

Satan's Imprisoning Words: Examining the Value of Language in

John Milton's *Paradise Lost*

By

Victoria Ryan

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

The Wilkes Honors College

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Arts and Sciences

With a Concentration in English Literature

Wilkes Honors College of

Florida Atlantic University

Jupiter, Florida

April 2009

SATAN'S IMPRISONING WORDS: QUESTIONING THE VALUE OF LANGUAGE
IN MILTON'S *PARADISE LOST*

by
Victoria Ryan

This thesis was prepared under the direction of the candidate's thesis advisor, Dr. Michael Harrawood, and has been approved by the members of his supervisory committee. It was submitted to the faculty of The Honors College and was accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Arts and Sciences.

SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE:

Dr. Michael Harrawood

Dr. Hilary Edwards

Dean, Wilkes Honors College

Date

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all my professors for their guidance over the years, without the lessons I have learned from each and every one of them I would not have been equipped for such an undertaking. I owe an immense debt to the professors of the Literature department, and special thanks are due to the two who had to suffer through reading this thesis: Dr. Harrawood and Dr. Edwards. I would like to thank Dr. Harrawood for officially introducing me to John Milton, for his time and helpful encouragement, and for steering me in new directions while still allowing me to find my own way. Without my time in Dr. Edwards' classes I would never have been able to attempt this thesis, as I would still be bereft of my scant knowledge of Existentialism, Phenomenology, and Modernism. I want to thank her most of all for the inspirational example she sets of the exceptional passion for literature that can be brought to each and every class discussion by a Professor. I owe any knowledge possible to be possessed regarding Postmodernism to Dr. Barrett, and I want to thank her for her patience and understanding and confess that I *may* have enjoyed a few American Novels: but just a little.

I also want to thank everyone who attended my presentation of this paper at the Symposium and all my fellow students at the Honors College for providing me with such a rich academic environment in which to write. My family and friends have been extremely supportive during this process, and I owe many thanks to my father: Thank-You for letting me pick your brain for theological accuracy and for making sure I ate on a semi-regular basis. My grandmother deserves much of the credit for encouraging my love of all things English, and without her I would never have traveled to that wonderful Island. Lastly, to *my* Adam, who bore the brunt of my breakdowns and helped offer a sanity to my insane world while continuing, somehow, to love me. Ultimately, I want to thank those who have been there for me in my moments of crisis and for everyone who has encouraged me along the way.

ABSTRACT

Author: Victoria Ryan

Title: Satan's Imprisoning Words: Questioning the Value of
Language in John
Milton's *Paradise Lost*

Institution: Wilkes Honors College of Florida Atlantic University

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Michael Harrawood

Degree: Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Arts and Sciences

Concentration: English Literature

Year: 2009

Through a critique of Satan's misuse of language, John Milton's *Paradise Lost* makes the greater argument that language should coincide with God's creation narrative. The poem proposes a theory of how language should be used: to connect the mutable world of humans to the immutable world of God. I propose that Milton uses Satan to portray both a fear and a faith in the power of language. Satan makes language the accomplice to his sin, attempting to use language, which has the power of creating a world that seems true, to replace God's Truth. Milton's poem neither solely endorses the theory that language points directly to absolute Truth, nor does it endorse the theory that language is an arbitrary system of signs which impose meaning the world. Milton blends these two theories of language, connecting the Idealist system to what will be Friedrich Nietzsche's.

Table of Contents

Introduction

Grasping for Truths: Satan's Speech as a Product of Milton's Tumultuous Time	1
---	---

Chapter I

Satanic Speech: Problematizing the Heroic Connotation of Seductive Oratory	10
---	----

Chapter II

Incest and Amorphous Bodies: Satan's Language of Entrapment	21
--	----

Chapter III

Mediating between the Mutable and the Immutable: Milton's Language Theory	39
--	----

Conclusion

Clinging to the Idea of Absolute Truth	46
--	----

Works Cited	48
--------------------------	----

Introduction

Grasping for Truths: Satan's Speech as a Product of Milton's Tumultuous Time

"Words! Mere words! How terrible they were! How clear, and vivid, and cruel! One could not escape from them. And yet what subtle magic there was in them! They seemed to be able to give a plastic form to formless things..." The Picture of Dorian Gray (Wilde 20)

Though the action of *Paradise Lost* occurs just before and up to the biblical Fall of Man, Milton's own age frames his poem by influencing which aspects of the original story on which he focuses as well as what he chooses to add (such as the personified figures of Sin and Death.) These two extremes positions of how to read the poem are unable to comprehend that Milton is both rewriting the story of Man's origin as told through the bible, *and* comparing the struggle of his age to that of the fallen angels and tempted humans. *Paradise Lost* is, therefore, as much of a work of Milton's present as his past. Though this assertion may seem uncontroversial, some critics focus only on the poem as a rewriting of the Bible, and are simply interested in how Milton mobilizes aspects of an already existing narrative in order to create popular entertainment. Others see the poem as a representation of Milton's own time: the war in heaven signifying political and religious turmoil in England, the character's struggle the struggle of the inhabitants of London. Milton writes *Paradise Lost* as a two pronged tale: he is concurrently telling both the original Fall of man and the Fallenness of Man in the 17th century. *Paradise Lost* mobilizes two sets of allusions, and layers issues of the 17th century over those found in Genesis. The character who best exemplifies Milton's layering technique is Satan, and it is he who Milton uses to link the biblical past to

Milton's present. Satan is the intermediary, the traveler between the past and the future because, from his position in Hell, Satan can both remember Heaven, and think forward to the prophesied Earth. He could, therefore, represent the poem itself, which mediates between the past as embodied by the bible, and the present age of Milton. Satan, by journeying between Heaven, Hell, and Earth experiences all the struggles and states of mind that come with these three spheres. He faces the struggles of the biblical Satan concurrently with the seventeenth century struggles of fallen man throughout the course of the poem. He does not, however, accept the truth of his past: that he was created by God, and therefore fails where the poem triumphs.

The seventeenth century experienced a catastrophic circumstance that surfaced along with the political, religious, and social confusion: the crisis of how to define the self. The Judeo-Christian idea that God infused his physical creations with a divine spirit, the dominant "truth" of England for hundreds of years, was being challenged. The need to "justify gods ways to man" and find a basis of faith and the need to find a working definition of "human" became a real necessity (Milton *Paradise Lost* 1.26¹). Milton's *Paradise Lost* does not lift up Satan as a hero, instead Satan's linguistic adeptness, which is the very quality that misleads critics into misinterpreting him² serves to question language's ability to convey truth. Through the critique of Satan's misuse of language, the poem creates a new theory of how language should be used: as a way to connect the

¹ I will exclusively use The Norton Critical Edition of Milton's *Paradise Lost* for my references to the poem.

² I will push past the idea proposed by A.B. Chambers in "The Mind is its Own Place: Paradise Lost, I, 253-255" who argues that: "Satan's speech, not the obvious and total lie it has been claimed to be, is ... another example of the curious mixture of truth and error upon which, even in the first book of *Paradise Lost*, Satan has come so heavily to rely." I will show how Chambers is wrong to suggest that God forces Satan to be located in a specific place, and instead argue that Satan entraps himself in his own dissembling rhetoric. (Chambers 101).

mutable world of humans to the immutable world of God. Rather than reading Satan as a lyrical genius, or seeing Satan as nothing more than a liar to be dismissed by the wary Christian, I propose that Milton uses Satan to portray both a fear and a faith in the power of language. Satan's prominent role in *Paradise Lost* highlights the poem's main focus: to address the emerging epistemological shift away from a belief in a theory of language that can point to an absolute Truth about an objective Reality and towards an emerging belief that words shape reality.³ By arguing that Satan is trapped not just in a physical Hell, but within his own rhetoric, I make the greater argument that language in *Paradise Lost* can only be true when it coincides with God's narratives.

The struggles readers of Milton had to face in the seventeenth century were indeed daunting,⁴ and Milton needed Satan to embody the physical and philosophical paradoxes implicit in the Bible and the seventeenth century. A character not bound to observe Milton's strict puritan code of morality was the only option to convey the blasphemous counter positions to God's authority that were gaining credence in Milton's age, and through Satan Milton is able to first give a fair account of these positions before showing their perverse results.⁵ Louis Schwartz said, "Of all the poets in the period, Milton stands out as one of the most concerned with poetry's ability to respond to the

³ Milton should be compared with other philosophers such as Michel Foucault, who, in his book "Discipline and Punish," observes that by the end of the eighteenth century, "The body as the major target of penal repression disappeared" (8). Both Milton and Foucault are interested in the move towards punishment being internalized; Foucault through the concept of the Panopticon, and Milton, as I will show, through Satan.

⁴ "John Milton grew up in a world of martial incandescence. The series of English civil wars, beginning in 1639, grouped and regrouped friends and foes, asserted and amended the beliefs for which men suffered. Profoundly read in past history, Milton responded both emotionally and thoughtfully to the uncoiling of history in his own time" (Coleman 48).

⁵ Between 1641 and 1660 there was "extensive liberty of the press in England" meaning there were many more incendiary and heretical theories being printed and circulated than the years before and after (Hill 17).

emotional and spiritual problems presented by what can only be described as catastrophic circumstances” (212). Milton saw a king killed by his own people, religious turmoil, the dismantling of churches, the rise and fall of a puritanical government, and a glorious revolution. Religious and political upheaval was inextricably linked with revolutions in the field of science, which influenced the very language used to define the self.

