potentially hostile world in which they worked and wrote and talked. But even Dodds cannot show anything in Greek culture, whether in shamanic cult or in Bacchic orgy, that approximates what we find here in Virgil's underworld and Allecto, and the difference needs to be clearly marked. In imaginative terms, next to these inventions, Virgil's Jupiter is a cardboard cutout. See generally Denis C. Feeney, *The Gods in Epic* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991).

37. For the motif of the World Tree see Hilda R. Ellis Davidson, *Gods and Myths of Northern Europe* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964), pp. 190–96, and Mircea Eliade, *Traité d'histoire des religions*, ser. Bibliothèque scientifique (Paris: Payot, 1949), pp. 239–49, 281–84 = Id., *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, trans. R. Sheed (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1958; repr. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), pp. 273–86, 327–30, and Eliade, *Le chamanisme et les techniques archaïques de l'extase* (Paris: Payot, 1951), pp. 244–248 = Id., *Shamanism. Archaic techniques of ecstasy*, trans. W.R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), pp. 269–74.
38. See R.D. Williams, *Aen.* IV 441–47 *ad loc.* for the Homeric originals, and Neil Forsyth, "'Having Done All To Stand': Biblical and Classical Allusion in *Paradise Regained*," *Milton Studies* 21 (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1986), pp. 199–214. Milton's line also imitates Tasso (who was himself following Virgil), *Gerus. lib.* xiv 67: "some spirits howld, some barkt, some hist, some cride," as Fairfax's translation has it (quoted by Leonard *ad loc.*).

their resistance. But Christ is stronger than a Virgilian hero, since he calmly resists even those supernatural creatures to which Turnus succumbs. And given that it is Satan who orchestrates these events, it is apt that for the climax he uses the creatures of Virgil's Hell (ghosts and furies), summarised as "terrors dire" (IV 431).

### 6. Hell: Dryden or Milton?

Hell, the place *Allecto* comes from, is another sign of that darkening realm in which Satan and the abstraction he embodies, evil, were coming into being. An essential component of the Christian cosmos, Hell has scarcely any precedents in Jewish literature. Sheol, the Old Testament graveyard of the dead, takes on some of the characteristics of Hades (the standard translation in *LXX*) in later Jewish texts, but before the Hellenistic period, when "syncretism" became widespread, Sheol (or sometimes Gehenna, a kind of garbage dump where the bodies of criminals were also thrown into fires that burned perpetually) was not much more than a spooky burial ground or vague place of the dead.<sup>39</sup> The Christian Hell derives, at the popular level, from various folk beliefs, and at the level of educated texts, from Virgil's reworking of the Homeric and Roman tradition. Virgil was the classical author most often Christianized, of course, in the medieval tradition, especially through the Messianic reading of Eclogue IV as a prophecy of Christ.<sup>40</sup> Thus it is Virgil who is most likely to provide a bridge between classical and Christian (as he does for Dante), even on so momentous a topic as evil. Milton knows and signals that several times, and in particular long before we hear the story of Satan's rebellion, in the first episode the poem dramatizes—Satan in Hell. Here he does not have to explain how Satan came to be, although the picture powerfully affects the way we read the rebellion episode, when we come to it in the course of the narrative. That first episode, Satan awakening in Hell, is where, for the reader, the figure of Satan originates. As in Shakespeare's tragedies with villains as heroes (*Richard III* and *Macbeth*), we meet and get close to him early.

So different is Virgil's underworld from its apparent model in Homer that the best term to describe the relationship might be, again, "pseudomorphosis." Milton understands Virgil's hell and reproduces it clearly, especially its most distinctive fea-

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Characteristically Milton's line also alludes to Ephesians 6.16 about using the shield of faith to "quench all the fiery darts of the wicked."

39. A good popular account, with some fine illustrations, is Alice K. Turner, *The History of Hell* (London: Robert Hale, 1993). More scholarly work can be found in Kittel's entry under *Hades*, and there is a useful summary by Duane Watson in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1992). Syncretism, the weak form of the relationship between Classical and Judeo-Christian (or more generally Eastern) religion, is a mild name for the fantastic cross-fertilization that was now taking place all over the Mediterranean world. At 1 *Enoch* 17, for example, a Jewish text that dates probably from the first century BC, the description of the pillars of fire from Heaven that stretch down to Tartarus echoes Hesiod's account of the silvery pillars of the House of Styx, while the situation of the imprisoned angels is like that of the Titans. The uncertainty about the afterlife in the New Testament can be measured by comparing the parable of Dives and Lazarus at Luke 16.19–31 with the reference to an Old Testament type at Matt. 11.23=Luke 10.15 (cf Isaiah 14.13–15, on which see below, p. 538).
40. See T.S. Eliot, "Virgil and the Christian World," *On Poetry and Poets* (London: Faber, 1957), pp. 122–4, and Christopher Baswell, *Virgil in Medieval England* (Cambridge University Press, 1995) (reviewed in this journal by Margaret Tudeau-Clayton, *IJCT* 5 [1998/99], pp. 615–618).

ture: even more than the monsters, and the bleakness, what he makes most of is its “darkness visible” (PL I 63). There are many instances of this paradoxical quality in Virgil, from the uncertain luminosity that Aeneas perceives as he starts his underworld journey to the black light (*atro / lumine*), an oxymoron divided by line-end, that Allecto throws as a torch into Turnus’ dream (*Aen.* V 456–7).

