‘I sing’? Narrative Technique in Epic Poetry

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Word Count: 79,909
Abbreviations and Standard Editions

Place of publication is London, unless otherwise stated. Quotations from pre-1900 sources have had their spelling, punctuation, and capitalisation modernised, except in cases where to do so would remove important nuance (as, for example, in the case of Spenser’s deliberate archaisms). Dates are given as they appear on the text in question. Bible quotations or references are KJV, unless stated.

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<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>ANB</td>
<td><em>American National Biography</em> [<a href="http://www.anb.org">www.anb.org</a>]</td>
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<td>DNB</td>
<td><em>Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</em> [<a href="http://www.oxforddnb.com">www.oxforddnb.com</a>]</td>
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<tr>
<td>Iliad, Od</td>
<td>Homer, <em>Iliad</em> and <em>Odyssey</em>, trans. by George Chapman (Ware, Herts.: Wordsworth, 2000)</td>
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<td>OED</td>
<td><em>Oxford English Dictionary</em> [<a href="http://www.oed.com">www.oed.com</a>]</td>
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<td>PR</td>
<td>John Milton, <em>Paradise Regained in MCSP</em></td>
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## Journal Abbreviations

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<td>CW</td>
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<td>ELH</td>
<td>English Literary History</td>
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<td>ELR</td>
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<td>HLQ</td>
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<td>JHI</td>
<td>Journal of the History of Ideas</td>
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<td>JWI</td>
<td>Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes</td>
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<td>MLN</td>
<td>Modern Language Notes</td>
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<td>PMLA</td>
<td>Publications of the Modern Language Association of America</td>
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<td>RES</td>
<td>Review of English Studies</td>
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<td>RQ</td>
<td>Renaissance Quarterly</td>
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<td>SEL</td>
<td>Studies in English Literature 1500-1900</td>
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<td>SP</td>
<td>Studies in Philology</td>
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<td>TSLL</td>
<td>Texas Studies in Literature and Language</td>
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<td>YWES</td>
<td>Year's Work in English Studies</td>
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This thesis examines the genre of epic, and particularly Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. It argues that it is only in attending to the contextual interactions within *Paradise Lost* that its full meaning can be comprehended. It demonstrates that the poem not only narrates the Fall, but actively performs its consequences in its thematic and linguistic structures, which continually stress the impossibility of approaching perfect (divine) totality.

Chapter one outlines the theoretical response to epic, read as a petrified genre in contrast to the newness, openness and linguistic flexibility of the novel. It then challenges these assumptions through a reading of the invocation to book III of *Paradise Lost*. The chapter closes by examining seventeenth-century writings on epic, demonstrating that Milton’s contemporaries saw the epic as defined by the possibility of didactic intervention into its context.

Chapter two examines the forms of the epic metaphor, which serve as a temporal link between the ‘mythic’ past of epic and contemporary events. It then shows that the nationalistic impulse of epic was a method by which the mythic past of a country was deployed as an exemplary narrative for the present. The chapter closes by considering the ways in which shifts in national conception were mapped onto the epic.

Chapter three outlines *Paradise Lost*’s thematic engagement with the concept of representation. It focuses on the twin images of the music of the spheres and the Tower of Babel, used in *Paradise Lost* to represent man’s relationship with God. It argues that the poem uses these tropes to explore the linguistic effects of the Fall. Both these images are deployed to suggest that postlapsarian expression is too open and ambiguous to properly portray divinity.

Chapter four moves that discussion to a linguistic level, arguing that the poem is characterised by indeterminacy. It argues that *Paradise Lost* calls into question the possibility of expressing perfect truth in fractured, postlapsarian language. It shows that punning is the mark of fallen creatures in the poem, and suggests that the poem’s own puns exploit this category to linguistically question its own status as representation through performances of ambiguity.

The conclusion synthesises these local readings of *Paradise Lost* into a reading of the poem as a whole. It argues that these individual instances demonstrate the poem’s continual reflexive concern over its theodicean project. By continually expressing ambiguity, at the level of imagery and language, *Paradise Lost* draws attention to its status as postlapsarian art, and the consequent impossibility of approaching the divine perfection exemplified by the celestial music or prelapsarian language.
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Declaration

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Acknowledgements

I wish most of all to thank my supervisor, Jerome de Groot. His enthusiasm was infectious, and his support (both professional and personal) ensured the project ran as successfully as it possibly could. His breadth of knowledge and perceptive critique are manifest throughout this thesis. Any failings that remain are doubtless the consequence of failing to follow his advice.

Jackie Pearson sat on my research panel throughout, always offering remarkably detailed and useful feedback which improved my work immeasurably. Naomi Baker and Chloe Porter sat on early panels, and their comments were important in the initial shaping of the project. Dani Caselli’s perceptive suggestions helped give shape to the conclusion. Estelle Haan and David Matthews and examined this thesis, and I am grateful for their sage advice about this project and my future work. Alan Gleave taught me long ago that loving literature was an end in itself, which remains with me still. The staff at the John Rylands, Bodleian and British Libraries were always patient and helpful.

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Finally, I owe a great deal to my family, without whose love and encouragement I could never have embarked on this project. My greatest debt is to my grandfather, whose unselfish and unstinting support, of every type, makes my work possible. My dedication is scant recompense for his own.
To my Grandfather
Introduction

Jorge Luis Borges’s short story ‘Averroës’ Search’ tells of a medieval Islamic translator of Aristotle, who struggles over the words ‘tragedy’ and ‘comedy’, since they have no equivalence in (twelfth-century) Arabic. The story is presented as a series of dramatic ironies, since Averroës repeatedly comes ‘tantalisingly close to success – it is as if he had only to reach out and grasp it – while we in the audience know it, and he never does’.¹ He attends a dinner party at which a merchant, newly returned from China, asks the guests (who have never heard of a play or theatre) to imagine a performance in which ‘someone shows a story instead of telling it […] They spoke and sang and gave long boring speeches!’² The other guests fail to understand the merchant’s story, presenting in a comic moment the (potential) futility of attempting intercultural understanding that underpins all of Borges’s narrative, since the interpreter ‘fails to comprehend [tragedy and comedy] fully because he lacks a certain fundamental conceptual category’.³

Critics of Borges’ cuento are united in seeing the incidents that Averroës encounters (the schoolchildren acting out the call to prayer, the discussion of theatre) as ironic moments because they read them as illuminations only of the titular character’s linguistic dilemma. Yet the close of the merchant’s story has much broader implications. The host interrupts the description of the theatre to point out how unnecessary the act of dramatic performance actually is:

“In that case,” said Faraj, “there was no need for twenty persons. A single speaker could tell anything, no matter how complex it might be.” To that verdict, they all gave their nod. (p. 239)

Faraj’s interjection raises the question not just of intercultural interchange, but of the very value of speech itself, since his confident assertion has the effect of collapsing literature to mere narrative, effectively excluding or eliding the impact of genre upon a text. The superfluity of drama suggested by Faraj negates the illocutionary act of speech; his assumption rests upon the idea that literature must have a direct purpose, the reverse of Terry Eagleton’s assertion that ‘[t]he story is not there to give us factual information, but to deliver what one might call a moral truth’.  

Faraj – and the other guests – ignore the value not just of the ‘moral truth’ (the ideology of a society), but the value of the ‘delivery’ itself.  

Borges’s imaginary recounting is an ironic gesture, but the irony is not just contained to Averroës. Rather, the text is inviting us to laugh at the absurdity of the two genres being placed in such stark contrast. The irony does not solely stem from our comfortable position of familiarity with drama, since in the comparison we see the absurdity of defining a text solely by the number of voices, as if all voices in a text were equivalent, and all had the sole purpose of exposition. Here Borges anticipates Beckett’s plaintive question, ‘What matter who’s speaking, someone said what matter who’s speaking’.  

It matters (as Borges’s reader is invited to understand), because each of those voices performs a speech-act that contributes, but is by no means homogenously constitutive of, the whole text; that is, each of the speakers functions alongside, and only alongside, each of the others, and the text is constructed from those (sometimes complementary, sometimes competitive) interactions.  

It is a fundamental tenet of post-structuralism that every utterance (iteration, text) is a ‘tissue of quotations’ which ‘blend and clash’, and that these quotations, fragments of previous signs, are given meaning only in their interaction.  

Similarly, Derrida extends Lévi-Strauss’s concept of the bricoleur (a mythic, highly flexible figure who adapts his methodology and

assumptions based on the material available) into the realm of textuality, arguing that ‘every finite discourse is bound by a certain bricolage’. 7 That is, all modes of signification are constructed from already existing fragments, which derive meaning solely from their relationship to one another (as codified in the moment of writing). It follows, then, that there can be no such thing as a singular speaker, since every text is consumed by the language even as it is created, in a system of displacement and deferrals which has no origin and no end. The speaker/author thus becomes one of many signs within a text, open to the same hermeneutic play as any of the other constitutive signs, so that

neither the first person pronoun, the present indicative tense, nor, for that matter, its signs of localization, refer directly to the writer, either to the time when he wrote or the specific act of writing; rather, they stand for a “second self” whose similarity to the author is never fixed and undergoes considerable alteration in the course of a single book. 8

The process of discourse, then, subsumes the ‘author’ into the system of signs which is by necessity anonymous (or at least refuses to permanently fix identity). The ‘I’ of a text can only be read within the system of signification in which it is placed, upon which signs it acts and is itself acted upon. Foucault’s ‘second self’ resists a simple biographical exegesis, because it recognises that the ‘I’ represented in literature need not (in fact, never could) work as a direct substitution for a living person.

The textual ‘I’, in fact, denotes a range of performative states, necessary at their individual moments in the text, but not necessarily cohesive or coherent with one another. These states do not give the work authority, or history, or a defined meaning, but rather mark it as

a performative, a rare verbal form (exclusively given in the first person and in the present tense) in which the enunciation has no other content (contains no other

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proposition) than the act by which it is uttered – something like the *I declare* of kings, or the *I sing* of very ancient poets.

The text, then, is always performance, never ‘recording, notation [or] representation’, and so the bold declarative of ‘I sing’ has the focus not on the ‘I’ but on the ‘singing’;¹ The ‘I’ (reaching back to the very beginning of oral composition and recitation of epic) is not any particular poet, but the voice(s) of an entire culture singing their mythopoetic history as one. The ‘I’ becomes a part of language and history simultaneously, inseparable from the two collectives that inform the poem.

This question (who is speaking/singing?) forms the basis of this thesis, which demonstrates (primarily though readings of *Paradise Lost*) that epic, like any other text, is subject to linguistic, historical and social (in other words, cultural) influences that cannot be identified solely with reference to the author. It contends that epic does not simply participate in a self-referential tradition of timeless literature: *Iliad* to *Odyssey* to *Aeneid* to *Commedia* to *Faerie Queene* to *Paradise Lost*. Rather, it is powerfully motivated and influenced by the cultural moment of its production, drawing (and commenting on) on contemporary concerns, debates and knowledge. This thesis will show that *Paradise Lost*, even at the moments which seem most intensely personal, is in fact universal, resonant not with the voice of the author-bard, but an entire *episteme*.¹⁰ *Paradise Lost* is the product of a culture that searched for the lost language of Babel; that wrote of music – heavenly and earthly – that could never be performed or heard; that found New Worlds that defied description; that struggled vainly against the multiplicity of the sign. In its rich ambiguity, *Paradise Lost* is

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¹⁰ The term is Foucault’s, denoting ‘the total set of relations that unite, at a given period, the discursive practices that give rise to epistemological figures, sciences, and possibly formalized figures […] it is the totality of relations that can be discovered’, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. by A. M. Sheridan-Smith (Abingdon: Routledge Classics, 2002), p. 211. Though Foucault uses the term specifically of the history of science, my use of the term will extend it to cover all the (potential) discursive practices of a particular culture at a particular time, not least because Foucault locates the emergence of specifically ‘scientific’ discourse significantly later than the seventeenth century (see p.114, below). The term is therefore used throughout in the sense of the possible discursive practices of a culture, and the relationships between those practices at any given time.
no less than the seventeenth century’s foremost inscription of the traumatic discovery of the limits of representation.

David Norbrook has convincingly argued that the Renaissance text did not represent the precise thoughts of its author, and so ‘[c]oncentrating on the sincere personality which is held to underlie the texts obstructs proper recognition of their role in the sphere of public discourse’.¹¹ For Norbrook, the text’s ‘role’ is to engage with (sometimes in a violent rejection of) the open-ended aestheticization of political questions; poetry performs, highlights, and questions (or supports) the power relations implicit within all language and discursive practice.

This thesis will, in key ways, follow Norbrook’s methodology. Though it will be less concerned with the political implications of a particular speech act, it will take as a starting point the idea that a text is the iteration, or performance (which includes challenge and dissent), of values implicit in the language of the culture that produces it. Here, of course, there is a large overlap with New Historicism, which began with the principle that ‘[s]ocial actions are themselves always embedded in systems of public signification, always grasped, even by their makers, in acts of interpretation’ and so literature is ‘the manifest assurance of a similar embeddedness’.¹² Norbrook’s work, though, is concerned less with dissenting individuation than Greenblatt’s. Norbrook’s focus, instead, is on shifts at the wider social scale, and so society (and, indeed, historical periods themselves) are presented as much more open to flux than Renaissance Self-Fashioning might allow; however, both critics perceive that the literary text is shaped by the episteme with which it engages.

Having demonstrated in the first chapter that this holds true for epic, the remainder of the thesis will focus on a historically inclined study of Paradise Lost’s engagement with its episteme. The second chapter examines the epic simile, arguing that it is a temporal dislocation: not the realm of ‘myth’ or classical legend, but rather a temporally aware

construction that speaks insistently to the moment of composition. The
metaphors of trade and colonialism in *Paradise Lost*, *The Faerie Queene*
and *Os Lusíadas* are examined in their historical context to demonstrate
the ambiguity they import into the text. The third chapter examines the
depiction of music within *Paradise Lost*, arguing that the poem is informed
by the (musical and scientific) discourse of the music of the spheres.
Rather than simply reflecting current beliefs, however, the epic
appropriates them to its own project, using the divine music as a recurring
trope to signify humanity’s fall away from God. The final chapter examines
the linguistic consequences of the Fall, arguing that Satan’s rebellion is
(at least partly) a contest over language: the indeterminacy of language is
both a cause and a consequence of a move away from God. Throughout
this thesis, the central point will be that the creative tension of *Paradise
Lost* stems from ambiguity, that it actively resists a definitive
interpretation, and in doing so demonstrates (in literary form) the
consequences of the Fall it depicts.

The assumption that epic must conform to generic boundaries,
preconceptions or stereotypes is thus called into question, for it relies on a
conception of genre as a fixed point, an immutable style to which new
texts must conform. This is a sharp distinction from the work of Quentin
Skinner, which, despite its highly influential delineation of the text as
speech-act, nonetheless argues that

some other form of study besides that of reading the text
itself ‘over and over’ must be indispensable to an
understanding of it. And it seems that this will at least need
to take the form of adding a study of the general conventions
and assumptions of the genre, from which the intentions of
any particular contributor to it may then – by a combination
of influence and scholarship – be decoded.\(^\text{13}\)

The importance of genre on a literary work should not be completely
denied; the second half of the first chapter examines in some detail the

\(^{13}\) Quentin Skinner, “‘Social meaning’ and the explanation of social action’, in *Meaning
effect(s) of genre on early modern writers and critics. However, Skinner’s analysis depends upon ‘the general conventions and assumptions’ of genre being a commonly shared, historically stable category, which, as is shown in the first chapter of this thesis, was in the seventeenth century only the case at the very broadest (and therefore not critically useful) level: either these conventions were so worn that their inversions and appropriations were already themselves conventional (such as the invocation to a muse), or they were so vague as to apply to almost any text (such as the idea that an epic should instructively depict heroes of great morality). Skinner, like Norbrook and Greenblatt, does call for a greater contextual awareness of a text (beyond the New Critical practice of self-contained analysis), but this is only artificial, since it opens only to another closed system (genre), which maintains the same goal of recovering ‘the intentions of any particular contributor’. This thesis explicitly does not set out to recover Milton’s intentions, but rather to illuminate the ambiguities, difficulties and concerns that the text itself presents by placing it in dialogue with the context from which it emerges, and to show how those ambiguities themselves are a crucial component of the poem’s production of meaning.

We might conclude by returning to Borges to note that ‘A single speaker could tell anything’, except a story. And yet the *cuento* is subtler still, since for all our ironic laughter, we ultimately find ourselves in the same position as the traveller to China: when a story is being told, we can never truly know who is telling it.

**Epic, the Poet-prophet, and Historicism**

Epic poetry is traditionally read within its own generic boundaries. Perhaps because of its historic status as the most elevated of genres, epic has traditionally been read without the considerations of generic hybridity. Explicitly theorised by Bakhtin as a self-contained mode of writing, epic is engaged with as a genre whose only reference system is a kind of ‘golden chain’ of great epicists (within the Western tradition:
Homer, Vergil, Dante, Ariosto, Spenser and Milton) who exist primarily to interact with one another, and therefore outside of their own histories. Critics have all too often, whether consciously or not, adopted this Bakhtinian creed, and attempted interpretation by reading epic as only epic. Bruno Currie opens the work he co-edited by stating his intention to ‘establish what kind of interaction was possible between the Homeric poems and other early Greek epics’, which instantly establishes an agenda for a mode of scholarship based primarily around the epic interactions that form the title of the work.  

Bowra notes that ‘we can mark a whole class of literary epic, discern its special characteristics and consider it as a whole’. His work (as the title, From Virgil to Milton suggests), is concerned with tracing the influence of epic on other epics. Even Colin Burrow, whose work so successfully challenges many of the generic preconceptions surrounding epic, falls into this pattern. He attempts to ‘formulate an alternative way of looking at the tradition of epic poems deriving from Homer’, and while he achieves this goal, synthesising the traditional splitting of epic as a genre into ‘heroic’ and ‘romantic’ epics, he does not really attempt to move beyond a linear view, focusing solely on epic to the exclusion of its context.

Such a practice of reading ‘Milton’s’ epic started almost immediately after its publication, for the commendatory poems attached to the revised second edition of Paradise Lost praise the poem in terms of the ‘greatness’ of its author. This, of course, is not dissimilar to the standard view of epic poetry. Vergil, after all, had been celebrated through the Renaissance, and by both sides during the Civil Wars, as a literary genius as well as a prophet. This allowed Christian imagery to be read back into the Aeneid, as well as authorising the peculiar practice, of which

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15 C. M. Bowra, From Virgil to Milton (Macmillan, 1965), p. 11
17 Marvell’s ‘On Paradise Lost’ and Samuel B[arrow]’s In Paradisum Amissam. Dryden’s ‘Epigram’ was actually added to the fourth issue of the first edition (1668), though since the commendatory prefatory material is thematically unified, for convenience I will discuss it here as one group. References to these poems are taken from PL, and are given by line number in the text.
Charles I was – at least apocryphally – an advocate, of the Sortes Vergilianaes. It is within this tradition that Dryden and Barrow’s poems place Milton.

Dryden’s epigram clearly articulates a sense of an epic tradition stretching from Homer, through Vergil, to Milton. Homer is praised for his ‘loftiness of thought’, and Vergil his ‘majesty’, but Milton is read as the combination of these classical predecessors: ‘The force of nature could no further go: / To make a third she joined the former two’ (3-6). Similarly, Barrow’s In Paradisum Amissam reserves as its highest praise for Paradise Lost (‘mighty Milton’s noble poem’ [1-2]) a comparison with those same two classical poets: ‘Haec quicunque leget tantum cecinisse putabit/ Maeonidem ranas, Virgilium culices’ [Anyone who reads this poem will think Homer sang only of frogs, Virgil only of gnats] (41-2). Both Dryden and Barrow ultimately judge Paradise Lost by reference to its author’s place in the pantheon of great writers; such judgement reveals the implicitly author-driven mode of criticism to which they subscribe, since the highest praise they can imagine is to surpass Homer and Vergil.

Andrew Marvell’s commendatory poem outlines his own author-driven response to epic poetry. Joseph Wittreich has argued that Marvell’s poem goes beyond praise of Paradise Lost to become an ad hominem defence against ‘an audience that, antipathetic to Milton, would be unreceptive to his poem’. Marvell’s response to Paradise Lost relies upon the prophetic genius of Milton (the poet, not the radical); his poem is concerned with the anticipation, understanding, and then finally acceptance of the poet’s ‘vast design’, rather than the text of Paradise Lost itself.

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18 On the history of this practice, see Helen A. Loane, ‘The Sortes Vergilianaes’, CW, 24 (1928), 185-89.
19 Joseph Anthony Wittreich, Jr., ‘Perplexing the Explanation: On Mr. Milton’s Paradise Lost’, in Approaches to Marvell, ed. by C. A. Patrides (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), pp. 280 -305 (p. 298). Wittreich argues that this defence is manifested in a concerted attempt to remove radical politics from Paradise Lost, through, for example, the praise of the poet’s blindness (which Royalist opponents argued was divine punishment for rebellion).
20 Andrew Marvell, ‘On Paradise Lost’, in PL, p. 53, line 2. Further references are given by line number in the text.
Marvell’s initial position is that of scepticism, as he notes that Milton’s ‘argument / held me a while misdoubting his intent’ (5-6). Though *Paradise Lost* initially appears to dispel Marvell’s doubts, they are instantly replaced by further misgivings about the possibility of successfully completing such a massive undertaking: ‘Yet as I read, soon growing less severe / I liked his project, the success did fear’ (11-12). Shifflett reads these misgivings as ‘Marvell’s willingness to revise the generic conventions of commendatory verse by repeatedly straining praise through a sieve of doubt’, and seeks to locate Marvell’s strategy in Jonson’s encomium for Thomas May’s 1627 translation of Lucan’s *Pharsalia*.\(^{21}\) Shifflett finds in these shared doubts a rhetorical practice of ‘doubting and discrimination when reading another’s texts’ (809), and certainly both commendatory poems function by exploring the potential problems of construction and interpretation posed by the texts they celebrate. Jonson is concerned with the possibility that ‘at every line some pin therefore should crack/ at least, if not the general engine slack’;\(^{22}\) Marvell analogously expresses his fears that in *Paradise Lost* Milton might have ‘perplexed the things he would explain / And what was easy he would render vain’ (15-16).

Both Jonson and Marvell refigure these doubts in order to offer praise for the authors who are apparently able to keep these decentring impulses in check. Jonson praises both Lucan, for his ability to ‘keep due proportion in the ample song’, and May, whose translation is ‘so wrought / As not the smallest joint, or gentlest word / In the great mass, or machine there is stirred’ (20-22). So too Marvell praises Milton for his ability in judicious selection: ‘Thou hast not missed one thought that could be fit / and all that was improper dost omit’ (27-8). As Schifflett notes (p. 813-14),


\(^{22}\) Ben Jonson, ‘To my Chosen Friend, the Learned Translator of Lucan’, in Lucan, *Pharsalia*, trans. by Thomas May (1631) sig. a8r, l. 5-6. Further references are taken from this edition.
both Jonson and Marvell suggest that these creative acts are the result of divine communication, access or inspiration.

For Jonson, this is a fairly simple matter of identification and inspiration: Lucan is inspired by (‘taught by’) Phoebus and Hermes, with whom May is aligned by a pun on his surname (‘the son of May’ is a reference to Hermes’ mother Maia). However, Marvell’s depiction of Milton as ‘Tiresias’, compensated for his blindness with the gift of prophecy, is rooted in the conception of Milton as a unifying author-figure, for the device is borrowed from the very poem Marvell is commending. Marvell’s analogy depends on a reading of the invocation to book three that fully identifies the narrative voice with Milton: ‘So were I equalled with them in renown/ Blind Tharymis and blind Maeonides/ And Tiresias and Phineus prophets old’ (PL III.34-6). This invocation is discussed in more detail in the first chapter, where an alternative reading is presented, which does not rely on the individual figure of the blind poet, but sees the blind figures as everyman ciphers for the general failings of humanity.

Marvell’s reading of the narrative figure of Paradise Lost clearly articulates the poem as the work of a solitary genius (‘above human flight dost soar aloft’ [37]) divorced from any sense of mitigating contextual influence – nor is any further impact by the poem on its context possible (‘no room is here for writers left’ [29]). Thus, Paradise Lost’s treatment of the sacred actually serves only to leave it unchanged: ‘things divine thou treat’st of in such state/ as them preserves, and thee, inviolate’ (33-4). This reconfigures Marvell’s earlier fear that Milton’s poem would be sacrilegious, but paradoxically does so by stressing the separateness of the poem from its sacral context: both the ‘divine’ and the ‘poet’ have been ‘preserved’, left unchanged by the act of composition that is being praised: in effect, what is valuable about the poem is precisely that it is apart, unconnected to the context with which it engages. That fear had, of course, been expressed as the fear of a change in the recognition of the divine, casting Milton as a Samson who ‘would ruin (for I saw him strong)/ The sacred truths to fable and old song’ (7-8). Marvell’s reading of this unchanging nature points towards the revelatory aspect of the poet-
prophet figure: only a prophet can reveal the true Word, untainted by (and ultimately moving beyond) its worldly context.

The idea of the singular poetic genius persisted through to the Romantic and Victorian poets. Wordsworth’s appeal to the ‘holiest of Bards’ that he ‘should be living at this hour’, and Tennyson’s praise of Milton as the ‘mighty-mouth’d inventor of harmonies, / O skill’d to sing of Time or Eternity, / God-gifted organ-voice of England’, both reveal the effect that the poet-prophet figure (drawn, in the Anglophone tradition, largely from *Paradise Lost*) has had.\(^{23}\) This figure ‘develops from the analogy between God and the poet as creators and the related one between God’s creation (the universe) and the poet’s creation (his poem)’;\(^{24}\) poetry thus becomes an act of (quasi-) divine creation, and it is the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that allows Milton to be conceived as the poet-prophet of *Paradise Lost*.\(^ {25}\)

The Romantic conception of Milton as a solitary genius reinforces Marvell’s initial response to the poem. The figure of ‘Milton’ as an inspired prophet, immanent in his text, has stubbornly resisted the sweeping away of authorial certainty; if anything, Milton studies has become ‘one of the last holdouts against a deconstructive reading’, focusing instead on


historicist readings of the text, in which *Paradise Lost* and the career and thoughts of its author are inextricably intertwined.²⁶

Modern Milton criticism has — possibly in response to the attacks on Milton by Eliot and Leavis — tended to concentrate on the figure of the poet, so that all of the cultural influences or potential ambiguities of *Paradise Lost* are filtered through the life and career of its author. Eliot led the New Critics’ attacks on Milton (fuelled, entirely consciously, by ‘an antipathy to Milton the man’) at the level of style and language:

> Every distortion of construction, the foreign idiom, the use of a word in a foreign way or with the meaning of the foreign word from which it is derived rather than the accepted meaning in English, every idiosyncrasy is a particular act of violence which Milton has been the first to commit. There is no cliché, no poetic diction in the derogatory sense, but a perpetual sequence of original acts of lawlessness.²⁷

Though Eliot’s critique of Milton can be overstated (the above passage actually marks Eliot’s recantation of his view that Milton was a ‘bad influence’), that critique nonetheless structured Milton criticism towards a concern with the ‘foreign idiom’ of *Paradise Lost* (‘is it too Latinate to be considered a great English poem?’), and a ‘formalist approach, focusing on Milton’s style’.²⁸

Leavis’s critique of Milton followed (and eventually perhaps even surpassed) Eliot’s critique of the ‘dissociation of sensibility’, arguing that when we read Milton’s verse ‘we are less exactingly conscious in respect of meaning than when we read other poets [...]. The state induced has analogies with intoxication’, stems from the same perceived discontinuity between sound and sense.²⁹ Leavis critiques Milton by comparison to

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²⁹ F. R. Leavis, ‘Mr. Eliot and Milton’, *Sewanee Review*, 57 (1949), 1-30 (p.8).
Keats, in whose poetry he finds the formal and musical qualities much more closely allied to the sense. The concerns of Eliot and Leavis are broadly canonical; the focus of their criticism is to establish and promote those poets (chiefly Donne and the metaphysicals) who can have the best influence on succeeding poets, as well as identifying those historical figures whose work fits most neatly with current preferences.

The work of Christopher Ricks went some way to resolving the ‘Milton Controversy’; in Milton’s Grand Style he demonstrated that Paradise Lost was much more responsive to the New Critical method than Eliot or Leavis had apprehended. This, though, came at the cost of accepting the assumption that this was precisely ‘Milton’s’ style, that the greatness of the verse was to be celebrated as the achievement of the poet just as its perceived shortcomings were the fault of the poet. Contemporary work by Arnold Stein and Balachandra Rajan provided a similar focus on the majesty of the poet’s style; Stein noted that ‘Milton does construct a poem of extraordinary complexity that is at last most impressive for its clarity’, and Rajan that ‘[t]he complexity of Milton’s epic is less one of surface than of reverberation’. These works, though crucial rebuttals of Eliot and his followers, have as their underlying assumption that Milton the poet is in full control of his style.