According to Christopher Hill’s *The World Turned Upside Down*:

Popular revolt was for many centuries an essential feature of the English Tradition, and the middle decades of the seventeenth century saw the greatest upheaval that has yet occurred in Britain. (13)

Hill goes on to express that “What was new in the seventeenth century was the idea that the world might be *permanently* turned upside down” (17). Barbara K. Lewalski also notes the tumultuous world Milton lived and wrote in, saying:

Milton would have become conscious early of political, religious, and cultural strains in the national fabric. While the divisions were not yet unbridgeable, they were manifestly widening.”(4)

Whereas most critics focus on the political schisms prevalent in Milton’s time, it is important to understand that they were inextricably linked to the religious reforms also erupting and quickly gaining credence only to fall from favor as quickly as they had arisen to popularity. Lewalski is aware that the clashing religious ideology would affect the young Milton. During his childhood there was:

An established church perceived to be clinging to the idolatrous remnants of Roman Catholic liturgy, ceremony, an church government, and to be

promoting an Armenian theology that made some place for free will and personal merit, was opposed by an energetic Puritan clergy bent on preaching the Word of God, reforming morals, holding fast to Calvinist predestination theology, and bringing the government of the English church into closer harmony with the Presbyterian model in Geneva and Scotland. A bright child had to be aware, at least subconsciously, that his life would be affected by such controversies and tensions. (4-5)

The concurrent upheaval of both the religious and political systems are more important to recognize as influences on Milton's poetry, as the tearing apart of all the traditional foundational definitions for the self contributed to the tensions in Satan's speeches in *Paradise Lost*. Milton was only to grow up into more turmoil, as he would play an active role working for and defending a government that deposed the king of England. The socio-political environment in which Milton was raised most obviously influenced *Paradise Lost*'s war scenes and most likely helped shape his idea of what constitutes a hero. The changing political and religious environment also must have impacted Milton in a more general way, leaving him desirous of something immutable to cling to in order to stabilize the shifting ideas of truth being bandied about in his generation. Lewalski does not theorize, however, as to how Milton's environment would ultimately help him shape a new theory of language. Milton, through *Paradise Lost* expresses the desire for the immutable in a mutable world; his poem both captures the changefulness of language and a longing to force language to point to an immutable truth.

Milton's Satan, by condemning the physical world that has beaten and ostracized him, focuses on self-definition through his mind, which, because he remains defiant, he believes remains constant. With class boundaries beginning to slip, and when even a king can be condemned to death, one's place in life became extremely precarious, and Satan's fall from grace could easily have reminded many Englishmen and women that their comfort relied on the whims of fate, and the political environment. Satan's constant insistence that his existence is seated in his language about himself, rather than his body is not a singular obsession; the seat of the self and the soul was being hotly debated in Milton's era due to the increasingly more viable scientific arguments that man was a material being.⁶ I will focus on how Satan undergoes the epistemological shift from understanding oneself in relation to God to understanding the self only through one's own language and rhetoric about the self.

Some critics have mistakenly attempted to make Satan merely a secondary character of the poem, claiming he was necessary, but unimportant as anything other than a theological plot device. Michael Murrin, one such critic, writes: Milton "believed that Satan caused man's fall and that this angelic coresponsibility set up the possibility of man's return to grace. Therefore, Milton had to explain who Satan was and his history" (350). Murrin sees Satan as important to *Paradise Lost* not in and of himself, but only in his relation to humanity. Murrin goes on to say: "Milton could not... depict man's sin accurately unless he devoted much of his narrative to relatively arcane matters, to events

⁶ Descartes, who died in 1650, wrote *Discourse on the Method* in which he worked on trying to provide a basis of existence first from the mind, and then attempted to connect it to the outside world. For Descartes and Satan, language is the key for both for expressing and demonstrating the truth of their intellectual being. Descartes attempts to write the truth by only including in his confessions what he cannot doubt. Descartes can build himself up from small truths; Satan tears himself apart with gross lies.

which preceded man's very existence" (350). Other critics of *Paradise Lost* have suffered from as similar problem as that of Satan. Whereas Satan seeks to divorce the narrative of his creation from God, the creator, they seek to divorce the words of the poem from that of their creator, John Milton. *The Two Poets of Paradise Lost*, by Robert McMahan, is an example of the set of critics who mistakenly separate *Paradise Lost* from the life of the actual John Milton⁷. McMahan examines the relationship between two separate entities. He differentiates these by calling them John Milton the historical figure, and the Bard, or the narrating Milton of the poem who he says exists in the ever present. He means that the narrating Milton is disconnected from history, and is a personality construct that only exists within the poem. This constructed narrator, then, would be outside of and unaffected not only by Milton's personal history, but all history. Though it is reasonable to argue that the narrator of *Paradise Lost* is not the voice of Milton himself as much as the voice of the narrator in a lyric poem is, to go so far as arguing against a biographical type of interpretation as McMahan does seems to ignore certain lyric portions of the poem. For example, the opening of book three begins with an invocation of Light, but mourns that it:

⁷ I side with the critical position of Peter Levi, who, in his book, *Eden Renewed: The Public and Private Life of John Milton* says that though there may be similarities between Milton the author and the speaker of the poem, they must be divorced into two separate entities for the sake of interpretation. I agree that Milton the author and the narrator of the poem must be acknowledged as different entities, but believe that severing the two completely leads to interpreting the text in a vacuum. Without knowledge of the author and his or her personal background and location within history, the reader is unable to understand much of a literary work's cultural references and import. Also, the biographical elements contained within the poem strongly support not severing Milton the man and Milton the narrator completely. Milton the man necessarily informs the poem's narrator, and the personal biography of Milton is important to a poem that heavily engages with the experiences of life in seventeenth century England. George Wesley Whiting, author of *Milton and This Pendant World*, shares my view, and argues for a return to a historical approach to literary studies, saying that to understand Milton a student must become engrossed in Milton's thoughts, and background.

Revisit'st not these eyes that roll in vain
To find thy piercing ray and find no dawn,
So thick a drop serene hath quenched their orbs
Or dim suffusion veiled. (3. 23-6).

When this narrator mourns his loss of light, and sight, yet compares his “fate” to that of “Blind Thamyras and blind Maeonides⁸,” the voice seems to express the personal struggle of John Milton himself, rather than any a-historical narrator (3.33, 35). McMahon’s theory is influenced by the poststructuralist and deconstructionist bias which assumes the “death of the author,” and suffers rather than benefits from his clearly pre-chosen critical stance on texts in general; his attempt to impose meaning upon *Paradise Lost* to suit his belief in what a text should mean is similar to Satan’s desire to impose meaning on his environment regardless of fact.

Satan falsely believes he can rewrite or unmake God’s reality if he can only write a new narrative. He attempts to deny the supremacy of God by rhetorical argument and narrative invention. By explaining Satan’s punishment is based on his language of lies, I will show that Milton believes there is such a thing as absolute Truth. This absolute Truth is God’s account of creation. Milton writes of God, giving God the ability to speak for himself and give an account of his creation. This God, though, is modeled on the God of the Bible. The Bible, then, would be an example of language used to convey Truth to man. Milton, in an age⁹ characterized by repeated religious and political upheaval largely spurred through pamphleteering, exposes the dangers of falling prey to the seductively

⁸ Both referring to poets.

⁹ For an extensive look at Milton’s life and times see: Lewalski, Barbara K. *The Life of John Milton*. Blackwell Publishing, 2003, Malden MA.

malleable properties of language. Satan lies because he gives an account contrary to God's, and Milton's language theory therefore would warn readers to compare preachers' accounts to the Bible to discern if they are in fact lying. Milton uses Satan to critique the removal of God as the foundation of the self and language. Satan wishes to eliminate the Truth: that God created him as well as all else. I will argue that Milton does not write a poem with Satan as its hero, but instead draws attention to the dangers of seductive language through Satan. In chapter one, I will address the critical position of Satan as the hero of *Paradise Lost*, and argue that Milton is undermining the idea that heroism should be based on manipulative speech. In chapter two I will argue that Satan's speeches entrap him because, by writing a narrative where God is not necessary for creation, Satan is forced to rely only on himself¹⁰ and his language. I will argue through these two chapters that Milton mobilizes the character of Satan in order to critique rhetorical language, and that the poem crafts the theory that language can only be "true" when it conforms to God's will. In Chapter Three I will propose that Milton's theory of language necessarily links ideas of Idealism with those of Modernism, claiming both that language is arbitrary and can be elided, *and* that it can point to an absolute Truth.¹¹

¹⁰ Walter Pater, in his *Conclusion to the Renaissance*, expresses a fear that if one focuses too much on the self, they will lose their connection to the outside world. I mobilize this fear, and argue that by building a world centered on himself, Satan is trapped and unable to connect to anything but himself.

¹¹ I use the uppercase Truth because I will argue that Milton does believe in its existence through God.