How powerfully Milton, in his blindness, responded to this paradox, in both its physical and its symbolic meanings, may be shown through a comparison with what Dryden makes of the passage which introduces Aeneas into the underworld. Of course Dryden was usually trying to avoid too close an echo of Milton’s language (he was writing some twenty years after *Paradise Lost* was published, and had already adapted its blank verse to the couplets of his operatic *State of Innocence*), but the result was often somewhat lame, as here:

Ye realms yet unrevealed to human sight!  
**Ye gods who rule the regions of the night!**  
 Ye gliding ghosts! permit me to relate  
 The mystic wonders of your silent state.  
 Obscure they went through dreary shades, that led  
 Along the waste dominions of the dead.  
**Thus wander travelers in woods by night,**  
**By the moon’s doubtful and malignant light,**  
**When Jove in dusky clouds involves the skies,**  
 And the faint crescent shoots by fits before their eyes.  
 Just in the gate, and in the jaws of hell,  
 Revengeful Cares and sullen Sorrows dwell.  
 (Dryden’s *Aeneid* VI 374–85)

If we now recall Virgil’s Latin, what we note in particular is that Dryden (line 380) has nothing for *Aeneid* VI 272 *et rebus nox abstulit atra colorem* / “black night has taken all colour from things,” but has instead a silly line about the fitful crescent moon, and some dusky clouds.<sup>41</sup>

*Di, quibus imperium est animarum, umbaeque silentes  
 et Chaos et Phlegethon, loca nocte tacentia late,  
 sit mihi fas audita loqui, sit numine vestro  
 pandere res alta terra et caligine mersas.  
 Ibant obscuri sola sub nocte per umbram*

41. Dryden’s obvious feeling of rivalry with Milton may account for some of these differences, which are both political and poetic (Catholic v. Protestant, rhyme v. blank verse). One result unfortunately is that in trying to be different from Milton he misses the genuine grandeur of Virgil, which Milton had already found the English for. Dryden also misses the idea that the underworld is the *kingdom* of Dis, perhaps because politically he couldn’t say so in 1697 under the Protestant king, William III of Orange (Dryden had remained a Catholic and was no longer poet laureate). So he also couldn’t talk about a phantom kingdom, *inania regna*. His delicate situation is well described by Paul Hammond, *John Dryden* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991), p. 156: “To write under such a regime without subscribing to it, Dryden meets [the] challenge through the multiple voices of his translation, the invitations to construct parallels, and the refusal to align himself identifiably with any specific portion of the

*perque domos Ditis vacuas et inania regna:  
quale per incertam lunam sub luce maligna  
est iter in silvis, ubi caelum condidit umbra  
Iuppiter, et rebus nox abstulit atra colorem.* (*Aeneid* VI 264–274)

Milton's famous paradox about "darkness visible," by contrast with Dryden, is only one of many phrases which repeat that central idea of hell, even in this single passage. Virgil's simile methodically deprives the eye of the images it presents.<sup>42</sup> It clearly anticipates Milton's

... dreary plain . . . / . . . voyd of light,  
Save what the glimmering of these livid flames  
Casts pale and dreadful (I 180–83)

and other paradoxes of hell, like the burning lake. Cumulatively they show the difficulty of imagining hell, and invite the reader to experience that difficulty for himself. What is more, the following passage begins the narrative, not merely of the underworld scene but, because Milton moves the experience of Hell to the beginning, of the whole poem. It describes what Satan sees as he awakens in Hell after being cast from Heaven, and then begins the narrative with the first words he speaks.

At once as far as Angels kenn he views  
The **dismal** Situation waste and wilde,  
A Dungeon horrible, on all sides round  
As one **great Furnace flam'd, yet from those flames**  
**No light**, but rather **darkness visible**  
Serv'd only to discover sights of woe,  
**Regions of sorrow, doleful shades**, where peace  
And rest can never dwell, hope never comes  
That comes to all; but torture without end  
Still urges, and a **fiery Deluge**, fed  
With ever-burning Sulphur unconsum'd:  
Such place **Eternal Justice** had prepar'd  
For these rebellious, here thir Prison ordain'd  
**In utter darkness and thir portion set**

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text or any particular interpretation." Dryden also never seems fully to grasp that Virgil's Hell is not simply a place but a state of mind and a dark feeling. See generally I. Proudfoot, *Dryden's Aeneid and Its Seventeenth Century Predecessors* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1960), pp. 258–76. A much more sympathetic view of Dryden's Virgil, including its politics, is to be found in Colin Burrow, "Virgil in English translation," in Charles Martindale, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Virgil* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), 28–30 and cf. now W.S. Anderson, "500 Years of Reading the Aeneid in English," in: Christine Perkell, ed., *Reading Vergil's Aeneid. An Interpretive Guide*, The Oklahoma Series in Classical Culture 23 (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), pp. 285–302 (with endnotes on p. 335f.).

42. Johnson, *Darkness Visible*, p. 88f, with a brilliant modern parallel from Conrad's *Secret Agent*. There is now an elegant and elaborate discussion in the book by Richard Jenkyns, *Virgil's Experience* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), pp. 450–57: "the scene is a depiction of negatives: a light that is virtually no light, a sky that is hidden from sight, a colour taken

**As far remov'd from God and light of Heav'n**

As from the Centre thrise to th' utmost Pole. (PL I 59–74)

What is remarkable here is that Milton can reproduce some of Virgil's language as his central idea, and at the same time, without apparent contradiction, allude to widely known paradoxes of the Judeo-Christian Hell. Job x 22, for example, says that in the land of the dead, Sheol, "the light is as darkness." Contemporaries of Milton knew this paradox as a theological enigma about Hell: Herrick, for example, writes that "The fire of hell this strange condition hath, / To burn not shine (as learned Basil saith)."<sup>43</sup> In his *Homily on Psalm xxviii*, St. Basil indeed explains that God separates the brightness of fire from its burning power: in Paradise fire can increase the joy of the blessed, while in Hell it helps torture the damned. The Basil passage is also cited by Aquinas, where it is debated whether the damned have any light and can see.<sup>44</sup> John Collop and Thomas Adams were among Milton's contemporaries who discuss the issue. T.S.Eliot's unusual lapse into vulgarity when he complained that Milton's blindness led him to write phrases like "darkness visible," which Eliot claimed to find difficult to imagine, thus has no theological and little imaginative justification.<sup>45</sup> On the contrary, he might have recalled Plutarch's discussion of the question "Whether darkness can be visible to us".<sup>46</sup> The issue was of some philosophical and scientific interest, but it also has obvious symbolic resonance.

**7. Satan, Aeneas, and Lucifer**

The basic contrast is clearly between Hell and Heaven (where God speaks from "a flaming Mount, whose top / Brightness had made invisible," V 598–9), and Milton's text now explores this contrast in narrative and in dialogue, first through what Satan sees around him, then through his first words to his chief companion, Beelzebub. His words, like the idea of "darkness visible," contain a double allusion, to the Bible and to Virgil.