The problematic moments of the text are thus assumed to be the product of the poet, so that the ‘reverberations’ (internal echoing, building in complexity) Rajan discovers throughout Paradise Lost are in effect the controlled iterations of the poetic genius informing the poem. Alastair Fowler provides a typical reversal when he notes that

there are many such [ambiguities and ironies] – so many, in fact, as to constitute a characteristic style, an individual rhetoric […] Milton chose and arranged words with an

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extraordinarily sustained awareness of ideological implication.\textsuperscript{31}

For Fowler, any of the ambiguities in the text are merely evidence of the genius of its author. Even R. A. Shoaf’s acutely sensitive study of the ‘ambiguous words’ which prevent the poem from having a definite meaning cannot (and does not even try to) escape this assumption: ‘Paradise Lost is intended: it is prophetic, the poem of a prophet. Milton has a meaning to convey.’ Though Shoaf maintains that the meaning is ‘vicariousness or mutuality’, he nonetheless finds that it must be affirmed through the poet, not through language itself.\textsuperscript{32}

So too for Stanley Fish, whose subtle examination of the progressions of meaning produced by Paradise Lost demonstrated the temporal ambiguities produced by the poem; that is, in the act of reading, which must take place in time, potential meanings are constructed but then modified by later information, so that the similes of the poem are constructed in such a manner that ‘error must be made before it can be acknowledged by a surprised reader.’\textsuperscript{33} For Fish, however, this is not a fundamental feature of language; rather, the slippages he notes are evidence of the design of the poet to lead the reader into sin and correct them back out of it, so that ‘a slight shift of perspective and the challenge is met by the discovery of deeper and truer meanings which send us back in a new way to the truths God and Milton have proclaimed’ (p. 234).

William Empson anticipated the same point (though in reverse, suggesting Milton wanted to reveal the wickedness of the Christian God), arguing that ‘Milton wanted us to imagine the temptation which made Satan fall’ so that the reader is seduced into ‘regarding Milton’s God rather as Satan does’.\textsuperscript{34} Though Empson differs from Fish in the outcome, they are united by a belief that the reader’s response is being subtly

\textsuperscript{31} PL, p. 19-20.
\textsuperscript{33} Stanley Fish, Surprised by Sin (Berkeley: Macmillan, 1967), p. 28. Further references are given in the text. The detailed readings that precede this conclusion of the similes of Satan’s spear (I.292-94) and his landing on the sun (III.588-90) are instructive (p. 22-29); the metaphor of the spear is discussed on p. 197-98, below.
\textsuperscript{34} William Empson, Milton’s God (Chatto & Windus, 1961), p. 95, 97.
guided by the poet, that his ‘vast design’ is in fact the education of the reader along preset and immutable lines. This view has subsequently been nuanced slightly by Jesse G. Swan. Arguing for a reader-response criticism more aware of the individual constructions of the author-function, Swan noted that ‘images of Milton live in the minds of those who generated them’. For Swan, multiple interpretations of the poem are possible, because readers constructs their own version of ‘Milton’: their reading of the poem, then, still returns to the authority of the original scriptor, but allows that figure to be diffused across multiple interpretations that nonetheless each return to ‘Milton’ (even if that figure is accepted as being no longer unified). Brian Johnson’s analysis of modes of reading within the poem (especially the other characters’ interpretation of divine utterance) leads him to conclude that reading the poem, like the divine hermeneutic, ‘is a matter of interpreting signs in a struggle to ascertain intended meanings which cannot be imposed upon the reader without jeopardizing his/her freedom’; there is, then, a ‘true’ meaning, but space must be provided for misinterpretation in order to preserve free will, so that Milton guides the reader towards, rather than directly imparts, interpretation and information.

The view that Milton guides the reader can be found in more recent criticism as well. David Ainsworth’s study of religiously focused reading suggests that *Paradise Lost* is the didactic production of the poet’s intention ‘to challenge his readers and alternately guide and goad them into developing their own readerly fitness’. Sharon Achinstein finds the same challenge to the reader, though focused not on religious but political allegory: Milton is ‘educating readers to become virtuous, to become revolutionary readers [...] to prepare them for the more difficult task of reading history’. For both Ainsworth and Achinstein, Milton’s purpose is

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36 Brian Johnson, ‘Sacred Silence: The Death of the “Author” and *Paradise Lost*’, *MQ*, 29 (1995), 65-76 (p. 69-70). On the various interpretations of God’s Word(s) by characters in the poem, see the fourth chapter of this thesis.
a didactic one, deliberately producing a poem that is difficult to comprehend in order to provoke its reader to reflect upon their own process of reading.

Critics of *Paradise Lost*, then, have historically claimed to know exactly who is speaking in the poem; it is, for better or worse, entirely the work of ‘Milton’, the historical figure, and the allusions, theology and politics of the poem are his alone. This assumption persists up to the present day, since Milton ‘continues to enjoy the status of the most monumentally unified author in the canon’.\(^\text{39}\) Leah Marcus reads the history of Milton criticism as one of an unconscious acceptance of the sense of self, authority and cohesion posited not just (as we have seen) by the poet’s friends and admirers, but by Milton himself:

> If Milton refuses to disappear under the rubric of history, or of deconstruction, or of the postmodern “death of the author”, that is because ‘Milton’ to us has meant – quite precisely – resistance to all such decentering impulses. He, as much as any other single historical figure of the English renaissance, has been credited with inaugurating a new way of […] asserting the author’s resistance to or transcendence of the sometimes pressing local circumstances within which he created his work.\(^\text{40}\)

In this persuasive reading, Milton criticism is overly concerned with locating and stabilising an authorial self for ‘Milton’, drawn primarily from his own works. This ‘Milton’ is a figure so preternaturally self-aware that his only engagement with his context is conscious and rational; that is, ‘Milton’ engages with his ‘local circumstances’ purely on his own terms, able to appropriate or reject the circumstances of his production as he sees fit.

Laura Knoppers’s work on Milton’s response to post-restoration performances of power (*Historicising Milton*) is a perfect example of Marcus’s categorisation of Milton criticism. Knoppers performs a synchronic, new historicist, reading of Milton to demonstrate that his


poetry not only ‘register[s] the power and problematics of monarchical spectacle in the restoration’, but actively transcends such spectacle, as it ‘both challenges and replaces the spectacles of state’.\textsuperscript{41} \textit{Paradise Lost} in particular is juxtaposed with the (by no means universal) outpouring of joy at the Restoration, and by doing so Knoppers is able to effectively demonstrate the ways in which the discourses of power were appropriated in order to undermine the attempts by Charles I to assert monarchical power through the ‘joy and celebrations of the King’s loyal subjects’ (78). She argues, largely successfully, that Milton assimilates the motif of public joy to the Satanic elements of his epic, critiquing it by opposing it to the true inward joy of loyal obedience to the divine will; Simultaneously, however, she acknowledges that Milton directly reworks royalist discourse of a new golden age by positing an eschatological triumphalism that stresses the public joy celebrated freely by God’s servants. Given Tennenhouse’s assertion that Early Modern ‘literature displayed its politics as it idealised or demystified specific forms of power’, such an apparent paradox should not be surprising, but rather the restatement of an essential tenet of New Historicism, that the literary/political text should simultaneously question, endorse and reshape power structures.\textsuperscript{42}

The poet is, in Knoppers’s deployment of New Historicism, able to judiciously select language and motifs from his context to construct a poem that excludes all possibility of ‘misreadings’; able, in other words, to clearly articulate and distinguish between its double appropriation of the discourses of power with no possibility of confusion. Further, Knoppers is able to reflect her reading back onto this conceptualised unitary author-figure, suggesting the interpretative moment is able to capture the ‘true’ sense of what the author intended the poem to be: ‘Milton wants to show that Satan receives not arbitrary and excessive divine punishment, but self-punishment with woe’ (81).


Such a methodology relies on the conception of ‘Milton’ as a force immanent within and controlling the poem by manipulating its response to its context. Sharpe and Zwicker, in their introduction to *The Politics of Discourse*, argue for precisely this sort of historicist reading of Milton, suggesting that ‘Paradise Lost was written at the nexus of religion and politics […] at no level can [Milton] be fully appreciated without a sense of his polemical engagement’. Language itself, for Sharpe and Zwicker, is intrinsically political, and their volume seeks to explore the multiplicity of meanings attached to canonical authors such as Shakespeare and Milton. They stop short, though, of a fully deconstructionist reading, arguing that the full range of competing tendencies within these canonical texts would not have been available to their seventeenth-century audiences: ‘Our deconstruction, that is to say, demands a reconstruction of the languages of Stuart England’ (3). Their task is to select and highlight the specific ‘polemical engagement(s)’ of the author, rather than illuminating the plurality of engagements made possible by the fact of the text-in-language.

‘Paradise Lost is’, in the words of Charles Martindale, ‘stamped everywhere with Milton’s opinions and with his personality’, and so he finds, for example, the wordplay of the poem simply as evidence of Milton’s ‘intense love for words’. Critical practice frequently depends on this type of detailed extraction of a particular virtue or opinion from Milton the author, and discovering it in his productions. John King suggests a satirical (largely nonconformist and anti-clerical) undercurrent to Milton’s poetry, located ultimately in Milton himself: ‘a sardonic habit of mind represents an essential component of his creative impulse’. Noam Reisner’s *Milton and the Ineffable*, which is carefully theoretically oriented in its main points (not least the precise definition of the ‘ineffable’) nonetheless maintains a belief in ‘Milton’s unique creative authority’.

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John Milton: Life, Work and Thought, although a biography, exemplifies this trend towards seeking an explanation of the poet’s work in his life, and, in particular, his politics. Campbell and Corns confidently assert that Paradise Lost ‘has the stamp of Milton’s political experience, but it also contains a version of himself in the invocations […] and in the occasional interjections of the narrator’.  

Perhaps the most crucial intervention of this thesis is to challenge this historicist-biographical trend in Milton studies. Stanley Fish registered his concern at the historicist scholars for whom ‘political concerns came first, their expression in linguistic and literary form second’, though he foregrounds the biographical, speculating on Milton’s intent and his opinions on current affairs such as the Iraq war. Fish’s response is a return to the primacy of the text itself, in which the function of criticism is to evaluate the poem’s ‘aesthetic achievement’ (10).

Though my thesis represents a turn away from the evaluation of Milton’s political or theological positions through the poetry, it does not reject the historical in the same manner as Fish. Rather, it suggests that Paradise Lost can be better understood by viewing it as a single node in a mutually-informing cultural nexus; it is in the poem’s relationship to its episteme that meaning is constructed.

Precisely this reading has already been undertaken for the other English epic, The Faerie Queene, which has been opened to ‘a poetics of the book that pursues the traces and shadows that throw the proper name

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48 Though the focus of this thesis is epic (Paradise Lost in particular), this methodology can be identified in studies of Milton’s other works. Timothy Burbery notes that ‘biographical readings of [Samson Agonistes] have, of course, been common for centuries’, in Milton the Dramatist (Pittsburgh: Duquesne UP, 2007), p. 114; the key reading is Christopher Hill’s, in The Experience of Defeat (Faber & Faber, 1984), p. 310-19, arguing that Samson’s second triumph (as a type of Christ) at the destruction of the temple offers a model by which the English Revolution could be continued after its apparent defeat (‘While others adapted to the experience of defeat, Milton, I suspect, knew there must be a way forward again’ [p. 317]). See Blair Worden, ‘Milton, Samson Agonistes, and the Restoration’, in Culture and Society in the Stuart Restoration: Literature, Drama, History, ed. by Gerald MacLean (CUP, 1995), pp. 111-36 for an overview of those readings; Worden attempts to move beyond the directly biographical, but does not challenge the implicit historicist methodology, concluding that ‘Samson is much closer to Milton and to Milton’s cause in the poem than in its sources’ (p. 133).
49 Stanley Fish, ‘Why Milton Matters: Or, Against Historicism’, MS, 44 (2005), 1-12 (p. 2). Further references are given in the text.
Stephen Greenblatt found in Spenser the perfect model of self-fashioning, since ‘the poem rests on the obvious but by no means universal assumption that a gentleman can be so fashioned’. Greenblatt explores the ways in which *The Faerie Queene* appropriates cultural sites of power relations (the encounters with the New World, the English in Ireland, and the Reformation impulse towards iconoclasm), in doing so he excavates the ‘dense network of analogies, repetitions, correspondences and homologies within which […] Spenser’s immense poem is embedded’ (p. 179).

Louis Adrian Montrose both anticipated and extended Greenblatt’s work on Spenser, providing a reading of *The Faerie Queene* as a historically contingent critique of its immediate context, which attempts ‘to combine a celebration of the Elizabethan social order and courtly culture with an imaginative exploration of their morally ambiguous nature’. New Historicist practice positions the *Faerie Queene* as a literary prism, through which we can observe (albeit in a potentially fractured or distorted manner) the concerns and trends of the culture from which it emerges. The focus of scholarship thus moves away from the career of its author towards a carefully archaeological study of the competing discourses of which it is composed.

For Shakespeare, too, the trend has increasingly been to set the London playwright deeply rooted in the material and political culture of his

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50 Jonathan Goldberg, *Voice Terminal Echo: Postmodernism and English Renaissance Texts* (Methuen, 1986), p. 39. Notably, though Goldberg does much to open up the Renaissance text to the deconstructive impulse, this project founders upon ‘Milton’, since ‘with Milton begins the possibility of speaking of his voice’ (p. 2); although Goldberg argues (p. 124-58) that Milton’s voice never appears fully, but always in the process of its own production (and self-denial), it is nonetheless always the recognisable voice of ‘Milton’.

51 *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, p.169. Further references are given in the text.

52 *The Faerie Queene*’s engagement with narratives from the New World is explored in more detail in chapter 2.

53 Louis Adrian Montrose, ‘“The perfecte paterne of a Poete”: The Poetics of Courtship in *The Shephearedes Calendar*’, *TSLL*, 21 (1979), 34-67 (p. 62).

54 Running counter to this trend are the allegorical and numerical studies, exemplified by A. C. Hamilton, *The Structure of Allegory in ‘The Faerie Queene’* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1961) and Alastair Fowler, *Spenser and the Numbers of Time* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964), which tend to assume the patterns they identify in the text are the intent of the author (Spenser ‘meant the thread of number symbolism to be more of a clue than a ligature’ [Fowler, p. 55]); For a fuller overview of these competing tendencies, see Andrew Hadfield’s ‘Introduction’, in *Edmund Spenser (Longman Critical Reader)* (Harlow: Longman, 1996).
day against the ahistorical Bard, so that ‘the Shakespeare who is a man of his historical moment dwells quite comfortably with the imaginative genius who belongs to the ages’ .

Reading the plays as the product of that ‘historical moment’ has created a ‘radical contextualising of literature which eliminates the old divisions between literature and its “background”, text and context’. The following chapters will demonstrate not only that *Paradise Lost* is (as a function of language) ambiguous, and beyond the control of its author, but also that that very ambiguity is ultimately the ‘meaning’ of the poem: the failure of *Paradise Lost* to harmonise the competing cultural positions of which it is constituted figures and reinforces the postlapsarian condition of Man, such that *Paradise Lost* represents and simultaneously re-enacts the Fall.

This is not a thesis completely without precedent, though its originality derives (at least in part) from the willingness to excise ‘Milton’ from *Paradise Lost*. John Shawcross has argued against what he sees as the prevailing critical view that ‘Milton is always right, and he always knows what he wants to say, and he says it’. Shawcross’s study instead charts the changes in Milton’s theological beliefs and shifts in political and legal matters. Yet the methodology – deploying the literary text as the 

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55 Leonard Tennenhouse, *Power on Display: The Politics of Shakespeare’s Genres* (Methuen, 1986), p. 2. Tennenhouse is interested, though, only in the first of these categories, a Shakespeare through which circulations of power are expressed – see pp. 72-101 for the argument that the Shakespearean tragedy and history play constitute the representations of contemporary strategies of state power.


(largely) uncomplicated projection of the poet’s mind – is distinguished from the critical orthodoxy he challenges only by virtue of its acceptance of ‘Milton’s changed mind’ (p.195). Thus, he challenges the monolithic figure of ‘Milton’, though his substitute is simply a multiplicity of ‘Miltons’. Annabel Patterson’s Milton’s Words stresses, as the final chapter of this thesis does, the ambivalence of language that is in play in Paradise Lost, largely by charting the variant uses of particular words throughout Milton’s œuvre. Yet this study nonetheless finds key concepts in Paradise Lost as ‘not circulating in the public discourse of the day, but brought into prominence by Milton himself and the intensity of his focus, his particular obsessions’.58 Patterson ultimately returns to a psychoanalytic examination of Milton, seeing these key words as ‘the product of a single mind […] that changed in response to different circumstances’ (p. 4). Joad Raymond’s Milton’s Angels carefully excavates the complex interactions between Milton’s work and seventeenth-century thought and literary production on angels. Yet Raymond still focuses his study through ‘Milton’, the author who is judiciously selecting from (and often rejecting) contemporary angelology, ‘as if he was only earnest in his representations when being evidently unorthodox’.59 So too J. Martin Evans begins a chapter entitled ‘The Narrator’ with the argument that it

is not a single euphonious instrument but a chorus of individual and sometimes discordant voices which echo the complex acoustics of Renaissance colonial discourse.60

However, it soon becomes clear that Evans still sees Milton as the origin and overseer of these voices; in fact, the discordant voices occur in the form of separate characters (Satan and the narrator), not in the discordant utterances of a ‘single’ character, so that ‘Milton is able to incorporate the secondhand narrator’s perception of resemblance into Satan’s firsthand encounter’ (p. 134). Rather than the contrast between Satan and the

58 Annabel Patterson, Milton’s Words (OUP, 2009), p. 94. Further references are given in the text.
59 Joad Raymond, Milton’s Angels (OUP, 2010), p. 284.
60 J. Martin Evans, Milton’s Imperial Epic (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1996), p.113. Further references are given in the text.
narrator that Evans (and Fish, above) sees, I will contend that the ‘discordance’ need not be confined to cross-character comparatives, nor is it ultimately authorized by the figure of ‘Milton’. Rather, I will examine the way in which this discordance takes place at the level of language itself.

Any study, of course, must also choose what to exclude. Reactions to epic that came after *Paradise Lost* are not treated here, with the exception of the theoretical material discussed in chapter one, which continues to impact upon readings of epic. The work by authors such as Dryden to appropriate the epic genre by combining it with other genres (such as the stage, in ‘heroic drama’) will not, therefore, be discussed.\(^{61}\) Though the impulse doubtless came from the sense of epic outlined in chapter one, these kinds of epic re-fashioning fall outside of the *episteme* of *Paradise Lost* which is the object of study for this thesis. Similarly, mock-epic will not be discussed here. *Paradise Lost* does engage with the mock-epic at times (notably the description of the devils entering Pandaemonium in book II); contextual work in the manner of that carried out in chapter two of this thesis to illuminate this aspect of the poem would doubtless prove rewarding.\(^{62}\) However, this thesis suggests that epic itself is capable of the novelistic, parodic impulse found in mock-epic. The primary site of investigation will be the epic tradition (specifically *Paradise Lost*), not the parodies that evolved from it.

The first chapter of this thesis will specifically engage with Bakhtin, to show that his conception of displacement of epic by the novel is in fact illusory, and that epic conforms to the same process of dialogism that he identifies as residing solely in the novel. Having established this theoretical position (and demonstrated the practical application of it with a new reading of the invocation to book III), the second half of chapter one

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demonstrates that the early modern conception of genre was not as fixed as Bakhtin suggests; rather, the term ‘genre’ signified a malleable set of expectations which were in part concerned with the form of the text, though the term ‘epic’ mainly denoted a ‘heroic’ or moral content. It shows how these expectations were appropriated by *Paradise Lost* to reconsider the terms of ‘heroism’ itself, presenting (in Abdiel and Christ) a Christian heroism based on moral virtue, not military prowess.

The second chapter continues this discussion, examining the ways in which heroism was demodulated in the seventeenth century from martial heroism towards a mercantile, adventurous model. It shows that the metaphors of Satan as a trader or explorer are the complex productions of a period that was itself coming to terms with contact with the ‘Other’, and the impact of that contact on the ‘domestic’. By placing Early Modern epic in dialogue with contemporary discourse on exploration and trade, this chapter is able to demonstrate epic’s nuanced engagement with its context. It argues that the epic form appropriates the sense of incomprehensible wonder found in contemporary travel narratives. This sense of the unspeakable is modulated into an inability to properly describe divinity; Epic depicts the limits of experiential understanding and fallen language. It further suggests that the epic metaphor functions on a number of temporal levels; it is both typological and contextual, engaging with a version of history in which events shadow and inflect one another (not necessary chronologically), as well as directly with contextual discourses. These work to deconstruct a teleological version of history, in which epic exists in a safely contained ‘mythic past’. The chapter examines how the literary metaphors of food, eating and the spice trade are inflected by the changes in the material culture of Early Modern Europe.

The second half of the thesis focuses more intently on *Paradise Lost*. Continuing the methodological and theoretical arguments from the first two chapters, the remainder of the thesis outlines the ways in which *Paradise Lost* makes the failure of its own system of representation explicit. The third chapter examines the musical metaphors that run
throughout Milton’s poetry. Particular attention is paid to the music of the spheres, a key site of *Paradise Lost*’s self-referential concern with expressing the inexpressible. The divine music is lost to fallen creatures, and yet *Paradise Lost* seeks not only to record it, but to (re)perform it, and this impossible desire provokes significant tension within the poem. This theoretical music provides an intersection in which practical elements of musical performance within *Paradise Lost* can be contextualised; musical metaphors (such as the pipe organ) are shown to be organised throughout the poem in a consistent pattern which reveals the proximity to divinity of its protagonists (including its singer), since harmonious music is a product of that proximity. The role of the singer is then considered in more detail, with particular reference to the relationship with Urania, demonstrating that the fallen nature of the bard naturally produces polyvocal speech, constantly opposed to the spontaneous unity of heavenly choir.

This theme is developed in the final chapter, which focuses on the linguistic dispersals within the poem. It suggests that *Paradise Lost* not only depicts, but re-enacts, the disunity of thought and language provoked by a falling away from God. Beginning with Satan, and his punning language and ‘ambiguous words’, this chapter shows that *Paradise Lost* is intimately concerned with the failings of postlapsarian (and especially post-Babelian) representation, whether deliberate, as for the fallen angels, or unavoiadable, as for those seekers after truth in *Areopagitica* who are ultimately doomed to see only fragments of perfection.

The thesis concludes by making explicit a theme that has been running throughout, arguing that *Paradise Lost* is a reaction to the original trauma of the Fall. As *Paradise Lost* seeks to ‘justify the ways of God to men’, it seeks to accommodate prelapsarian experiences to precisely those subjects that can no longer experience them. It is a poem that remains frustratedly self-aware of its own status as a fallen creation, attempting to close up the wounds of fallen language, knowledge and experience in which it is itself trapped; it expresses, perhaps above anything else, the limits of its own expression.
1. Epic Poetry: Genre and Form

This chapter will outline the response to epic as a genre, to provide a methodological and theoretical base for the thesis as a whole. It contends that epic is an open and ambiguous genre, informed by (and reacting to) its context; only by reading epic in conversation with its episteme can the full range of potential meanings enshrined within the text be activated.

Alastair Fowler, extending the position he established in *Kinds of Literature* that genres are not universal and stable, but rather historically situated and variable, suggests that the study of genre is a crucial critical tool: ‘The Future of Genre Theory’ calls for ‘literary theory as a whole to be reformulated in terms of genre’. Epic, when read as a genre, has been placed in a binary with or against the novel by theorists such as Bakhtin and Paul de Man. They argue that the epic is a fixed or closed genre; a genre that refers only to its own generic tradition, is controlled by the poet, and does not admit context except in a controlled and limited fashion. The first part of this chapter will outline their reading of epic, and suggest that the binary ‘epic-novel’ is false and unproductive. Through a reading of the invocation in book III of *Paradise Lost*, I will show that the epic does in fact conform to the ‘novelistic’ in its use of contextual material and open and suggestive language.

The second part of this chapter will follow from Fowler’s suggestion that genre is historically contingent. It examines seventeenth-century thought on epic, arguing that while epic was seen as a type of literature, it was not formally constituted as such. That is, there was in the seventeenth-century no prescribed form for epic. Instead, when *Paradise Lost* was being composed, genre was determined not by form, but by content, and so was much more flexible than the literary theory discussed in the first part of the chapter would allow. Nigel Smith notes that ‘most literary forms in early modern England also involve more than one genre,

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and their interaction in the reading or performance of the text constitutes a
dynamic play of power relationships.\textsuperscript{2} The text, in effect, serves as a
material refraction of contemporaneous ideological disputes and
negotiations; the textual interaction of genres and forms enacts, at the
same time as it contributes to, those ideological negotiations.

The paratextual material attached to the literary text is designed to
‘surround it and extend it, precisely in order to present it.\textsuperscript{3} As Brian
Schneider notes, by the beginning of the seventeenth century ‘prologues
and epilogues were becoming more and more important’ and so ‘the
framing text prior to the Restoration was recognized, exploited and
apparently irresistible’.\textsuperscript{4} Though Schneider’s work focuses exclusively on
drama, the materiality of the printed prologue blurs the distinction between
drama and prose;\textsuperscript{5} the paratext attached to \textit{Samson Agonistes}, exploiting
precisely this liminality, defends its own status as a prologue by citing
classical precedent, but from poetry, not drama, since ‘ancient tragedy
use no prologue, yet using sometimes in case of self-defence, or
explanation, that which Martial calls an epistle’.\textsuperscript{6} Martial attached a note
‘To the Reader’ (as well as others to prominent figures such as Caesar
and Cato) to his \textit{Epigrams}; the selection of Martial (alongside the
admission that no precedent is found in classical drama for a frame
outside of the main text) suggests that this kind of paratextual material
was not seen as exclusive to drama. Paratexts thus provided a space in
which genre could be considered, discussed and even exploited, and it is
for this reason that the second half of this chapter focuses on paratexts
attached to, and reflecting on, the epic.

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{5} Schneider notes, for example, that dramatic prologues were often reprinted
independently in collections of poetry, (p. 119 and 132), suggesting a familiarity with the
form extending beyond the stage.
\textsuperscript{6} SA, ‘Of that Sort of Dramatic Poem which is called Tragedy’, in \textit{MCSP}, p. 356.
\end{flushleft}
Epic Language and the Heteroglot Novel

The comparative methodology implicit in Bakhtin’s title ‘Epic and Novel’ produces a particular reading of epic as a genre primarily as a technique for understanding the development of the novel. The Bakhtinian understanding of the play between these genres is entirely one-directional: where the epic is monologic, monolithic and exists in a mythic past, closed to interpretation, the novel is dialogic, vibrant and filled with competing heteroglossia (making definitive interpretation impossible). The novel is a developing genre, which engages with its literary predecessors in order to select and appropriate those features which will continue the elevation of the novel to the dominant literary discourse. Such a process, of course, may very well be a satirical or otherwise ironic appropriation.

The conception of the novel developed through Bakhtin’s writings is not unitary: it does not exist, codified, in a particular text. It is, rather, a function of the process of ‘novelisation’, which creates a ‘zone of maximally close contact between the represented object and contemporary reality’.7 This is a process of contextualisation, of moving both the signified and the literary past which was its previous signifier into contact with the openness of the present, so exposing it to the possibility (one might say the certainty) of change or ridicule. ‘Epic and Novel’ attempts to provide a genealogy of this literary development, suggesting that the novel (that is, those texts which are read as containing some sort of ‘novelised’ discourse) always develops from, and must therefore be read against, genre that is monolithic.

These older genres, chiefly epic, are read by Bakhtin as closed because they attempt to (more or less) consistently conform to a particular generic structure; they have ‘fully formed and well-defined generic contours’ (4) and this allows genres to complement one another as well as delineating new utterances within those genres. The novel, by

contrast, is a text which defies these kinds of fixed structures, and so the literary canon as a whole:

The novel parodies other genres (precisely in their roles as genres); it exposes the conventionality of their forms and their language; it squeezes out some genres and incorporates others into its own particular structure, re-formulating and re-accentuating them. (5)

Yet the novel is dependent on these older, fixed, genres as a literary mode against which it can define itself, albeit never permanently, or in a single manifestation. The process of novelisation, then, is one of generic development and (self-)examination which must take place outside of traditional genre boundaries or forms. As Paul de Man notes, ‘the novelist does not set out to take the place of his master, the epic poet, but to set him free from the restricting coercions of his single-minded monological vision’. The novel represents a dialogic space, where genres (and the individual, homogenous, “languages” in which they are contained) can be examined, as well as set against one another. For Bakhtin, the novel recognises and welcomes even the potential presence of the (structural, linguistic or generic) Other, but epic seeks to eliminate, or at least contain, any voice but its own.

Bakhtin’s division of poetry and drama depends primarily upon the number of speakers, so that the lyric (or, more broadly, the poetic) is the direct, controlled (and therefore monologic) utterance of the author, and drama is entirely ‘othered’ discourse, lacking a direct authorial ‘voice’ (at least in the way it appears in the lyric). The virtue of the novel is that it does both simultaneously – that is, author and representation speak together, in a clash that reveals the polyphony and open-endedness of the very language of representation.

This is a division heavily dependent on the classical division of genre that resurfaced and was revitalised in the Early Modern period, as will be discussed in more detail in the following section. Bakhtin, as Kristeva points out, challenges this triad of poetry-drama-epic by replacing

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the epic with the novel, so that instead of a discursive system in which the
author and characters speak in turns, they speak together in novelistic
discourse. Kristeva applies a logical sequence to literature, in which 0 is
denotation, 1 is fixity (‘God, Law, Definition’), and 2 is ambivalence or
ambiguity:

With Bakhtin, who assimilates narrative discourse into epic
discourse, narrative is a prohibition, a monologism, a
subordination of the code to 1, to God. Hence, the epic is
religious and theological; all “realist” narrative obeying 0-1
logic is dogmatic […] The organisational principle of epic
structure thus remains monological […] limited by the
narrator’s absolute point of view which coincides with the
wholeness of a god or community.9

In Kristeva’s reading of Bakhtin, the epic is the genre that above all others
pursues its own internal logic, constantly attempting to subdue its
linguistic structures and ambivalences to the absolute monologism that is
God. In doing so, the narrator must become the vates, the poet-prophet,
who speaks with the ‘absolute’ language of the 1, language with a
singular meaning, with all of its richness and ambiguity yoked constantly
to support the theological project of epic writing. There is, then, precisely
one speaker, and the ‘subordination of the code’ is the prerequisite for his
‘wholeness’. By contrast,

the only discourse integrally to achieve the 0-2 poetic logic is
that of the carnival. By adopting a dream logic, it
transgresses rules of linguistic code and social morality as
well. (70)

A 0-2 logic is one that not only transcends, but transgresses, the 1 that is
only implied in its continuum; that is, the language(s) of carnival
(dialogism, the novel) exists purely at the level of difference, in which the
languages of prohibition and transgression ‘meet, contradict and relativize
each other’ (78). The carnival – which is the root of the dialogic novel form

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Gora, Alice Jardine and Leon S. Roudiez and ed. by Leon S. Roudiez (New York:
Columbia UP, 1980), pp. 64-91 (p. 70-77). Further references are given in the text.
– contains (or rather, is constituted of) a series of competing voices. It is for this reason that Kristeva (and Bakhtin) argue that it ‘transgresses rules of linguistic code’ because they see it as the only form of writing which offers simultaneous discourse (as opposed to the singular epic, or sequential drama). By inserting the carnival (or novel) into a division of genre based upon the number of speakers, the very categorisation of genre becomes dialogised.