Chapter I

Satanic Speech: Problematizing the Heroic Connotation of Seductive Oratory

*Of good and evil much they argued then,
Of happiness and final misery,
Passion and apathy, and glory and shame:
Vain wisdom all and false philosophy!
Yet with a pleasing sorcery could charm
Pain for a while, or anguish, and excite
Fallacious hope or arm th' obdured breast
With stubborn patience as with triple steel. (2.561-69)*

Critics have generally taken two courses when attempting to explain why Milton gave Satan such powerful speeches: some have read Satan's speeches as a defense of individualism at the birth of Romanticism against an oppressive God and argue, as did Blake, that Milton was "a true poet, and of the Devil's party without knowing it" ("The Marriage of Heaven and Hell"). Blake is often quoted out of context with regards to Milton, and many suppose Blake to mean that Milton wrote *Paradise Lost* to glorify Satan and abuse a tyrant God. This is a misreading of Blake, however, who saw Hell not as a place of torment and evil, but of energy, chaos and creation. Milton, therefore, was of a Blakeian Devil's party, but a Blakeian Devil is not a Miltonic Satan, and those who argue that Milton was seeking to make Satan the hero of his epic should not seek Blake as their support.

Peter Levi, in his book, *Eden Renewed: The Public and Private Life of John Milton* seeks to connect Dante's descriptions of the Devil to Milton's Satan to offer a reading of the character. He argues that: "Satan is a heroic figure, rather than the grotesque as in Dante" (207). By comparing the more sympathetic version of Milton's

Satan to the monstrous Satan of Dante, Levi argues that Milton has transformed Satan into a hero. Satan's character is necessarily heroic, he argues, because *Paradise Lost*, as an epic poem, must have a hero. He says: "Milton's Satan is a fiction and, to sustain an epic poem, must be heroic and terrible" (208). His argument is convoluted, because rather than arguing that *Paradise Lost* is an epic poem because of the existence of an epic hero, he argues that since the poem is described as epic, it necessitates the existence of a hero. Levi cannot divorce the poem from its previous critical reception, and worse than failing to classify Milton's poem, he relies on the supplied genre classification given by past critics: Epic. Using this ready-made label, he then seeks to fill in the necessary requirements to uphold it.

Levi mistakenly believes Satan fills the role of the hero in the epic, because Milton compares Satan with other Epic heroes.¹² He disregards the other candidates for a heroic position, and argues the poem's hero is Satan because of the adorned nature of Milton's descriptions of Satan:

Among splendidly well chosen metaphors a line or two (371-2) suggests Milton's sympathies are *not where they ought to be*: 'the image of a brute, adorned/With gay religions of pomp and gold,' a line that reminds me of 'gli ornamenti barbarichi e le pompe'. (209-210 emphasis mine)

Levi's reading of Milton exalts Satan as a hero, albeit an inappropriate one, as evidence

¹² Johnathan H. Collett is similarly mistaken when he argues in "Milton's Use of Classical Mythology in 'Paradise Lost'" that: "[t]he requirements of genre and theme, far more than doctrinal persuasion, determined for Milton when and how the classical myths would be used" (88). His reading dismisses the parodic nature of Satan's invocation of these Pagan sources.

in his phrase that “Milton’s sympathies are not where they ought to be.”¹³ If we read Milton’s poem as a traditional¹⁴ epic¹⁵, the evidence of Satan being the poem’s hero *is* strong, as Levi says:

the figure of Satan confirms the vivid impression he has already made of being a super-hero, so heroic that he has few other characteristics: he is taller, grander, and more powerful than Achilles, Odysseus and Agamemnon combined. (221)

Satan’s heroism, according to Levi, is inextricably tied to Satan’s rebelliousness, and his longing for individuality. Satan, however, is an overblown parody of these heroes, and he does not have the most important characteristic of a hero: dynamism. I agree with Stanley Fish’s reading of heroism in *Paradise Lost*, who says in *Paradise Lost*: “Heroism is obedience” (332). Satan clearly does not fit the role of the hero according to Fish. Satan ultimately is a static character, a parody of a hero who, defeated, will not admit loss or change. Every adventure Satan has is merely a repetition of his Fall. Levi does not see the parodic nature of Satan, and can only take the comparison of Satan to other heroes at their face value.

¹³ Similar to Levi’s idea that Satan is an character that the Milton is sympathetic towards, Alice K. Turner argues:

The entire concern of *Paradise Lost* is to confute predestination and demonstrate the freedom of will. Satan chooses to rebel in Heaven and chooses further wickedness; we share every twist of his thinking. (178)

Her argument is that the poem is not a glorification of God’s plan, but rather a seditious glorification of rebellion. Others have criticized Milton for losing control of his character and writing Satan too well.

¹⁴ Parsons O. Coleman’s argument would support such a reading, as she argues that: “Milton recapitulated Homeric, Stoic, and Erasmian views” (51).

¹⁵ The Norton Anthology to English Literature “Paradise Lost in Context: Overview” says: “the epic tradition itself was a major literary resource for Milton” and lists “four epics central to Milton’s idea of that genre: Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, Virgil’s *Aeneid*, and Torquato Tasso’s *Jerusalem Delivered*” (The Norton).

Milton dispels any possibility that Satan's willfulness is to be admired during Satan's first speech. From the reader's first encounter of Satan, we are led to understand that the outward persona of Satan may seem heroic, but his "true nature"¹⁶ is corrupted and incapable of anything but selfish brooding. Satan, to rally himself after the fall asks,

What though the field is lost?
All is not lost: th' unconquerable will
And study of revenge, immortal hate
and courage never to submit or yield—
(1.105-108)

Satan's words compare "the unconquerable will" with "revenge" and "immortal hate" in order to complicate and subvert the ancient heroic connotation attached to the will.¹⁷ If, as I argue, Satan is not a hero but a character which challenges the traditional idea of one his language could also problematize ideals of heroic speech. The will is further stigmatized through its Fall from grace because the will, as well as Satan, is not "lost," but is banished from Heaven to reside in Hell.

Even Satan himself seems to realize the error of his actions, and to see the desperate falsehood of his position. His first line of speech: "If," exemplifies Milton's intention that Satan expresses doubt as to what he sees (1.184). His turmoil over his support of "th' unconquerable will...revenge, immortal hate" is expressed by the gap between his speech and his physical reactions. After upbraiding God for holding the

¹⁶ I am arguing that Milton believes Satan has a true nature, one that he attempts to shield from view through his use of dissembling language and transformations that hide his denigrated body. I will discuss this further in chapter two.

¹⁷ The hero Achilles of Homer's Epic is independent and willful, and the poem exalts him as a hero.

“tyranny of Heaven” the narrator informs the reader that: So spake th’ Apostate Angel though in pain, / Vaunting aloud but racked with deep despair (1.123-126). Satan is unable to accept his own words because they are false; Satan speaks of “hope” but is “racked with deep despair” (1.120, 126). Satan, in this scene is as yet unable to force his body to submit to his mind, unable to force his reality to be reconciled with his words. Satan does not believe his own words, as is exemplified by his soliloquy before entering the realm of Adam and Eve. In his long tirade he remonstrates himself for his previous actions, but stays determined on his course because he knows any attempt at returning to God would only cause him to fall further. Satan questions his actions in this speech, and makes it clear that he does not still believe his propagandistic arguments against God:

Ah wherefore! He deserved no such return
From me, whom He created what I was
In that bright eminence and with His good
Upbraided none. Nor was His service hard:
What could less than to afford Him praise,
The easiest recompense, and pay Him thanks?
How due! Yet all His good prove ill in me
And wrought but malice. (4.42-50)

Satan shares with the reader that he does not believe his own words, and since they rely on him only, their foundation is precarious. Satan’s speeches, not heroic, actually question his own actions, and he critiques the foundation of his exalted position of hero among his fallen peers.

A.J.A. Waldock argues that Milton made Satan too magnificent, and then attempted to remind the reader that Satan is actually inglorious. Waldock argues, “Each great speech lifts Satan a little beyond what Milton really intends, so he suppresses him again (or tries to) in a comment” (86). The above quote, however, does not attempt to suppress Satan through moralizing why he is wrong, instead, it signals a key point in Satan’s strategic degradation from Fallen angel to the Devil of popular culture. It actually serves to expose the tenuous support Satan has for his seduction of Adam and Eve, as well as the fact that even Satan is not foolish enough to believe the invectives he’s invented against God. If Milton had, in essence, lost control of Satan, he would not follow such a clear path from the glorious defeated warrior to the writhing serpent that we see him follow. This passage moves Satan from the dejected yet impressive leader of the fallen angels to a hopelessly doomed yet stubbornly determined agent of the Fall. In a well designed use of foreshadowing the Fate of man, Satan asks himself, “Hadst thou the same free will and pow’r to stand? /Thou hadst” (4.66-67). I agree with Joseph Addison who argued as early as 1712, “there is in the *Paradise Lost* all the Greatness of Plan, Regularity of design, and masterly beauties which we discover in *Homer* and *Virgil*” (379).

C.S. Lewis argues that it was Milton’s intention “to be fair to evil, to give it a run for its money—to show it first at its height, with all its rants and melodrama and ‘Godlike imitated state,’” but argues that it is a reading that Milton made “Satan more glorious than he intended” is incorrect (201). Though he also argues that “Satan is the best drawn of Milton’s characters” because “he is incomparably the easiest to draw,” I would argue

that this cannot be the only reason Satan is more fully developed character, as the amount of time spent with Satan's character is far longer than any other; Milton could have chosen to develop the Archangel Michael further, as his scenes could have made an impressive epic counterpoint to Satan's (201). Milton does not focus on the battle scenes of Michael, however, for the same reason he denigrates Satan's willfulness: Milton is providing a new aesthetic for epic poetry by replacing the hero (a speaker who uses words for their own glory) with the worshiper (who uses words for prayer or God's glory).