O how unlike the place from whence they fell!  
 There the companions of his fall, o'whelm'd  
**With Floods and Whirlwinds of tempestuous fire,**  
 He soon discerns, and weltring by his side  
 One next himself in power, and next in crime,  
 Long after known in *Palestine*, and nam'd  
*Beelzebub*. To whom the Arch-Enemy,  
 And thence in Heav'n called Satan, with bold words  
 Breaking the horrid silence thus began:

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away" (p. 454). (On Jenkyns' book in general see now the review article by W.W. Briggs, "Virgil and the Land," forthcoming in this journal [*IJCT*] 7.1 [Summer 2000].)

43. L.C. Martin, ed., *The Poetical Works of Robert Herrick* (Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 387.

44. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, *Suppl.* xcvi 4. A full discussion with these and many other references is John M. Steadman, "'Darkness visible': the Quality of Hellfire," in Idem, *Milton's Biblical and Classical Imagery* (Pittsburg: Duquesne University Press, 1984), pp. 121–35.

45. T.S. Eliot, "Milton I," in Idem, *On Poetry and Poets* (London: Faber, 1957), pp. 138–45.

46. Plut. *De placitis philosophorum* IV 15, 901 d-e [V p. 342 Bernardakis]. Cf. Ann Gossman, "Two Milton-Notes," *Notes and Queries*, N. S. 8 (1961), p. 182.

If thou beest he; but O how fall'n! how chang'd  
**From him who in the happy Realms of Light**  
**Cloth'd with transcendent brightness didst out-shine**  
**Myriads though bright: . . . (I 75–87)**

Both the place and the person are immediately contrasted with Heaven: "O how unlike the place from whence they fell" (75) is apparently the narrator's comment, though as often in these parts of the poem, it could also be beginning to register indirectly Satan's reaction to what he sees. His first words reiterate this reaction, this time about his companion: "O how fall'n! how chang'd" (84).

How do the allusions work here? In some cases of allusion major episodes and images of the Homeric epics, or Virgil's or Ovid's, are brought back to our consciousness.<sup>47</sup> This is not usually done just to establish the genre and lineage of *Paradise Lost*, though that is one important function of allusion, but rather with a specific and local purpose. Satan is in fact repeating some of the words of Aeneas to Hector from Virgil's *Aeneid* II 274–6. Aeneas is recounting a dream in which the dead hero appears to him as he was when he had been dragged behind Achilles' chariot, covered in blood and dust:

*ei mihi, qualis erat, quantum mutatus ab illo*  
*Hectore qui redit exuvias indutus Achilli*  
*vel Danaum Phrygios uaculatus pubbibus ignis!*

Ah me, what a sight he was, how different from that Hector who came back wearing the trophies of Achilles, or after hurling Phrygian [Trojan] fire-brands onto the Greek ships!

The parallels are important. This is Aeneas' first appearance in his own story, and it occurs at a tragic moment: just as he thinks the danger to Troy is over and he can sleep soundly, Hector appears to tell him Troy will be utterly lost and he must prepare to escape to a new home across the sea. Satan speaks for the first time at a moment when he comes to the consciousness of his new state, now that Heaven is lost. But note the difference. Hector is changed but still Hector, and his deeds are still in Aeneas' memory. That indeed is one of the classic functions of epic, to preserve heroes in the memory of others. But who this devil is Satan cannot quite say: he used to be . . . ? Who? We never learn the name he used to have in Heaven. And he is not yet Beelzebub, as the narrator tells us he is to be called later. Not only can Satan here not name his companion, he is not sure at first he even recognizes him. (John Leonard compares Dryden's clunking adaptation in his operatic and rhymed version of the poem, *The State of Innocence and the Fall of Man*, I.i.20,

47. One example of each: Hector's soliloquy before he faces Achilles for the last time (*Iliad* XXII 99–130) is recalled by that of Abdiel before he does combat with Satan at *PL* VI 114–26; the scales of Zeus (*Iliad* VIII 68–77, XXII 208–13) and Jupiter (*Aeneid* XII 725–7) recur at *Paradise Lost* IV 997–1014, but merged with the famous writing on the wall of Daniel 5.27 in which Belhazzar is weighed in the balance and found wanting (so the loser's scale flies up, not down as in Homer); the tree of life in Eden has "blooming ambrosial fruit / Of vegetable gold" (IV 219–20), recalling the golden apples of the Hesperides of Ovid, *Meta.* IV 637f, referred to explicitly a few lines later (IV 250).

Ho, *Asmoday*, awake,  
 If thou art he: But, ah! how chang'd from him!  
 Companion of my Arms! How wan! How dim!<sup>48</sup>)

Thus the Virgilian allusion both establishes a parallel between the heroes of the two epics and invites us to consider the differences, which is what all thorough allusions do for the knowledgeable and sensitive reader.

What is more, the classical allusion overlaps with another, this time biblical: "How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning" (Isaiah 14.12). That text is one of the most important for the identification of the devil as the agent of evil in history, as the Christian fathers constructed him, and especially for the story of his fall from heaven. Indeed these words have already been alluded to in the narrative before Satan first speaks (I 40–48). In Isaiah the words are spoken to the king of Babylon, whom they address metaphorically (and ironically) in language borrowed from an ancient myth about an ambitious god who had tried to enthrone himself among the stars, the divine assembly, but had been cast down to Sheol, to the pit, where he now finds himself, just as Satan does.

What is the effect of this double allusion? The Isaiah text, taken alone, might well appear to place the poem's language firmly in the tradition of Judeo-Christian reading of the Bible. But the simultaneous presence of Virgilian epic, and the language of the great and good hero, *pious Aeneas*, at that, loosens the relation between Milton's Satan and the firm place given the devil by the Church fathers. We may wonder at least just what story is being told or retold here, and feel uncertain how we are to evaluate it.

And there are other problems, once we start to scratch the surface of the text in this way. For one thing, these hesitant words of Satan are introduced by the narrator as if they were quite different: he calls them "bold words" just two lines before we hear them, and the effect must be very disconcerting. They may become bold as the speech goes on, but that is not how they sound at the beginning. Indeed it is hard to exaggerate the importance of that first word of Satan's spoken in the poem: *If*. He is awakening here, beginning to reconstitute himself. And that process is dramatized by the uncertainty of his speech, its broken grammar. That first word also shows him as in a sense an embodied hypothesis, the eternal game-player who keeps trying out alternatives, other possibilities from those God has laid down. And some of that uncertainty and doubt may already transmit itself to the reader.