This move, however, rests upon two assumptions. Firstly, that conception of generic division is presumed to be ahistorical, timeless and unquestioned; as this chapter will demonstrate, the idea that clear formal divisions could be drawn between genres was under question at the moment *Paradise Lost* was produced. Secondly, it requires epic being moved to one side, ‘first subsumed under the head of the poetic, then lumped together with drama, and both finally counterposed to the novel.’

Bakhtin inserts the heteroglot text of the novel into the new triad of poetry-drama-novel at the cost of eliding and smoothing the language of epic, which I contend is far more dialogic than he allows.

Bakhtin’s assumption that genre is the primary division of textual forms (‘the major and crucial fates of literature and language, whose heroes turn out to be first and foremost genres’) allows him to suggest that the novel is the driving and revitalising force of genre. Other genres, under contact with the process of novelisation (if not necessary the ‘novel’ in the sense of the nineteenth century manifestation of the form), become open:

They become more free and flexible, their language renews itself by incorporating extraliterary heteroglossia and the “novelistic” layers of literary language, they become dialogised, permeated with laughter, irony, humour, elements of self-parody and finally – this is the most important thing – the novel inserts into these other genres an indeterminacy, a certain semantic openendedness, a living

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contact with unfinished, still-evolving contemporary reality (the openended present).

Bakhtin’s model here has the novel transcending genre precisely through those dialogising elements; in contrast to the ‘conventional languages of strictly canonical genres’ (6), the novel functions by eschewing stylisation. It functions, in fact, by not striving to be ‘art’, by dissolving the distance between representation and reality. In doing so, it reveals the process of simulacra that lies at the heart of all other literary modes, which revelation impels them to ‘renew’ themselves by incorporating these features of the novel. Such a theory, of course, relies on the basic assumption that all writing seeks to elide its status as art – Bakhtin has no explanation for the deliberate archaism of *The Fairie Queene*. That text is a stylistic rejection of novelistic discourse that is nonetheless dialogic, which

situates itself in the place of a lost text, invaded by other voices, spoken in the voice of an Other, and those in the text are so constituted that there is no Other except as figured in the text.12

*The Fairie Queene* yokes novelistic discourse to its own status as textual representation. This thesis will show that for epic, the process of representation involved considerable self-reflection over the very possibility of representation; precisely by reinforcing its status as art, epic calls into question the process of textual signification.

What Bakhtin is outlining is not necessarily a generic category, but rather the text’s gradual enmeshing in the material, cultural and linguistic process of its own production. The novel is not the motive force for this enmeshing, but instead is the ultimate manifestation of the literary text’s increasing absorption of fragmented subjectivity. As the process of self-fashioning began, and grew increasingly sophisticated, so too the texts produced by those systems began to reflect the fragmented voices of which their authors were increasingly incorporated. Stephen Greenblatt,

without using such Bakhtinian discourse, outlines this synthetic aspect of a text, which he argues is

the focal point for converging lines of force in sixteenth-century culture; their significance for us is not that we may see *through* them to underlying and prior historical principles but rather that we may interpret the interplay of their symbolic structures with those perceivable in the careers of their authors and in the larger social world, as constituting a single, complex process of self-fashioning.\(^\text{13}\)

For Greenblatt, both the text and the self are fashioned by and from the conflicts between those ‘converging lines of force’, a process that prevents critics from ‘decisively separating works of art from the minds and lives of their creators’ (5), since the same forces are at play in the creation of both, and so the ‘symbolic structure’ of the text is reliant (though not exclusively reliant) on that of its author, and vice-versa. In fact, the text becomes a cultural artefact that reveals (or can be made to reveal) the discursive practices of a culture at the moment of its production; what Bakhtin identifies as dialogism, Greenblatt sees as the functions – and languages, for self-fashioning ‘is always, if not exclusively, in language’ (9) – of the institutions (and aliens) of the ‘social world’. The novel, then, was the inevitable result of the process of self-fashioning outlined by Greenblatt: once subjectivity began to be composed of competing voices, it was natural (indeed, necessary) that any form of cultural production should follow.\(^\text{14}\)

The competition between these voices can be recognised in the narrative voice of *Paradise Lost*, at the very moments in which the strongest individuation appears to occur. During the invocations, what would appear to be the closest form of Milton’s own voice (and individual history) simultaneously takes on a universal character. The hymn to light

\(^{13}\) Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, p. 5-6. Further references are given in the text.

\(^{14}\) Though literary production is the focus here, the same observation could be made of visual art: see Umberto Eco, *A History of Beauty*, trans. by Alastair McEwan (New York: Rizzoli, 2004), p. 176-84 for the argument that the Renaissance artist was a self divided between a creator and an imitator of nature; On the conjunction between the artist and their context in the production of art, see Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson, ‘Semiotics and Art History’, *The Art Bulletin*, 73 (1991), 174-208, esp. pp. 178-84.
that begins book III, seems to shift from praise of the ‘holy light’ (III.1) to an apparently highly individual and melancholy meditation on the poet’s blindness:

\[
\text{thee I revisit safe,} \\
\text{And feel thy sovereign vital lamp; but thou} \\
\text{Revisit’st not these eyes, that roll in vain} \\
\text{To find thy piercing ray, and find no dawn;} \\
\text{So thick a drop serene hath quenched their orbs,} \\
\text{Or dim suffusion veiled.} \quad (III.21-26)
\]

This section has been conventionally read as the imposition of Milton’s direct voice into the poem’s narrative arc, with the prophetic light of God compensating for the blindness of the poet who is

\[
\text{from the cheerful ways of men} \\
\text{Cut off, and for the book of knowledge fair} \\
\text{Presented with a universal blank} \\
\text{Of nature’s works to me expunged and razed,} \\
\text{And wisdom at one entrance quite shut out.} \quad (III.46-50)
\]

Yet this seemingly personal plea is at once both individual and universal; that is, its intense subjectivity works to reveal the general character against which that is positioned. In essence, this is novelistic: the ‘monoglot’ discourse of the epic invocation is put under strain by the dual impulses of the passage, in which the Epic Voice struggles to contain the personal and the universal simultaneously.

The poet’s (‘Milton’s’) malady is specifically described as having ‘universal’ consequences: the entire ‘book of nature’ is denied to the speaker, and ‘wisdom’ is ‘shut out’. Wisdom is personified in a later invocation as the muse’s sibling in a passage that depends upon the scriptural authority of Proverbs, ‘I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him’ (Prov. 8:30):

\[
\text{Thou with eternal Wisdom didst converse} \\
\text{Wisdom thy sister, and with her didst play}
\]
In presence of thy almighty Father.  (VII.9-11)

The same chapter, with its emphasis on the role of hearing in acquiring wisdom, when applied to the invocation in book III, begins to reveal the general nature of the issues presented.\textsuperscript{15} Wisdom claims to be ‘plain to him that understandeth, and right to them that find knowledge’ (Prov. 8:9), and the chapter as a whole suggests that wisdom is only available to those who are open-minded enough to comprehend her.

The combination of this type of wisdom with the ‘book of knowledge’ composed of ‘nature’s works’ is indicative of the presence of the Early Modern \textit{episteme} of resemblances identified by Foucault. In this thought-system, the works of God were explicable by their connectedness, so that the apprehension of the world depended upon the realization that it ‘must fold in upon itself, duplicate itself, reflect itself, or form a chain with itself so things can resemble one another’.\textsuperscript{16}

Explaining these resemblances was the key to deciphering the book of nature, a task available only to humanity, whose higher consciousness and ability to observe the signatures of resemblance made him unique on Earth:

\begin{quote}
[B]y means of his wisdom, which is also knowledge, he comes to resemble the order of the world, takes it back into himself and thus recreates in his inner firmament the sway of that other firmament in which he sees the glitter of the visible stars […] [Man] is the fulcrum upon which all these relations turn.
\end{quote}

(23-25)

Man is the sign for which all others signify. Raphael expresses this clearly, informing Adam that the heavens are ‘as the book of God before thee set / Wherein to read his wondrous works and learn’ (VII.67-68). The quest for the ‘book of knowledge fair’ of the Epic Voice, then, is the

\textsuperscript{15} Hearing, or the voice, of wisdom is mentioned 13 times in the 36 verses of Proverbs 8: ‘understanding put forth her voice’ (1), ‘Unto you, O men, I call, and my voice is to the sons of man’ (4), ‘Hear, for I will speak of excellent things’ (6), ‘My mouth shall speak truth’ (7), ‘Hear instruction, and be wise’ (33), ‘Blessed is the man that heareth me’ (34).

general quest of humanity from Adam onwards, and a particular feature of seventeenth-century thought. The reading of the ‘book of nature’ was a common theme in seventeenth-century theological and philosophical writings, in which it became a companion piece of scripture for spiritual instruction; as William Kerrigan notes in his psychoanalytic reading, ‘it must have come to this poet with a special rightness’, since Milton had devoted his life to literature, and literary exegesis. Even without this biographical reading, the image of a literary-material natural world presented by George Sikes (possibly familiar to Milton, having included Milton’s commendatory sonnet in his biography of Henry Vane) offers a typical definition of the relationship, arguing that the Bible:

> does more perfectly, excellently, and fully declare the mind of God, as to the duty and concerns of man, then the book of nature, yet doth it no ways rescind, obliterate, or invalidate it.

The intuitive or empirical ‘reading’ of the book of nature is secondary to man’s direct instruction in the Bible, though nonetheless a necessary part of proper spiritual behaviour; for Sikes, it is ‘our duty and concern, thus to mark and spell out the significant instruction, which by the voices of the creatures is ministered unto us, in the book of nature’ (15).

Yet where Adam could, in his unfallen state, intuit the meanings of the book of nature by examining the thing itself (for example when naming the animals, or deducing the possibilities of the cosmos), for postlapsarian humanity this has become a system of signs that require interpreting precisely in their relationship to one another. Jacob Boehme used exactly the same metaphor (failed light) for this loss of

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18 George Sikes, *The Life and Death of Sir Henry Vane* (1662), p. 93-94. Further references are given in the text. Milton is not named as the author, and the sonnet is merely attributed to ‘a learned gentleman’. Campbell and Corns suggest that – given its proximity to the execution of Vane – this might have been an ‘act of vindictiveness [which] produced a probably unlooked for and perhaps unwelcome Miltonic publication’ (Campbell and Corns, *John Milton: Life, Work and Thought*, p. 320). Given the difficult context of publication, it is hard to envisage Milton being unaware of either Sikes or his pamphlet, in spite of the fact that it was printed anonymously.
19 George Sikes, *The Book of Nature Translated and Epitomized* (1667), p. 3. Further references are given in the text.
understanding, claiming that at the Fall ‘the Divine Light, which shone out of the Divine Body of the Heavenly Essentiality, was extinct unto him; for the Curse seized upon the Soul’. So the blindness of the poet becomes a more general blindness: the ‘wisdom’ to interpret God’s works has been ‘shut out’ because after the fall it is no longer instinctive to man. This blindness, whether spiritual or physical, can be rectified by the workings of the mind. A translation from the collection of a Dutch physician, issued under the name George Sibscota (almost certainly a pseudonym), outlines this belief:

[those] that are born deaf, are also blind, although they are deprived of the knowledge of many things, which come within the compass of the senses, nor can arrive at the knowledge of God by the outward Book of Nature, as the other, yet they may obtain the knowledge both of God and themselves, by those notions that are grafted in their minds.

Here, just as in the invocation, the outer (unreadable) book of nature is internalized, for the blind can ‘incline their minds to the Knowledge of the Deity, by virtue of that innate light that is in them’ (35). The ‘innate light’ here is the soul, a fragment of God’s wisdom and grace, which allows true contemplation without being distracted by ‘outward objects, and the fancies that result from them’ (35).

The divine light can, once implored to return to humanity, even more fully grant (or restore) understanding:

So much the rather thou, celestial Light,  
Shine inward, and the mind through all her powers  
Irradiate; there plant eyes, all mist from thence  
Purge and disperse, that I may see and tell  
Of things invisible to mortal sight.  

(III.51-55)

22 George Sibscota, *The Deaf and Dumb Man’s Discourse* (1670), p. 34. Further references are given in the text
The ‘mist’ is a visual metaphor for the hazy understanding of the ‘book of nature’s works’, similar to Paul’s metaphor in Corinthians (‘now we see through a glass, darkly’ [1 Cor. 12:13]); the meanings of nature can be glimpsed, but not fully understood without the aid of the heavenly light. This is most fully expressed by the pun inherent in the verb ‘irradiate’, which means both ‘fill with light’, but also ‘cleanse’. The task of the poet, singing of things ‘invisible to mortal sight’, is the (partial) restoration of that innate understanding to humanity, all of whom have the mental ‘mist’, and so the lamentation on individual blindness has become a commentary on the general failure to see – all ‘mortal sight’ fails when confronted with divine works. The standard poetical trope of the plea to the muse (identified in this invocation with the Godhead) for inspiration and aid with a specific poem is surpassed: the invocation carried out here is infused with the universal, and the purging and the singing are for all of humanity.

The invocation, then, is engaged with both the local circumstances of its author and the wider concerns of its episteme. The ‘stylisation’ that Bakhtin recognises in the older genres is here reworked into a dialogic entity, as the invocatio draws meaning not only from the epic tradition, but also from the moment of its own production. That is, the canonical elements of a genre become open to parody and revitalisation within that genre itself. The appropriation of these established models creates a space in which difference can be expressed, a tradition that can be

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23 The same metaphor is used in Milton’s description of his own blindness as ‘a mist which hovers before my eyes’, but that personal description is transfigured into a metaphor for the general ‘guidance and wisdom of God’ (‘To Leonard Philaras, Athenian’, CPW IV:869-70).


25 See Estelle Haan, “Heaven’s Purest Light”: Milton’s “Paradise Lost 3” and Vida, Comparative Literary Studies, 30 (1993), 115-136, for the convincing reading that ‘light’ here is (in a Neo-Platonic fashion) simultaneously a physical and spiritual aspect of divinity. She also offers (p. 117) a useful overview of the debate over the ‘precise nature of the Light’, though none of these scholars dispute that the light ultimately emanates, in one form or another, from God the Father (which was probably Milton’s position: see The Development of Milton’s Thought, p. 95-100).
revitalised (or rejected) by bringing it into contact with the historic specificity of the new text’s construction.

Paradise Lost repeatedly blends the traditional and the contextual to create meaning, and the next chapter will examine this at the level of the epic simile. The most striking example of the poem’s appropriation of the classical rhetorical elements of epic, though, comes in the first invocation, in the poem’s bold claim to originality and greatness:

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my adventurous song,
That with no middle flight intends to soar
Above the Aonian mount, while it pursues
Things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme.  (I.14-17)
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The final line is, as has been commonly noted, a direct translation of Ariosto’s own claim to open the Orlando Furioso (‘cosa non detta in prosa ne in rima’ [things not said in prose or in rhyme]), itself borrowed from Boiardo’s Orlando Innamorato (30.1).26 Shore finds the irony in the borrowed claim to originality only in Ariosto, suggesting that ‘Milton attempts to restore the fallen irony of Ariosto’s line to its original, innocent uprightness in Boiardo’ (197). The irony is retained, however, as the claim to originality becomes, in Paradise Lost, parodic of the epic endeavour itself. The jarringly unoriginal claim serves as a linguistic reminder that the poem cannot ever soar as high as it wishes, but is permanently held within the boundaries of human discourse – so much so that even its claims to originality must rely on already existing texts. Paradise Lost presents its startling theodicy (including a representation of the prelapsarian cosmos) within the confines of linguistic, discursive, allusive and generic categories that remain firmly fallen.

The grandest claim of Paradise Lost is that it can faithfully represent God Himself. Yet to express divinity in human thought is inevitably – however much the bard might attempt to take on the mantle of

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prophetic writing\textsuperscript{27} – to place the ultimate monad into a discursive and symbolic system that is founded upon (or infected by) différance. I am using this term différance in its Derridean sense of ‘sameness which is not identical’;\textsuperscript{28} it signifies (and this is the sense it which it will be used throughout this thesis) a language system that denies (or refutes) absolute meaning, in which all meaning is constituted from the reciprocal relationship between concepts. Signification is entirely dependent on the interplay between signifiers that are not yoked inextricably to a single signified, as they are for the unifying logos, or monad; all expression thus becomes a ‘relationship between that which exceeds and the exceeded totality: the différance of the absolute excess’.\textsuperscript{29} The excess is generated in the multiplicity of the signifier opposed to the singular signified; since they are dependent upon one another for meaning, all utterances point outside their own sign (signifier-signified) towards the chain of other utterances which they resemble, disrupting the smooth unity of that sign itself.

Graham Pechey’s comments on Blake’s theological poetry (specifically, here, ‘The Tyger’) are relevant here:

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{27} The key pieces of textual evidence for this self-presentation are PL I.16-25, III.26-36 and VII.12-16. See Kerrigan, The Sacred Complex, p. 100, and The Prophetic Milton (Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1974) for the argument that the narrator ‘has access to the cumulative wisdom of the entire prophetic tradition’ (p. 128, n.2; see also p. 261-62); Stephen R. Honeygosky, Milton’s House of God: The Invisible and Visible Church (Columbia, MO: U of Missouri P, 1993), p. 192-93, who posits that the term ‘prophet’ had a wider set of meanings for Milton than prediction of the future, theological or otherwise. A largely biographical argument, based on Milton’s potential career as a clergyman, is provided by John Spencer Hill, John Milton: Poet, Priest and Prophet (Totowa, NJ: Rowman & Littlefield, 1979); Ken Simpson, Spiritual Architecture and ‘Paradise Regained’: Milton’s Literary Ecclesiology (Pittsburgh: Duquesne UP, 2007), also suggests that the late works should be read as a continuation (albeit presented in more scholarly and literary form) of Milton’s early ecclesiological impulses. James S. Baumlins (William Perkins’s Art of Prophesying and Milton’s “Two-Handed Engine”: The Protestant Allegory of “Lycidas” 113-31’, MQ, 33 [1999], 66-71) finds this commitment to prophecy outside of direct invocation, reading the allegorical nature of the ‘two-handed engine’ of Lycidas as a metaphor for the poet’s commitment to (theologically) didactic song; for the alternative view, that Lycidas only refers to, without ever joining, a ‘prophetic tradition that exists independently of the poem’, see Lawrence W. Hyman, “The False Surmise” and the “True Revelation”, MQ, 17 (1983), 7-11 (p.10).
\textsuperscript{29} Jacques Derrida, ‘Cogito and the History of Madness’, in Writing and Difference, pp. 36-76 (p. 75).
\end{flushright
To talk about god, Blake had to write a poem – a poem, moreover, that was poetic (read: apostrophic) to the nth degree; to transvalue the godhead that he rejected he had at the same time to refract his intentions parodically and polemically through the words of others.30

Pechey contends that ‘The Tyger’ draws upon a number of contemporaneous political-theological discourses to represent an act of creation in the distant past. In this way he argues that it is precisely the fractured nature of the Blakean symbolic representation of divinity that reveals (obliquely), the unified nature of the godhead. The search for that unity – and the inevitable failure of it – suggests the limits of human comprehension and thus posits the existence of an unreachable, inexpressible unifying force: ‘the constitutive obverse of that knowledge of finitude’ (78). *Paradise Lost*, of course, does not reject the Godhead in the same way that Blake’s poetry does; however, they both attempt (albeit for contradictory purposes) to make God into a symbol. The poetic expression of divinity is precisely the moment at which Bakhtin’s definition of poetry begins to collapse, for the Godhead of both Blake and Milton is a dialogic representation of the original and ultimate monoglossia. The act of placing God within *Paradise Lost* – a text, as will be discussed in chapter four, highly conscious of its postlapsarian system of linguistic representation – necessitates referents outside of that timeless, monoglot discourse (and even scripture falls outside of that discourse), and so becomes enmeshed in the dialogism of the postlapsarian present. Milton’s description of divinity, therefore, frequently occurs in terms of a spontaneous harmony, which postlapsarian art can report, or even attempt to imitate, but in which it can never participate; this will be examined in greater detail in chapter three.

Bakhtin’s conception of genre is one of fixed, dividing limits that are broken down by the novel (or, more precisely, the novelistic impulse). His analysis thus depends on a highly conventionalised and commonly understood coding of texts into ‘genres’, a division predicated on the number of speakers, and the manner of discourse. It is thus the formal

30 Pechey, ‘Not the Novel’, p. 77. Further references are given in the text.
quality of literature that is given precedence. However, *Paradise Lost* resists the rigid imposition of a generic model. The invocations are open to their context, engaging with the epic tradition while simultaneously reaching outside of it, to the poem’s own *episteme*. The methodology of this thesis will be to follow the poem in its relationship with its context; it will consider the ways in which *Paradise Lost* uses contemporary discourses and ideologies (the music of the spheres, the imagery of Babel, the universal language movement) to comment on its own status as a representative text. I will argue that *Paradise Lost* appropriates these discourses to demonstrate (as in the invocation discussed above) the impossibility of postlapsarian understanding of the divine.

**Seventeenth-Century Conceptions of Epic**

Before narrowing the focus to *Paradise Lost*, however, I wish to examine the theories of epic that circulated at the moment of its production. In the seventeenth century texts were largely considered as cross-generic entities, and as such contain multiple narrative modes; consequently, the suggestion that epic poetry is constituted of a singular voice – either in Bakhtin’s theory, or the ‘Bardolatry’ of the romantic poets – is not supported by either the theory or practice of Early Modern writers. Seventeenth-century writers and critics understood the epic (or 'heroic’) poem as a number of intermingled narrative forms. Genre was examined by comparing forms of literary production, and, increasingly, examining how the boundaries between literary forms could be blurred or shifted. Writers in the seventeenth century, in short, do not appear to have seen genre as a fixed, immutable and inherent quality of the text. Rather, it was subject to play and flux as writers and readers destabilised classically mandated formal categories, finding new, combinatorial modes of writing in which the definition of genre relied on the action depicted instead of the manner of depiction.

Epic as a genre was seen in the seventeenth century as contextually engaged in its representation of heroism. It was a mode of writing which was seen as didactic, as its depiction of great figures served
as a model for current and future behaviour. The epic’s concern with heroism (especially as constituted in the classical tradition of martial exploits) allowed it to map, and comment on, the ideological shifts in heroism in the seventeenth century, as the reality of the Civil Wars devalued military triumph. In this section, I will first establish that Early Modern writers on epic were concerned not with the form of the poem, but primarily the content. This prioritisation of content over form suggests not only that epic is contextually engaged, but also reveals the flexibility of the generic form itself. This chapter has already shown that *Paradise Lost* revitalises the epic tradition in the invocations through the addition of contextual concerns; it will close by demonstrating that the descriptions of warfare in *Paradise Lost* work in the same manner, as described by contemporary writers. Raphael’s description of the war in Heaven denies its classical precedents in order to present a version of heroism based on ‘patience and heroic martyrdom’ (IX.32). The change in ideas of heroism is mapped in greater detail in the following chapter; this section demonstrates that the epic tradition produced a viable (even necessary) mode in which that change could be presented and examined.

Thomas Hobbes’ theoretical comments on epic as genre appear to offer some support for the Bakhtinian mode of division by number of speakers, especially in the printed, prefatory, correspondence between D’Avenant and Hobbes regarding *Gondibert*. However, Hobbes did not establish these categories as immutable or completely distinct entities, and even his ‘singular’ speaker has more dialogism than Bakhtin would allow.

The preface to *Gondibert* provided an opportunity for Hobbes to refine the Aristotelian definitions of genre, identifying:

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\text{[T]hree sorts of poetry: Heroic, scommatick [satirical], and pastoral. Every one of these is distinguished again in the manner of representation [...] The heroic poem narrative (such as [Gondibert]) is called an epic poem; the heroic poem done dramatic is tragedy.}^{31}
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31 William D'Avenant, *A Discourse upon Gondibert [...] With an Answer to it by Mr. Hobbs [sic]* (1650), p. 121-2. Further references are given in the text.
For Hobbes, the primary factor that distinguishes between heroic poetry and drama is their 'manner of representation', which is to say the number of speakers. Drama is dialogic, containing a number of participants, ‘every one adorned and brought upon the theatre to speak and act their own parts’ (121). These characters engage with one another, as well as the audience, to further the development of the plot. The phrase 'speak and act' introduces the possibility of an intermediary interpretative action between the text and the audience: by acting, rather than simply speaking, the part, the performer becomes (however momentarily) a part-author of the text, disrupting, or at least problematising, the smooth transmission of “meaning” from author to audience.

An epic poem, by contrast, 'is narrative, wherein the poet himself relates' the action (121). So too for Dryden, who argues that in a drama the ‘action thus described, must be represented and not told, to distinguish Dramatic Poetry from Epic’.\(^{32}\) This appears to suggest a much more immediate relationship between the production and reception of a text. It is almost a Bakhtinian reading, albeit one with drama replacing the novel as the alternative to the monologic, self-contained epic model. The poet (the bard, the vates) stands as a creative figure, solely responsible for the content and medium of the poem. Yet in Hobbes, ‘narrative’ placed alongside ‘relates’, and in Dryden ‘told’, points towards the orality, or at least oral beginnings, of epic poetry. The oral tradition introduces a performative element to the epic poetic text. In the purest sense of the tradition, the bard himself may compose the poem in performance; equally, he, or other singers, will reproduce and reinterpret the poem a number of times, as almost certainly happened with classical epic.\(^{33}\) The main difference, then, between Hobbes’s definitions of epic and tragedy, lies in exactly how a text is spoken, or sung.

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Hobbes raises similar concerns in the preface to his translation of Homer’s *Odyssey*. This preface (‘concerning the virtues of a heroic poem’) explicitly codifies what Hobbes believes to be the crucial components of epic poetry. These virtues are not formal, nor do they insist upon a specific subject as being more appropriate to the epic genre. Hobbes does comment that Latin is perhaps more suited than Greek to hexameter, seemingly endorsing that verse form as epic or heroic. However, deploying this form is, by itself, insufficient to make a poem epic:

[T]his may make the Latin verse appear more grave and equal, which is taken for a kind of majesty; though in truth there be no majesty in words but then when they seem to proceed from an high and weighty employment of the mind.

(sig. B5v)

The primacy of an intellectually stimulating content is stressed as far more important than the scansion. Though Hobbes does not entirely discount the value of metre, ‘taken for a kind of majesty’ is a dismissive phrase, containing an implied critique of those readers, and critics, who focus on the form of a text to the exclusion of examining its content. Milton’s sentiment, in his introduction to *Paradise Lost*, that the lack of rhyme would only appear a defect to ‘vulgar readers’, seems to echo this sentiment.

Clearly, Hobbes does not completely discount form or narrative structure in his consideration of genre. It is, however, merely a methodology for identifying relatively fine distinctions between texts already assigned a generic category. The primary concern, when considering the genre of a text, is ultimately not the number of speakers, but the content (and tone) of a work. Hobbes’s definition of a heroic work as being ‘the description of great men and great actions’ [136] does not specify a particular type of narrative, and in fact leaves open the

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35 *PL*, ‘The Verse’. 
possibility that a ‘heroic’ text might encompass any narrative structure that
can describe the heroic.

Hobbes had developed his thoughts on the role of narrative in the
epic by the time he came to translate Homer. Where the preface to
Gondibert argued for a singular speaker (albeit one rooted within the oral
tradition), his preface to the Odysseys nuances that unity between the
poet and the text:

[T]here is difference between a poem and a history in prose.
For a history is wholly related by the writer; but in a heroic
poem the narration is a great part of it, put upon some of the
persons introduced by the poet. (sig. B3r-v)

The comparison Hobbes makes between history and poetry has the effect
of moving his definition of poetry closer to that of drama established in
Gondibert. As with the definition of heroic drama expressed in the preface
to Gondibert, Hobbes makes a distinction between the author and the
characters within the text. The singular speaker of epic, then, need not be
a Baktinian monologic voice.

Hobbes’ concerns over the epic voice can be seen in the critical
works of John Dennis, writing around fifty years later. Dennis offers a
useful insight into post-civil war aesthetic theory; as Morillo puts it, he
‘exemplifies the cultural and ideological dynamics of the turn of the
eighteenth century in England’. 36 Like so many of his contemporaries,
Dennis categorised genre by content, decrying texts such as Scarron’s
Virgili Travesti, a burlesque re-imagining of Vergil’s Aeneid for ridiculing
‘heroic poetry, which is the noblest invention of human wit’. 37 A similar
sentiment can be seen in the preface to his own work The Court of Death,
which argued that the goal of epic was ‘to move the Reader, and cause in
him admiration. Now by heroic poetry, the reader’s mind is exalted
gradually’. 38

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36 John Morillo, ‘Enthusiastic Passions, Cultural Memory, and Literary Theory’, in
37 John Dennis, Miscellanies in Verse and Prose (1693), sig. A6v.
38 John Dennis, The Court of Death: A Pindaric Poem (1695), sig. A2v.
inspirational poetic achievement, which deserves appropriate respect and contemplation.