Levi and Lewis ultimately err, I believe, by disregarding the pagan nature of the heroism attributed to Satan, and the process whereby Milton turns the archaic aesthetic of the willful hero into an anti-hero for his Christian epic. Levi almost makes an important revelation when he compares Satan to "an orator of Athens or Rome in the days of freedom," however, stops short of drawing the invaluable comparison between Satan and a wayward linguist (227). Balachandra Rajan also falls short of explaining Satan's role in *Paradise Lost*. He argues, in "The Problem of Satan," that:

If Milton dwells upon [Satan's heroic qualities] it is because he knows you will put them in their context, that that you will see Satan's virtues as perverted by their end and darkening therefore to their inevitable eclipse, corroded and eaten out by the nemesis beyond them. (408)

Rajan reminds today's reader that for Milton expected that his audience bring a "wary admiration of the orator's resources" to the poem (412). He argues that, "The sympathy for Satan which the poetry imposes, the admiration it compels for his Promethean

qualities, are meant to be controlled by this sort of moral reaction” (409). He expects that readers cannot be swayed by Satan’s poetry because they have been taught to be suspicious of it, and to expect it. He believes the choice to give Satan such impressive language is to elevate Satan’s character far enough for the reader to believe he is capable of fighting against an almighty force. He says, “When the weight of poetry is thus thrown on Satan’s side, the effect must be to equalize in our imagination the relative magnitude of contending forces” (409). Though I agree that Satan’s language is ultimately not meant to seduce the readers to Satan’s side, Satan’s speeches are not meant to be ignored by the reader. Milton gives Satan the strongest presentation possible of his position, yet shows the horrible degradation of his character in order to show the danger of engaging in active hypocrisy.

The best reading of Milton’s heroic similes is provided by a synthesis of Peter C. Herman’s argument with my own. Herman, to explain what he understands as the prevalence of the “Miltonic ‘Or¹⁸’” throughout the poem gives the example of “the poem’s first epic simile, that in which Milton compares Satan to ‘Briareos or Typhon’ (1.199)” (189). He explains that the “or” could denote either an either/or comparison or a linking of the two warriors. The two schools of interpretation regarding one of the warriors further complicate the choice of the reader however, as Briareos can be read, with the Virgilian camp as evil, or with the camp of Hesiod and Homer as a “good guy”

¹⁸ Herman’s paper traces the many instances where Milton uses the word “or,” which, as Herman argues, can signal an inclusionary or exclusionary reading of the choices which follow. In other words, Herman believes Milton’s “or” can lend to a reading of ‘either/or’ as well as ‘and.’ Milton intended the Miltonic “Or,” according to Herman, to complicate the text of *Paradise Lost* by multiplying the possibilities of interpretation. He argues that Milton’s own tortured ambivalence led to his poem’s inability to give a clear indication of preference to one reading over another.

(189-90). Herman, following in Stanley Fish's critical footsteps,¹⁹ interprets the multi-layered comparison implicit in the "or" by comparing the two warriors as a choice for the reader: "the comparison of Satan to Briarios confronts the reader with a double choice, a double 'or,' as it were" (190).

These "Or" choices are, for Herman, an implicit signal of Milton's conflicting ideology after the fall of the government he so diligently worked for. He says, "[r]ather than reflecting his unease about poetry or his concern for the limitation of human reason and press censorship, the Miltonic "Or" in *Paradise Lost* reflects Milton's uncertainties after the Revolution collapsed" (202). I disagree with this, however, and instead would argue that Milton uses the "Or" trope to complicate the reading of his poem not because of his own shifting political allegiances, but rather to call for his readers to make choices.²⁰ Milton's readers must ally themselves with God or the devil, and the "Or" is a poetic catechism that reminds the reader of their own necessary choices. His use of "Or" brings the power of language to the forefront, as each choice the reader makes turns on how they read the or, which value system they ascribe to will define their reading. If the reader wishes to justify Satan, they can, but they are misreading the poem, taking the wrong path offered by the "Or." Milton does not fully negate this reading ever, because

¹⁹ Fish is a reader response critic.

²⁰ Though we cite different evidence for our readings, Nicholas Wallerstein shares my conclusion that *Paradise Lost* creates an environment in which its readers are participants. He argues that:

[T]hrough an author's development of form, the reader gains an experiential relationship to the meaning of a work. In both the angelic chorus and sonnet 23 the reader achieves a remarkable level of participation in the poetry, a level made possible though Milton's formal designs." (42)

So, both the choices forced upon the reader, and the form of the poem itself, make the reader of Milton's epic complicit in the action of the plot. The reader, through their choice of how to read the words of Milton's poem, as well as through the hypnotic effect of the words and rhythms of the prayers the poem simulates, are pulled into the poem unwittingly.

the poem is meant to reproduce the precariousness of misreading language in one's life. The reader, if they cannot discern which way the "or" points, may not be able to discern which path to take to follow God. The heroic symbolism attached to Satan serves the same purpose. The reader, familiar with the heroic references contained within the poem, yet unfamiliar with them being used to describe Satan, is forced to contemplate Satan's allegiance with each heroic reference. Readers are then forced to ask: Is Satan heroic? If he is, is being heroic a quality to be admired?

Many critics argue that Satan is a heroic and motivating speaker, one set applauding Milton or his choice, and the other set critiquing Milton's inability to resist the seduction of Satan. Critics have ignored the third option that Satan's words are not his strength; they neither set him free as an individual nor do they contribute to his role as too sympathetic a character, instead, his eloquent speeches themselves cause and are an elegant expression of his own damnation. It is Satan, not Milton, who loses control of his language. Satan attempts to bend the rules of language, and ultimately his words do not point to anything outside of himself, as they are all lies of his own invention. Satan's words do not have the power of creation since he is not God; to give his words any power he is forced to support them by his own actions. He becomes completely divorced from the rest of the world first through his lies that try and erase it, and then through his actions that fail to create his lies. As early as book three, Satan is little more than a result of his lies, forced to follow a path he knows to be hopeless because of his words:

None left but submission and that *word*

Disdain forbids me and my dread of shame

Among the spirits beneath whom I seduced
With other promises and other vaunts
Than to submit, boasting I could subdue
Th' Omnipotent. Ay me! they little know
How dearly I abide that boast so vain,
Under what torments inwardly I groan
(4.81-88 emphasis mine)

Satan cannot submit because he disdains the very word, instead he suffers in order to carry out his vain boasts. His words, once uttered, necessitate action, and he travels the wretched path he wrote himself.

Chapter II

Incest and Amorphous Bodies: Satan's Language of Entrapment

*"First examine the mind of a word, and then only its face; (740)
do not trust the adornment of its face alone"
(Geoffrey of Vinsauf 236).*

In this chapter I will examine what happens when Satan, turning away from a physical definition of existence after losing the war in heaven, begins to rely on words to shape his identity and environment. When Satan attempts to rewrite his own story of creation he questions the connection of words to absolute Truth because he discounts God's creation narrative. Once Satan has discovered the capacity to manipulate language and create narratives contrary to God's he becomes the father of dissembling, polysemy and simulacra. Satan's language is a representation of Satan's evil, because his language attempts to express a will and an alternate reality to that of God's. Augustine, in his *Confessions*, argues that evil is the perversion of good, the turning away of the will from the will of God.²¹ Milton shows the dangers of language unmediated by God through Satan's incest. I will argue that Satan's language cannot actually introduce anything new, but instead leads to his becoming divorced from reality as a result of his narrativising. Satan tries to force his body to obey his language, but since his mind is directed towards perversity, he loses control of his physical transformations. It is not the "Miltonic godlike

²¹ Peter Fiore, in his book, *Milton and Augustine* "attempts...an investigation" of "the three main doctrines inherent in the myth of the Fall: paradisaical life (preternatural world), which was lost (Original sin), and finally recovered (Redemption)." (1). He argues that Milton was heavily influenced by the authority of Augustine, and that "Augustine's definition of Original Sin, cited in *Christian Doctrine*, gives evidence of the fact that the poet drew explicitly from the Father for a doctrine that is most central in a treatment of the Fall of Man" (2).

stance” that is created out of an anxiety of influence,²² as Bloom purports, instead, Satan suffers from this anxiety and attempts and fails to replace God as author because for Milton God is the supreme authority and author (36).

Book one gives the reader Satan at the height of his rhetorical energies, and some of Satan’s most famous speeches occur in this book. However, the reader encounters Satan for the first time not in heaven, but post-battle and defeated in Hell. Milton, therefore, chose to focus not on the rebellious yet hopeful Satan, but on the already doomed and banished Satan. In one of his speeches to his companion angels, he says he believes “reason hath equaled” the rebels to “Him” (God,) yet only “force hath made [God] supreme/ Above His equals” (1.248-9). Satan’s hubris leads him to believe he is intellectually equal to God, and it is simply through brute force that God has beaten him. This reasoning is why Satan prefers to seduce and orate in order to get his way rather than wage open war in the future. By using reason, Satan feels he can be as powerful as God. This preference is what leads Satan, in the beginning of the poem, to prefer the mind to the body.