For another thing, is that biblical allusion really as safe as it sounds, even without the interference from the classical epic hero? The narrator is very clear that Satan is speaking to Beelzebub, but Satan we have seen is uncertain just whom he is addressing. The words he quotes from Isaiah are addressed to Lucifer, at least in Jerome's Latin translation (*lucem ferre*, to bring light), though in the Hebrew, a language Milton could read<sup>49</sup>, this is *Helel ben Shahar*, shining one, Son of the dawn. Lucifer, as John Leonard carefully shows,<sup>50</sup> was Satan's name before he became the adversary, so the addressee of Satan's first words is at least in part himself rather than his companion

48. John Leonard, *Naming in Paradise* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), p. 78.

49. W.B. Hunter, Jr., "Milton Translates the Psalms," *Philological Quarterly* 40 (1961), 485–94, and Golda Werman, *Milton and Midrash* (Washington: Catholic University Press, 1995), p. 42, who writes that Milton "had sufficient knowledge of Hebrew to read the Bible and enough Aramaic to read the Targum—nothing more."

50. Leonard, pp. 90–145.

dear. He it is who we soon learn has not yet lost all his original brightness (I 592), and who later tells the sun he hates him for reminding him of "what I was / In that bright eminence" (IV 43–4).

### 8. "God created evil"

Milton's Hell, then, if not its chief inhabitant, is a Virgilian place (with some Dantesque additions).<sup>51</sup> But where does this Hell come from? That is not a question Virgil asks, but Milton does, and answers it. In doing so he faces the key theological question of whether the Christian God creates evil: in Milton he does, but in a subordinate clause. In the main clause, what he creates is Hell. The grammar of the text saves the phenomenon, exchanging nouns and adjectives, but only just. The passage follows the council scene in Book II, when the more adventurous devils take off to explore their new habitation, and do not much like what they see:

through many a dark and drearie Vaile  
They passed, and many a Region dolorous,  
O'er many a Frozen, many a Fiery Alpe,  
Rocks, Caves, Lakes, Fens, Bogs, Dens, and shades of death,  
A universe of death, which God by curse  
**Created evil, for evil only good,**  
Where all life dies, death lives, and Nature breeds,  
Perverse, all monstrous, all prodigious things,  
Abominable, inutterable, and worse  
Than Fables yet have feigned, or fear conceived,  
Gorgons and *Hydras*, and *Chimaeras* dire (II 618–29).

The passage contains one of those memorably monosyllabic lines which make the reading of Hell analogous to exploring it (compare also 948 and 950, where "Ore bog or steep, through strait, rough, dense, or rare," it is the voyaging Satan who "pursues his way, / And swims or sinks, or wades, or creeps, or flies"). But the key line about evil, which seems short, is actually too long by one syllable, as Roy Flannagan points out *ad loc.*, and requires an elision across "for evil," which the stress pattern also requires, but which the sense strongly resists. These metrical marvels call strong attention to the passage, which is dotted with unpleasant bits of the natural world, but also with classical monsters of various kinds, Gorgons, Hydras, and Chimaeras, who threatened Aeneas during his underworld journey (*Aeneid* VI 288–9).

But the most important allusion by far is the biblical text that comes closest to attributing evil to God, Isaiah 45.7: "I form light and I create darkness; I produce good and I create evil."<sup>52</sup> In his theological treatise, *De Doctrina Christiana*, Milton explains

51. The young Milton read Dante "reverently" (as Flannagan puts it in his "Introduction" to *Paradise Lost*, p. 299) and cites him frequently in his *Commonplace Book*. Beside the obvious reference here to "*lasciate ogni speranza, voi ch'entrate*" of *Inferno* iii, 9 referred to in *Paradise Lost* I 66 ("hope never comes / That comes to all"), quoted above, many other allusions are collected by Irene Samuel, *Dante and Milton* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1966).

52. The word usually translated *evil* in the Hebrew bible, as here, is *ra*; the primary meaning is worthlessness or uselessness, hence bad or ugly. As a metaphysical entity there is not much about *evil* in Judaism, except for a brief flurry in the intertestamental or Second Temple period. There is still no entry for *evil* in the *Encyclopedia Judaica*.



this unsettling text as follows: "that is, what afterwards became evil, and now remains so; for whatever God created was originally good, as he himself testifies, *Gen. i.* God always produces something good and just out of evil or injustice and creates, as it were, light out of darkness." The stark statement of the biblical text is thus avoided by introducing a narrative time scheme—"afterwards."<sup>53</sup>

The solution in the poem is to sail even closer to the wind, to repeat the biblical words but with the important grammatical modification that *evil* becomes an adjective in the phrase "created evil," and only then an abstract noun in the extension through apposition, "for evil only good."<sup>54</sup> The first use of the word is a predicative adjective agreeing with the pronoun "which," and so referring to "a universe of death." No question, then, but that God himself creates this dreadful place, and by curse at that. The relation of good to evil certainly gets very muddy, both linguistically and theologically. We may well have to read twice to see that these syntactic niceties do not actually make God directly responsible for evil, at least as a nominal and philosophical abstraction. But he clearly makes something that is itself unequivocally evil. Plato, we recall, had condemned Homer and the tragic poets in the *Republic* II 379–82, and argued (in the mouth of Socrates) that the gods were good and thus could not be responsible for evil.<sup>55</sup> Milton appears implicitly to be taking the side of the poets, and increasing the moral ambivalence of his God.