His work on the historicity of the epic comes in comments on the *Aeneid*, in which he considers the difficulty of enacting the pathetic within heroic poetry by comparing it to drama. As well as those incidents in books eight and nine of friends accidentally causing one another’s death in the war between the Trojans and the Latians (particular attention is paid to the cases of Nisus and Lausus), Dennis makes some observations on the character of Dido.

Dennis reads the Dido represented in the *Aeneid* as a tragic figure. His primary analysis fits with the uncomplicated binary structure of epic that he has already described, arguing that Dido represents Carthage as a counterpoint to Aeneas’ Roman/Trojan virtue: ‘by the opposition it has to that of Aeneas, [Dido] is contrived to give the last Satisfaction to all who are acquainted with the Carthaginian and Roman States.’ In order to fit Dennis’s epic model (which relies on competition between opposite factions, such as Carthaginians/Trojans), Dido must be read simply as an obstacle to Aeneas’ fulfilment of his destiny, as well as a synecdochic allegory for the later Carthaginian opposition to Roman expansion in the Mediterranean. However, Dennis also notes that her character is ‘compounded of virtues and faults, which composition is proper for the exciting terror and pity’ (198). Dido functions as a tragic character, evoking pathos through the ‘extraordinary force of love’ (200), which is the cause of her downfall as ruler of Carthage, and, ultimately, her suicide. Dennis again finds his authority in Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, declaring that ‘to be torn from one’s friends’ (198) is also a form of tragedy.

Dido thus operates as a kind of contact zone between the two genres of epic and drama. Although her action is necessitated by the demands of the poem, as well as its contemporary audience, Vergil nonetheless ‘has taken care, according to the maxim of Aristotle, to bestow on this character, all the softening which would consist with his Subject’ (199). This ‘softening’ is the introduction of pathetic and tragic

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elements to a character that the text would otherwise demand to be one-dimensionally evil and implacably opposed to Aeneas' vision and quest. The epic poem, then, cannot be simply the direct discourse of its 'creator', but is acted upon by a number of cultural and historical factors which impinge upon the text, shaping the potential meaning(s) in ways that are outside of authorial control. Chapter two, dealing with similar ideas of inter-cultural writings, will examine the effect of these cultural factors on texts in greater detail.

Epic, then, was not constituted formally in the Early Modern mind, but rather was something to be identified from the actions of the characters it depicted. The poet Thomas Campion noted in his *Observations in the Art of English Poesie* ('the last, and subtlest, of the forlorn Elizabethan attempts to regulate English verse by the rules of classical metrics'\(^{40}\) of blank verse that

> These are those numbers which Nature in our English destinates to the Tragic, and Heroic Poem: for the subject of them both being all one, I see no impediment why one verse may not serve for them both.\(^{41}\)

Campion was an accomplished musician, and his texts produced sense through a conjunction of scansion and music.\(^{42}\) Here, however, the technical form of the poem is secondary to the content, since the 'subject' of the genres is what validates the use of the 'one verse' for them both. Indeed, since heroic and tragic poetry are indistinguishable (or interchangeable) in their verse forms, and yet Campion draws a distinction, we can surmise that the differences between the types of poetry lie in the actions that it narrates.

The 'verse' Campion refers to is the same hexameter as Hobbes (above), and this 'perfect and true Hexameter, or Heroic verse' was the

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\(^{40}\) *DNB*, Thomas Campion.


\(^{42}\) See Christopher R. Wilson, *"Words and Notes Coupled Lovingly Together": Thomas Campion, a Critical Study* (New York: Garland, 1989).
only formal marker of epic in the seventeenth century. Edward Phillips defined the hexameter as ‘a verse consisting of six feet, it is otherwise called a heroic verse, because it is used in heroic poems’. Yet, as with Hobbes and Campion, the use of the verse form is not of itself sufficient to raise poetry to the level of epic. The heroic verse was traditionally regarded as the most elevated style of versification (‘the most absolute of all meters’ due to Homer and Vergil), and so was simply the style most suited to match the elevated content of epic: ‘It is most fit to sing to heroic verse: for it hath wonderful gravity with alacrity.’ Diodati’s Annotations confirm the point during the discussion of the book of Job (itself read by Milton as a model for epic in The Reason of Church-government):

The most common opinion is that Moses hath been the author of it, having written the narration in prose, and the discourses which were held upon this subject in heroic verse, fitting with the dignitie and gravity of the matter.

For Diodati, the verse form is a suitable choice only because the content itself is heroic. The ‘dignity’ and ‘gravity’ of Job make the choice of verse form ‘fitting’; the heroic verse does not alter, but rather reinforces, the didactic message of the content.

That was certainly the case for Sidney, who in his Defence of Poesie defined heroic poetry as ‘most capable and most fit to awake the thoughts from the sleep of idleness to embrace honourable enterprises’. Similarly, comedy is ‘an imitation of the common errors of our life […] so as it is impossible that any observer can be content to be such a one’.

43 Robert Chamberlain, A New Book of Mistakes, or, Bulls with Tales, and Bulls Without Tales, but no Lies by any Means (1637), p. 10.
44 Edward Phillips, The New World of English Words (1658), p. 85. We may potentially detect some influence from Milton’s view of epic verse form here, since his nephew lived with him from around the age of ten, was tutored by the poet and ‘often worked alongside his uncle’: see John Milton: Life, Work and Thought, p. 133 and p. 270.
46 Johann Heinrich Alsted, Templum Musicum, trans. by John Birchensha[w?] (1663), p. 79.
47 CPW I:813
while tragedy ‘openeth the greatest wounds, and showeth forth the ulcers that are covered with tissue; that maketh kings fear to be tyrants’ (27). The function of poetry, for Sidney, is essentially didactic (albeit in a more aesthetically pleasing manner than philosophy or history), and so the genre of a text is determined by which kind of moral message it seeks to impart.

Samuel Wesley, in the preface to his *Life of Christ*, similarly argued that an epic ought to be both interesting and instructive:

> the end of epic, [is] agreeable instruction; and thence it follows strongly, that a poem wrote in such a manner, must, notwithstanding the fore-going rules, be a true and proper heroic poem.\(^50\)

Wesley’s ‘rules’ concern not the manner of the poem, but the choice of subject. He argues (following Aristotle) that only a fable is suitable for epic representation, since ‘no single hero, or true history, which the ancients knew[,] was sufficient, without fable, to furnish matter for an epic poem’ (p. 3). The task of the epic poet is to select the most instructive parts from a number of fables, and knit them together, just as painters ‘gather a great many Beauties together, out of ’em all, to steal one Venus’ (p.3). The epic is therefore celebrated as a multivocal genre, synthesising multiple traditions in its production.

Milton outlined the same dilemma in *The Reason of Church-Government*, relating his ambition to write an epic poem in English. His primary consideration was to question ‘what king or knight, before the conquest, might be chosen in whom to lay the pattern of a Christian hero’, simultaneously decrying the ‘libidinous and ignorant poetasters’ who have ‘scarce ever heard of that which is the main consistence of a true poem, the choice of such persons as they ought to introduce’.\(^51\) Milton is very clear that the primary function of heroic verse is educational, and so he strives

\(^{50}\) Samuel Wesley, *The Life of Our Blessed Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, an Heroic Poem* (1695), [unpaginated, p. 3]. Further references are given in the text, with my pagination.

\(^{51}\) *CPW* I:813-14; 818.
not to make verbal curiosities the end (that were a toilsome vanity), but to be an interpreter of the best and sagest things amongst mine own citizens throughout this island in the mother dialect.\textsuperscript{52}

The task of the epic poet is not to provide a self-aggrandising display of literary brilliance, but to form part of a collective effort of national improvement. The language of the second half of the sentence is skewed towards this idea of the English good: ‘mine own citizens’, ‘this island’, ‘mother dialect’, and it is evident that the function of the epic is to provide a readily-understood example of those ‘best’ and ‘sagest’ things. There is an intercultural resonance here as well, provided by the word ‘interpreter’ alongside that deliberate noting that this must be an English epic; the role of epic in constructing national identity will be examined in greater detail in the following chapter. This passage suggests that epic is a living genre, which it is both possible and suitable to revive for the concerns of the present.

Such claims for epic were not only theoretical. Edward Benlowes, in the preface to his attempt at epic, \textit{Theophilia}, questions the reader

\begin{quote}
Delightest thou in a heroic poem? If actions of magnanimity and fidelity advancing moral virtue merit the title of heroic, much more may Theophilia, a combatant with the World, Hell, and her own corruptions, gain an eternal laurel[.]
\end{quote}\textsuperscript{53}

Benlowes’s claims for the superlative nature of his text arise not from the verse itself, but from the content, since it is, crucially, the ‘actions’, not the form, of a poem that warrant the ‘title of heroic’. His poem warrants the ‘eternal laurel’ not because it is a supreme example of poetry, but because it is the highest example of heroism.

\textit{Paradise Lost} and \textit{Regained} make the same claim to divinely-inspired superiority as Benlowes, claiming to be ‘more heroic than the

\textsuperscript{52} \textit{CPW} I:811-12.
\textsuperscript{53} Edward Benlowes, \textit{Theophilia, or Love’s Sacrifice, a Divine Poem} (1652) p. 9.
wrath / Of stern Achilles’ (PL IX.14-15). *Paradise Regained* emphasises the true heroism of Christ:

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to tell of deeds
Above heroic, though in secret done,
And unrecorded left through many an age,
Worthy t’have not remained so long unsung.
(PR I.14-17)
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Though ‘secret’ and ‘unrecorded’ refer to the fact that much of *Paradise Regained* is exegetic rather than directly scriptural, the surrounding phrases ‘above heroic’ and ‘unsung’ give them a secondary sense of competing with the recorded, public deeds of the preceding epic heroes. There are few ‘deeds’ of any kind within *Paradise Regained*, except for the speech-acts of Christ; the contest between Satan and Christ becomes ‘a struggle for correct interpretation, rather than [a] physical struggle or ordinary battle’, just as it does with Abdiel, or Michael, in *Paradise Lost*’s relation of the war in heaven (below). 54 Satan is not vanquished through miraculous or martial means, and so Christ’s victory is an interior, intellectual one: the physical standing on the pinnacle of the Temple is merely an outward sign of steadfastness and purity affirmed primarily through thought and debate. 55 The full implications of this victory, eliding and eliminating the trauma of Adam and Eve’s misguided deed, will be examined in the conclusion.

*Paradise Lost*, like *Paradise Regained* and *Theophila*, stresses that it is more heroic because it treats of deeds that are worthier of the name; opposed to the ‘wrath’, ‘rage’ or ‘ire’ of the classical heroes (IX.14-19),

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55 The same point is made broadly by Stanley Fish, ‘Inaction and Silence: The Reader in Paradise Regained,’ in *Calm of Mind: Tercentenary Essays on *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes*; in Honor of John S. Diekhoff*, ed. Joseph Anthony Wittreich, Jr. (Cleveland: Case Western Reserve UP, 1971) pp. 25-47, suggesting that though the contest is verbal, Christ’s submission to the father requires total inaction (including silence), though this is challenged convincingly by Steven Goldsmith, ‘The Muting of Satan: Language and Redemption in *Paradise Regained*’, *SEL*, 27 (1987), 125-40 (p. 132-33) who sees the victory of Christ as a victory for the voice (with the concomitant silencing of Satan). See also Mary Ann Radzinowicz, ‘*Paradise Regained* as Hermeneutic Combat’, *Hartford Studies in Literature*, 16 (1984), 99-107, arguing that the battle between Christ and Satan centres on correct interpretation (of scripture).
Paradise Lost presents a mode of Christian heroism founded on piety and obedience, not warfare. That standard is subsequently applied to contemporary epic:

Not sedulous by nature to indite  
Wars, hitherto the only argument  
Heroic deemed, chief mastery to dissect  
With long and tedious havoc fabled knights  
In battles feigned; the better fortitude  
Of patience and heroic martyrdom  
Unsung; or to describe races and games,  
Or tilting furniture, emblazoned shields,  
[...]  
The skill of artifice or office mean,  
Not that which justly gives heroic name  
To person or to poem.  

The centrepiece of Paradise Lost is a detailed description of the war in heaven; however, unlike the warfare of Homer or Tasso, this is a manifestation not of violence but of Christian morality – the action in heaven is not ‘havoc’, but chaos temporarily allowed by God in order to magnify the triumph of the Son: ‘this perverse commotion governed thus / To magnify thee worthiest to be heir’ (VI.707-708). The confluence between Satan’s failure in warfare and his linguistic misunderstanding (deliberate or otherwise) of God will be discussed in greater detail in chapter four of this thesis; it is sufficient here to note that the description of warfare in Paradise Lost differs sharply from the epic methodology it presents (to disavow) at the beginning of book nine. Raphael’s description


57 PL IX.27-41. Dante’s Commedia is noticeably absent from these depictions; See Robert Hollander, ‘Milton’s Elusive Response to Dante’s Commedia in Paradise Lost’, MQ, 45 (2011), 1-24 for the argument (pace Irene Samuel, Dante and Milton [Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1966]) that Milton deliberately excluded references to Dante in his poetry so that he could compete (and appropriate from) solely with pagan poetry.
of the war focuses primarily on speech-acts, not martial endeavour. He merely gestures towards the other deeds done during the war ('in other parts like deeds deserved / Memorial' [VI.354-55] and 'I might relate of thousands' [VI.373]), giving far more attention to the councils both of Satan (in his palace and again on the battlefield) and the Father.

Even the physical deeds of the war are differentiated from previous epics; as David Quint notes, '[f]rom its very beginning Paradise Lost moves away from the epic of Iliadic warfare.' The line ‘dissect / With long and tedious havoc fabled knights’ contains a pun on ‘dissect’; the meaning of ‘describe in detail’ suggested by the context masks the literal meaning of the term, ‘take apart’, or, more precisely in the context of warfare, ‘wound’. The wounds suffered by warriors in classical epic were ‘a measure of the man and his code of masculinity as well as honor: ideals were represented and glorified in wounds’. Such wounding, of course, literally cannot take place in heaven. Satan is wounded by Michael (from whom ‘A stream of nectarous humour issuing flowed / Sanguine, such as celestial spirits may bleed’ [VI.332-33]), but that is temporary, since ‘Soon he healed’ (VI.344). In fact, the rebelling angels are specifically described as ‘unobnoxious to be pained / By wound’ (VI.404-5). The triumph of the Son is achieved because the rebelling angels see his full glory and in their terror throw themselves down to hell (both a literal and figurative self-fall), with no wounds, and no deaths – Christ’s thunder is ‘checked […] Not to destroy but root them out of heaven’ (VI.853-55).

Paradise Lost and Regained, then, move beyond the physical wounding of the protagonists and their enemies towards a system of epic combat that is ‘more heroic’ because it relies on the ‘patience and heroic martyrdom’ of Christian obedience; ‘in the entire recounting of the war in

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58 Note, for example, the combat between Abdiel and Satan, which comprises roughly eighty lines of discourse (VI.111-88) followed by ten of action (VI.189-98), or that between Satan and Michael, which is approximately equally divided between ‘parley’ (VI.261-95) and ‘fight’ (VI.304-33). The encounter between Satan and Gabriel (IV.876ff) has 99 lines of debate before Satan flees at God’s displaying of Libra. David Quint, ‘Milton’s Book of Numbers: Book 1 of Paradise Lost and its Catalogue’, International Journal of the Classical Tradition, 13 (2007), 528-49 (p.529).
heaven, Milton simultaneously imitates and radically criticizes the classical heroic tradition’ by constantly presenting an alternative to (Satanic) warfare. The combats are essentially decided in debate, with the physical action mirroring the outcome of the vocal contention, as Abdiel outlines:

His puissance, trusting in the almighty’s aid,  
I mean to try, whose reason I have tried  
Unsound and false; nor is it aught but just  
That he who in debate of truth hath won,  
Should win in arms, in both disputes alike  
Victor; though brutish that contest and foul,  
When reason hath to deal with force, yet so  
Most reason is that reason overcome.  

(VI.119-126)

God’s praise of Abdiel upon his return from Satan's council emphasises that he is ‘in word mightier than they in arms’ (VI.32). It may be true that ‘Abdiel, Gabriel and Michael all have their “aristeiai” (moments of glory) on the battlefield’, but in Paradise Lost the true ‘glory on the battlefield’ comes from articulating the choice to serve, not the martial victory that follows as a consequence. It is for this reason that Abdiel ‘transforms the epic battle taunt […] into a vehicle for political argument and prophetic testimony’, the real combat is hermeneutic. The fight, in effect, has already been won by the loyal angels, simply by remaining loyal and therefore obtaining the ‘almighty’s aid’. Abdiel’s disdain for the ‘brutish’ and ‘foul’ combat is that it is a sign of the rebels’ fallen nature only to be swayed by physical superiority. For the same reason, before he casts the rebelling angels out of Heaven, Messiah explains that a demonstration of power is the only way they can be fully defeated:

since by strength  
They measure all, of other excellence

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62 Francis C. Blessington, ‘Paradise Lost’ and the Classical Epic (Routledge, 1979), p. 35.  
Not emulous, nor care who them excels;  
Nor other strife with them do I vouchsafe.  

(VI.820-4)

The ‘other excellence’ referred to here can only be the obedience to the will of God that the Son himself embodies, and has referred to repeatedly in the speeches leading up to the climax of the war.

The chain of epic referents is thus appropriated to the poems’ didactic message; the martial expectations of the war in heaven are subtly reworked to substitute vocal for physical combat, and this refashioning of the terms of heroism is subsequently reinforced by the narrative voice and the later epic. The refusal to write heroism literally onto the body of the participants also gestures towards the poems’ context; as Nigel Smith has noted, ‘the Civil War had proved the decadence of aristocratic, martial, honour culture, and after 1660 traditional epic was no longer possible.’

Epic was a crucial site of this transvaluation of heroism; able to respond both to ‘honour culture’ and the context which made that culture impossible, *Paradise Lost* demonstrates the limits of martial heroism even as it presents (in Abdiel and Christ) a moral alternative. The following chapter will explore these shifts in heroism in more detail, examining the presentation of Satan in the context of a national shift from aristocratic to mercantile value-systems.

*Paradise Lost* is in one sense a process of epic rewriting, restructuring epic on a generic level by using the tropes of its epic predecessors. In its claims to surpass those other epics, it should not be forgotten that it cannot bypass them; the epic tradition must be appropriated – and reworked – for the poem to attempt prelapsarian representation. This uneasy balance between the trace of the pagan or postlapsarian world and the perfect representation towards which the poem strives is the key driving force of *Paradise Lost*. Chapters three and four will return to this proposition, arguing that the tropes and language of

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the poem form a reflexive schema designed to interrogate the limits of artistic expression.

This chapter has shown that epic as genre was seen by seventeenth-century writers as both mythic and contemporary; in contrast to theorists such as Bakhtin, the epic was viewed in the Early Modern period as a vital genre (in both senses of the word). The next chapter examines the epic simile in more detail as the site of this temporal link between the ‘mythic past’ and contemporary reality, and suggests that the poem deploys the epic simile to react to, and engage with, contextual shifts in ideological value attached to concepts such as ‘heroism’.
2. ‘Merchants bring their spicy drugs’: Intercultural Interactions in the Seventeenth Century

The previous chapter demonstrated that *Paradise Lost* responded to its post-civil war context by disavowing the martial ‘heroic endeavor’ of classical epic. It presented, instead, through Abdiel and the Son, a new type of heroism based on obedience, a model ultimately fulfilled in *Paradise Regained*. This form of heroism-through-submission will be returned to in chapter three. This chapter, though, will examine what was at stake in altering the terms of heroism. It contends that the primary impulse for this change was a fundamental shift in the linked concept of nationalism. As the European nation-state engaged with the ‘Others’ beyond its boundaries, the ideal of martial heroism was supplanted by spirituality and commercialism.

This chapter argues that *Paradise Lost* was produced during a period in which the material culture of England – and Europe – altered radically. Trade, especially trade with the Far East, forced a revaluation of ‘Englishness’. Unlike the earlier colonisation of the Americas (focused on exploitation, and the wholesale exportation of peoples, ideas and cultures), the Orient stood as a mysterious Other, whose impact on the domestic culture of England was carefully negotiated. Trade with the Orient was increasingly seen in terms of the superabundance associated with the Americas; the practice of this trade, however, necessitated a new marketplace in England, one which altered (indeed, demanded alteration of) domestic and traditional eating practices. Portugal’s epic, Camões’s *Os Lusiadas*, makes explicit the new connection between heroism and trade – da Gama is presented not as conquistador, but as a wily merchant. National epic, in this period, negotiates a crucial conflict between the traditional and the new, precisely because it is an intervention into the varied and multiple processes of self-presentation.
For *Paradise Lost* and *Regained* the choice presented is rebellion or service, and it is heroic simply to stand, as Jesus demonstrates on the temple at the dénouement of *Paradise Regained*.\(^1\) This type of heroism is clearly biblically inflected, but it also engages with contemporary discourses on England as a ‘New Israel’, in which the Civil Wars are presented as a necessary trial for God’s chosen people. Abdiel, who remains ‘unshaken, unseduced, unterrified’ (PL V.899) in the face of Satan’s blasphemous arguments for his own kingship, serves as an exemplar for those who resist the tyrannous reign of Charles. *Paradise Lost* offers both an eternal spiritual message and a temporally inflected response to the changing nature of heroism and nationality in the period in which it was produced. Other epic, such as *Os Lusiádas*, performed a similar function by translating the military heroism of Achilles or Aeneas into a heroism based on mercantilism, which served the economic, rather than military, interests of a nation. Epic played a crucial role in documenting and justifying the shifting self-conception of the European nation-state in the seventeenth century.

Epic poetry is, ultimately, a myth of nationhood. It is a recounting of a familiar story: the great deeds of a member (often the founding member) of a nation, which synecdochically provide the archetype of that nation’s self-conception. Achilles’s valour, Odysseus’s wisdom (or cunning), Aeneas’s *pietas* and Dante’s faith all stand as the epitome of a virtue highly prized by the culture that provided them, the type to which contemporary society must aspire. Dante identified this trait in the *Aeneid*, arguing that Vergil ‘wish[ed] to praise the age which was seen to be arising in his time’.\(^2\) These epitomized qualities are, through the cultural capital of epic, re-valourised as constituting the origins of the national psyche; in this process, they are made to serve a purpose at the moment of writing, reinforcing or reinscribing the current society’s self-presentation.\(^3\)

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1 *PR* IV.551-576. Cp. Sonnet XVI, l. 14 (‘they also serve who only stand and wait’).
3 In the *Aeneid*, this is perhaps most clearly observable in Aeneas’s visit to Anchises in the underworld (VI.752-892). Anchises shows him a vision of his descendants,
In the early modern period, as the previous chapter demonstrated, epic was considered primarily as a moral or instructive guide for actions in the present. Milton argued that an epic should be ‘an interpreter of the best and sagest things’; Tasso defined ‘[a] heroic poem (that is, an epic)’ as ‘an imitation of noble action, great and perfect’. It is, in fact, a typological relationship that provides the clearest link between the subject of epic (the national past) and the culture of its production (the national present). As Louise Cowan has noted, the epic provokes ‘conscious memories of the heroic past, sufficient for envisioning their people’s role in the ongoing process of history’. Epic intervenes in the ‘process of history’ precisely through its depiction of the absolute past, since ‘the lives of individuals and the destiny of the community are fitted into a larger pattern of time’. Rather than existing in a valorised yet inaccessible past, epic poetry serves as an intervention into the continuous process of national self-fashioning.

Epic retells the construction of a national identity, and in doing so participates in that construction. It is for this reason that J. B. Hainsworth contends that epic poets ‘relate the hero and his deeds to the cosmic order and give his poem the sort of general relevance that persuades his patrons not to let it perish’. The actions of the heroic past serve both as a key constitutive force of the present and a guide to sustaining national identity in the future. Epic, with its interest in the mythic origins of a nation,
is a method by which a culture can reflect upon itself: the myth ‘is itself the model of which everyday reality is in some sense the symbol’. Yet, as the previous chapter demonstrated, the epic is also constructed by and within that ‘everyday reality’. MacCaffrey and Hainsworth’s readings therefore emphasise the double temporality of epic: it exists at the level of myth, presenting the original ‘model’, but also in its own present (the ‘symbol’), and so the presentation of the ‘original’ is not a neutral presentation of myth, but rather the necessary restating of that myth in order to construct a ‘symbolic’ present, to have a sense of the ‘present’ as something that can be related to the past. This temporal engagement will be demonstrated in this chapter through an examination of the way *Paradise Lost* appropriates metaphors of trade in its presentation of Satan.

This chapter begins by examining the way in which this temporality is negotiated within epic. Through a close analysis of metaphor in *Paradise Lost*, it demonstrates that the epic simile is a double signifier, referring to both the mythic past and the contemporary context; The chapter then turns towards a more detailed examination of that contextual intervention. Two particular forms of England’s engagement with the Other are considered, one conceptual and the one material. Firstly, *Paradise Lost* is read as the product of the presentation of England as God’s Elect nation, forged in the trials of the Civil Wars. This section expands on the conclusion to the last chapter, arguing that while the brutal reality of war may have made military epic obsolete, the submissive heroism that replaces it is more than a pacifist contrast. The scriptural heroism of obedience and humility presented by *Paradise Lost* is (at least in part) a response to a new sense of divinely ordained national destiny, as well as the apparent thwarting of that destiny at the Restoration. The final section of the chapter examines the material impact of Europe’s engagement with new cultures, mapping the impact of the spice trade on the idea of the domestic. Here, a second alternative to martial heroism is presented: the merchant adventurer. The presentation of both Da Gama and Satan as merchants or explorers will be considered, in light of

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contemporary discourse on the subject, demonstrating the subtle and nuanced engagement of epic with this crucial context.

**Temporality in the Epic**

It is the mythic quality of epic that prompts Bakhtin to characterise it as exclusively focused on the ‘national heroic past’. It is this very ‘past-ness’ that is, for Bakhtin, the constitutive feature of epic:

\[
\text{The epic world is constructed in the zone of an absolute distanced image, beyond the sphere of possible contact with the developing, incomplete and therefore rethinking and re-evaluating present. (17)}
\]

This reading of epic confines it to the celebration of already achieved events, negating the possibility that these events can be made to speak to their context of their retelling. Absolutely distanced time stands opposed to the present embodied in the dialogizing carnivalesque, since ‘those in [the epic past] can never imagine that their epoch was ever someone else’s future or that it will ever be someone else’s past’. Erich Auerbach, similarly, contends that epic exists ‘in a local and temporal present that is absolute’, which forms a ‘uniformly illuminated, uniformly objective present [...] the possibility for a perspectivistic present no longer exists’. Bakhtin and Auerbach’s ’s evaluation of epic denies the possibility of a typological relationship between past and present, assuming that the epic distance prevents the collapsing of histories that permits the (analogous or allegorical) application of epic events to contemporary discourse(s).

This type of temporal distinction is common amongst those twentieth-century theorists with a focus on genre. Benjamin places the epic alongside Greek tragedy as a mythic text, unable to interact with the

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Early Modern *episteme* of allegorical interconnectivity (a world-view explored in the previous chapter). He argues that '[t]he epic poem is in fact a history of signifying nature in its classical form, just as allegory is its baroque form'.\(^{12}\) For Benjamin, the myth as presented by epic remains outside of any kind of symbolic representation of reality (the 'allegory' of the 'baroque form', embodied in *Trauerspiel*), and so denies the possibility of a historicist reading, since its hero is mythic (and tragic) precisely in the sense that in his sacrifice he is somehow moving 'beyond' nature, divinity, society. Only the baroque, with its *episteme* of interconnectedness, provides the kind of semiotic immanence by which the sign of a literary text can be made to conform to a natural or historical signifier.

The same division between the transcendence of epic and the immanence of the novel is made by Lukács in *The Theory of the Novel*. Lukács reads epic as providing a 'mythic' (though he does not use the term) view of life, which is 'never the creation of a new reality but always only a subjective mirroring of what already exists'.\(^{13}\) Epic remains 'completely in the past; therefore its time is static and can be taken in at a single glance' (p.122). Just as for Bakhtin, for Lukács the epic stands as a fixed opposition to the novel which exists in time, 'that rubs the sharp edges off each heterogenous fragment and establishes a relationship – albeit an irrational and inexpressible one – between them' (p.125). In doing so, the novel produces a text-in-history, open to the kind of allegorical explanation that Benjamin posits.

Auerbach contends that Homeric similes (in fact, the whole practice of digression from the epic action of which they constitute a small part) take place in 'the foreground – that is, in a local and temporal present which is absolute [...] a uniformly illumine, uniformly objective present'.\(^{14}\) Homer's epic metaphors permit no sense of time, or history, so that the lifespan of the epic participants is flattened – Odysseus' scar has history only at the precise moment it requires explanation. Conversely, that


\(^{14}\) *Mimesis*, p. 7. Further references are given in the text.
history is constituted only in and through the object under explanation, since it has history precisely because it requires it at (and only ever at) the point of exegesis. So too Dante’s characters, although from the recent past, are nonetheless suspended, presenting ‘an intensified image of the essence of their being, fixed for all eternity in gigantic dimensions’ (p.192). This state permits no change, but compels them to continuously re-perform their earthly passions and concerns. Auerbach’s reading offers a linguistic analysis of the kind of ‘epic’ or ‘absolute’ time theorised by Bakhtin and Benjamin – the totality and unity of the epic is preserved by a system of referents that refuse a temporal function, existing solely to illuminate the ongoing action of the epic.