Frustrated at his inability to control his physical environment in heaven, Satan feels that the presence of God is oppressive. He turns away from the body and physical existence after he loses his fight. Satan says, “Farthest from Him is best” (1.247). Satan claims that his is: “A mind not to be changed by place or time!” (1.253). Satan here most simply means that he refuses to repent his ideas though he has been beaten and expelled from Heaven. The line also suggests, that Satan, violently rent from familiar surroundings

²² Milton does not suffer from what Harold Bloom calls an Anxiety of Influence or “the poetics of anxiety, the process of misprison by which any latecomer strong poet attempts to clear an imaginative state for himself” (36).

and social standing, falls back upon the insistence that the definition of his self is reliant upon his own definition of self, which has remained constant thereby devaluing both his body and changefulness²³. This reading is further supported by his speech:

Yet not for those
Nor what the potent Victor in His rage
Can else inflict do I repent or change,
Though changed in outward luster, That fixed mind
And high disdain from sense of injured merit
(1.94-98)

The stagnation of his mind, then, which is a physical space as much as an intellectual one, suggests it is in a diseased state. Satan does change drastically over the course of the poem because he attempts to fill the roles prescribed by his language. Rather than his fall being simply a physical event, I agree with A.B. Chambers, who argues “Satan’s Fall from heaven to hell is an external or physical reflection of his moral degeneration from Lucifer to Adversary” (98). Satan changes circumstance based on the plan he spoke to his fallen angels, and his words force him to take on new roles. His physical transformations coincide with different modes of speech, and when he speaks sweetly he is a cherub, when he has to whisper in Eve’s ear he is a toad.

In order to undermine the authority of God, he invents a new narrative for his origin that removes God as the creator. He says:

²³ Satan’s body is denying accepted medical discourse which felt that humors must move through the body in order to be healthy.

That we were formed then say'st thou? And the work Of
secondary hands by task transferred
From Father to his Son? Strange point and new!
Doctrine which we would know whence learnt: who saw
When this creation was? Remember'st thou
Thy making while the Maker gave thee being?
We know no time when we were not as now,
Know none before us, self-begot, self-raised
By our own quick'ning power when fatal course
Has circled his full orb, the birth mature
Of this our native Heav'n, ethereal sons.
Our puissance is our own. (5.85-864)

Satan, by cutting himself off from God, is cut off from all of God's creation. He is always only a copy, a "God-like imitated state," because he attempts to rewrite but can only imitate the light of God, never recreate it. (2.270, 511) Satan makes language the accomplice to his sin, attempting to use language, which has the power of creating a world that seems true, to replace God's Truth. Language in this scene has the ability to offer an alternative reality to that provided by God, however, since this reality is only dependent on Satan's lies, it cannot compete with the tangible and immutable Truth of God's reality.

Satan, surveying the position of his troops of Angels, calls to them: "Awake, arise, or be forever fallen!" (1.330). Satan falsely juxtaposes "arise" and "be...fallen"

with “or” suggesting that the actions are mutually exclusive. He supposes that if the angels arise, they will not be fallen. This is only true if language has its own intrinsic meaning devoid of God’s intention. Milton plays on “fallen,” and shows Satan still hopeful that his words can change the meaning of God’s intentions. Satan attempts to raise the fallen angels with his command, with nothing other than the rousing power of his voice. Fallen, to be used truthfully for Milton, would take into account the sense that the angels have fallen away from God, grace and heaven. Satan, however, seeks to take the loaded word and divorce it from the power of God, and use it in its most basic definition. Satan manipulates language by setting up the logical fallacy that to arise means to not be fallen; he believes that if the Angels heed his call to rise, they will no longer be fallen.

Satan goes addresses his new environment and he calls to Hell, saying:

Receive thy new possessor, one who brings
A mind not to be changed by place or time!
The mind is its own place and in itself
Can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven.²⁴
(1.252-255)

He believes that though his seat in heaven has been lost, Hell will be more bearable because in his mind he can imagine it a Heaven. However, by saying “in itself” Satan

²⁴ This passage is discussed by A.B. Chambers, who recapitulates the critical reception of the passage as follows:

As Isabel MacCaffrey notes, Satan’s boast is at odds with the action of the epic as a whole; and as D.C. Allen’s scholarship has shown, it perhaps is based on heresy. I nevertheless suggest that to reject Satan’s speech out of hand is in one way wrong, for the premise of his argument-if not the conclusion is partially true. (98)

exposes the weakness in his plan, he can only make Hell a Heaven in his mind itself, and is therefore dooming himself to create a new world for himself out of the recesses of his already sinful mind. The world he can create therefore will be entropic and will trap him in it, because he cannot actually affect God's reality, but the words he chooses to describe it provide an alternate view of reality for Satan. Satan attempts to reverse his fallen state by exchanging the words Heaven and Hell, not by changing his physical position in Hell. Satan is simply unable to "make a Heaven of Hell" because he can only pervert God's reality with his words, not change it.

Satan soon realizes that he cannot escape from the world he himself has written, because that world is Satan himself. A.B. Chambers argues:

"While...Satan declares himself unaffected by time and place-those phantasm of the mind, as Hobbes calls them-what he cannot escape is the ultimate placing of himself by God" (101).

I disagree that God *places* Satan, rather God serves as an ever present point of reference from which Satan separates himself. Satan acknowledges that his punishment is not contained within the physical realm he sought to escape, instead, it is contained within himself:

Which way shall I fly
Infinite wrath and infinite despair?
Which way I fly is Hell,
Myself am Hell,
And in the lowest deep a lower deep

Still threat'ning to devour me opens wide,
To which the Hell I suffer seems a Heav'n.

(4.73-78)

Satan changes his words, initially stating that he could “make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven,” initially discounted physical demarcations in lieu of definitions that he could change with word games. When he says, “the Hell I suffer seems a Heav'n” he has accepted that his punishment is not to be relocated to a physical Hell, but to be forced to internalize his sinful words and become them.

Satan becomes enslaved to his words because when he makes a speech, his words point only to himself, the liar. By Book Four, he realizes his words have the power to make things seem real, but not power enough to create anything. The narrator, after a speech Satan makes to his Fallen companions, says:

But he his wonted pride

Soon recollecting with high words that bore

Seemance of worth, not substance, gently raised

Their fainting courage ... (1.527-8 emphasis mine).

Even as early as the first book, Milton distinguishes between the appearance and the actual meaning of Satan's words. Though they have no substance, however they do serve to rally the fallen angels, and therefore are not completely without power, however, Satan, showing again his preference for linguistic warfare over physical strength here goes further by uplifting his own imagination over external realities remarks:

Who overcomes

By force, hath overcome but half his foe.

(1. 648-9)

He intends this remark to denigrate the physical, but even by disparaging it he admits its existence. Satan, as much as he wishes to fully dismiss the physical world of God, must contend with it even when he tries to argue its unimportance.

Thomas Sprat, a contemporary of Milton's, proposes that the unchecked evolution of the English language was dangerous, because the stylistic ornamentation of the language had become the norm. He warned that this ornamented style of speaking was being used to manipulate unsuspecting listeners. Milton agreed with Sprat, and felt that overly ornamented language could be dangerous. Sprat asks: "How many rewards which are due to more profitable and difficult Arts have been still snatch'd away by the easie vanity of *fine speaking*?" (117) Sprat interrogates the centuries-old worship of orators and oratory, a questioning continued by Milton's poem, and Satan's language becomes the symbol of perversion in *Paradise Lost*. Even when Satan does not directly speak, his words provide the influence to the course he will take. Beelzebub addresses the Fallen angels with a plan, not to make war or peace with Heaven, but to find a new world:

There is a place,
If ancient and prophetic fame in Heav'n
Err not, another world, the happy seat
Of some new race called Man about this time
To be created like us though less
In pow'r and excellence but favored more

Of Him who rules above. (2.345-351)

Satan, wishing to create a new history for himself, but unable to create anything apart from himself, sees the opportunity granted him of a new world. He, and not Beelzebub, is responsible for the words suggesting the journey to Earth:

Thus Beelzebub

Pleaded his devilish council first devised

By Satan and in part proposed. For whence

But from the *author* of an ill could spring

So deep a malice to coundound the race

Of mankind in one root and Earth with Hell

To mingle and involve, done all to spite

The great Creator?" (2.378-384 emphasis mine)

The Angels "vote" on this plan, delivered by Beelzebub but authored by Satan (2.389). Milton emphasizes the role of Satan as author of Beelzebub's proposed plan to expose two dangers of words in a democracy: that the masses can be persuaded to choose an ill course by the orative skills of the proposer, and that a dictatorship can veil itself as a democracy by manipulating individuals behind the scenes. Satan, rather than introducing new opinions in his democracy of demons, simply speaks through the mouths of others; he perverts the other fallen angels, and they lose their individuality, becoming puppets and speaking the language of his cause.

The only way Satan can provide a reality devoid of God is to lie, and try and act out his lies. Satan, therefore, becomes a living contradiction. C.S. Lewis argues, in his

article “Satan,” that “a creature revolting against a creator is revolting against the source of his own powers” (402). He also argues, Satan “has become more a Lie than a Liar, a personified self-contradiction” (402). Here I agree with Lewis, however, I would add that though Satan’s words are not only lies before he himself is willing to enact his speech. Once he performs the lies, they exist, but since they are contrary to God’s will they are a perversion and not a creation.