### 9. Language of Sin

The example of Milton's game with the word *evil* is actually a key to the way he transforms the traditional *topos*. As usual we can get at the characteristic Miltonic view through his play with language, since for him, as Stevie Davies puts it, "language itself is the maze in which we wander."<sup>56</sup> God's creating word fashioned the universe, but it did so by dividing it from him and within itself.<sup>57</sup> And human languages, after Babel and the confusion of tongues, are "a jangling noise of words unknown," "a hideous gabble," "a hubbub strange" (XII 53–62). This *confusion* (the etymology of *Babel* accord-

53. *De Doctrina Christiana*, Columbia edition, vol. XV, p. 66, Yale ed., vol. VI, p. 333, ch 8. It is worth noting that in spite of Milton's love of accumulating Biblical quotations to support his views, he finds few texts to endorse his special and important doctrine about good coming out of evil: apart from the crucifixion itself, they are the Joseph story about converting Egypt from an agrarian to a mercantile economy, the cruelty suffered by martyrs in Acts 4.28 and Rom. 11.11, and Paul's words about tolerating heresies, 1 Cor. 11.19

54. By changing the biblical present to his own past tense, as R.A. Shoaf has pointed out to me, Milton also introduces another textual possibility: "create[d evil]."

55. Plato's various and naively optimistic discussions of evil (or evils) are at *Gorgias* 477e, *Theaetetus* 176a, *Politikos* 269c-d, 273b-c, *Lysis* 221 a-c, *Cratylus* 403e-f, *Timaeus* 42d, 48a, 53b, 86b-c, *Laws* X, 903b-905d. His general solution is that either evils are not the work of god, or they are not really evils but deserved punishments. We call things evil, runs the argument in *Laws* X, out of ignorance. For more extensive discussion, see Friedrich Solmsen, *Plato's Theology*, Cornell Studies in Classical Philology 27 (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1942), and Mark L. McPherran, *The Religion of Socrates* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1976). See note 5 above for Milton's reference to Plato's quarrel with the poets, and note 8 for the problem of evil in ancient philosophy.

56. Stevie Davies, *Milton* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), p. 102.

57. *Paradise Lost* VII 241, 251, 262, 269. See Sanford Budick, *The Dividing Muse: Images of Sacred Disjunction in Milton's Poetry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

ing to both the Geneva and the Authorized version at Gen 11.9) is never explicitly dispelled or corrected, either in the Bible or in Milton, with the result that our languages, to use the more contemporary idiom of Stevie Davies, are “shadowy riddling guides to truth, a corporate fabrication enshrining our ignorant assumptions, sophisticated devices and our wish to oppress one another.” The poem casts doubt on what people say and believe, on those narratives which count as authority to the communal mind, and which record the collective experience and wisdom, even the laws, of the peoples to whom we belong and owe allegiance. Indeed Milton learned the techniques for doing this when he learned the fundamental skills of classical rhetoric at Cambridge.<sup>58</sup>

What Eve really likes about the serpent, after all, is that he is a talking snake:

What may this mean? Language of Man pronounc't  
By Tongue of Brute, and human sense exprest?

...

Thee, serpent, subtlest beast of all the field  
I knew, but not with human voice endu'd;  
Redouble then this miracle, and say,  
**How cam'st thou speakable of mute?** (IX 553–63)

The marvellous neologism *speakeable* both suggests what makes evil itself so attractive and helps to answer, from within the terms of the poem itself, the problem posed by the *unimaginability* of hate in Heaven. Between the two episodes of listening to the angel and the devil, Eve has come a long way—into a new and subtle kind of discourse.

At the moment of Satan's self-invention (he learns on meeting his daughter Sin at the gates of Hell), it was both Sin itself, but also the Sign (or at least one very powerful aspect of signification), which came into being. She tells him the story of her own origin and so reminds him of his own. The passage recalls the birth of Athena to Zeus:

Then shining heav'nly fair, a Goddess arm'd  
Out of thy head I sprung: amazement seis'd  
All the Host of Heav'n; back they recoil'd afraid  
At first, and call'd me Sin, and for a Sign  
Portentous held me; (II 760)

Milton is clearly playing with the sounds here, and he was more than capable of speculating about the etymology of Sin, in the way that W.W. Skeat (the great nineteenth century philologist, student of Old English, and one of the minds present in that remarkable work of scholarship, the *OED*) does. Anglo-Saxon *synne*, he writes, represents . . . an Idg (Indo germanic) type . . . *sont*. It is the abstract sb. allied to L. *sons* (stem *sonti-*), sinful, guilty, orig. 'being,' real; and Curtius refers this (along with Icel.

58. To anyone trained in classical rhetoric that statement will not seem nearly as bizarre as it will to those who know such ideas only in the idiom of what today is known as “literary theory,” or rather “theory.” The purposes and emphases of deconstruction are rather different, nothing less than the undermining of Western metaphysics, but many of the moves are part of standard legal or rhetorical training. For Milton's exercises in the classical rhetorical tradition see above n. 3.

sannr, true, very, Goth. *sunja*, the truth, sooth) to the root ES, to be; remarking that . . . language regards the guilty man as the man who it was."<sup>59</sup> He further connects it with the present participle of the Greek verb to be, *eont-*, *eon*, = *esôn\**, being.

Milton's pun goes in a different direction, not towards being but towards meaning. "All signs emerge from sin [which] is the precondition . . . of the sign," says R.A. Shoaf.<sup>60</sup> Sin is named by the angels, and they are right that she is a portent, or something monstrous. But this naming of Sin, to make the pun with *sign*, is arbitrary, shifting language from a natural to a merely artificial or customary basis. There is no cognoscence, only coincidence, in the pun. From now on that is how language will mean. That was exactly why Aristotle objected to verbal ambiguity in the *Rhetoric*.<sup>61</sup> He wanted words to be clearer and more fixed than that. Milton, though, exploits them for the profoundly unsettling quality they can have.

### 10. Evil Eve

Nor does the word *evil* itself escape this labyrinth of language. And here the pun is insidious and goes to the heart of what Milton is doing in the poem. The real problem for men and women, he thinks, is not the world as created by God and perverted by Satan, but each other. Sexual difference is the best thing about the world, and the worst. In particular, as the poem demonstrates many times, Eve's feeling of inequality, of belatedness, is what Satan has to exploit. And the word *evil*, at least in Adam's mind, and so in ours, is linked to his wife's name. "O Eve, in evil hour thou didst give eare / To that false Worm" (IX 1067). As Ricks puts it, Adam "proclaims that the word evil is derived from Eve, and that evil derives from her."<sup>62</sup>

Nevertheless Milton makes one very important distinction between his version of the story and the one common in the tradition. This relation of Eve to evil was solidified, for speakers of English at least, because she received that name in Genesis only after the Fall. But in *Paradise Lost* she is addressed as Eve before the Fall, notably by the angel Raphael at VIII 172.<sup>63</sup> There is thus no inherent connection between *Eve* and *evil*, only an accidental similarity which Adam seizes on in the first heat of his fallen reaction. The similarity, like that of *Sin* and *sign*, requires all readers at least to think through the issue again, and perhaps distinguish between accidental and essential parallels.