Epic, however, can move outside its own ‘static time’ through its deployment of metaphor. I contend that the metaphors of *Paradise Lost* actually exist in the ‘double time’ established in the introduction. The following two chapters will more fully explore the ways in which *Paradise Lost* negotiates the depiction of a prelapsarian world in postlapsarian language. This section prepares for that analysis with a broader, introductory, discussion of how the temporal disjunction between the subject and context of the epic produces metaphor that is – by its very nature – anachronistic.

In some cases this is directly typological, with comparisons being made across biblical narratives that inform one another. In a long metaphor upon their awakening in Hell, the fallen devils are first described as being, in an epic commonplace, ‘Thick as autumnal leaves that strew the brooks / In Vallombrosa’ (I.302-303). They are then compared to scattered sedge Afloat, when the fierce winds of Orion armed Hath vexed the Red Sea coast, whose waves o’erthrew Busiris and his Memphian chivalry While with perfidious hatred they pursued

15 See Sacvan Bercovitch, ‘Literature and the Repetition Compulsion’, *College English*, 29 (1968), 607-615, for the suggestion that the sinners of the *Purgatorio* are undergoing traumatic punishment, since ‘only after the sinner has repeatedly relived his crucial misstep can he perceive the evil (“bind” it) and become free’ (p. 613). This kind of traumatic repetition will be addressed in the conclusion.

The sojourners of Goshen, who beheld
From the safe shore their floating carcasses
And broken chariot wheels, so thick bestrewn
Abject and lost lay these, covering the flood.

(I.304-12)

Rather than a direct comparison between the devils and the ‘Memphian
 cavalry’, they are compared only to the sedge upon the sea; the
description of Busiris’s destruction is, technically, only an amplification of
the disturbed state of the waters. However, the ‘sedge’ and the ‘floating
carcasses’ are allowed to syntactically run together, uniting the devils and
the forces of Busiris. The conflation is strengthened by the phrase ‘thick
bestrewn’: ostensibly referring to the ‘broken chariot wheels’, it also refers
back to the initial description of the devils as leaves that ‘Thick […] strew
the brooks’. The elision of this natural imagery into the biblical destruction
of Pharaoh’s pursuing force has the effect of re-aligning the classical epic
commonplace – the fallen force – into a typological narrative of God’s
punishment of evil or obstructionist forces.

The figure of Busiris also strengthens the typological nature of the
metaphor. ‘Busiris’, a mythical tyrant of Egypt, who sacrificed his visitors,
was a common gloss for the Pharaoh of Exodus 1 who orders the
drowning of the Israelite males:

Busiris is held to be the King of Egypt, that so heavily
oppressed the Israelites, the author of that inhumane edict of
drowning their male-children; hence he is said to have
sacrificed strangers’.17

In the biblical account, that Pharaoh dies (Ex. 2:23), but Paradise Lost
here conflates the original Pharaoh, and the ‘Red Sea Pharaoh’ of Exodus
14.18 The unification of these figures, and the implicit comparison with
Satan – also the leader of a force scattered for ‘perfidious hatred’ and
warfare against the Elect – reveal not a ‘misreading’ of history, but rather
a reading that moves through ‘shadowy types to truth’ (XII.303); that is, a

17 John Jones, Ovid’s Invective or Curse against Isis (Oxon., 1658), p. 71.
18 D. C. Allen, ‘Milton’s Busiris’. MLN, 65 (1950), 115-6 finds a precedent for this
conflation in Melancthon’s Chronicle and Isocrates’ twelfth oration.
view of history in which sequential events refer backwards and forwards, pointing to the greater truth of divine revelation, which lies outside of human chronology. Typology is therefore not ahistorical, or ‘mythic’ but rather a re-viewing of history (including the present and the future) as a sequence of eschatologically-inclined events: Paradise Lost ‘forces us to see that men throughout the flux of temporal history re-enact the sins originated by Satan’. Typology is at once outside of that ‘flux’, but also cyclical, relying on the continual repetition of original events even as it points to their deferred conclusion. We shall return to this theme of deferred repetition in the conclusion.

Paradise Lost frequently uses classical references in a similar way, though here the typology is not implicit, as for the biblical texts, but rather is revealed by the poem. The description of paradise compares its trees to those of classical mythology:

Others whose fruit burnished with golden rind
Hung amiable, Hesperian fables true,
If true, here only, and of delicious taste.

(IV.249-51)

The Hesperians were a race tasked by Jupiter to guard the golden apples, stolen by Hercules as one of his labours. Catherine Belsey argues that describing Eden with pagan references reduces the scriptural Paradise to the level of mythology: ‘The classical allusions which elevate its perfection also diminish its reality, its certainty’. This would be accurate, except that doubt is inserted into the comparative, not the object of comparison. Eden is not directly like the ‘Hesperian fables’, which may or may not be true; rather, it is the ‘only’ point at which they might become true. Scriptural Eden gathers up the fragments of truth in the classical myth, revealing its essential truth because it reveals it precisely as a type of the

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19 See Rosalie L. Colie, ‘Time and Eternity: Paradox and Structure in Paradise Lost’, JWI, 23 (1960), 127-138 (p. 128-31). The imperfection of man’s search for divine truth in this manner is described at XII.300-314 (the difficulty of fully typological analysis under the law, that is, before the rapture), and explored in greater detail in chapter 4, with reference to the metaphor of Osiris in Areopagitica.
20 Kates, Tasso and Milton, p. 129.
truth that is Scripture. It is for this reason that ‘negation is the prime means by which Milton expresses the features of hell’. The true horror of hell (as Satan realises on Niphates) is precisely that it is not heaven, nor is there any longer access to divine truth: it is ‘the state wherein the fallen angels lament their everlasting loss of Heaven’. Thus the Hesperian fables are ‘true here only’ because it is only in Eden, with its own divinely guaranteed history of a failure to properly guard valuable fruit, that the essential reality of the Hesperian myth can be fully understood. This type of metaphor, which derides the pagan classical as a misapplied or misunderstood version of biblical truth, is discussed in greater detail in chapter four.

However, the third form of epic simile deployed by *Paradise Lost* harnesses contextual terms and imagery to the prelapsarian world they describe. Satan’s shield, for example, ‘Hung on his shoulders like the moon, whose orb / Through optic glass the Tuscan artist views’ (I.286-87). By the comparison to ‘the moon’, Satan’s shield is linked, in the epic tradition, to those of Achilles (*Iliad* XIX.359-65) and Spenser’s Radigund (*FQ* V.v.3). However, the allusion to Galileo – the ‘Tuscan artist’ – breaks (almost literally, since the shift occurs over a line break) this chain of epic referents, introducing instead a contemporary figure who stands as a synecdoche for the incipient rationalism and empiricist discoveries of the seventeenth-century, an ‘icon of persecuted reason’. As Broadbent notes, Galileo here ‘represents a culture quite different from, and implicitly superior to, the military heroism [...] fixing the gaze of seventeenth-century rationality on the heroic shield’. The deployment of Galileo does not directly add to the simile, since the spatial comparative moon/shield functions in the same way without the ‘optic glass’. Rather, the simile serves as a reminder to the reader that they, too, must rely on an

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empiricism and rationalism (valorised above the martial heroism implicit in ‘shield’) to discern truth. The contemporary allusion to Galileo creates a temporal link between the mythic actions of Satan and the Italian scientist; this link between the mythic and the contemporary will be returned to in the last section of this chapter.

**Epic, the Nation and the Other**

Dryden’s epigram on *Paradise Lost* clearly identifies epic with nation: ‘Three poets, in three distant ages born / Greece, Italy and England did adorn.’ The ‘three poets’ (Homer, Dante and Milton) are directly equated with their nation, to the point that no further identification is necessary; moreover, through the verb ‘adorn’, Dryden gestures towards the status of their poems as their respective countries’ highest artistic achievement. Milton, declaring his epic ambition in the *Reason of Church-Government*, makes this idea of national glorification more explicit:

> That what the greatest and choicest wits of *Athens, Rome, or modern Italy*, and those Hebrews of old did for their country, I in my proportion with this over and above of being a Christian, might do for mine: not caring to be once named abroad, though perhaps I could attain to that, but content with these British Islands as my world.  

As the previous chapter demonstrated, Milton (like his contemporaries) did conceive of epic as a vehicle for the improvement of a nation; It is no coincidence that the note on the verse attached to *Paradise Lost* specifically described the poem as being ‘English heroic verse’.  

However, the self-constraint to ‘these British Islands’ need not be as inward-looking as it might appear. As Stewart Mottram has

26 ‘Dryden’s epigram’, *PL*, p. 55.
27 *CPW* I:812
28 On the deployment of terms such as ‘British’ as a signifier (and guarantor) of the restoration of a glorious past, harking back to Arthur and Constantine as a ‘basis for Henry [VIII]’s imperial claims’, see Philip Schwyzer, *Literature, Nationalism and Memory in Early Modern England and Wales* (CUP, 2004), p. 21-45 (p.32).
29 ‘The Verse’, *PL*, p. 54.
demonstrated, early imperial self-presentation in England presented the nation as an inward-looking ‘empire, compact of church and state’.\textsuperscript{30} The break with Rome allowed England to present itself not as a colonial empire, but instead as an independent, self-regulating nation-state, distinct from its European neighbours and enemies still in thrall to Rome. By identifying with Constantine’s secular power over the early church, the Tudor monarchy presented England as ‘the divinely intended setting for the establishment of the Golden Age on earth’ (p. 87).

Such a view manifested itself again in the discourses surrounding the Civil Wars. Milton’s early prose testifies to a belief in the primacy of England amongst God’s counsels, presenting England as the Elect Nation to replace Israel. \textit{The Judgement of Martin Bucer} (July, 1644) offers the idea that England would, through its own trials, become a beacon for other countries to follow: ‘Ye have a nation that expects now, and from mighty sufferings expects to be the example of all Christendom to a perfeatest reforming.’\textsuperscript{31} As Christopher Hill puts it, ‘[b]ecause the crisis which had been solved by civil war in England was a European crisis, England had the opportunity to bring liberty to other countries’.\textsuperscript{32} This idea is expressed more forcefully in \textit{Areopagitica}, printed just four months later:

\begin{quote}
Why else was this Nation chosen before any other, that out of her as out of Sion should be proclaimed and sounded forth the first tidings and trumpet of reformation to all Europe […] God is decreeing to begin some new and great period in His church, even to the reforming of Reformation itself: what does he then but reveal Himself to his servants, and as his manner is, first to his English-men.\textsuperscript{33}
\end{quote}

There is a clear sense here of England’s manifest destiny: if Zion was the first Elect nation from which doctrine was produced, then England has a divinely ordained opportunity to achieve the fulfilment of that doctrine, through the final reformation of the church. England serves as a beacon of

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{30} Stewart Mottram, \textit{Empire and Nation in Early English Renaissance Literature} (Cambridge: Brewer, 2008), p. 63. Further references are given in the text.  \\
\textsuperscript{31} CPW II: 438.  \\
\textsuperscript{32} Christopher Hill, \textit{Puritanism and Revolution} (Pimlico, 2001), p. 274.  \\
\textsuperscript{33} CPW II: 552-53.
\end{flushright}
Godliness, and so the tumult of the Civil Wars is rewritten as the ‘much writing, much arguing, many opinions’ that will eventually produce the truth that God has decreed should be ‘sounded […] to all Europe’. England’s internal debates thus take on an international, if not cosmic, significance.\(^{34}\)

The equating of England with Israel (as God’s chosen nation) was relatively commonplace. Cromwell’s victory allowed him to be hailed in a newsbook as ‘one of the Saviours (as God has miraculously manifested him to be) of this Israel’.\(^{35}\) The trope was reversed after the Restoration, where the parallels with Israel revealed the failure of both states to live up to God’s bestowal of Elect status. Laura Knoppers, in her survey of marginalia of *Samson Agonistes* finds that one early reader, noting Israel’s rejection of God’s deliverance (SA 265-76), ‘directly links Restoration England with the Israel of Judges: corrupt, idolatrous and having lost their inner virtue’.\(^{36}\)

Milton ultimately rejected the idea of an ‘English’ epic, at least in the sense that he contemplated, before rejecting, a number of subjects from British history before settling on Adam and Eve.\(^{37}\) Yet, when considered in the light of these discourses on England’s chosen status, an epic with the Fall at its centre becomes a necessity; in this national schema, the elect have failed to hear the voice of God – or his ‘umpire conscience’ (\(PL\) III.195) – and so the Restoration is the withdrawal of His grace, such that England ‘may stumble on, and deeper fall’ (III.201). Adam and Eve’s misguided choice offered solace, and their story ‘would among other things provide explanations of the failure of the godly in the English Revolution […] To turn God’s Englishmen to God again, God’s ways must be justified to them’.\(^{38}\) The Fall may be a long-past (‘mythic’) event, but it

\(^{34}\) See Barbara K. Lewalski, ‘*Samson Agonistes* and the ‘Tragedy’ of the Apocalypse’, *PMLA*, 85 (1970), 1052-54 on the contemporary belief that the Civil Wars were the fulfilment of eschatological history.


\(^{37}\) See *CPW* I:813-14, as well as *Epitaphium Damonis*, 162-78 and *Mansus*, 80-84 (both in *MCSP*). Herschel Baker discusses Milton’s rejection of the Arthur myth in more detail, finding a ‘distinction between literature and history’ that the poet was unable to bridge (*The Race of Time* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1967), p. 82).

is also a myth which is re-imbued with significant force in its reinstatement at the moment the myth of England’s Election is seemingly dispelled.

However, before this defeat (or Restoration), Interregnum England did take the opportunity to offer itself as an example to other, newly discovered, nations. The 1650s saw the establishment of ‘the first English (later British) empire, and it contained the central contradiction of later imperial life – the forcible imposition of English liberties’. \(^{39}\) The initial confluence between Englishman and Other occurred abroad, and so the general contact with the foreign came firstly through textual reconstruction. This contact, filtered primarily through discourse, called into question the very viability of existing language.

Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene* explicitly discusses the failings of descriptive potentiality when faced with what appears to be – or is presented as being – literally indescribable. Just as with the Borges story discussed in the introduction, the moments at which the narrative presents an ‘indescribable’ event are also the points at which the text reveals itself precisely as a text, constrained by language dependent on shared experience. These are moments at which the text can reflect upon the very process of representation itself.

Although the *topos* of inexpressibility was well-established by the time Spenser was composing, it was usually contained to ‘panegyric, [in which] the orator “finds no words” which can fitly praise the person celebrated’. \(^{40}\) Curtius, in fact, finds among long narrative poems more evidence of the opposite of this trope, an extreme version of inclusivity in which all (including the epic poet) ‘affirm that the deeds [of the protagonist] are sung among all peoples’ (161). Spenser and Dante return to the *topos* of inexpressibility when faced with the divine that they have experienced; it is the nature of that experience that cannot be communicated.


\(^{40}\) Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* (Routledge, 1953), p. 159. Further references are given in the text. Curtius cites as epic examples *Iliad* II.488 and *Aen* VI.625ff, which is derived from it – though this is not the Epic Voice, but rather the Sibyl. Both of these, however, (descriptions of a group of soldiers and a collection of sinners respectively) are inexpressible due to sheer quantity, not the essential nature of the thing being described.
Spenser’s project, as Stephen Greenblatt has so effectively demonstrated, is informed by a cultural poetics that cannot adequately comprehend the contact with the alien, specifically in the form of the territories of the New World. Described in terms of lavish superabundance, these territories had to be positioned in relation to the very structures of representation and experience that they surpassed, just as the Bower of Bliss surpasses other mythological paradises:

More sweet and holesome, then the pleasant hill  
Of Rhodope, on which the Nimphe, that bore  
A gyaunt babe, her selfe for griefe did kill:  
Or the Thessalian Tempe, where of yore  
Fayre Daphne Phoebus hart with loue did gore;  
Or Ida, where the Gods lou’d to repayre.  
(FQ II.xii.52)

The Bower cannot be accurately described, except in saying what it is not; it is simply more than what has gone before. Existing modes of description, then, are shown to be insufficient, as only the comparative is adequate to express the glory of the Bower. Even this, though, is ultimately shown to be inadequate: the final line of the stanza, as the Bower is ‘like Eden self, if ought with Eden mote compaire’ (FQ II.xii.52). The Faerie Queene asks its readers to compare two incomparable and indescribable things, and in doing so reveals the limitations of its system of comparison and description. In this it is similar to Paradise Lost, where the reader ‘can know this landscape only by comparison, but it is by comparison to things that we have never seen’. The Faerie Queene, however, reveals its own fictive nature by invoking an incomparable Eden, and in doing so drawing attention to the very system of representation: all of these frames of reference are allowed to collapse when faced with that which truly defies description.

For the first explorers, that modulation of existing forms of description fails, at least in part, because the ‘American landscape has to

41 Achinstein, Revolutionary Reader, p. 217.
European eyes the mysterious intimations of a hidden art'. That is, it is both strangely familiar and yet completely outside the European frame of reference, which must necessarily be expanded to encompass it. This alteration had the dangerously subversive potential for reciprocity; as Bartolomé de las Casas noted, the Spanish explorers were seized with a cruelty unrivalled in the Old World. According to de las Casas, the Spanish were prone to ‘tear [the natives] in pieces, kill them, martyr them, afflict them, torment them, & destroy them by strange sorts of cruelties never neither seen, nor read, nor heard of the like’. Paradoxically, this modulation of the European world-view was the prerequisite of its imposition; as Greenblatt puts it, ‘the radical undermining of Christian order is not the negative limit but the positive condition for the establishment of that order.’ Though Greenblatt is referring to the Machiavellian posturing of divinity amongst the Virginia colonists, we can extend his argument across the New World: the Spanish cruelty (unnecessary, since de las Casas reports that the natives were ‘without malice, very obedient and very faithful’ [9]) is a destructive test of the limits of Christian virtues that must take place for those very virtues to be imported into the New World. As Karen Kupperman notes, ‘Christianity did not represent a package that [the natives] accepted entire; rather, they unpacked it and reassembled its parts’. The fear of this unpacking, evidence of an active alterity able to change a fundamental aspect of European-ness, necessitated the cruel imposition of Christian values.

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42 Greenblatt, Renaissance Self-Fashioning, p. 180. Further references are given in the text.
The result of this liminality was the construction of a new system of inscription which depends upon constant reference to the failure, or at least inadequacy, of the old: it is no surprise, though he does not note it, that the sources Greenblatt cites actually precisely fail to ‘record their astonishment’ (180) at the splendour of the Americas: ‘I beheld a thousand shapes, and a thousand forms, that I cannot express in writing’. 46 Nor is this an uncommon theme, for English or Continental explorers; Bernal Díaz del Castillo reported that Tenochtitlan was too much for the conquistadores to take in:

[A]gunos de nuestros soldados decían que si aquello que vían, si era entre sueños, y no es de maravillar que lo escriba aquí desde manera, porque hay mucho que ponderar en ello que no sé como lo cuente: ver cosas nunca oídas, ni vistas, ni aun soñadas, como vimos.

Some of our soldiers said that the things they saw were like a dream; and it is no marvel that I write them here in this manner, for there is so much to ponder that I do not know how to account for it all. The things we have seen on our travels, I cannot describe, for we have never heard of, or seen, or even dreamed of them before. 47

For Bernal Díaz, the only way to account for these wonders is to place them specifically outside of the realm of description: the marvels of the new continent surpass ‘purely descriptive terminology, for there is nothing within the author’s experience that can equal the diversity and perfection he sees in these new lands’. 48 The New World is simply too rich, too abundant, too much like Eden, for the first travellers to completely comprehend.

So too The Faerie Queene, which draws on this tradition to ask, like the early explorers, that its audience trust the writer with no basis of shared experience:

47 Bernal Díaz del Castillo, Historia Verdadera de la Conquista de la Nueva España (Madrid, 1632), A, chap. 87 [My translation].
Who euer heard of th'Indian Peru?
Or who in adventorous vessel measured
The Amazons huge riuer now found trew
Or fruitfullest Virginia who did euer view?

Yet all these were when no man did them know,
Yet haue from wisest ages hidden beene
And later times things more vnknowne shall show.
Why then should witlesse man so much misweene
That nothing is but that which he hath seen?

[FQ II.Proem.2-3].

The proem here asks for Faerie to be given the same status as these other marvellous, and hitherto unknown lands. As Murrin puts it, in ‘contemptuous language Spenser flatly denies any imaginative status for his poem’. What is in doubt is not the existence of these strange lands, but the potential for understanding and imagining them. Ultimately, the poem, when faced with an experience beyond that easily appropriated to European systems of signification, simply refuses description entirely. Spenser refuses to explicitly outline the contours of the ‘goodly Citty’.

Whose wals and towres were builded high and strong
Of perle and precious stone, that earthly tong
Cannot describe, nor wit of man can tell;
Too high a ditty for my simple song.  

(FQ I.x.55)

That city signifies – at least in part – the New Jerusalem, which is actually described in considerable detail in Revelations 21, from which a brief quote will suffice:

And the building of the wall of it was of Jasper: and the city was pure Gold like unto clear glass. And the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones: the first foundation was of Jasper, the

second of Sapphire: the third of a Chalcedony, the fourth of an Emerald.51

Yet The Faerie Queene simply refuses any description: the walls may be of ‘perle and precious stone’, suggesting the biblical New Jerusalem, but the poem will describe them no further. The detail, and allegorical significance, of the description in Revelations is flattened into the unspeakable: by reducing the eleven verses of revelations to a single formulaic line, Spenser reiterates the failure of comparisons to express the archetypal city he seeks to portray. The marvellous places of Heaven, the New World and Faerie collapse into one another, and in doing so reveal a reliance on experiential education: these things, quite simply, must be seen to be believed.

**Foreign food and the European ‘self’**

The difficulties of textual representation were countered by the material culture of Early Modern Europe; the increased import and availability of exotic goods meant the ‘foreign’ was increasingly visible. Consequently, it became necessary to negotiate the balance between ‘foreign’ and ‘domestic’ goods, increasingly leading to a construction of the ‘domestic’ that appropriated, rather than denied, the foreign. Ann Jones and Peter Stallybrass have, through careful analysis of the clothes (as well as backgrounds and props) visible in portraiture, charted a shift in self-representation in the early part of the seventeenth century. They argue that

the construction of the portrayed subject through prostheses, the attachable/detachable parts, the clothes, furniture, books scientific and musical instruments that animate the subject […] provided material evidence of their wearers’ interaction with England’s “others”.52

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51 Rev. 21:18-19; the description continues to comprise twelve foundations, each keyed to a precious stone.
52 Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory* (CUP, 2000), p.49. For a survey of the changes in Early Modern fashion, and
These courtiers actively engage in cross-cultural activity, being painted in dramatic poses against a foreign landscape, in clothing that combined English and ‘foreign’ modes of dress; to be seen as interacting with ‘England’s “others”’ carried significant cultural capital in Early Modern England. These portraits can be read as a concerted, serious and long-term attempt to negotiate the new contact zones being forged between England and the ‘others’ it had discovered.\textsuperscript{53}

Excluded from Stallybrass and Jones’ list, yet one of the key (and relatively little-considered) points of this contact was food. Food was used as a metaphor for spiritual goodness by the antidisestablishmentarian (to borrow an anachronistic term) preacher Robert Abbott, arguing that:

\begin{quote}
We are also too much in love with that way that hath most danger in it. \textit{The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak} and is ready to eat poison for wholesome food; sometimes out of custom, sometimes out of curiosity, and sometimes out of an ill appetite we have got to unwholesome things.\textsuperscript{54}
\end{quote}

In order to gloss the citation from Matthew, Abbott deploys a food metaphor which combines spiritual weakness with an extremely material element of food: it can become, literally as well as figuratively, bad. The scriptural source for this conceit is the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus
teaches that ‘every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit’. Milton’s *Areopagitica* produces a comparison of physical and literary sustenance which is remarkably similar to that produced by Abbott. In Milton’s text, books become a ‘rare morsel’ which can either be nourishing or poisonous, ‘for books are as meat and viands are, some of good, some of evil substance’.

The Eucharist, at the heart of the Christian service, served as ‘a way to break down the barrier between the physical and the spiritual, between earth and heaven, death and life’. The physical presence of Christ in the bread and wine allowed the receivers of communion to (quite literally) eat spiritual and physical sustenance simultaneously. They could, in other words, be nourished, in all respects, simply by choosing to eat the right food (at the appropriate time). Food, and eating, served as a material representation of spiritual or cultural goodness. As a site of such literary and cultural importance, which underwent significant alteration once Europe came into contact with its ‘others’, a study of food practices gives insight into the manner in which that contact was perceived and received. This section, then, provides a brief sketch of those changes, as well as the political and economic impulses behind them, before turning to the way in which seventeenth-century epic appropriated and engaged with the discourses of food and trade.

The English (and European) diet changed radically in the seventeenth century, in response to the sudden availability of exotic foodstuffs. Yet the discourses surrounding these newly-imported foods do not centre on their new-ness or exotic-ness; rather, they were ‘Englished’ in the same manner as the literary productions of other countries. These foods were incorporated both materially and figuratively into ‘Englishness’, being silently added into traditional recipes, cultivated in English soil, or even becoming part of the language itself.

In 1604, James I held a feast to celebrate peace between England and Spain, at which he

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55 Matt. 7:17.
56 *CPW* II:506, 512.
handed to his principal guest, the Constable of Castile, a melon and six oranges still hanging on a green branch. These were the fruits of Spain, he said, transplanted into England.58

This piece of royal largesse is suggestive of the wider cultural shift that will be examined in this section. Exotic food, and ways of thinking about food, altered the English culinary landscape. The orange was not native to Britain, and in a pamphlet of the same year was specifically identified as something foreign, belonging to Spain: ‘for Apples and such ordinary fruit England; for oranges, Lemons, Pomegranates and such like, Spain and other hot countries’.59 When Paradise Lost was composed, some sixty years after, they remained sufficiently exotic for the ‘citron grove’ to be included alongside the ‘myrrh’ and ‘balmy reed’ (V.22-23) in the plants of Eden; the last section of this chapter returns to the construction of the exotic in Paradise Lost. Yet James is not here celebrating the newness or exotic nature of the orange, but instead re-exporting it as a kind of ‘English’ fruit. James’ act reveals a nationalist pride in the ability of England to absorb, nourish and renew the domestic foods of other lands.

The early modern period marked a widespread change in eating practices, as food from abroad gradually augmented (or even replaced) the English diet. Robert Applebaum notes that in this period ‘diet became more and more commodified, as well as varied; that is to say, it came to depend less on local products, locally harvested and prepared, than on far-fetched goods, many of them pre-processed’.60 Although Applebaum is more concerned with tracing that ‘commodification’, it is useful to note the significantly increased variety of food, as well as the changes in the way food was prepared and presented.

The concept ‘food’ no longer signified seasonal, local produce, but a wider category of goods, resulting in a change in the way that concept

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59 Thomas Palmer, An Essay of the Means how to make our Travels, into Foreign countries, the more Profitable and Honourable (1604), p. 84.
was considered and deployed. Food, like literature, was a sphere in which the foreign could be, quite literally, brought to England and appropriated to the English appetite. Throughout the seventeenth century, as Joan Thirsk notes, there was a steady rise in the tithes paid on certain herbs and fruits, which indicated

that these were now commercial items no longer grown only for domestic consumption[…] (this) almost certainly meant the presence nearby of a great lord or gentleman who had encountered foods in London or abroad that he wanted grown at his own home.61

However, this was a two-way process. The act of making foreign food ‘English’ necessarily made the English diet more foreign.

James Markley has demonstrated that luxury goods, paradoxically, became a necessity for the continuous economic growth - and the security this provided against trading rivals such as the Dutch and Portuguese - of Early Modern England. He argues that in the first half of the seventeenth century the primary goal of European explorers and merchants was the discovery and capitalisation of trading triangles that ultimately returned ‘commercial partners wealthy enough to buy large quantities of Western goods and to energize the imaginary structures of faith in the production of surplus value’.62 These trade systems allowed European merchants to sell their products to large states on the Asian continent or subcontinent, reinvest that profit in spices such as pepper or nutmeg purchased directly from the small Indonesian islands to which they were indigenous, and return to Europe to sell them at a substantial mark-up. This profit was diverted from the Turks who had regained control of Constantinople (and thus control over land trade with Asia, and the Mediterranean market in those goods) in 1453, as well as England’s Catholic rivals: the Italian city-states, Portugal and Spain.

The import and resale of these exotic foreign goods, as well as the opening of new markets to drive up domestic production (especially in the

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61 ‘Food in Shakespeare’s England’ p.17
wool trade), offered a potential (fantasy) future of continual economic prosperity, ever-increasing wealth, and rising employment. It also impacted upon the English diet, as the sudden availability (in larger quantities and more regularly than ever before), as well as the economic need to increase consumption of spices affected the way people thought about food. Markley notes the ‘changes in the diets, recipes and tastes of Englishmen and women to transform what were still luxury condiments into essential foodstuffs’. Similar changes occurred in other nations who had opened up new trading opportunities. The success of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) effected a significant change in the Dutch diet and domestic food production in the Netherlands. Exotic fruits and vegetables were brought back to Europe and made available to the newly-affluent merchant classes, such that ‘fruit that had been regarded as luxurious, and priced accordingly – melons, oranges and grapes – became abundant and relatively inexpensive’. This fruit, as well as vegetables such as asparagus and artichokes, began to be grown in the Dutch countryside to feed the growing urban demand. These new foods found their way into recipes accordingly, with, for example, melon juice becoming a ‘somewhat surprising staple of many Dutch recipes, especially lengthily cooked stews’.