Satan’s lies are only actualized through Satan himself. When he acts upon these lies, he either produces simulacra or he transforms. His language of lies, therefore, rather than changing God’s reality, only serves to create an illusory world of Satan’s incestual offspring and slippery roles that he can transform into for short times. Transformation is thematized in the poem as a form of lie, and the fallen angels as well as Satan transform not to escape their fate, but to attempt to lure others to share in it:

Through God’s high suff’rance, for the trail of Man,
By falsities and lies the greatest part
Of mankind *they corrupted* to forsake
God their Creator and th’ invisible
Glory of Him that made them, *to transform*
Oft to the image of a brute adorned
With gay religions full of pomp and gold,
And devils to adore for deities! (1.367-73 emphasis mine)

The above quote connects “lies,” “corrupted,” and “to transform.” The lies of Satan and his cohorts are the tools both of corruption and transformation. They do not have

generative power, but they do have the power of perversion, and their power is the power of persuasion and seduction. The oral power of seduction possessed by the fallen angels is also reiterated as a sexual power. The angels are able to transform the minds of men by their lies both using language and their bodies:

for spirits when they please
Can assume either sex assume or both, so soft
And uncompounded is their essence pure,
Not tie or manacled with joint or limb
Nor founded on the brittle strength of bones
Like cumbrous flesh but in what shape they choose,
Dilated or condensed, bright or obscure,
Can execute their airy purposes
And works of love or enmity fulfill.
For those the race of Israel oft forsook
Their Living Strength and unfrequented left
His righteous altar, bowing lowly down
To bestial gods... (1.423-35).

The angels' bodies, malleable and capable of seduction, become a type of text that can be used for "works of love or enmity." Satan's lies are able to seduce men to his purpose, and the Angel's bodies, parading as "gods" are able to seduce not just by weaving tales of their eminence, but by embodying them.

The transformations of Satan and his angels at first seem convenient to their purposes, as when they shrink to fit into pandemonium:

They but now who seemed
In bigness to surpass Earth's giant sons
Now less than smallest dwarfs in narrow room
Throng numberless... (1.777-80)

This transformation seems to be merely one of necessity, but it also signals that they, having fallen, are now not even as impressive as "Earth's giant sons" and are instead "less than smallest dwarfs." Their shrinking in size is representative of their shrinking in glory. The transformations Satan undergoes ultimately serve not to free him, but instead are physical representations of his lies. They are disguises, but do not actually serve to do more than veil his true self or intentions. Satan:

casts to *change his proper shape*
Which else might work him danger or delay:
And now a stripling cherub he *appears*,
Not of the prime yet such as in his face
Youth smiled celestial and to every limb
Suitable grace diffused, so well *he feigned*. (3.634-39 emphasis mine).

Satan has a "proper shape," but can change this shape to appear as another with the intention to feign, and therefore his transformation is simply a costume designed to accompany his words. Satan becomes in this scene an actor, he both speaks and looks as another, and though he appears innocent, he dissembles in order to gain intelligence.

Milton injects humor into this scene, as Satan says he has an “Unspeakable desire” to see the newly created Earth (3.662). This, as pointed out by the narrator is a very true statement, but it is veiled in hypocrisy:

“So spake the false dissembler” (3.681)

Satan dissembles so as to gain knowledge under false pretenses, feigning worship but planning to undermine God yet again.

Satan’s physical lies are a representation of his lying words, and are just as transitory and empty since they too seek to pervert God’s authority. Satan’s transformations of language and body are destructive and call Death into being:

At last this odious offspring whom thou seest,

Thine own begotten, breaking violent way

Tore through my entrails, that with fear and pain

Distorted all my nether shape thus grew

Transformed. But he my *inbred* enemy

Forth issued his fatal dart

Made to destroy. (2.781-787 emphasis mine)

Death, begotten of Satan, is a copy of Satan, and represents the destructive and distorting effect of breaking away from one’s own creator.²⁵ Death, the inbred son of Sin and Satan is the force created when Satan acts on his sinful idea to turn away from God. Satan lies²⁶ with Sin and the result is not a new creation, but an inbred destructive force that will

²⁵ Sin and Death are referred to as part of, or extensions of Satan: “Sin and Death, his two main arms” (12.431); Satan says Sin and Death are: “My substitutes” (10.403).

²⁶ The double entendre here is intentional as Satan both has sex with his daughter Sin and tells lies with sinful intention.

consume all in its path.

Satan's incestual family is the tangible representation of his lies because his language, doubling back upon him rather than pointing to anything outside of himself,²⁷ causes him to be both creator and created. Sin not only comes from Satan, she is an extension of his self. She describes her birth by saying:

Out of thy head I sprung! Amazement seized
All th' host of Heav'n. Back they recoiled afraid
At first and called me "Sin" and for a sign
Portentous held me. (2.758-761)

The Angels, and Sin's name denotes her character, she is called Sin because she is the visual representation of Satan's Sin. Their close physical appearances suggest she is a copy of him:

full oft
Thyself in me thy perfect image viewing
Becam'st enamoured and such joy thou took'st
With me in secret that my womb conceived a growing burden.
(2.763-767)

Johnathan H. Collett, in "Milton's Use of Classical Mythology in 'Paradise Lost'" makes the important point that though Sin and Eve's births are similar (both coming out of the body of another: Sin from Satan's head, Eve from Adam's rib,) they have a major

²⁷ Here I am mobilizing an idea that Walter Pater proposes in to the Renaissance. By becoming too focused on himself, Satan is unable to connect to the rest of the world, and he becomes trapped in his own mind. Being completely solipsistic is dangerous because, "As Pater says, 'that exaggerated inwardness is barren' because it 'withdraws us too far from what we can see, hear, and feel,' because it cheats the senses and the emotions of their triumph" (Bloom 37).

difference: “Adam sees Eve as quite different in mind and body from himself” (91). Satan fails to differentiate Sin from himself, and instead sees her as an image of him. Adam succeeds where Satan fails, then, both because he accepts God’s narration of the creation of Eve,²⁸ and because he sees Eve as an entity separate from his own body.

The word given in naming is at times a direct correlation with the meaning or the Truth of the thing named: both Sin and Death’s True identity is captured in their name.

Sin explains that when:

I fled, and cried out, “Death!”
Hell trembled at the hideous name and sighed
From all her caves, and back resounded “Death!”
(2.787-9.)

The connection between making and language²⁹ is made over and over throughout the poem. Sin, to Satan, says: “Thou art my father, thou my author” (2.864). The idea that language is life giving is expressed in Milton’s *Areopagitica*. Milton says:

For books are not absolutely dead things, but do contain a potency of life
in them to be as active as that soul was whose progeny they are; nay they
do preserve as in vial the purest efficacy and extraction of that living
intellect that bred them. (342)

There is the existence in the text of two competing theories. Through Satan, language’s ability to craft worlds is problematized. The naming of Sin and Death exposes language’s ability to convey absolute truth.

²⁸ Adam’s account of Eve’s creation is a paraphrase of one of the Biblical accounts of Eve’s creation. The angelic account of Eve’s creation takes the other biblical story of her genesis into account.

²⁹ A Poet in Milton’s time was called a maker, derived from the Greek *Poienin*, *poesis*, or making.

The clearest example of Satan's words being the harbinger of his own doom is the recurring transformation of Satan into a serpent. The first instance is a disguise with which to safely approach and so seduce Eve. He chooses the guise of a serpent because of its "wit and native subtlety," suggesting its very created nature is conducive to Satan's purpose (9.93). Satan, returning triumphant to Hell, knows he is doomed, but chooses to believe that his punishment will occur in the future. Instead, he is punished immediately:

So having said, a while stood expecting
Their universal shout and high applause
To fill his ear when contrary he hears
On all sides from innumerable tongues
A dismal universal hiss, the sound
Of public scorn. He wondered not but long
Had leisure, wond'ring at himself now more:
His visage drawn he felt to sharp and spare,
His arms clung to his ribs, his legs entwining
Each other till supplanted down he fell
A monstrous serpent on his belly prone
Reluctant but in vain: a greater pow'r
Now ruled him, punished in the shape he sinned
According to his doom. He would have spoke
But hiss for hiss returned with forked tongue
To forked tongue, for now all were transformed

Alike to serpents, as all accessories

To his bold riot. (10.504-521)

It would be simple to read Satan's second transformation into a serpent as a change wrought by God, but Satan is transformed in this scene because of his misuse of language:

And the dire hiss renewed and the dire form

Catched by contagion, like in punishment

As in their crime. Thus was th' applause they meant

Turned to exploding hiss, triumph to shame

Cast on themselves from their own mouths.

(10. 543-47 emphasis mine)

The punishment scene of the devils makes the point to show their words turning back on them. The hiss of their tongues is the shame their words bring upon them. This is a punishment earned and brought upon themselves. God does not have to interfere to dole out this punishment, because the devils, using their words to seem as they are not, ultimately become so entrapped in their world of false words that they lose control of their transformations. God allows Satan to seduce man, because (as Satan comes to realize): "Revenge at first though sweet/ Bitter ere long back on itself recoils" (9.171-2). Satan is released from the adamantine chains of physical punishment³⁰, because Satan's lies, and therefore his language, functions as a prison³¹. Satan "inscribes in himself the

³⁰ "the external power may throw off its physical weigh; it tends to the non-corporeal" (Foucault 203).