59. Walter W. Skeat, *An Etymological Dictionary of the English Language*, new ed., rev. and enl. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910, repr. 1974), p. 563.

60. R.A. Shoaf, *Milton, Poet of Duality* (New Haven: Yale, 1993), pp. 30–59. Leonard objects to this, saying it is not all signs, or the sign, but only a sign, which is at issue, *Naming*, pp. 166–8.

61. Aristotle seems to have a special dislike for *homonymia* and *amphibola*, since they violate that fundamental virtue that he calls *hellenismos*, i.e., clarity, *sapheneia*. *Rhetoric* II, 24, 1401a 13–23, III, 2, 1404b 35–40, and 5, 1407a 33–65; cf. the briefer reference at *Poetics* 22, 1458a 18. What Aristotle objects to, it seems obvious, is Sophism. See the splendid discussion in W. Bedell Stanford's unjustly neglected *Ambiguity in Greek Literature* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1939), pp. 6–34. It is true that Aristotle defends Homer from the charge of using puns (*Rhet.* III, 11, 1412a 33–6), but that only goes to show how little real sympathy he had with the multivalence of poetic language.

62. Christopher Ricks, *Milton's Grand Style* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963) p. 103

63. Leonard, *Naming*, pp. 35–36. For further word-play with Eve's name, including the ubiquitous *deceived* = "dis-Eved," see Shoaf, *Poet of Duality*, 1993, pp. ix–xix. Leonard partially endorses this pun.

Before the fall, Adam had been as perplexed as a classical philosopher about hate in heaven or the source of evil: following her dream, he tells his wife, without knowing Satan was behind it, that "this uncouth dream, [was] of evil sprung I fear" (V 98). Thus far his prelapsarian insight can take him. Yet no further, for he cannot answer the question, his variant of Augustine's *unde malum?*, that he then poses: "Yet evil whence? in thee can harbour none."<sup>64</sup> That he can later change his mind and make the Eve/evil pun suggests how serious is the problem he now faces. But it no more answers the question than his earlier innocence can.

It is only when he finally puts together everything Eve has told him with God's prediction about the serpent's head and bruises that he can see what has happened, and whence this evil:

thy seed shall bruise  
The serpent's head; piteous amends, unless  
Be meant, whom I conjecture, our grand Foe  
Satan, who in the Serpent hath contriv'd  
Against us this deceit: to crush his head  
Would be revenge indeed (X 1031–36)

So he finally realizes that the serpent was Satan. He had supposed before that "some cursed fraud / Of Enemie hath beguil'd thee, yet unknown" (IX 904–5), but he now makes the key move anticipated by the poem's opening question and answer ("Who first seduc'd them . . . ? the infernal Serpent," I 33–4), and realizes the meaning of the story he is living out.<sup>65</sup> He has made the connection that is evident to readers of classical epic. Human and divine levels of action intertwine, so that quarrels among men set off or extend similar quarrels among the gods. In Virgil snakes infect Allecto's victims—but none of them know it. In Milton the main character has worked out the supernatural source of the infection for himself.

### 11. Openings

Milton's opening question to his Muse imitates Homer's "What god was it that set them to conflict?" (*Iliad* I 8), which is immediately answered: Apollo's anger at the king is what drove the foul pestilence among the people. Just so Milton's question is instantly answered ("Who first seduced them . . . ? the infernal serpent," I 33–4). Yet when we put the texts so baldly together side by side, the difference leaps out at us. In one case the answer is clear and unambiguous, and applies only to the local quarrel of Agamemnon and Achilles. But Milton's answer, while it clearly introduces supernatural agency, does not name the being in spite of that straightforward question "Who?"

64. See the analysis of Augustine's *Confessions*, vii, 5, in Kenneth Burke, *The Rhetoric of Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), p. 86–90. See also Neil Forsyth, *The Old Enemy*, pp. 387–440; Paul Pritchard, *The Influence of the Fathers Upon Milton with Especial Reference to Augustine*, unpublished PhD diss, Cornell University, 1925; John Rumrich and Stephen Dobranski, eds., *Milton and Heresy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

65. Georgia Christopher is right to make this the turning point of the poem in *Milton and The Science of the Saints* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), pp. 163–72. It is when the promise of redemption is recalled, and so begins to work.

The answer invites a further question (“and who is that?”) and thus requires the reader both to anticipate Adam’s insight in Book X, and to repeat the long process of linking images and proof-texts that had constructed the basic doctrines of Christianity in the early years of the Church. And in the process to face the problem of evil.

Commentators here cite Revelation 12.9, “that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world,” and they are right to do so. Yet that old serpent was not infernal, at least not at that point: he was cast out, as the grand dragon, but “into the earth,” and his angels with him. It is only at Rev. 20.1–3 that he (no mention of his angels) is bound in the abyss. You might add several other texts to get a complete picture of this event, including the Isaiah 14 passage we looked at before, in which Lucifer tries to be like the most high, but is brought down to hell. Milton’s story is both a reconstruction of the events, and of the relevant texts, but what is most peculiar about this version is that he withholds the name Satan as the answer to his opening question, and offers that name only 49 lines later, at line 82.

You might say, well, there is no question about the identity of the serpent. He had been thoroughly identified by Origen and Augustine long before, using the same proof texts.<sup>66</sup> But in fact the story is so diffused throughout the Bible (and indeed, never explicitly there at all), that it had been variously told and reconstructed. For most Renaissance poets, for example, the name of this hero was Lucifer rather than Satan, and there is nothing to parallel Milton’s careful deployment of those two names as the before and after of the rebellion. In some accounts they are even different figures.<sup>67</sup> Nor is there any agreement about the transformation of Lucifer into serpent: for many this happened when he was cast into the pit.<sup>68</sup> Thus it may still have been something of a surprise for Milton’s first readers (afraid, like Marvell, that he would “ruin . . . the sacred Truths to Fable and old Song”<sup>69</sup>) to discover Satan still an angel in Hell when he has been announced as an infernal serpent.