It is worth noting that in the literature of Early Modern England, this set of international relationships is largely figured within tropes of equitable, mutually profitable trade, not colonialism. Colonisation was not a practical goal, especially for England and the (relatively) poorly funded East India Company (EIC) which had to contend both with local rulers and the powerful VOC. The manpower, ships and resources of the EIC were insufficient to force their way into trade systems or oust local rulers. In any case, such a move was not possible in the most desirable places (China and Japan), where the Europeans encountered industrially and militarily advanced societies, with sufficient resources to repel any potential

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63 The Far East and the English Imagination, p.40
attempt at invasion. The fantasy of superabundant trade made such questions largely irrelevant, in any case: staggering profits were available to be made by appropriating the free trade in the East to the re-export market within Europe.

Unlike the Americas, there was no real move to dispossess or displace the indigenous population; rather, European powers competed amongst themselves to trade with the locals; as Julia Adams has demonstrated, they ‘enforced and fought over the terms of trade under which exchange took place, without intervening directly in production and extraction themselves’.  

Nowhere was this more evident than in the Banda Islands, which was the World’s only source of nutmeg until the British transplanted the trees to other parts of the Empire in the nineteenth century. The spices from these islands, in Robert Markley’s terms, ‘symbolized an ongoing transformation of the idea of surplus value: rather than a luxury, they increasingly seemed a necessity for maritime nations that made international trade a crucial component of their tax structure, financial planning, labour markets, investment strategies and ideological self-definition’.  

Control of Banda allowed for a monopoly on (and extensive manipulation of the market in) a commodity that was increasingly seen as a staple of the European diet (as well as having medicinal value), and thus delivered the kinds of ready and swift profit to be found nowhere else.

The location of Banda had been a closely guarded secret for many years, until the Portuguese discovered it almost by accident; the Dutch traders followed their rivals there and established a competing trading company (in fact, the incipient VOC). Though they established an armed garrison, at Fort Nassau, this was not conquest but rather the establishment and enforcing of a ‘perpetual contract’, as a contemporary account demonstrates:

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All the Islands of Banda, from the tenth of August 1609, were by a special treaty & agreement made with the Orang-cayas, or Magistrates of the fore-said islands, were put under the protection of the high and mighty, the States General of the United Provinces, on condition to defend them from the Portugal, and other their enemies, provided that they of the said islands are bound to deliver unto the Fort called Nassau, or unto the Committees of the said Company, all their fruits or spices at a certain price.68

Dutch foreign policy during the seventeenth century centred around creating these kinds of contracts, and gaining full economic control over the spice islands of Banda. The de facto Dutch control of the islands’ produce created resentment and competition amongst English merchants, who were primarily based in India. This competition, though, took the form of economic incentive, with the locals being persuaded to adopt exclusive treaties with different nations. The Dutch were reported, in English pamphlets, to be constantly trying to undermine their trading agreements, promising the locals that

they could, nay and would interpose between all danger and them, and that they had sufficient strength to guard them from all the Nations in the world, if they would give them a pawn to enjoy the profits of their Fruits at those terms the English had conditioned with them.69

It is notable just how much agency is provided to the inhabitants here; as Richmond Barbour notes, ‘To suppose that the unexplored world was as supine as the empty page effaces alien agency and the mutuality of exchange.’70

The response of the Bandanese (albeit filtered through English discourse) is to reject the Dutch entreaty:

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69 Abraham Woofe, *Tyranny of the Dutch against the English wherein is exactly declared the (almost unvaluable) loss which the commonwealth of England hath sustained by their usurpation* (1622), p. 13.
we could almost persuade our selves into a confidence that your spirits are so noble, that you scorn to uninterest the English of what is their proper due, & make our names for (complying with you) to be engraved in every heart with the indelible characters of base perfidiousness.\(^71\)

Similarly, Samuel Purchas’ travel narrative reported that in Banda

the Chief affirmed, that if we would not deal with them, their Spice should rot upon the trees, and they would all dye, ere they would deal with the Hollanders […] after many protests, they made me a writing to deal with me only, for all their Spice at Puloway, and Puloron, and at Ayre Putee, and not to sell or part with the Hollanders one Cattee thereof.\(^72\)

Purchas outlines a scenario in which the Bandanese actively seek out the English as trade partners; this though, was largely an English fantasy. The prospect of actually controlling the spice trade in the face of the government-backed and better organised Dutch East India Company was a distant one. England harboured ambitions of regaining the spice islands up until the conclusion of the second Anglo-Dutch war, when they accepted New Amsterdam (renamed New York; actually principally the island of Manhattan) in exchange for the rights to Run, a small island in the peninsula, and the last to fall under the Dutch sphere of influence.\(^73\) In practice the English had to be content with a trading presence on the Asian subcontinent, and the colonies in America, which became the focus of foreign policy from Cromwell onwards. Indeed, peace and mutual trade with the Dutch was increasingly seen as a way of militarily exercising the new-found economic strength borne of trade, as a discussion around the first Anglo-Dutch peace of 1654 demonstrates:

amity with that people would make those two commonwealths entire masters of the whole ocean; and you might so dispose of the trade of the whole world, as you please and where you please […] it were easily to be


\(^{72}\) Samuel Purchas, *Purchas his Pilgrims* (1625), p. 199.

\(^{73}\) The island was ceded under the Treaty of Breda, 1667.
demonstrated how that the whole profit of the kings of Spain’s West Indies might be brought to England and Holland.74 Though this was an uneasy peace, it does exemplify the distinct nature of the English thought processes: broadly, the East Indies were commercial, the Americas were a place of conquest and colony.

Tropes of colonialism, and the inherent contrast between the idealised (civilized) self and the (also idealised, usually ‘savage’) other, are noticeably absent from early accounts of trade. Keith Sandiford’s essay on the sugar trade demonstrates the ways in which imagery of sugar, especially the refining of sugar, was deployed as a metaphor for racist colonialism, arguing that it represents ‘a sometimes virulent discourse on racial purity and paranoia about cultural contamination.’75 Even here, though, that ‘paranoia’ is brought on not by the indigenous other, but by a European rival. The process of refining sugar produced ‘the obvious analogues of human scum and dregs (which were) displaced onto the marginalised Portuguese Jews’ (p. 151). However, the evidence Sandiford finds for the development of this topos comes almost exclusively from post-Restoration texts (the earliest primary source he cites is Ligon’s History of Barbados, published in 1657). Instead, earlier accounts of international commerce tend to focus on free trade between nations, believing trade to be a source both of unbridled economic growth and a facilitator of mutual understanding and greater civility.

The fantasy of trade-fuelled perpetual growth, though, was not contained within the purely economic sphere. This distinction between the motives for exploration affected domestic conceptions of class, questioning the sharp dividing line between the martial function of the aristocracy and the newly emergent and upwardly-mobile bourgeois middle classes. David Quint has noted

74 Folger Shakespeare Library, Robert Bennet papers, MS X.d.483 (12), Anthony Nicholl to Robert Bennet, 9 Nov. 1653.
the divergent interpretations of the voyages that ran along class lines. The enterprise of discovery could alternately be understood as a heroic endeavor in the epic, aristocratic mold or as a business expedition undertaken by adventurous merchants.\textsuperscript{76}

This distinction, however, between the ‘martial’ aristocracy and the ‘businesslike’ merchants was not always clear cut. The royalist translator Christopher Wase’s praise poem upon the restoration of Charles II posits the king, not the merchant class, as the origin of trade:

\begin{quote}
While you repair our wooden walls decays,  
Churches erect, and a fair city raise;  
While you in Peace unite divided Hearts,  
And with Free trade revive ingenuous Arts.\textsuperscript{77}
\end{quote}

Wase reconfigures the project of noble construction (military enclosures and churches) into that of ‘Free trade’, co-opting the noblest figure in the land into the mercantile cause. Moreover, free trade has a restorative power, coupled with (and perhaps with an agency in) the new peace, as well as a clear cultural impact in those ‘ingenuous Arts’. In fact, in Wase’s imagined future, free trade becomes a crucial operative function of the nobility.

Camões’s Portuguese epic on the voyage of Da Gama, Os Lusíadas, takes its title not from a single individual but from the entire nation (the sons of Lusus); the focus of the epic is Portuguese trade with the East Indies, and the virtues of their policy of maritime supremacy. Richard Fanshawe, a member of the gentry, translated Camões’s epic in 1655. His translation collapses Quint’s distinction between military and mercantile classes, emphasising the conflation of these roles in the noble captain:

\begin{quote}
(For \textit{Trade} brings \textit{Opulence} and \textit{Rarieties},  
For which the \textit{Poor} doe \textit{sweat}, the \textit{Rich} doe \textit{Pine})
\end{quote}

Of two great fruits, which will from thence redound,  
His shall the glory; thine, the Gain be found.  

Da Gama is here speaking to the Emperor of India, and appears to cast himself simply as a noble emissary: he offers all the economic reward of any alliance to the natives, so long as he (as substitute for the King of Portugal) receives the glory. Similarly, he seems to disdain the practice of trade, suggesting that only the poor should ‘sweat’ for it, while the rich simply ‘pine’ for the ‘rarities’ it can deliver to them. Yet the locals are more aware of Da Gama’s mission, as the Emperor’s closing offer reveals:

Added to this, his avaritious Eye  
Upon the gainful Trade of PORTUGALL  
Makes him obey; and rather to comply  
With the brave Captain, then the Moorish gall.  
In short, he bids DE GAMA presently  
Get him aboard his Fleet; and, without all  
Suspect of harm, whatever Merchandice  
To send ashore to sell, or truck for Spice. (VIII.77)

Trade, in fact, is as much the goal of Da Gama as any glory – he wishes to return to Portugal with spice as well as fame. The offer reveals the real value to the Europeans of Oriental trade, since ‘trucking’ their merchandise for spice (and with it, undermining the Spanish/Dutch trading empires) allows the realisation of surplus value from that merchandise, and was (as we have seen) by far the most profitable interaction with the foreign available in the seventeenth century. Moreover, the Emperor’s offer reveals the inherent balance in cultural value; not only is he able to understand the true purpose of these negotiations (a notable contrast to the European accounts of native Americans), but the offer of trade places the two cultures into a mutually beneficial relationship.

Fanshawe’s dedicatory epistle gestures towards the effect that foreign trade can have on domestic culture:

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78 Luis de Camões, Lusiad, trans. by Richard Fanshawe (1655), VII.62. Further references are given in the text.
How much more obliged am I to bring unto your Lordship this TREASURE-TROVE, which (as to the second life, or rather Being, it hath from me in the English-Tongue) is so truly a Native of YORKSHIRE, and holding of your Lordship.

(Sig. A2v)

It is difficult, in a preface to a poem about the discovery of the East, not to read ‘treasure-trove’ as either the spices themselves, or the profit to be made from them. In any case, Fanshawe’s image assigns a local identity to the exotic, and this is achieved by the translator’s agency. It is, like the focus on trade, the intermediary process which is assigned the most importance. The ‘value’ of translation, here, is that it allows an appropriation of a foreign text to a political context – less explicit, here, than in other prefaces, but nonetheless the emphasis on the ‘political’ ramifications of a text so closely concerned with (nobly figured) expansion and foreign trade cannot be overlooked. By placing the text as a ‘holding’ of his dedicatee, the Second Earl of Strafford, Fanshawe recasts his role of translator as a type of Vasco da Gama, travelling to foreign lands and appropriating their produce.

In Paradise Lost, conversely, the role of trader is taken by the anti-hero, Satan. His mission to seduce Adam and Eve is framed by metaphors that, through their relationship to the seventeenth-century episteme of the spice trade, highlight the ambiguity and uncertainty of Satan’s intentions. J Martin Evans has demonstrated that Satan

rehearses virtually all the major roles in the repertoire of English colonial discourse. By turns buccaneer, pilgrim, empire-builder, lover, missionary, and merchant, he embodies not only the destructive potential of imperial conquest but something of its glamor and energy as well.79

Evans, however, is primarily concerned with the ‘colonial discourse’ concentrated on the Americas, and so it is the roles of ‘empire-builder, lover [and] missionary’ that he explores. His reading of Satan as a

'merchant' is (perhaps necessarily) brief, and suggests an equivalence between Satan’s description of his ‘purchase’ of Eden with an apple (X.466-504), and the ‘settlers who bought Manhattan Island’ (p. 70) for a few beads.

However much Satan presents his voyage as a conquest, winning Eden ‘to range in, and to dwell, and over man / To rule’ (X.492-93), the metaphors that bookend his actual voyage reveal the impossibility of that conquest. It is the spice trade, which was a response to the impracticality of the colonial project in the east, to which Satan’s voyage is compared. His journey from Hell to Earth begins with a comparison with a trading fleet:

As when far off at sea a fleet descried  
Hangs in the clouds, by equinoctial winds  
Close sailing from Bengala, or the isles  
Of Ternate and Tidore, whence merchants bring  
Their spicy drugs: they on the trading flood  
Through the wide Ethiopian to the Cape  
Ply stemming nightly toward the pole. So seemed  
Far off the flying fiend. (PL II.636-43)

Markley reads this passage as a direct attack on England’s trading rivals, especially the Dutch, noting that Ternate and Tidore ‘had appealed to James I for protection from the monopolistic practices of the VOC’. 80 This metaphor, though, should be read within the broader context outlined above. The comparison of Satan to a trade fleet casts him as a merchant adventurer, figuring his voyage as one of discovery rather than conquest. David Quint has noted the debt the description of Satan owes to Fanshawe’s translation of Camões, arguing that for this passage Milton’s ‘principal subtext is the journey of Vasco da Gama around the Cape of Good Hope to India in Os Lusiadas’. 81

The conceit of the profit-seeking European explorers, coupled with the deliberate naming of two islands heavily contested by those European powers, blends the two stated objectives of Satan’s mission. Satan admits

81 Quint, Epic and Empire, p. 253.
to the Council of Hell that he does not know where the Earth (notably figured as ‘the happy isle’ at II. 410) is, and he must search through the abyss for ‘whatever world, or unknown region’ (II. 442-43) he can find. Earth is, according to ‘ancient and prophetic fame’, a ‘happy seat’ which Satan believes to be especially favoured by God (II. 346-51). This echoes the early European beliefs about the wealth of the East, and the perceived value of their voyages of exploration (as outlined above).

The theme is reprised at the end of his voyage, as Satan arrives at the walls of Eden. The ‘native perfumes’ (IV.157) of Paradise are as pleasing to Satan as the scent of spices to weary sailors:

As when to them who sail
Beyond the Cape of Hope, and now are past
Mozambic, off at sea north-east winds blow
Sabean odours from the spicy shore
Of Arabie the blest, with such delay
Well pleased they slack their course, and many a league
Cheered with the grateful smell old Ocean smiles.
(IV.159-65)

For the traders, the odour of spice is an indicator of the success of their mission, both geographically (as they, like Satan, approach their destination) and commercially. This scent, though, is clearly figured as exotic, in contrast to the ‘native’ scents of Eden; it is only available in the lands beyond the Cape (Mozambique, Sheba, Arabia), which remained a difficult and expensive voyage. The danger is emphasised in the narrative of Tobias which immediately follows this simile:

So entertained these odorous sweets the fiend
Who came their bane, though with them better pleased
Than Asmodeus with the fishy fume,
That drove him, though enamoured, from the spouse
Of Tobit’s son, and with a vengeance sent
From Media post to Ægypt, there fast bound.
(IV.166-71)

Satan is twice reported as being ‘pleased’ or ‘entertained’ with the ‘odourous sweets’ of Eden; these descriptors provide parallels between
Satan’s entrance to Eden and the traders of the previous narrative, since both are ‘pleased’ by the ‘Sabean odours’/‘odorous sweets’. The introduction of the narrative of Tobias (‘Tobit’s son’) allows for a typological reading to be added to the contextual metaphor.\(^{82}\) Tobias justifies his marriage to Sara by comparison with Adam, since God ‘madest Adam, and gavest him Eve his wife for an helper & stay’.\(^{83}\) Tobit’s ability to drive off ‘Asmodai / the fleshliest incubus’ (\(PR\) II.151-52) by creating a foul smell offers a typological ‘vengeance’ for Satan’s ‘bane’ to Eden (and therefore Adam and Eve). Even the ‘odorous sweets’ of Eden, then, however pleasing they may be to Satan at the moment of his entry, prefigure his eventual defeat. This juxtaposition of the readily available native perfumes of Eden with the difficult to obtain spices of our fallen world, coupled with the metaphor of dangerous smells that immediately follows it, serves to introduce peril to Satan’s mission at the very point when it appears most successful.

The Tobias metaphor also serves a contemporary purpose. Although both Adam and Tobias are warned against their foe by Raphael, the pleasing ‘sweets’ of Eden do not drive Satan away, as the ‘fishy fume’ does Asmodeus.\(^{84}\) The scents of Paradise, collapsed into the spicy odours of seventeenth-century exploration, become dangerously enticing for those who, like Satan, seek to possess or despoil them. The Tobias story thus also serves as a warning against the too-alluring mercantilism of our fallen world. James I, in his anti-smoking tract of 1604, attacked the ‘inconsiderate and childish affectation of novelty’ which prompted the attribution of many beneficial properties to the newly-available tobacco.

\(^{82}\) The book of Tobit was treated as apocryphal in the Protestant tradition, and dismissed as unscriptural by commentators such as the prominent Hebraist scholar and theologian Hugh Broughton, who claimed in his \textit{Principal Positions for Grounds of the Holy Bible} (Amsterdam, 1609) that ‘such fables are fitter for Telemachus and Aeneas than God’s people’ (sig. D4v) . It was, however, included in the Apocrypha in the 1611 Authorized Version.

\(^{83}\) The \textit{Holy Bible [Authorized Version]} (1612), Tobit 8:6.

\(^{84}\) The Tobias story is reintroduced when Raphael is sent by God to warn Adam about Satan (V.221-23).
James attacks the grandiose claims made by tobacco merchants, culminating in a deployment of the Tobias narrative:

And if it could by the smoke thereof chase out devils, as the smoke of Tobias fish did (which I am sure could smell no stronger) it would serve for a precious relic, both for the superstitious Priests, and the insolent Puritans, to cast out devils withal. (sig.C3r)

This ironic attack also conflates a seemingly beneficial smell with the foul odour of Tobias’s fish. This movement serves to undermine the proponents of tobacco, reducing the smoke to a proverbially foul smell, and simultaneously removing the only benefit of ‘Tobias fish’, the power to drive away demons. By suggesting this confusion, James’s text privileges biblical truth against the unsubstantiated claims of the advocates for tobacco.

Milton modulates this attack on merchants (whom he places alongside the clergy as ‘dispensers of treasures inestimable without price’) in the *Reason of Church-Government*, suggesting they place worldly profit above the commonweal:

And that which aggravates the burden more is, that having received amongst his allotted parcels certain precious truths of such an orient lustre as no Diamond can equal, which never the less he has in charge to put off at any cheap rate, yea for nothing to them that will, the great Merchants of this world seeing that this course would soon discover, and disgrace the false glitter of their deceitful wares wherewith they abuse the people, like poor Indians with beads and glasses, practice by all means how they may suppress the venting of such rarities and such a cheapness as would undo them, and turn their trash upon their hands.  

The comparison of ‘precious truth’ with the ‘diamonds’ it outshines reveals the line of Milton’s attack: truth should be given freely (‘for nothing to them

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85 James I (Stuart), *A Counterblast to Tobacco* (1604), sig. B1v. The tract was reprinted with commentary and further material by John Hancock as *The Touchstone, or Trial of Tobacco* (1676). Further references are taken from the 1604 edition, and given in the text.

86 *CPW* I:801-802.
that will’), yet the practice of trade (and the increased consumerism it
necessitates) means the people are given ‘trash’ and ‘false glitter’ instead.
The same comparison between truth and trade is made in Areopagitica:
‘Truth and understanding are not such wares as to be monopolized and
traded in by tickets and statutes [...] like our broad cloth and our wool
packs.’87 Just as for James, the practice of trade itself is not deleterious
(truth is described as having an exotically ‘orient lustre’), except if the
focus on the trade removes attention (either from producer or consumer)
from the search for truth. This theme of the worldliness of truth will be
returned to in Areopagitica’s image of Osiris in chapter four.

This kind of discourse offers further nuance to Satan’s positioning
as a trader. He is simply ‘entertained’ by the ‘sweets’ of Eden, without
realising their true importance: God has created the plants for Adam and
Eve to nurture (‘to tend plant, herb and flower, / Our pleasant task
enjoined’ [IX.205-206]), not simply to enjoy. A few lines later, after leaping
over the wall, Satan perches on the tree of life:

Sat like a cormorant: yet not true life
Thereby regained, but sat devising death
To them that lived; nor on the virtue thought
Of that life-giving plant, but only used
For prospect, what well used had been the pledge
Of immortality. So little knows
Any, but God alone, to value right
The good before him. (IV.196-203)

Satan, like the misguided merchants, simply does not understand how to
‘value right’ the possessions of the New World he would claim. The
narrator makes clear here what was implicit in the image of the spice
trader: Satan, like the ‘poor Indians’, is distracted by outward appearance.
This metaphor thus reverses his colonial mission, casting Satan as the
naïve figure unable to understand true value.

Satan’s voyage is portrayed as one of either conquest or colony.
Satan offers both courses of action at the Council of Hell: ‘with hell fire to
waste his whole creation, or possess all as our own [...] or if not drive,

87 CPW II:535-36.
seduce them to our party’ (II. 364-68). The choice he presents is apparently based on expediency and opportunism rather than any deep-rooted ideological imperative. The spice trade, with its multiple, shifting, contexts of trade, exploration, wealth and conquest, provides an excellent allegory through which *Paradise Lost* can depict and explore Satan’s mission to Eden.

These metaphors, then, serve as a mutually illuminating link between the seventeenth-century *episteme* and the mythic past. They allow the epic to engage with its *episteme* by exploring questions over nationality and Otherness. These issues are not finally resolved in the character of Satan, since his mission is never entirely aligned with any one type of contact with the Other. Instead, these metaphors activate competing systems of meaning to destabilise Satan’s public and private pronouncements on his mission.

In doing so, they function in a similar manner to Spenser and Dante’s imagery of the ineffable. The references to the contemporary materiality of the spice trade continually frustrate any potential for a cohesive characterisation of Satan; rather, they fracture and undermine both his self-presentation, and the presentation of the Epic Voice. These metaphors reflect upon the act of presentation itself: the uncontrollable allusions that they activate offer a number of potential sites of meaning, none of which is ultimately endorsed by the poem.

This chapter has demonstrated that the imagery of epic is temporally inflected, and engages in multivalent ways with its *episteme*. It has shown that epic does not exist in a closed-off or mythic past, but rather draws meaning from contextual allusion. This conflict between the myth and contemporary reality foregrounds the text’s fictive status, and calls into question the value of writing (or language itself) as a mode of representation. The remainder of this thesis contends that this concern over the possibility of representation plays out continuously within *Paradise Lost*. 
3. ‘O may we soon again renew that song’: *Paradise Lost* and the Limits of Fallen Expression

The previous two chapters have both been, in some ways, methodological. The first chapter demonstrated the inadequacy of the theoretical position that the epic is a ‘dead’ genre which must be supplanted by the novel. Instead, it argued for a reading of epic as a dialogic text, one open to its context and alert to the ambiguity and différance inherent in language. It demonstrated that such a reading was prevalent amongst seventeenth-century commentators on the epic form, who saw in the genre the potential for didactic intervention into the moment of its production. Placing the epic in conversation with its *episteme* reveals a level of meaning which is invisible to a strictly generic or biographical reading. As the reading of the invocation to book III (in chapter one) demonstrated, these seemingly personal and biographical elements of the epic are in fact multivalent examples of intertextuality. They combine the epic tradition with contemporary discourse and ideologies to present the central image of the poem: humanity’s fall away from God. It is this theme, as it is expressed through the consistent trope of music, to which this chapter returns.

The second chapter focused on the epic simile, rejecting the idea that epic existed only in a highly valorised but always already finished past. The temporality of epic, rather, is a multivalent version of history, in which the narrative is able to point outside of the epic frame, either supplementing national mythography, or directly referring to contemporary events and figures. Reading the epic simile as contextually engaged allows new sets of meanings to emerge; reading Satan’s voyage to Eden alongside contemporaneous voyages for exploration, conquest or profit demonstrates how the text uses contemporary models (both competing and complementary) to nuance its own narrative. That methodology will
be extended in this chapter, which examines not a single metaphor, but rather an accretive sequence of similes. I argue in this chapter that the references throughout *Paradise Lost* to music and singing are unified in the same failure of representation that characterised responses to the new world discussed in chapter two. The music of *Paradise Lost* is a motif for the presence (or absence) of the divine; fallen creatures (including the bard of *Paradise Lost*) are unable to hear or properly reproduce the divine music.

This chapter, then, marks a shift in the thesis away from work on epic as a genre; this chapter, and the one that follows, narrow the focus to *Paradise Lost*. The methodology already established could, I suggest, be valuable for the study of any particular epic poem – as the introduction demonstrated, a similar methodology is the basis of much valuable work on *The Faerie Queene*. *Paradise Lost* is the focus of this thesis for two reasons. Firstly, Milton studies remains broadly biographically oriented, and resistant to the kinds of deconstructionist work I am doing here. Secondly, it is an epic which, perhaps more than any other in the genre, is self-consciously interested in the limits of human representation, in its own ability to signify. As the following two chapters will demonstrate, *Paradise Lost* continually calls into question its own claim to represent divine perfection within fallen systems of signification.

Chapters three and four are both concerned with tracing the ways in which *Paradise Lost* engages with the openness and ambiguity of language, and the generic form of epic, established in chapter one. The following chapter is specifically linguistically oriented, focused on the role of ambiguous language within the poem itself. It will argue that linguistic ambiguity is inescapably symptomatic of the Fall, and demonstrate the varied responses of fallen creatures – including the Epic Voice itself – to the difficulties of expression once away from the divine presence which serves as guarantor of meaning.

However, the difficulty of proper expression is also explored in *Paradise Lost* through a sequence of images of music. This chapter therefore prepares for the work on linguistic expression that follows by
examining how *Paradise Lost* thematically and metaphorically presents its failure to properly represent the divine. It argues that the poem appropriates contemporary discourses of the divine music, or the Music of the Spheres, in order to display the futility of ‘mortal voice’ attempting to sing of divine perfection.

The chapter begins by examining those contemporary discourses of the celestial song. It traces the continuing impact of the Platonic theory of the movement of the spheres, and the music they produced, on music theory as well as other, diverse, fields of enquiry such as astronomy and theology; in doing so, it shows that this heavenly music was a key driving impulse behind social and scientific theorising. It then examines iterations of the doctrine of celestial harmony throughout Milton’s early poetry, demonstrating that those poems use the image of the angelic or divine song to explore humanity’s relationship with God, both in the fact of its failing, and the potential of its restoration. The painful failure to hear, or participate in, the heavenly song is a consistent trope in Milton’s poetry, and it is continued in *Paradise Lost*. The final part of the first section examines the inversion of the myth, the parodic singing of the devils in Hell. It reads their song, as well as the metaphor of the pipe organ that accompanies the building of Pandæmonium, as an example of divergence, not the ‘concord’ that ‘is in heaven’ (*PL* III.371). The disharmonious, or ‘partial’ (II.552), singing of the devils reveals the principle that runs throughout *Paradise Lost*: God is (or will be) ‘all in all’ (III.341), creator of a perfect, monist universe, and to fall is to lose all place in his exalted hierarchy, and by implication in the celestial song and divine utterance. Rather, fallen creatures are inherently disharmonic, disunited and dispersed in all their utterances, musical or linguistic.

The chapter will then move to a discussion of the figures of the muse and the bard (or Epic Voice), both of which are shown to sing the

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1 The phrase ‘all in all’ is scriptural (I Corinthians 15:29), and the complementary passages both suggest that this ultimate perfection will only occur after the incarnation and resurrection.
poem. The invocation to book seven identifies the muse with Urania (the classical muse of astronomy), who is presented as singing the ‘celestial song’ (VII.12). In this way the poem places the ‘I sing’ of the epic within the contemporary astronomical discourse of the music of the spheres. This appeal to the muse forces an examination of the Epic Voice’s claim to be a participant in the celestial song; in fact, as the remainder of the second section of this chapter will show, the invocations reveal precisely the inadequacy of the poet, and the impossibility of truly singing with anything other than ‘mortal voice’.

The metaphors of singing, either on their own terms or as descriptions of the act of narrating, always work as reminders that humanity can no longer sing the celestial music. Fallen music is unable to properly approximate the spontaneous chorality that is the mark of the divine; in the association with Urania, Paradise Lost reveals the extent to which this is a metaphor for all fallen utterances. Just as the perfect harmony of music is lost at the Fall, so too is the spontaneous perfection of the ‘prompt eloquence’ (V.149) which marks Adam and Eve’s prelapsarian speech. Michael Wilding contends that the 1645 Poems has as its ‘recurring image […] the music of the spheres’, noting the positioning of the Nativity Ode and Lycidas, the first and last poems in the volume, as a crucial part of this schema.³ As I will argue in this chapter, these two poems, alongside Paradise Lost, are attempts to reproduce the universal song, even though they are each conscious that this is a hubristically doomed project for fallen man to embark upon. Jamie James argues that Milton framed himself as a second Pythagoras (commonly credited as the inventor or discoverer of harmony), as he ‘no less than Pythagoras himself, made it his business to unpurge human ears’, using poetry as a device by which the universal harmony might be comprehended and examined by fallen man, even while conscious that it cannot be heard or properly reproduced, only gestured towards.⁴ As Christopher Hill has noted, Milton thought that ‘men and women should

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strive to achieve perfection on earth, even though Milton did not think they could ever succeed'.