³¹ "Hence the major effect of the Panopticon: to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power. So to arrange things that the surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action; that the perfection of power should tend to

power relation which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection” (Foucault 203). Satan’s lies do not escape their original truths by dissembling, they simply point to those truths by standing in opposition to them. It is dangerous to lie in *Paradise Lost*, because with each language, the word calls that into being, so if Satan was successful, he could create a new world. If God and the Son did not intercede in Man’s defense, Satan would have succeeded in creating a new ever Fallen world with naught but his influential words to Eve. Milton, long before Nietzsche, or the Modernists, saw the possibility that words themselves could shape the world.

render its actual exercise unnecessary...in short, that the inmates should be caught up in a power situation of which they are themselves the bearers” (Foucault 201).

Chapter III

Mediating between the Mutable and the Immutable: Milton's Language Theory

“[I]t should be understood that there is not just a single sense in this work: it might rather be called polysemous, that is, having several senses. For the first is that which is contained in the letter, while there is another which is contained in what is signified by the letter” (Dante Alighieri 99).

Milton's theory of language seems quite paradoxical. He neither believes language only points to an essence or truth, nor does he believe language is an arbitrary system of signs used by humans to impose meaning upon their world. Instead, Milton blends the two theories, becoming a bridge between the Idealist system of language and that of what will be Friedrich Nietzsche's. Milton's theory brings together the two because he believes there is absolute Truth accessible through language:³² the knowledge of God, yet acknowledges that language can be used to dissemble and create personal versions of the world. Milton finds polysemy and ornamentation in language dangerous when used for purposes contrary to God, and since language is immensely malleable, there is always the danger of it being used contrary to God's will. Satan errs because he goes awry when he manipulates language. Satan attempts to treat God as merely an option, or convention. Satan, like linguistic theorists in Nietzsche's camp, believe truth is merely a convention. Nietzsche says:

that which is to count as 'truth' from this point onwards now becomes fixed, I.e. a way of designating things is invented which has the same validity and force everywhere, and the legislation of language also produces the first law of truth, for the contract between truth and lying

³² Milton, says Truth is "Left only in those written records pure," referring to the Bible (12.513)

comes into existence for the first time: the liar uses the valid tokens of designation-words-to make the unreal appear to be real; he say, for example, 'I am rich', whereas the correct designation for his condition would be, precisely, 'poor'. He misuses the established conventions.

(Nietzsche 876)

For Milton, God is the Truth, and any language that is not primarily consecrated to signifying this is destructive, and leads to the Fall. To separate language from its divine authority is to subvert the very signifying power of language itself and when the subversion of language subverts the authority of God, lying has dire consequences. Satan experiences these consequences when he mistakes God's seat of power as little more than custom. He says:

But he who reigns

Monarch in Heav'n till then as once secure

Sat on His throne upheld by old repute,

Consent or custom (1.637-40).

Satan fails to proscribe to Milton's theory, that God is not a concept created of custom, but the ultimate Truth.

At first, my argument that Satan's words are the cause of his self-imprisonment would seem to suggest that Milton agrees with Sprat, who, in 1667, writes *The History of the Royal-Society in London*, calling for "a great Reformation in the manner of [England's] speaking and writing" (112). Sprat believes the Royal society of London must: "set a mark on the ill Words, correct those which are to be retain'd, admit and

establish the good, and make some emendations in the Accent and Grammar” (114).

Sprat goes so far as to say:

The ill effects of this superfluity of talking have already overwhelm'd most other *Arts* and *Professions*, insomuch that when I consider the means of *happy living* and the causes of their corruption, I can hardly forbear recanting what I said before, and concluding that *eloquence* ought to be banish'd out of all *civil Societies*, as a thing fatal to Peace and good Manners. (116)

My argument is not, however, simply to place Milton along side of Sprat. Though Milton may agree with Sprat that eloquence is dangerous, Milton, vehemently against censorship³³, would not approve of banishing words. Instead, he may simply wish to warn against believing all that one hears. This warning would have been particularly relevant for Milton's readers during a time of zealous religious proselytizing. Peter A. Fiore states:

The years between 1600 and 1675 were heavy in pulpit influences. The Puritan preachers held the ear of England, and their zealous, articulate, and learned sermons directed the lives of many a scholar, poet, and Stuart Englishman. (2)

³³ In his paper, "Areopagitica," Milton writes that books are: "are as lively, and as vigorously productive as those fabulous dragon's teeth; and being sown up and down, may chance to spring up armed men. And yet, on the other hand, unless wariness be used, as good almost kill as man as kill a good book. Who kills a man kill a reasonable creature, God's image; but he who destroys a good book, kills reason itself, kills the image of God, as I were in the eye" (342).

The puritan preachers, however, “professed to scorn all authority but the bible,” and for Milton, if their eloquence were used to teach the bible, it would be rightly used (2).

Milton shares Sprat’s opinion that the conflict of knowledge in the seventeenth century is a conflict fought with words and language style. Sprat and Milton, knowing this, share uneasiness over the ability of language to be manipulated by mal-intentioned orators.

Milton does not go so far as to agree with Sprat that certain words should be eliminated from the English language. He would, however, sympathize with Sprat’s statement that the intent of words can be for good or evil. Sprat says he would support a ban on eloquence, except:

[eloquence] is a Weapon which may be as easily procur’d by *bad* men as *good*, and that, if these should onely cast it away, and those retain it, the *naked Innocence* of vertue would be upon all occasions expos’d to the *armed Malice* of the wicked. (116)

Sprat believes adornment is not only for the wicked, and Milton mobilizes this concept in his poem.

Milton is aware that manipulating the polysemous ability of language can make falsity seem true. Satan, who uses the nature of language to dissemble, is abusing the flexibility of language in a way that Milton finds extremely dangerous. Belial, one of Satan’s troops, also has Satan’s flaw; he speaks contrary to reason:

He seemed
For dignity composed and high exploit,
But all was false and hollow; though his tongue

Dropp'd manna, and could make the worse appear
The better reason, to perplex and dash
Maturest counsels. (2.110-115)

That words can be “hollow” in Hell is extremely telling, and proved that Milton does not follow a strictly idealist view of language. George William Smith, in his “Iterative Rhetoric in *Paradise Lost*,” makes the astute observation that:

Iteration is only slightly more frequent in the speeches which tempt Eve, where...Satan is trying to distract her from her faulty logic by his intense and pleasing iteration, than in his soliloquies, where he has no need for such distractions” (Smith 7).

What he doesn't see, however, is that Satan, in his soliloquies, is attempting to persuade himself that his course is correct.

Milton does not lose faith in language's ability to point to truth, however, if the intention of the reader or speaker is to worship, as he believes the Bible is a reliable source of Truth and is the Word of God³⁴ and *Paradise Lost* itself includes characters other than Satan who ornament their language. These characters do not suffer the same fate as Satan because they ornament their language to make the telling of the truth beautiful, rather than to disguise lies. Smith argues that: “Recent studies have concluded that Milton indulges in iterative displays in *Paradise Lost* for the purposes of decorating the blank verse, miming the Logos, embellishing ritual, and concealing truth” (1).

³⁴ “In 1644, he published “*Areopagitica*,” his defense of free speech, declaring that truth—which he compares to the broken body of Osiris, in Egyptian myth—can never be wholly known on earth until the Second Coming of the Messiah; we therefore must all search for truth in every way we can, which means not censoring the press. For Milton, the great trial of life was to discover truth through error, but without falling off the path of good.” (Rosen)

Smith's own argument denies this premise; he goes on to argue that characters in *Paradise Lost* use iterative language for different purposes. He says:

the speeches in which the frequency of iteration is highest should be devoted entirely or in large part to Milton's core argument. This is the case. (7)

The core argument he refers to is the "justification of God's ways" (8). The iterative nature of Father and Son's speeches are higher than even Satan's, therefore, because they are Milton's attempt to justify God's ways. Ornamenting language, therefore, is not simply the tool of Satan; Milton, through the rhetorical language of God and the Son, is trying to convince his reader that God's ways are just.

After falling, with the knowledge of good and evil, Milton wanted his readers to be presented with both and to choose with the full knowledge of the arguments of both sides. God, the son, and the un-fallen Angels all offer a way of using ornamented language for good:

The Angel ended, and in Adam's ear
So charming left his voice, that he a while
Thought him still speaking, still stood fix'd to hear
(8.1-3)

Similarly, the torturous predicament Satan forces himself to experience: a Hell within himself, can be reversed. If Adam is faithful, he will gain "A paradise within" (12.587) Ultimately, Satan's greatest sin is trying to replace the word of God with his own.