There is, in fact, considerable doubt at first about his physical appearance—and, as we saw, he shares that doubt himself. Not only is he uncertain who his companion is, since he is so “chang’d / From him who in the happy Realms of Light . . . didst outshine / Myriads though bright” (I 84–87), but he is in fact, we eventually discover, “prone on the flood” (195), with just his “Head uplift above the wave,” that is, in the very posture of a serpent. Indeed these lines are modelled on Virgil’s description of the sea-serpents in the Laocoon episode<sup>70</sup>: no doubt they anticipate the later and explicit metamorphosis of Satan at X 504–56,<sup>71</sup> but on a first reading the lines may well suggest that this is the actual appearance of the infernal serpent, especially since a

66. The whole process is recounted in Neil Forsyth, *The Old Enemy*.

67. See Taubmann as cited in Stella Revard, *The War in Heaven* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980), p. 224.

68. *Ibid.*, p. 229.

69. Marvell, “On *Paradise Lost*,” 7–8, printed with the 1674 edition; see Flannagan, p. 350.

70. Compare *pectora quorum inter fluctus arrecta iubaeque / sanguineae superant undas; pars cetera pontum / pone legit* and *ardentisque oculos suffecti*, *Aeneid* II 206–10. Fowler *ad loc.* notes the parallel, and Flannagan thinks Satan is actually “a sea-serpent here, modeled after the sea-serpents in the *Aeneid* swimming toward Laocoon: ‘Rampant they were among the waves, their blood-red crests / Reared up over the water; the rest of them slithered along’” in C. Day Lewis’s translation, 2.16–18.

71. On this passage see Thomas Corns, *Regaining Paradise Lost* (Harlow: Longman, 1994), pp. 33–6.

winding monster simile (Briareos, Typhon and Leviathan) now intervenes. Only when he rears upright (221) does Satan's mighty stature become apparent, his wings expand (225), and eventually his feet are mentioned as they reach land. His angelic appearance is confirmed by the shoulders on which his shield hangs like the moon (286), and by the spear he walks with to support his steps (295). But the word itself appears only when, standing on the beach of that inflamed sea, he calls his legions, "angel forms" (301). And it is applied to Satan himself only after the long catalogue of all these others, when he stands like a tower above them all and we finally hear that "his form had not yet lost / All her Original brightness, nor appear'd / Less than Arch-Angel ruind" (I 591–3). What has been happening throughout this long sequence, then, is that the reader's experience of Satan has been transformed backwards, as it were, from an infernal serpent to a heroic angel. And it is in that form that he initiates the action of the poem by his proposals during the council scene. It is also in that form that he will appear to Eve in her dream and tempt her to eat the fruit of the tree. So when he reappears as a serpent, it is no wonder she does not identify him.

All this is a long and complex answer to that straightforward Homeric question. Why, we may wonder, did Milton not simply use Virgil's more complex variant? The answer is that Virgil changed too much of his Homeric model. Juno is still there in the same narrative slot as the instrumental cause of Aeneas' sufferings. But she is not there as an answer to a question. When the question to the Muse comes, as it immediately does, it is not about the story, but about the reasons for it. What is the reason for Juno's anger? And then comes another question, even more general and reflective, this time posed directly, whether to the Muse or the reader, and not directly answered: *tantaene animis caelestibus irae?* (*Aeneid* I 11) / "Is there such anger in the minds of the gods?" The narrative then begins as an answer to these questions: it soon turns out to be Juno's hopes for Carthage that make her angry with the Trojans, and also her fury at Paris because of his preference for Venus in the apple contest. The larger question about the minds of the gods takes longer to solve; indeed it is answered, if at all, by the whole poem—and there are many episodes, from the destruction of Troy to Turnus, that tell us the answer is "Yes, gods are indeed capable of such anger."

Of course Milton has used Virgil's method, for indeed it is his entire narrative which answers the initiating question. And he also used Virgil's questions. The simple Homeric question, "Who?," is itself, in Milton's text, embedded as an answer to a question, like Virgil's to the Muse (*Musa, mihi causas memora, Aeneid* I 8), "Say first, what cause / Mov'd our Grand Parents . . . to fall off?" (*PL* I 28–30). So Milton, like Virgil, doubles the questions. The Virgilian question "what cause?" is answered by the further Homeric question, "Who?," which in turn is answered by "th'infernal Serpent." And the narrative can begin, with that extraordinary enigma Satan as the answer to the question which in turn poses so many further questions that only mythological narrative can answer them. It is a relief, given the complexities that thus arise, that Milton does not here imitate that further Virgilian question, "Is there such anger in the minds of the gods?"

## 12. Perverse

Elsewhere though Milton does translate this question into his poem, twice in fact, and on both occasions it carries powerful allusive meaning. Satan himself quotes it at the climax of his successful temptation of Eve, as a way to convince the innocent

woman that God could not possibly have meant to deny her the fruit of the tree: "is it envie, and can envie dwell / In heav'nly breasts?" (IX 729–30). It is his final argument, and so obviously requires the answer "No" that Satan needs to say no more. The irony is clear: Satan's is exactly that kind of "heav'nly breast," as the reader has long known since the infernal serpent's primary sin was named as Envy at I 35. If poor Eve had read Virgil she would know that the correct answer is "Yes." Complicity between the educated reader and Satan is nowhere more obvious or more disturbing in the face of this primal innocence.

The other allusion to the question about divine anger is for the mini-war epic at the heart of the poem. "In heav'nly spirits could such perverseness dwell?" (VI 788), Milton (or Raphael?) asks parenthetically as the Satanic forces rally for a further assault. Here too the reference is obvious to all readers, yet from Virgil's *ira* to Milton's *perverseness* is a large step. *Ira* is a pure emotion, anger, even if we recall the *dies irae* to which it gives name in the Judeo-Christian tradition. But *perverseness* implies a double perspective, the typical "before" and "after" split that the Christian idea of the Fall promotes. Something that previously was a positive quality (though we do not know what it may have been, perhaps that same pure anger), is now irremediably changed. It is turned (*vertere*) completely (*per-*) in a new and unsavoury direction.<sup>72</sup> The real precedents for that concept are not in Virgil, still less in Homer, but in the Judeo-Christian literature.