The musical metaphors of the poem thus point to the linguistic dispersal (Bakhtin’s heteroglossia) which is the condition of fallen creatures. The remainder of the chapter therefore examines the idea of the multivocality that infects fallen poetry, however lofty its theodicean designs, or its appeal to a muse for aid. The ‘heavenly muse’ invoked in the *Nativity Ode* (15) and *Paradise Lost* (I.6) acts as a unifying force, bringing the full force of the heavenly song to the poem through the figure of the poet. Indeed, the association of the muse with Urania (classically, the muse of astronomy) in *Paradise Lost* fulfils a similar double function to the sirens of the ‘Solemn Music’, appropriating the necessary pagan machinery to Christian inspiration. The polyphonic *Lycidas* also has an invocation (‘Begin then, sisters of the sacred well’ [15]), and a unifying figure (the ‘uncouth swain’ [186]) who, along with a host of characters, seemingly sings the poem. This chapter will demonstrate that *Lycidas* is a concerted attempt to demonstrate the impossibility of reproducing that perfect harmony in the constricted language of fallen man. Using *Lycidas* as an analogous text – since it is also a poem with an invocation for divine aid in singing which seeks to unify a succession of voices into a generic tradition (albeit elegy, rather than epic) – I argue that *Paradise Lost* performs, at a structural level, the failure to synthesise voice that is analogous to the failure to perform the celestial music.

Having established this analogy, I turn to the seventeenth-century movement to recreate a universal language of perfect signification. I suggest that the myth of Babel, frequently deployed in contemporary tracts, is used in *Paradise Lost* to signify a linguistic fall. This takes the same form as the musical metaphors, revealing a failure to reperform perfection that in language takes the form of dispersal, an opening up of language to différance. This inability to properly signify is at the very heart of *Paradise Lost*’s narrative, as it thematically and linguistically explores the consequences of the Fall. This chapter, then, examines the images

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and tropes it uses in that exploration, while the following chapter will explore the language of the poem in more detail.

**The Universal Song**

The music of the spheres (or celestial, or universal, song) was a concept that combined music theory, theology, philosophy and astronomy to update the Greek ideas of a harmonic, music-producing cosmology. This perfectly ordered cosmos was seen as evidence of God’s continued immanence in his benevolent creation, although fallen man is unable to feel the joy of divine presence, and thus hear the heavenly song. The music of the spheres was an example of the divine perfection of creation, and thus represented the spontaneous joy expressed by God’s works singing praise back to him. As with all virtues in *Paradise Lost*, this is most clearly expressed by the Son, who informs the Father that he finds ‘in thy presence joy entire’ (III.265). In Adam and Eve’s morning prayer, the heavenly bodies are instructed to join the universal song begun by the angels that ‘circle his throne rejoicing’ (V.163): ‘ye five other wandering fires that move / In mystic dance not without song, resound / His praise’ (V.177-79). The positioning of ‘resound’ at the end of the line forces a strong stress onto the second syllable, as well as offering a momentary pause before the full phrase is activated, emphasising its dual meaning: the celestial bodies not only resonate with their music (as suggested by line 178 taken in isolation), but re-sound, or sing back, the praise of the creator.

Milton’s poetry continually betrays a concern with its own status in relation to the music of the spheres, usually enacted by apparent deference to the Muse who must sing through the poet. ‘At a Solemn Music’ is a plaintive appeal for reinstatement in the divine chorus:

That we on earth with undiscreding voice
May rightly answer that melodious noise
[...]  
O may we soon again renew that song,
And keep in tune with heaven, till God ere long
To his celestial consort us unite
To live with him, and sing in endless morn of light. (1-28)

It was the ‘disproportioned sin’ (19) of humanity that caused the break in the song, and so humanity’s return to a position in the ‘celestial consort’ is emblematic of the fall-redemption pattern of Christian belief. However, there are two types of singing here. The renewal of the song actually takes place before the singer is taken to ‘live with him’; that is, the song is first renewed on earth, with ‘mortal voice’ (PL VII.24), before it joins with the endless song of the celestial choir.

The model for the ‘Solemn Music’ was Petrarch, specifically ‘the stanza used by Petrarch in his canzone to the Blessed Virgin’ (Vergine bella, che di sol vestita), which similarly appeals to a heavenly figure for aid in singing (‘Ma non so'ncominar senza tu' aita’ [But I cannot begin without your aid’], laments the poet), suggesting an inadequacy on the part of the poet that must be compensated if the song is to be sung at all. The attempt to ‘keep in tune with heaven’, to match the music of the spheres, requires the participation of a singer in that celestial harmony to join with the singers on Earth.

The song of fallen man, in effect, is able to approximate the divine chorus, but even to attempt to do so requires celestial intervention. In the ‘Solemn Music’ this is sought from a ‘Blest pair of sirens […] Sphere born harmonious sisters’ (1-2), who are asked to sing through the poet who requests that they ‘present / That undisturbed song of pure concent’ (5-6). These are the same ‘sirens’, producers of the music of the spheres, heard by the Genius of the Wood in Arcades, who reports that he hears ‘the celestial siren’s harmony / That sit upon the nine enfolded spheres, / and sing’ (63-65). These ‘sirens’ are identified with the Fates of classical mythology (specifically, as Carey notes, that of Plato’s Republic) as they ‘turn the adamantine spindle round/ On which the fate of gods and men is wound’ (66-67). Similar imagery of the all-knowing siren is found in Homer, with the sirens themselves declaring to Odysseus that ‘those high

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issues that the gods ordained / And whatsoever all the earth can show / t’inform a knowledge of desert, we know’ (Od XII.281-83). These same creatures are described by Odysseus as the ‘heavenly-singing sirens’ (XII.236), suggesting a potential identification between Milton’s ‘sirens’ of ‘At a Solemn Music’ and the ‘heavenly muse’ of Paradise Lost and On the Morning of Christ’s Nativity.

‘At a Solemn Music’ combines the pagan system of the music of the spheres with a Christian sense of the music of heaven. John Hollander notes that ‘the purely pagan cosmological compliment can be seen to be a conventional one. But from the very beginning, the Christian theme of the intimation of the heavenly music as seen in actual earthly singing appears’.7 ‘At a Solemn Music’ enacts the restorative performativity of the music of the spheres, suggesting that through song fallen man can once again approach God. In Milton’s poetry, participation in the heavenly music is both a technique for approaching the divine, while also serving as a sign of the increased purity required for such a task; that is, song is both an effect and cause of humanity’s improving relationship with God.

Milton doubtless had an understanding of practical music derived from his father, whose contribution to the Triumphs of Oriana, a collection of madrigals presented to Elizabeth in 1601 demonstrated ‘unmistakeable evidence of talent and skill in the composition of light secular music’.8 Milton the elder apparently remained on good terms with many of the musicians he met during the composition of the Oriana, and continued to move in musical circles throughout his life. At least some of the elder Milton’s musical taste influenced his son, whose ‘preferences for part-singing, the organ, and the viol (as opposed to solo singing, the harpsichord, and the violin) place him in the same conservative musical tradition as his father’.9

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8 Ernest Brennecke, John Milton the Elder and his Music (New York: Columbia UP, 1938), p. 56. Further references are given in the text.
9 DNB, John Milton 1562-1647.
However, the younger Milton’s poetry is concerned with the philosophical qualities of music (in particular the music of the spheres), which was deemed solely the province of *musica speculativa*. From a practical perspective, by the mid to late 1630s (the time Milton was composing many of the poems to be published in 1645), Brennecke notes that ‘[p]olyphonic composition […] was no longer exemplified in anything like its former purity’ (116). The spectacular multivocal or multi-instrumental musical works that Milton imagined in his writings were becoming solely the province of the speculative intellectual. Though song is performed (or, more frequently, reported to be being performed or heard) throughout his works, it serves to invite speculation on the nature of music, rather than its performative or technical qualities. As Finney argues, Milton’s musical ‘metaphor is less specific than that of many other poets’, for it is primarily concerned not with the production of music, or the practical facets of the music itself, but with the effects of that production.¹⁰ Milton’s poetry presents the celestial music as the fulfilment of humanity’s communication with God, and in doing so ‘authorizes the figure-making activity of the imagination (“high-raised fantasy” [‘Solemn Music’ 5]) as a noble striving toward the divine ideal’.¹¹ The only person concerned with how the music is to be performed is the poet himself, for poetry constitutes an attempt to sing the celestial chorus on earth: ‘the poet is, himself, the musician; music is verbal language.’¹²

Though Milton does not directly prescribe the study of music in *Of Education*, that text does stress the musical qualities potentially present in poetry, directing the students to learn:

[A] graceful and ornate rhetoric […] To which poetry would be made subsequent, or indeed rather precedent, as being less subtle and fine, but more simple, sensuous and passionate. I mean not here the prosody of a verse, which they could not but have hit on before the rudiments of grammar, but that sublime art which in Aristotle’s poetics, in

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Horace and in the Italian commentaries of Castelvetro, Tasso, Mazzoni and others [...] would show them what religious, what glorious and magnificent use might be made out of poetry, both in divine and human things.\footnote{CPW II:402-6}

Milton here suggests a refinement of the natural tendency towards ‘prosody’ (defined by a contemporary as ‘Prosody (which chiefly belongs to poets) that expostulates the accent, rhythm, quantity and measure of feet in every word or verse\footnote{Simon Daines, \textit{Orthoepia Anglicana} (1640), unpag., with missing pages [sig. A2v?].} by using the examples of great rhetorical figures. The links between ‘prosody’ and musical qualities were well established, such that James Howell could quip in his poem ‘Upon Dr. Davies British Grammar’ that the tongue ‘now speaks by rules, and sings by prosody’.\footnote{James Howell, \textit{Epistolae Hoelianae} (1650), p. 164.} An improved technical understanding is thus added to the baser ability to construct a musical or rhythmic text (‘what despicable creatures our common rhymers and play-writers be’, Milton bemoans in the same passage\footnote{CPW II:405.}) supplementing and refining the rudimentary arts of prosody to produce the sensuous and passionate poetry which nonetheless retains musical qualities. The note on the verse added to \textit{Paradise Lost} clarifies Milton’s position, declaring rhyme to be ‘to all judicious ears, trivial and of no true musical delight; which consists only in apt numbers, fit quantity of syllables and the sense variously drawn from one verse into another’.\footnote{‘The Verse’ \textit{PL}, p. 55. For the argument that the lack of rhyme in \textit{Paradise Lost} is a response to Royalist appropriations of psalms into rhyming couplets, see Paula Loscocco, ‘Royalist Reclamation of Psalms into rhyming couplets’, \textit{RQ}, 64 (2011), 500-543 (p. 539-40); See also David Norbrook, \textit{Writing the English Republic} (CUP, 1999), p. 135.} Poetry must be musical, but that effect is not achieved through jangling rhyme, but rather the properly understood and applied technical features of music. The note makes clear that Milton intends \textit{Paradise Lost} to be of ‘true musical delight’; poetic language must approximate music, but only if it can do so in the full harmonic complexity that should accompany its position as a participant in the universal song.
Milton’s engagement with music serves as an intervention into speculative music theory. The science of music (as with many other sciences) in the seventeenth-century was split into ‘speculative’ and ‘practical’ understandings of the subject. While the practical elements of musical study focussed on the technical aspects of performance, the speculative was concerned with ‘acquiring speculative knowledge about the world, achieved primarily through an understanding of the principles of harmony’.  

The passage from ‘art’ of music to the ‘science’ of astronomy (in our modern understanding of these terms as disparate and unconnected areas of study; no such distinction existed in the seventeenth century) was traversed by figures such as Johannes Kepler and Vincent Wing, who used the theory of the music of the spheres as a basis for astrological study. In his *Harmonices Mundi* (1619), Kepler suggested that the elliptical orbits of the planets corresponded to harmonic frequencies, and even included a formula for producing music based on the collective ratios of planetary orbits, ‘confirming that their real music is polyphonic and not some static scale of distances’. Kepler found the harmony not in the distances between the planets, but in their relative movements (most clearly in the ratio between the extremities of their orbits): ‘quod igitur inter hos duodecim terminus seu motus, planetarum sex, solem circumcurrentium, sursum deorsum et quaquaversum stent proportiones harmonicæ’. In Kepler’s astronomy, every aspect of the universe is harmonic; the individual planets have harmonic aphelia and perihelia, and these are also harmonic when combined in any number, such that ‘the proportion between single voice singing, called monody, and that of many voices singing together, is the same as that of the single planet to their

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21 ‘Therefore, in the limits of the twelve motions of the six planets that circle the sun there are above, below and in every direction harmonic proportions.’ Johannes Kepler, *Harmonices Mundi Liber V* (Linz, Austria: 1619), p. 202. My translation. Further references are given in the text, in English only.
harmonic conjunction’ (p.201-2). As the dedication to James I demonstrates, it is Kepler’s firm belief that this is not a coincidence, but rather proof of the benevolent divine ordering of the universe: ‘It is God who has ordered all the melody of human life’ (Dedicatio, p.2). Thus, for Kepler, the discovery of the harmony of the spheres confirms both ‘his own empirical knowledge and the instinctively natural, polyphonic practice of modern musicians’.22

Kepler’s work was an early attempt at a grand unified theory, seeking ‘to bare the ultimate secret of the universe in an all-embracing synthesis of geometry, music, astrology, astronomy and epistemology’.23 Kepler sought ‘to prove that the age-old belief in a universe resonating in accordance to musical consonances can be corroborated with the help of 17th-century physics’, and this ‘age-old belief’ continued to hold contemporary relevance for the devout scientist, informing many of his speculations on the nature of the universe.24

Paradise Lost appropriates, though as with all astronomical theory ultimately stops short of endorsing, Kepler’s theory.25 The debate (or instruction) on the nature of the universe between Adam and Raphael in book VIII is partly drawn from Kepler’s work, as Raphael ‘presents Kepler’s alternative’, offering a model of ‘attractive virtue’ (VIII.124) that parallels his theory of magnetic attraction to explain astronomical movement.26 Anita Lawson, building on Adamson’s work, also noted significant allusion in book III, describing further instances of the theory of magnetic attraction, as well as a definite reference to ‘the continuing controversies over the position of the sun in the universe’.27 Here, too, Paradise Lost does not solely rely on one astrological system, but synthesises them into a general concept of heavenly music. Heavenly

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25 See p.126, below, on Milton’s ambivalence between the systems of Galileo and Copernicus in this dialogue and at X.668ff.
bodies here 'move / Their starry dance' (III.579-80), and that dance, as the poem later informs the reader, is musical: 'wandering fires that move / In mystic dance not without song' (V.177-8). Rajan notes that in Paradise Lost 'there is a suggestion [...] that the music of the spheres too may have its heavenly counterpart'. Joad Raymond, similarly, contends that the heavenly choir of Paradise Lost does not equate or consist with the music of the spheres, for two reasons: 'firstly, it is profoundly verbal [...] Secondly, it is far more creaturely than any account of the celestial harmonies. These are words sung'.

The ambiguity is appealing given the poem’s reluctance to fully adopt a system of cosmic organisation, yet there is no distinction drawn in Milton’s work between the celestial choir and the music of the spheres, as they are both rational and necessary outcomes of God’s ordering of the universe, every element of which sings harmoniously back to him ('both heaven and earth shall high extol / Thy praises' [III.146-7]). As the 'Solemn Music' makes clear, this is ‘the fair music that all creatures made / To their great Lord’ (21-2), demonstrating an equivalence in sacred song between the heavenly choir and the universal music. This equivalence is outlined by Raphael, who informs Adam that the angels:

In song and dance about the sacred hill,  
Mystical dance, which yonder starry sphere  
Of Planets and of fixt in all her wheels  
Resembles nearest. (V.619-22)

The angelic song is equated with the movement, if not explicitly the music, of the spheres, yet that movement is, both for Milton and other seventeenth-century philosophers, intrinsically harmonic. Though the angels are singing, they are still participants in the outpouring of joy perpetually performed by God’s unfallen works.

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28 Balachandra Rajan, 'Paradise Lost' and the Seventeenth-Century Reader (Chatto & Windus, 1966), p. 62. Rajan also offers (p. 151) a summary of the instances of conjunction between the celestial and cosmic dances in Paradise Lost as well as in contemporary literature.

29 Raymond, Milton’s Angels, p. 315.
The autodidact astronomer Vincent Wing produced, around 30 years after Kepler, the ‘first significant English treatise on planetary astronomy since the Copernican revolution’.\(^{30}\) Although Wing does not claim explicitly that the movement of the planets produces music, the title of his treatise, *Harmonicon Cœleste, or The Celestial Harmony of the Visible World*, makes clear his debt to the notion of the music of the spheres. For Wing, the orderliness that the celestial music would require is the natural starting point for a mathematical treatise on practical astronomy: ‘so may we by this theoretical doctrine not only see the spheres and orbs of all the planets, but also apprehend […] the motion of the planets is essential, and given them by God.’\(^{31}\) The ultimate purpose of Wing’s study is to provide a mathematical base to gather the empirical evidence that supports this theory, and so provide further evidence for the divinely ordered universe.

The study of music could thus even lead to meditation on, and a greater understanding of, the divine, as it did for the Catholic music scholar Mersenne, for whom ‘the three great *genera* of music […] constituted a Triunity comparable to the Holy Trinity.’\(^{32}\) The power of music to spark thoughts of the divine was not in question in the seventeenth century, with all but the most extreme Puritans accepting music as some part of the liturgy, most often in the form of the singing of psalms. The main controversy was the extent to which this occurred: whether music alone could draw the soul closer to God (as Catholics, and High Church Anglicans such as Laud, argued), or whether anything beyond the most rudimentary music became a distraction from proper contemplation (broadly, the Puritan and Anglican position).\(^{33}\) This debate had been pre-empted by Augustine, who had argued that the value of music (specifically, the singing of psalms) is that it can promote

\(^{30}\) *DNB*
\(^{33}\) For a comprehensive survey of the seventeenth-century literature on this issue, see Gretchen L. Finney “Organical musick” and Ecstasy’, *JHI*, 8 (1947), 273-92.
meditation on the text, but it is sinful if it purely promotes pleasure, that is, affects only the sense:

I am moved, not with the singing, but with the thing sung [...] Thus float I between peril of pleasure and an approved profitable custom [...] so oft as it befalls me to be more moved with the voice than with the ditty, I confess myself to have grievously offended, at which time I wish rather not to have heard the music.34

As with colour or crafts (both also discussed in this section of the Confessions), the ‘peril of pleasure’ is that the needs or desires of the body are given precedence over the soul. Augustine argues that the soul senses through the body, becoming receptive to the way upon which it is acted, and so drawn further into meditation on the divine mystery (‘reason for the senses' sake gained admission’ [675]). In his treatise On Music, the same distinction is drawn between ‘the rhythms that re-echo through those vicious theatres’ and the ‘divine rhythm of wisdom’ which is received ‘not from the body but from God’.35

This sort of speculation was the province of the university-educated intellectual elite, held to be superior to the actual practice of music, and the chief object of this speculation was the idea of the mathematical and harmonic principles of the universe: the music of the spheres. John Dowland makes this clear in his translation of the Musicae Active Micrologus (1515) of Andreas Ornithoparcus [Andreas Vogelsang], still a crucial treatise on musical theory, and one which Dowland, himself a famous composer, ‘may have used in his own teaching’:36

He is called a musician, which taketh upon him the knowledge of singing by weighing it with reason, not with the servile exercise of practise, but the commanding power of speculation [...] Therefore a speculative musician,

35 Augustine, De Musica, trans. by W. F. Jackson-Knight (The Orthological Institute, 1949), p.90 [VI.v.8].
excels the *practical*: for it is much better to know what a man doth, than to do that which another man doth.  

A clear hierarchy is established here, with the ‘speculative musician’ as more intellectually advanced than his practical counterpart. Dowland, in privileging those with an intellectual understanding of music, was following classical precedent; the *Cyropaedia*, for example, offers as the highest example those musicians who ‘use not those tunes and songs only which they have learned, but study also to make and set other’. Underpinning this conclusion is the sense that the speculative musician can somehow penetrate the mystery of music, understanding the production of music on a much more profound level than someone whose understanding comes only with slavishly reproducing music (‘the servile exercise of practice […] to do that which another man doth’).

The passage is a definite echo (in fact, almost a direct translation) of Boethius’ definition of musicianship: ‘it is much better and nobler to know about what someone else fashions than to execute that about which someone else knows’. Boethius, in a text that served as the foundation of much of the seventeenth-century understanding of music (and certainly Ornithoparcus drew heavily upon it), established three categories of musical understanding, performers, composers and what we might call theorists, or speculative musicians (‘those who have a capacity for judging’ [51]). Here, too, it is the synchronising of musical understanding with intellectual or philosophical insight that distinguishes the speculative musician: ‘This class, since it is totally grounded in reason and thought, will rightly be esteemed as musical. That person is a musician who exhibits the faculty of forming judgements according to speculation or reason relative and appropriate to music […] and all the things that are to be explained subsequently’ (51).

37 John Dowland, *Andreas Ornithoparcus his Micrologus, or Introduction: Containing the Art of Singing* (1609), pp. 4-5.
One of the things that could, potentially, be ‘explained subsequently’ to a complete understanding of harmony was the celestial music. Ornithoparcus revisits the long-established theoretical position (later confirmed, albeit in a corrected version, by Kepler) that an orderly system of celestial organisation would be intrinsically harmonic:

how can this quick-moving frame of the world whirl about with a dumb and silent motion? From this turning of the heaven, there cannot be removed a certain order of harmony [...] So then, the world’s music is an harmony, caused by the motion of the stars [...] certain it is, that the grand work-master of this mundane fabric, made all things in number, weight, and measure, wherein principally, mundane music doth consist. (p.1)

The heavenly music is a natural result of the perfectly systemic divine ordering of the universe. Consequently, by understanding the principles of harmony and astronomy, a thoughtful observer might be able to reach a greater understanding of God through his rational works. This was certainly the position of university scholars: the Bodleian Library acquired numerous works by Kepler, and ‘attendance at lectures in geometry became compulsory from 1620 [...] and astronomy lectures were similarly obligatory on all sixth- and seventh-year students’. The existence of ‘mundane music’ (that is, earthly music) is evidence that God’s creation is harmonious, as it seeks to approximate and reproduce, although it can only do so partially, the divine song.

In Arcades, the Genius of the Wood is able to hear the ‘celestial sirens’ harmony’, but that music ‘none can hear / Of human mould with gross unpurged ear’ (63; 72-73). The idea that the music is available to cosmic or celestial creatures, but not fallen man, was not new: it originated with Pliny, and was repeated by philosophers, commentators and artists up to Dante (‘through the incandescent air there ran / sweet melody [...] if [Eve] had been devout beneath her veil / I should have

savoured those ineffable delights before’ [Purg XXIX.22-30]) and Shakespeare: ‘Such harmony is in immortal souls; / But, whilst this muddy vesture of decay / Doth grossly close it in, we cannot hear it.’ Patrides, though, distinguishes between the two uses of this doctrine here, arguing that ‘Shakespeare was probably interested much more in the poetic merit of the idea whereas Milton was as much concerned with its moral import.’ The Second Prolusion certainly expands upon the moral or spiritual implications of this doctrine, stating that the fact that the music of the spheres is inaudible is not a result of cosmic silence, but our own inability to hear:

What if no one on earth has ever heard this symphony of the stars? It does not therefore follow that everything beyond the sphere of the moon is mute and utterly benumbed in silence. The fault is in our own deaf ears, which are either unable or unworthy to hear these sweet strains.

It is the question of worthiness that concerns Milton in the remainder of the Prolusion. Prometheus is offered as an allegory for the fall, and his sin of overreaching is the reason that humanity can no longer hear the celestial music:

The fact that we are unable to hear this harmony seems certainly to be due to the presumption of that thief Prometheus, which [...] robbed us of that happiness which we may never again enjoy so long as we remain buried in sin.

Here again the pattern of fall and redemption is connected to humanity’s ability to hear the angelic or cosmic music; if fallen man could once again become pure, then he would once again be an auditor of the divine song: ‘If our souls were pure, chaste, and white as snow [...] then indeed our

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Patrides also offers a useful overview of other Renaissance poetic uses of the doctrine, p. 41-45.
43 CPW I:238
44 CPW I:238-39.
ears would ring and be filled with that exquisite movement of the stars’. This is poetically (albeit ironically) expressed by the eponymous villain of Comus, who claims that those ‘that are of purer fire / imitate the starry quire / That in their nightly watchful spheres / Lead in swift round the months and years’ (111-14). The promise of humanity’s return to this music is reiterated by Michaël, who prophesies that the music heard at the incarnation will be available to the pure ‘simple shepherds’ who attend Christ at his birth and so will ‘by a choir / of squadroned angels hear his carol sung’ (PL XII.365-7).

The presence of the heavenly choir signifies the transcendence of God, the joy of His presence, and His grace towards humanity. After He has completed the creation of the universe, God returns to heaven

Followed with acclamation and the sound
Symphonious of ten thousand harps that tuned
Angelic harmonies: the earth, the air
Resounded (thou rememberest, for thou heardst)
The heavens and all the constellations rung. (VII.559-63)

At this point Raphael specifically reminds Adam (and Eve, who is listening despite the singular verb) that they are fortunate enough to be able to hear the celestial song. Even at this moment of spontaneous joyous outpouring though, Adam and Eve only ‘heardst’ the song, rather than participated in it. God’s acts are themselves (punningly, as above) ‘resounded’, both by his own works, the rest of creation, which sings the joy of that creation back to Him, and by the angelic choir, who mark the

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46 Carey notes the allusion to Plato’s Timaeus, 40, which ‘describes the stars and planets “circling as in a dance”, and reinforces the idea that the movement of the spheres is intrinsically harmonic (as Kepler, above). However, although Plato describes a rational universe consistent with the production of the music of the spheres (see Francis M. Cornford, Plato’s Cosmology [Routledge, 1977] for a more detailed reading of Timaeus), the necessity of purity to properly observe the universe is a Miltonic addition to this doctrine (though stemming from a long tradition, as above).
heavenly Sabbath by hymning on God’s works: ‘Creation and the six days acts they sung’ (VII.601). Even Raphael’s recounting of these events to Adam is in the form of a sleep-repelling ‘song’ (VII.108).

*On the Morning of Christ’s Nativity* performs a similar identification. The heavenly muse first begins to sing at the birth of Christ, specifically preceding the adoration of the magi: ‘Have thou the honour first, thy Lord to greet, / And join your voice unto the angel choir’ (26-27). The incarnation of Christ restores the angels (who are ‘harping in loud and solemn quire’ [115]) to participants in the celestial song:

Such music (as ‘tis said)  
Before was never made  
But when of old the sons of morning sung  
While the creator great  
His constellations set.  

This original song is recounted by God as he questions Job, asking him where he was ‘while the morning stars sang together, and all the angels shouted for joy’ (Job 38:7). The phrase ‘sons of the morning’ is also an echo of Isaiah 14:22, ‘how art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!’ The reference to Satan offers an explanation for the apparent disruption of the celestial choir: the Satanic fall, and his subsequent temptation of man, has disrupted the divine song until the manifestation of Christ can restore it. The reference to Isaiah reinforces this reading, as the biblical text prophesies that after Satan’s destruction, the peace on Earth will be expressed through spontaneous celebratory song: ‘the whole Earth is at rest, and is quiet: they break forth into singing’ (Isaiah 14:7).

At the moment of Christ’s birth, however, the heavenly choir and the music of the spheres are once again in harmony:

Ring out, ye crystal spheres  
[…]
And with your ninefold harmony  
Make up full consort to the angelic symphony.  

(125-32)
Nature (in this case cosmological nature) complements and completes the angelic choir; the birth of Christ promises the restoration of the ‘symphony’ that once existed between all of God’s works, and that the angelic choir could not fully express before that moment.

Adam and Eve had heard that song at the creation, and prelapsarian Eden is clearly one of the ‘eternal regions’ filled with the ‘loud hosannahs’ produced by the angelic choir. Adam reminds Eve that even as they prepare to sleep they are able to hear that celestial choir singing their continuous hymn:

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All these with ceaseless praise his works behold
Both day and night: how often from the steep
Of echoing hill or thicket have we heard
Celestial voices to the midnight air,
Sole, or responsive each to other’s note
Singing their great creator
[…]
In full harmonic number joined, their songs
Divide the night and lift our thoughts to heaven.
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(IV.678-88)

This is not a song in which humanity actively participates, except by hearing. It is performed ceaselessly, and as Adam points out, the addition of his voice and Eve’s is superfluous (‘nor think, though men were none / That heaven would want spectators, God want praise’ [IV.675-6]). The point is reiterated in Adam and Eve’s morning hymn, which addresses God ‘unspeakable […] to us invisible’ (V.156-7) and so requests that the angels intercede in their praise: ‘speak ye who best can tell, ye sons of light / angels, for ye behold him’ (V.160-1). Sonnet XIX vocalises the concern that this might raise, as the narrator, fearing that his poetic talent is being wasted, is reassured by Patience that ‘God does not need / either man’s work, or his own gifts’ (9-10).

Rather, the value of the song to humanity is that it is inspirational, lifting their ‘thoughts to heaven’ and facilitating a greater contact with the divine. This trope of the song as a method of communion with the divine is appropriated in the hymn to light that opens book III, in which the narrator declares himself ‘smit with the love of sacred song’ (III.29), and imagery of
singing abounds: ‘hearest thou’, ‘with other notes then to the Orphean lyre / I sung’, ‘warbling flow’ and ‘harmonious numbers; as the wakeful bird / sings darkling’ (III.7, 17-8, 31 and 38-9). The link between musical and poetic singing, and the impossibility of any approximation of divine communication for fallen creatures (with the consequent failure of ‘sacred song’) is discussed in more detail in the next section of this chapter.