Some may find Milton's desire to justify God blasphemous, and argue that there is no need for human's to question³⁵ God's intentions, nor seek Truth. Milton's poem, at one point even seems to suggest this when Adam is warned that some things are beyond human knowledge. Raphael tells Adam, however, that his questions will be answered, "if else though seek'st/Aught, not surpassing human measure, say" (7.639-40). Raphael warns Adam not to try and learn more than he is capable of understanding, but agrees to explain certain aspects of God's plan. Even in a prelapsarian state, therefore, Adam was allowed to question, but with the intent of better worshiping God. Adam and Eve were supposed to have faith and only desire more information, not to question the information they were given. Hence, when Eve preferences the serpent's narrative of why not to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge over the narrative she is given by God, she fails as Satan fails: not simply disobeying, but choosing the wrong reading of the law.

³⁵ One such Critic is Katherine Morse, argues that: "Milton discourages the inductive process" and Morse argues that he is in opposition to "all of Bacon's teaching as to inquiry into the secrets of Nature with a view to solving her perplexities" (153).

Conclusion

Clinging to the Idea of Absolute Truth

“They trespass, authors to themselves in all” (Milton 3.122).

Milton mobilizes Satan in order to critique rhetorical language, and argues that language can only be “true” when it conforms to God’s will. Milton uses Satan to show the epistemological shift towards defining the self without first supposing oneself to be a creation of God. The concept of human, language, and truth are all questioned through Milton’s Satan, and he seeks to return God to the central role of concept maker. In *Paradise Lost*, the traditional role of the orator hero is torn down, but the power of language is not only stigmatized; Milton’s language theory manages to cling to the idea of absolute Truth in an age of slipping and shifting roles³⁶. Milton provides his readers not just with a warning of the dangers of language, but points out that though the world may be turning upside down³⁷; one’s existence is not in peril if only one can cling to the God’s Truth. Milton makes language and faith a life and death struggle, where the misguided, as Satan, punish themselves by losing not only God, but also knowledge and themselves. The Fallen can only ever write of their Fallenness, and as God says of them: “They trespass, authors to themselves in all” (3.122). With a language turned inwards,

³⁶ Christopher Rosen reminds us that: “It is difficult for a modern reader to parse the intertwined worlds of politics and religion that Milton inhabited and that led to those wars. His father had been disinherited for rejecting the family’s Catholic faith in favor of Protestantism, but, in England, where Henry VIII had brought about the Protestant Reformation, in the fifteen-thirties, for the purpose of remarrying, the lines between faith, political conviction, and personal expediency were particularly thin. By Milton’s time, further schisms had emerged. With Charles I at its head, Anglican Protestantism became increasingly ceremonial and High Church, spreading fear of Papist resurgence and increasing the power of certain key bishops. Milton, like many of his contemporaries, moved toward Puritanism, attracted by its idea that the Bible was the ultimate authority and trumped all institutional hierarchies. Milton was particularly well equipped to follow this line. He could read the Hebrew Bible in the original and had absorbed aspects of rabbinic culture; indeed, his Hebraism helped radicalize his Christian beliefs.” (“Return”)

³⁷ I am here alluding to the Title of Christopher Hill’s book quoted earlier in my paper: *The World Turned Upside Down*.

they cannot save themselves through a connection to God (3.122). Ultimately, Milton's poem is the artistic rendering of the journey and salvation of the soul through making the choice to use language for worship, making Milton himself the new ideal hero.

Works Cited:

- Addison, Joseph. "Spectator." *Paradise Lost*. Gordon Tesky, Ed. New York: W.W. Norton and Co, 2005.
- Augustine. *Confessions*. Trans. Henry Chadwick. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998
- Alighieri, Dante. "The Letter to Can Grande." *Literary Criticism of Dante Alighieri*.
Trans. Robert S. Haller, Ed. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1973.
- Blake, William. *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell. William Blake's Writings, vol. 1*.
G.E. Bentley, Jr. Ed. Oxford: Clarendon, 1978.
- Bloom, Harold. "Coleridge: The Anxiety of Influence." Diacritics. 2.1 (Spring
1972): 36-41. The Johns Hopkins University Press. JSTOR. Florida Atlantic
University Lib., Jupiter. 3 May 2009 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/464923>>
- Chambers, A.B. "The Mind is its Own Place: Paradise Lost, I. 253-255." Renaissance
News. 16. 2 (Summer, 1963): 98-101. The University of Chicago Press on behalf
of the Renaissance Society of America. JSTOR. Florida Atlantic University Lib.,
Jupiter. 13 January 2009 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2857800>>
- Coleman, Parsons O. "The Classical and Humanist Context of Paradise Lost, II"
Journal of the History of Ideas. 29. 1 (Jan-Mar, 1968): 33-52. University of
Pennsylvania Press. JSTOR. Florida Atlantic University Lib., Jupiter. 13 January
2009 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2708464>>
- Collett, Johnathan H. "Milton's Use of Classical Mythology in 'Paradise Lost.'"

PMLA, 85.1 (Jan., 1970): 88-96. Modern Language Association. JSTOR. Florida Atlantic University Lib., Jupiter. 13 January 2009

<www.jstor.org/stable/1261434>

Descartes, Rene. *Discourse on the Method of Conducting One's Reason Well and for Seeking Truth in the Sciences*. Indiana: Hackett Publishing Co, inc., 1998.

Fiore, Peter A. *Milton and Augustine: Patterns of Augustinian Thought in Paradise Lost*. University Park: The Pennsylvania University Press, 1981.

Fish, Stanley E. *Surprised by Sin: The Reader in Paradise Lost*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971.

Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish*. New York, Vintage Books: 1995.

Geoffrey of Vinsauf. "Ornaments of Style." *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. William E. Cain et. all, Eds. New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 2001.

Herman, Peter C. "Paradise Lost, the Miltonic "Or," and the Poetics of Incertitude." *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*. 43.1 (Winter, 2003): 181-211. Rice University. JSTOR. Florida Atlantic University Lib., Jupiter. 13 Jan 2009
<<http://www.jstor.org/stable/4625063>>

Hill, Christopher. *The World Turned Upside Down*. London: Penguin Books, 1975.

Levi, Peter. *Eden Renewed: The Public and Private Life of John Milton*. St. Martin's Press, New York, 1996.

Lewalski, Barbara K. *The Life of John Milton*. Blackwell Publishing, 2003, Malden MA.

Lewis, C.S. "Satan." *Milton Modern Essays in Criticism*. Arthur E. Barker. Ed.

- Oxford University Press, London, 1968.
- McMahon, Robert. *The Two Poets of Paradise Lost*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998.
- Milton, John. *Paradise Lost*. Gordon Tesky, Ed. New York: W.W. Norton and Co, 2005.
- Milton, John. "Areopagitica." *Paradise Lost*. Gordon Tesky, Ed. New York: W.W. Norton and Co, 2005.
- Murrin, Michael. "The Language of Milton's Heaven." Modern Philology. 74.4 (May, 1977): 350-365. The University of Chicago Press. JSTOR. Florida Atlantic University Lib., Jupiter. 13 Jan 2009 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/436914>>
- Morse, Katherine. "Milton's Ideas of Science as Shown in 'Paradise Lost.'" The Scientific Monthly. 10. 2 (Feb., 1920): 150-156. American Association for the Advancement of Science. JSTOR. Florida Atlantic University Lib., Jupiter. 6 March 2009 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/6806>>
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. "On Truth and Lying in a non Moral Sense." The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism. William E. Cain et. all, Eds. New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 2001.
- The Norton Anthology of English Literature Online. "The Early Seventeenth Century." <http://www.wwnorton.com/college/english/nael/17century/topic_2/welcome.htm>
- Rajan, Balachandra. "The Problem of Satan." *Paradise Lost*. Gordon Tesky, Ed. New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 2005.
- Rosen, Jonathan. "Return to Paradise: The enduring relevance of John Milton."

The New Yorker. 2 June 2008. 20 March 2009.

<http://www.newyorker.com/arts/critics/atlarge/2008/06/02/080602crat_atlarge_rosen?currentPage=all>

Schwartz, Louis. "'Conscious Terrors': Seventeenth-Century Obstetrics and Milton's Allegory of Common Sin in *Paradise Lost*, Book 2." *Arenas of Conflict: Milton and the Unfettered Mind*. Eds. Kristin Pruitt McColgan and Charles W. Durham. Cranbury, NJ: Susquehanna University Press, 1997: 212-26.

Sprat, Thomas. *The History of the Royal-Society in London*. Montana: Kessinger Publishing Co, 2003.

Smith, George William "Iterative Rhetoric in *Paradise Lost*." Modern Philology. 74.2 (Aug., 1976): 1-19. The University of Chicago Press. JSTOR. Florida Atlantic University Lib., Jupiter. 13 January 2009
<<http://www.jstor.org/stable/436086>>

Turner, Alice K. *The History of Hell*. Orlando: Harcourt Brace and Co., 1995.

Waldock, A.J.A "Satan and the Technique of Degradation." *Milton: Paradise Lost A Collection of Critical Essays*. Louis L. Martz, Ed. Englewood Cliff, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1966.

Wallerstein, Nicholas. "'The Copious Matter of My Song': A Study of Theology and Rhetoric in Milton's 'Paradise Lost' and 23rd Sonnet." Pacific Coast Philology, 30.1 (1995): 42-58. Pacific Ancient and Modern Language Association. JSTOR. JSTOR. Florida Atlantic University Lib., Jupiter. 13 January 2009
<<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1316818>>

Whiting, George Wesley. *Milton and This Pendant World*. University of Texas,
Austin, 1958.

Wilde, Oscar. *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 2006.