That is not to say that the word *perverse* does not itself appear in Virgil. Indeed it occurs at the end of the Allecto story, as we have seen (above, p. 530f. with n. 34). What is more, Virgil there intervenes in his own voice, like Milton here, to condemn the war that Juno and Allecto begin, attributing it to a *perversum numen* (*Aen.* VII 584). Milton obviously recalled this passage at this key moment in the war (the Messiah is about to intervene and chase the rebels down to Hell), since there are parallel omens in Heaven, ignored by the rebels, whose hearts, like Pharaoh's troops, are hardened:

In heav'nly Spirits could such perverseness dwell?  
But to convince the proud what Signes availe,  
Or wonders move th' obdurate to relent?  
They harden'd more . . . (VI 789–91)

And Milton invites the comparison, as often, to bring home the difference from Virgil. The word may look the same, *perverse*, but that is merely pseudomorphosis: Milton's story is not about the local power of a malign influence, or *numen*, as in Roman religion, but the rebel angels initiating the archetype of all wars at the beginning of time and history as we know it. And the hardening of their hearts is a specific and fundamentally Christian religious doctrine. Indeed Milton explains it at some length in his theological treatise: "Hardening of the heart is usually the last punishment inflicted on inveterate wickedness and unbelief in this life . . . God often hardens the

72. Roy Flannagan has a note at II 625 on the implications of "perverse," when it appears as a keyword in Hell in the passage quoted above ("Perverse, all monstrous, all prodigious things"). But like many commentators at this and other points he needs to exonerate God in the face of the poem's ambiguity, and quotes the theological Milton to do so: Milton found it "intolerable and incredible that evil should be stronger than good and should prove the true supreme power" (*De Doctrina Christiana*, 1.2, Yale ed., vol. VI, p.131).

hearts of powerful and arrogant world leaders . . . Thus Pharaoh is said to harden his heart."<sup>73</sup> Modern parallels will spring readily to mind. And this self-infliction of damnation is what is dramatized in the wonderful soliloquy of Satan on Niphates (IV 32–113). That kind of perverseness is not what Virgil means.

A few lines later come those wondering doubts of the innocent audience, "filled with Admiration and deep Muse," which we may hear now as a further variant on Virgil's famous question: could there be such hate in heaven? The answer is quite simply "Yes," however unimaginable to Adam and Eve. Despite his expressed reluctance to reproduce the subjects of classical epic, Milton constantly uses its terms and language to complicate his own. The wrath of stern Achilles, the rage of Turnus, the ire of Juno, supposedly left behind by the Miltonic narrator (IX 14–18),<sup>74</sup> are all here again in the celestial battle, in the "wrauth" of the Son at VI 826, or of God at VI 59, and the problem for many readers is that, in spite of the claims in the invocation to Book IX, their wrath is not different from that of their predecessors. In these cases classical epic genuinely contaminates the effort of the Christian poet to transcend his medium. Even pseudomorphosis will not get us out of the difficulty that Juno's ire, or the more general *animis caelestibus irae*, is reproduced not only in Satan's resentment but in the "wrauth awak't" of God, giving off smoke and flame in "dusky wreathes" (even at this moment Milton cannot resist a pun<sup>75</sup>).

So spake the Sovran voice, and Clouds began  
To darken all the Hill, and smoak to rowl  
In duskie wreathes, reluctant flames, the signe  
Of wrauth awak't . . . (VI 56–9)

The Christian poet might have wanted God's wrath to be utterly other than Achilles' and Juno's or Neptune's, just as the word *perverse* resonates so differently, but if so, he brought that well-known biblical emotion dangerously close to the classical: indeed the passage which reduces classical epic to varieties of anger (as Flannagan well puts it *ad loc.*) follows by only 4 lines his statement about God's "Anger and just rebuke and judgement giv'n" (IX 10). Putting biblical and classical so closely together must mean that we are to think them together, just as we must with "hate in heaven."

Indeed even that hate, Satanic as it is, is also divine. What Adam and Eve in fact are reacting to, in the narrator's summary of their "Admiration and deep Muse," is not only what God calls "Hellish hate" (III 298) but also his own, and his Son's. To end the war in heaven, which God calls "this perverse Commotion," he tells the Son to get out his chariot and drive out "these sons of Darkness" from heaven into "the utter Deep" (VI 706–16). To which the Son agrees, and says "whom thou hat'st, I hate, and can put on / Thy terrors, as I put thy mildness on, / Image of thee in all things" (VI 734–36). Christ is quoting Psalm 139.21–22, "Do not I hate them, O Lord, that hate thee? . . . I

73. *De Doctrina Christiana* 1.8, Yale ed., vol. VI, pp. 336–7.

74. Quoted above, p. 517.

75. Indeed there may be a triple pun here, since *reluctant* means "writhing," *OED* 1, as both Fowler and Leonard explain *ad loc.* Flannagan ignores them and says that "the flames are reluctant because they, as they are personified, hesitate to proclaim the terror of God's wrath." Leonard points out that this modern sense of the word, *OED* 2b, is in any case a Miltonic coinage.



hate them with perfect hatred," and also Romans 9.13 where God is said to hate the reprobate.<sup>76</sup> Thus it may be true that in the overall structure of the poem's plot and its theology, as God says, "Heav'nly love shall outdo Hellish hate/ Giving to death, and dying to redeem,/ So dearly to redeem what Hellish hate/ So easily destroy'd" (III 298–301). But here at the centre of the poem, at the very moment when Christ mounts his chariot to anticipate and symbolize all his further triumphs, from the resurrection to the ascension itself to the final battle, hate itself is heavenly.

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76. Michael Lieb, "Hate in Heaven': Milton and the *Odium Dei*," *English Literary History* 53 (1986), 519–39, brings together the various passages, together with Calvin and other commentators relevant to Milton. These include Lactantius, whose treatise *De ira dei* (see note 9 above) argued for a God who can both love and hate (1.5 - 8.32).