The failure of that song is expressed within the metaphor of the celestial music itself. One of the macrocosmic consequences of the Fall is that the music of the spheres is itself disrupted, as expressed in ‘At a Solemn Music’: ‘disproportioned sin / Jarred against nature’s chime, and with harsh din / Broke the fair music that all creatures made’ (19-21). In their morning hymn Adam and Eve praised the harmonic nature of the heavens as an aspect of God’s wondrous nature, and included them as participants in the song of universal praise: ‘ye five other wandering fires that move / In mystic dance not without song, resound / His praise’ (V.177-9). After the Fall, however, God sends the angels to reorder the heavens, and though this is largely presented as having a climactic impact upon the Earth, one of the effects is to disrupt the preceding harmony of the spheres:

To the blank moon
Her office they prescribed, to the other five
Their planetary motions and aspécts
In sextile, square, trine and opposite
Of noxious efficacy, and when to join
In synod unbenign, and taught the fixed
Their influence malignant. (X.656-62)

The conjunction of these celestial bodies is no longer musical. In his note to this passage, Fowler contends that the geometric references are taken from Ptolemy’s *Tetrabiblos*, and are used to signify disharmony. It is not clear, however, that the *Tetrabiblos* would have been directly available to Milton. The *Tetrabiblos* had been translated into French, and printed, as early as the fifteenth century; however, the only English edition

circulating as Milton was composing was *The Compost of Ptolomeus*, first printed in 1540 and subsequently reprinted in 1638. This, though, was closer to a combined commentary on and application of Ptolemy’s general dictates on astrology, with additions such as the naming of parts of the hand after planets, or an adaptation of Ptolemy for medical astrology, with very little direct translation from the Greek included.\(^{48}\) Jackson Boswell suggests that there is a strong possibility that Milton owned, or at least consulted, Ptolemy’s *Geographiae Libri Octo Graeco-Latini* (a Greek and Latin edition of Ptolemy’s *Geography*, containing Mercator’s maps, published 1605 in Frankfurt), but makes no mention of the *Tetrabiblos*.\(^{49}\) Sherburne, in his astrological catalogue attached to *The Sphere of Marcus Manilius* references an edition bound within Ludovicus de Rigiis’s *Astrological Aphorisms* (1535), and this phrase (‘astrological aphorisms’) is used by Burton, Culpeper and Joseph Moxon, potentially indicating at least some circulation throughout the seventeenth century.\(^{50}\) Though the coincidence of these astrological terms is striking, it is difficult to read this passage as a close engagement with Ptolemy’s work.\(^{51}\)

Whether a direct allusion to Ptolemy or not, this passage makes clear that the stars and planets have been reordered as a result of humanity’s transgression. The stars (‘fixed’) are no longer exuding the ‘sweet influence’ (VII.375) that marked them at the moment of creation, but rather an ‘influence malignant’. The spheres are now ‘noxious’ and their conjunction (‘synod’), rather than harmonic (‘mystic dance’) has become ‘unbenign’. The concerns of the passage are cosmological, not astrological. The reordering of the universe is a punitive response to

\(^{48}\) Anon., *The Compost of Ptolomeus*, 2nd ed. (1638), [unpaginated] chapters LVI and VI.


\(^{51}\) On Milton’s use of the astronomical systems of Ptolemy and Galileo, in particular the equivocation between them (‘some say’) at X. 668-78, see Allan H. Gilbert, ‘Milton and Galileo’, *SP*, 19 (1922), 152-85, especially p. 164-7, which outlines the ambiguous passages in *Paradise Lost* concerning astronomical positioning. Gilbert contends that these ambiguities are finally resolved (in the character of Raphael) in favour of Galileo’s system. Grant McColley offers a thorough overview of the seventeenth-century context of Milton’s ideas on astronomy, particularly as expressed by Raphael, in ‘Milton’s Dialogue on Astronomy: The Principal Immediate Sources’, *PMLA*, 52 (1937), 728-762.
man’s fall, and a removal of a corrupt influence from the divine symphony; the effects of the newly reordered universe are secondary, such that ‘[t]he Divinely appointed readjustments of the planets did not incriminate Uriel and his task force in the black magic later to be practiced by the judicial astronomers’. The poem’s presentation of the macrocosmic effects of the Fall, and their effect on humanity, will be returned to in the conclusion.

God’s (pre-emptive) discussion of man’s Fall, and his offer to the angels of an opportunity to redeem man is noticeably greeted with the absence of the heavenly song: ‘all the heavenly choir stood mute / And silence was in heaven’ [III.217-8]). This is presumably a sudden silence; though it is not explicit, the fact that the angels were singing after the creation, the hymn to light that opens book III, and the ‘ambrosial fragrance [that] filled / All heaven, and in the blessed spirits elect / sense of new joy ineffable diffused’ (III.135-7) all combine to suggest a joyous music ongoing within heaven until after God reveals the full horror of his foresight. It is only after the Father accepts the Son’s sacrifice that the universal song is able to resume:

No sooner had the almighty ceased, but all
The multitude of angels with a shout
Loud as from numbers without number, sweet
As from blest voices, uttering joy, heaven rung
With jubilee, and loud hosannas filled
The eternal regions. (III.344-49)

The combination of ‘shout’ with ‘jubilee’ to stand for joyful singing has a number of biblical precedents. As noted above, God reminds Job that at the creation ‘all the angels shouted for joy’ (Job 38:7). The prophet Zechariah urges joyful shouting: ‘Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem’ (Zech. 9:9). The Psalms instruct their readers to ‘Make a joyful noise unto the LORD’ (Ps. 100:1). Most clearly, Moses corrects Joshua’s misinterpretation of the shouting in the camp of the Israelites:

And when Joshua heard the noise of the people as they shouted, he said unto Moses, There is a noise of war in the camp. And he said, it is not the voice of them that shout for mastery, neither is it the voice of them that cry for being overcome: but the noise of them that sing do I hear.

(Ex. 32:17-8)

The angelic choir’s shout, similarly, is clarified as ‘uttering joy’, a conjunction repeated at the creation, where ‘with joy and shout’ the choir ‘hymning praised / God and his works, creator him they sung’ (VII.256-9). That the angels ‘shout’ does not, then, make their song unharmonic, but rather marks it as unified, spontaneous joy in the divine presence, and that presence makes the song ‘sweet’ and harmonious. The divine ideal, as Summers notes, is ‘a multiplicity of wills and motions, truly free, yet moving either in unison or harmony’.

This unity is noticeably absent in hell, despite the ‘firm concord’ (II.497) that ensues. The council is a series of contradictory speeches, closed, in a marked contrast with the ‘sweet’ noise of heaven, with a ‘deafening shout’ (II.520) and ‘wild uproar’ (II.541). This contrast is established during the war in Heaven, when the sound of the angelic choir is disrupted: ‘Unanimous, as sons of one great sire / Hymning the eternal Father: but the shout / Of battle now began’ (VI.95-7).

This disruption to the angels’ song is brought about by rebellion, and Raphael’s imagery of warfare stresses the disharmony it provokes, when ‘clamour such as heard in heaven till now / Was never, arms on armour clashing brayed / horrible discord’ (VI.208-10). ‘Clamour’ offers a contrast to the peaceful hymning of the loyal angels, the restoration of which is the Son’s stated objective in vanquishing the rebels; his victory, as he tells the Father, will allow the resumption of the choirs that ‘Unfeignèd alleluias to thee sing /

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hymns of high praise’ (VI.744-5). The phrase ‘brayed / Horrible discord’, too, develops the motif of (musical) disharmony, with ‘brayed’ having the meaning of any jarring sound, and ‘horrible discord’ a contrast with the harmonious singing of the choir, a unanimity established in the ‘undiscording voice’ (17) of the ‘Solemn Music’. The unusual double negative (un- and dis-) is used here because it is itself a response to the initial ‘discord’ provoked by rebellion. The impulsive noise of the multitude in hell is, therefore, not as naturally harmonious as the joyful shout of heaven, signifying their revolt against, and subsequent removal from, divinity.

The devils do maintain the tradition of song, but in hell the jubilant song of heaven is travestied from an act of sublimation to one of individualisation, self-aggrandisement and personal joy:

Their song was partial, but the harmony
(What could it less when spirits immortal sing?)
Suspended hell, and took with ravishment
The thronging audience. In discourse more sweet
(For eloquence the soul, song charms the sense)
Others apart sat on a hill retired.

(Il.552-57)

‘Partial’ has the meaning, as Fowler glosses it, of a biased account of the war in heaven: the devils are singing of ‘their own heroic deeds and hapless fall’ (Il.549) in an attempt to blame fate, or chance, for their defeat. However, ‘partial’ here also reveals that this is incomplete, unlike the music of heaven where there is ‘no voice exempt’ (III.370), and Satan, disguised as a cherub, must offer an explanation to Uriel as to why he has wandered ‘from the choirs of cherubim / Alone’ (III.666-7). This is not a song in which everyone present participates, as the devils are singing ‘each one for himself alone’.55 There may even be a musical pun in ‘partial’, as a technical term, which the OED defines as ‘Each of the simple sinusoidal components of a complex musical sound’. That is, the

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devils’ song is made up only of the constituent parts of complex music, without ever producing unified symphonic music.

A clear distance is established between singer and auditor (the ravished audience, which does not sing, but only listens). Moreover, the devils are already separated, having dispersed after the council of hell (‘the ranged powers / disband, and wandering, each his several way’ [II.522-3]), and another group are pointedly referred to as ‘apart’ while the song is produced. The discourse of that group is contrasted with the songs of both hell and heaven. It is ‘discourse more sweet’ than song, and is able in its eloquence to charm the soul; the comparison suggests that the devilish music, which we are told affects only the ‘sense’, is superficial and transitory. Patrides notes that ‘the music of Milton’s Hell is far from perfect, for music, once divorced from its true source, becomes ‘partial’, a concordia discors wherein […] jarring noises tear Hell’s concave’.56 The devils, with a clear separation of discourse for the soul, and music for the sense (body), have fallen away from the Augustinian ideal into the grievous offence of being ‘more moved with the voice than with the ditty’ he warned against.

So too the use of ‘sweet’ in this context prefigures the sweetness of the ‘blest voices’ of heaven, but the philosophers of hell are finding sweetness in sophistry (‘vain wisdom all, and false philosophy [II.565]) away from the divine. ‘Discourse’, rather than intuitive reason, marks a distinction that Raphael outlines between man and angel: ‘the soul / reason receives, and reason is her being, / discursive or intuitive; discourse / is oftest yours [Adam], the latter most is ours’ (V.487-89). Though Raphael does not suggest that discursive reason is a fault in humanity, it is nonetheless a fault in the devils, who have fallen away from their previously intuitive understanding of ‘providence, foreknowledge, will and fate’ (II.559). Just as that group, lacking scriptural authority, find themselves ‘in wandering mazes lost’ (II.561), so the singers, lacking the divine presence, are unable to properly recreate the unified joy of heavenly song.

56 Patrides, Christian Tradition, p. 45.
This undermining of the music of hell forces the reader to reconsider the building of Pandæmonium. Music is present twice at the raising of the devilish capitol, once as an epic simile to describe the construction process, and once in the exultant chorus that greets its completion:

from the boiling cells
By strange conveyance filled each hollow nook,
As in an organ from one blast of wind
To many a row of pipes the sound-board breathes.
Anon out of the earth a fabric huge
Rose like an exhalation, with the sound
Of dulcet symphonies and voices sweet.

(II.706-12)

The devils’ singing travesties the music of heaven (there is an echo in this passage of the description of the production of that heavenly music, which includes a ‘dulcimer [and] all organs of sweet stop’ [VII.596]), as it praises not the divine creation but a self-aggrandising parody. Pandæmonium is lit with ‘starry’ lamps giving ‘light / as from a sky’ (I.728-30), but this is only a vainglorious approximation of the divine creation that the devils are unable to properly replicate. The comparisons to the monuments of Babylon (I.717), Babel (I.694) and Egypt (I.694-5 and I.718-22) reinforce this conception.

The metaphor of the pipe organ also points to the fallen nature of the singing in hell. Though organs are used in heaven (VII.596, above), the crux of this metaphor is that the organ is an agent of divergence. In hell, the organ is an instrument by which ‘one’ can bring forth ‘many’, signifying the increased individuation that is a result of the Satanic fall and withdrawal from God’s presence. The devilish artillery, which also works to ‘dash / To pieces’ (VI.488-89), is described using language befitting an organ. The operation of the cannon involves flame placed into ‘hollow engines long and round’ (VI.484), and they are placed together like organ pipes, a ‘triple-mounted row of pillars’ (VI.572). When they fire, it is the production of noise that is given prominence: ‘deep-throated engines
belched, whose roar / Embowelled with outrageous noise the air’ (VI.586-87).

The organ, moreover, had been an important part of the debates on Laud’s church reforms. Laud himself, in one of his earliest anti-reformation moves, used his presidency of St. John’s, Cambridge (1610-11) to renovate the college chapel to include ‘a new organ loft, and the commissioning of anthems to be sung there’. The presence of organ music was an important constituent part of the newly ornate and complex church services that Laud devised. Richard Culmer, reporting on a cathedral preacher that ‘pleaded so for bowing’, noted that

He proceeded, upon that occasion, to a large discourse in the behalf of church music and organs: I never heard more pleading for cathedral piping; he was so vehement in his Discourse for Organs, that he was almost out of breath.

The prominent Laudian apologist, and later biographer, Peter Heylyn, defended the presence of organ music within the church in a digression in his *History of the Sabbath*, noting that ‘Pope Vitalianus, anno 653, added the organ to that vocal music, which was before in use in the church of Christ’. The introduction of music by the papacy conversely allowed a puritan contention that it was really the work of antichrist; so too did Laudian detractors seize on the presence of this music as reminiscent of Catholicism, and the reign of Mary, whose liturgical services demanded choral and instrumental complexity. The nonconformist puritan theologian William Ames devoted a section of his treatise against ceremony to ‘Cathedral Music with Organs’, marshalling Aquinas, Zwingli and Erasmus to demonstrate that organ music was an extra-scriptural Catholic invention: ‘In the solemn worship of God, I do not judge it more suitable, then if we should recall the incense, tapers, and other shadows

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57 *DNB*
of the Law, into use."\(^6^2\) As Hollander notes, '[f]or the puritan reformers of the liturgy, the organ was as emblematical of the Roman rite as was the "curious singing" [harmonic choral singing\(^6^3\)].\(^6^4\) Instrumental music was seen as unnecessary ornamentation lacking in gospel support, and the independent preacher Henry Burton included music twice (and specifically the organ) in his attack on the ‘priests, sacrifice, images, crucifixes, adorations, organs, curious music, and many other devises for your pompous service’ in the High Church.\(^6^5\)

Milton had himself used the organ metaphor in his early poetry. \textit{Il Penseroso}, a poem suffused with singing, contains a request for precisely this kind of church– or chapel-music as part celebration of the joys to be found in scholarship:

\begin{quote}
There let the pealing organ blow,
To the full-voiced choir below,
In service high, and anthems clear,
As may with sweetness, through mine ear
Dissolve me into ecstasies,
And bring all heaven before mine eyes.
\end{quote}

\textbf{(161-66)}

The speaker of the poem is seemingly aligned more closely with Mersenne than with Augustine; the ecstatic vision of heaven that can be brought on by music forms part of devout scholarship despite its apparent closeness to the ‘peril of pleasure’ associated with corporeal sinfulness. Graham Parry argues that the poem is ‘striking evidence of the young Milton’s enthusiasm for the Laudian ethos’, though he notes that Milton ‘rethought his position before the outbreak of war’.\(^6^6\) Thomas Corns, similarly, notes that ‘[t]o the country revels of \textit{L’Allegro} [Milton] opposes

\begin{itemize}
\item[\(^6^2\)] William Ames, \textit{A Fresh Suit Against Human Ceremonies in God’s Worship} (1633), p. 404-406.
\item[\(^6^3\)] The phrase is Thomas Cartwright’s, from \textit{A Reply to an Answer Made of Master Doctor Whitgift} (1572), op. cit. Richard Hooker, \textit{Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity} (Everyman, 1964), vol. II, p. 147.
\item[\(^6^4\)] Hollander, \textit{Untuning}, p. 251.
\item[\(^6^5\)] Henry Burton, \textit{A Reply to a Relation, of the Conference between William Laude and Mr. Fisher the Jesuit. By a Witness of Jesus Christ} (1640), p. 393.
\end{itemize}
not the strictness of the puritan but the religiosity of a Laudian’. Sandra Corse does not engage with the debate over Milton’s own religious leanings, but does note that the emphasis on harmony ‘coincides with the idea of the music of the spheres, in which the image is of a number of independent sounding together in perfect consonance’. Instead, though she also reads the poems as oppositional, she finds their opposition centred on the development of musical theory, arguing that L’Allegro explicitly responds to the concerns of the Italian theorists over the power music has to obscure poetry, and is part of the development towards a recitative style, while Il Penseroso, specifically in the lines quoted above, outlines the older, polyphonic style.

Il Penseroso may appear to endorse aspects of Laudian worship, although the enjoyment of music was not necessarily at variance with Puritan beliefs. The complexity of music in Il Penseroso looks backward to prelapsarian singing, as does the ‘Solemn Music’, whose angels ‘in thousand choirs / Touch their immortal harps of golden wires’ (12-13). Harmony (as opposed to recitative monody) is the natural music of unfallen creatures, because the unity inherent in the celestial song prevents misunderstanding. Hence all creatures sang ‘in perfect diapason, whilst they stood / In first obedience’ (23-24). The transportative effect of the music of ‘At a Solemn Music’ and Il Penseroso is not an endorsement of Catholic or Laudian principles, merely a momentary alignment with a poetic attempt to ‘repair the ruins of our first parents by regaining to know God aright, and out of that knowledge to love him, to imitate him’. What is actually celebrated in these two poems is the Augustinian (and indeed puritan) understanding of music as an aid to contemplation of the divine; Milton’s understanding of the divine music, however, necessitates a

69 See Percy Scholes, The Puritan and Music in England and New England (OUP, 1934), for the argument that although Puritans did (as did Anglicans) warn strongly against excess in music, as with any other recreation, they were neither especially opposed to music as an art form nor reverential towards it.
properly harmonic chorus on earth to ‘renew that song / And keep in tune with heaven’ (‘Solemn Music’ 25-26).

The image *Paradise Lost* presents of the devilish organ engages with its mid-seventeenth-century position as an instrument of discord. The devils here proleptically demonstrate the errors that fallen man will later adopt. The image of the organ is used in the vision Michael offers to Adam of Cain’s descendants, from whose tents ‘melodious chime / Was heard, of harp and organ’ (XI.559-60). Though Adam finds hope in the vision, Michael corrects him, informing him that ‘Those tents thou sawst so pleasant, were the tents / Of wickedness' filled with ‘inventors rare, / Unmindful of their maker’ (IX.607-11). Music, when performed by these ‘fair atheists’ (IX.625), is an attractive but ultimately unwholesome activity that not only detracts from communion with God in its inventor, but serves as a lure even for the ‘sons of God’ who ‘shall yield up all their virtue’ (IX.622-23). Music, when not informed by the joyful presence of the divine, forms part of the ‘wreckage of grace that ingenuity involves’.

Both the devils and the sons of Cain attempt to approximate the music of heaven, from which they are now excluded. The organ that they use is marked within the epic simile as fragmentary; it serves as the exact negation of the coalescing monist impulse of the divine song. The music of fallen creatures is ‘partial’ and fragmented: no song could achieve the unified perfection that is guaranteed by divinity. The musical metaphors thus reveal the essentially imperfect nature of all fallen actions or utterances; even the ‘spirits immortal’, when apart from God, cannot reproduce his ‘song’ or rhetorical ‘eloquence’. In this way *Paradise Lost* aligns the musical image with the linguistic dispersal of the Babel myth, in which one language produces many when used in a way of which God disapproves. It is this linguistic dispersal, highlighted by the musical trope, that forms *Paradise Lost*’s account of man’s relationship with God; the remainder of this thesis will examine the ambiguity and difference produced by partial reproductions of divine perfection.

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In the building of Pandæmonium, the ‘exhalation’ coming from the ‘earth’ serves as a proleptic reference to the cessation of the celestial song (or, at least, the ability of now-impure creatures to hear the singing). The falls of both Eve and Adam also provoke sighing and groaning (IX.782-83 and 1001), signs that they too are withdrawn from the universal song of joy that represents sublimation in the divine.

The reaction of nature to the falls first of Eve and then Adam is indicative of the disruption of that universal song, mirroring the silence in heaven when God predicted their disobedience. As Eve eats the forbidden fruit, nature responds with a sound that is not a sound: ‘Nature from her seat / sighing through all her works gave signs of woe’ (IX.782-83). This is echoed at the second fall, at which ‘Nature gave a second groan’ (IX.1001). The fall results in the cessation of the angelic song in Eden, as the ‘angelic guards ascended, mute and sad’ (X.18); this evidence of the trauma provoked by the fall will be returned to in the conclusion.

This, then, is a song no longer available to fallen man. The Nativity Ode makes this explicit with an almost plaintive request that humanity should be part of the audience of the music of the spheres, asking them to ‘Once bless our human ears / (If you have power to touch our senses so)’ (126-27). Even the harping of the angelic choir is beyond human comprehension, described as ‘unexpressive notes’ (116). Ruby Nemser argues that ‘unexpressive’ here signifies not inexpressible (that is, poetically unobtainable), but rather ‘the supernatural music of heavenly spirits, ordinarily inaudible on Earth’.72 The music is inaudible, cannot ‘touch our senses’, because they are dulled to the music as a result of the fall, as Milton makes clear throughout his work.

The celestial chorus is the perfect exemplar of univocality, as all sing together with one purpose and there exists no possibility of disharmony or misunderstanding. Yet, once cut off from the song (‘wisdom at one entrance quite shut out’ [III.50]) and the universal language it represents, any poetic attempts from fallen man must,

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ultimately fall into polyvocality—however much they attempt to renew that song. In invoking both the music of the spheres that they cannot reach, and the heavenly muse that must join with the earth-bound singer, Milton’s works undermine their own status as coherent monovocal entities, continuously reminding their audience that they exist, polyvocally, as productions of fallen man in fallen language. The metaphors of music that are presented throughout those works serve as a thematic reminder of the failure of humanity to participate in that song; they also point to the futility of *Paradise Lost*’s own attempt to reproduce sacred song.

**The Bard and the Muse**

That relationship between the celestial music and poetry is made explicit in the figure of (and invocations to) the muse of *Paradise Lost*. The invocation to book III was discussed in the first chapter, which demonstrated that the apparently personal plea of the blind poet stood synecdochically for the failure of humanity to read the book of nature; that is, the invocation laments the fact that after the Fall, there is no possibility of fully understanding or participating in God’s works. This section will examine the uneasy partnership established between bard and muse in *Paradise Lost*, as well as in the *Nativity Ode* and the acutely polyphonic *Lycidas*. It suggests that, rather than simply participating in a generic convention, the invocations to the Muse in *Paradise Lost* present the poem’s failure to sing properly, uniting the song that is poetry with the celestial song unavailable to the ‘gross unpurged ears’ of postlapsarian creatures.

The muse of *Paradise Lost* is identified with (not as) Urania in the invocation that opens book VII:

Descend from heav’n Urania, by that name
If rightly thou art called, whose voice divine
Following, above th’Olympian hill I soar,
Above the flight of Pegasean wing.
The meaning not the name I call: for thou
Nor of the Muses nine, nor on the top
Of old Olympus dwellest, but heavenly born
Before the hills appeared, or fountain flowed,
Thou with eternal wisdom didst converse,
Wisdom thy sister, and with her didst play
In presence of the almighty father, pleased
With thy celestial song. (VII.1-12)

Although Urania is invoked here, doubt is twice expressed (‘If rightly thou art called’ and ‘the meaning not the name I call’) as to the propriety of that naming. The name of the muse of *Paradise Lost* (and this invocation is the only moment in the poem that a definitive name is offered) is important but inexpressible (or ‘unexpressive’); as Lieb notes, ‘[o]ne should not assume from this statement that the name is insignificant but quite simply that it is not to be had: it is unfathomable’. The earlier invocations had addressed the muse as ‘heavenly muse’ (I.6), a ‘Spirit’ associated with temples (I.17) and ‘holy light, offspring of heaven first-born’ (III.1), suggesting an identification with the divine presence that produces spontaneous song. The aspect of Urania stressed in the invocation is the production of ‘celestial song’, a further allusion to God’s assertion to Job that at the creation ‘the morning stars sang together, and all the angels shouted for joy’ (Job 38:7).

The identification of the muse with Urania is appropriate for the astrological discussion that is central to books VII and VIII, and ‘directs or supports those dazzling stellar flights’ as the subject of the poem turns to the cosmic. However, it also reads back into the earlier invocations, demonstrating the central importance of the music of the spheres to *Paradise Lost*, especially given the preoccupation of those earlier invocations with heavenly singing and sacred song.

The identification of the Christian muse with Urania was not, however, unique to Milton. Lily Campbell notes that ‘[f]rom 1574, when Du Bartas published *La Muse Chrestiene* containing the poem *L’Uranie*, Urania, the Muse of Astronomy had been taken over as the Christian

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74 Mindele Anne Triep, ‘Descend from Heav’n Urania’: Milton’s ‘Paradise Lost’ and Raphael’s Cycle in the ‘Stanza della Signatura’ (University of Victoria: ELS, 35, 1985), p. 34.
Muse’. William Leybourn’s commendatory poem to Wing’s *Harmonicon Coeleste* enacts a similar equivalence between Christian inspiration, the pagan muse of astronomy and the universal song:

Sacred Urania invites ‘em to draw nigh  
And be partakers in her harmony  
Whose wing’d ambitions elevate their eyes  
To view the order of the spangled skies.

Hunter and Davies, also noting the earlier example of Du Bartas’ *L’Uranie*, argue that in its invocation *Paradise Lost* is ‘rejecting the profane fabrications of the classical epic tradition, while laying claim to a redeemed version of the genre itself’. By appropriating this Christianised muse, and giving the ‘celestial song’ such importance in the invocation, *Paradise Lost* reveals as one of its central concerns the presence (and absence) of divine music. Moreover, by coupling the divine music with the inspirational muse, the poem thematically links the celestial music and its own ‘sacred song’. By linking it with the unobtainable music of the spheres, *Paradise Lost* inverts the trope of the appeal to the muse: instead of being in appeal for inspiration, it reveals precisely the impossibility of celestial singing.

The standard critical approach to these addresses to the muse is that they constitute some form of prayer for poetic assistance. Stanley Fish, though, has questioned this reading, asking ‘is this, in fact, a prayer?’ He instead describes the three invocations to the muse within *Paradise Lost* (I.1-26, III.1-55 and VII.1-39) as demonstrative of Milton’s ‘conflicted relationship with the ideal of submission’ (523). He finds

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throughout Milton’s work a poetic anxiety created by a refusal to submit to a type of universal, celestial song that impels the anonymity of the speaker: ‘no one can be said to be doing the singing; rather, everyone is sung by an informing presence whose precedence is endlessly and involuntarily declared’ (513). For Fish, the very act of singing, even (or especially) when that song declares the loss felt at the impossibility of total identification with the divine, involves an anxious displacement of the threat of loss of agency such a unification entails.

Fish finds the clearest expression of this displacement in the last of those invocations, the address to Urania:

Half yet remains unsung, but narrower bound
Within the visible diurnal sphere;
Standing on earth, not rapt above the pole,
More safe I sing with mortal voice, unchanged
To hoarse or mute, though fallen on evil days,
On evil days though fallen, and evil tongues;
In darkness, and with dangers compassed round,
And solitude; yet not alone, while thou
Visitst my slumbers nightly, or when morn
Purples the east: still govern thou my song,
Urania, and fit audience find, though few.

(PL VII.21-31)

His reading of this passage is that the triumphant ‘I sing’ in fact forms a challenge to Urania, and that by placing himself within a ‘narrower bound’ (by extension, a bound that can be extended or measured to mark fame and poetic accomplishments) on earth, the poet attempts to escape the loss of identity implicit in the ‘rapt’ embrace of Urania and the divine song. In the appeal for a ‘fit audience’, Fish contends that Milton is ‘really asking for a space in which to operate’ (519); if Urania were the sole governor of his song, it would already be cosmic, and so the auditors would already simultaneously be participants, and the appeal would have no function. Milton is unable, Fish contends, to directly voice these concerns, and so they must be obliquely displaced onto proxies such as Bellerophon and Orpheus, who respectively signify the poet’s fear of castration and the loss of voice attendant in unification with the celestial harmony.
However, within Fish’s model of biographical reading, this passage could equally well be read as a celebration of the poet’s steadfast acceptance of the will of God. ‘I sing’ is a defiant challenge not to Urania, but to the circumstances (‘evil days’, ‘darkness’ and ‘solitude’) in which Milton finds himself as a result of adherence to his various theological and political convictions. The ‘unchanged’ voice of the poet signifies a desire to continue with what he believes to be God’s work, approaching the divine (through the mediation of Urania) as closely as is possible with his ‘mortal voice’.

Fish, in fact, rather ignores the connotations of ‘standing’, which he sees as a demonstration of individuality: ‘to be standing, to be visibly erect and erectly visible, distinguishable from others and from other potential versions of himself, both greater and lesser’ (517). Yet to ‘stand’, within Paradise Lost is to actively resist temptation, to reject tyranny and oppression with inner strength derived from faith. Areopagitica makes it clear that this is a model that all Christians can and should aspire to:

He that can apprehend and consider vice with all her baits and seeming pleasures […] and yet prefer that which is truly better, he is the true warfaring Christian. I cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue […] that which purifies us is trial.80

Milton’s conception of Christian virtue centres on the active choice to resist sin. This resistance is more than simply passive avoidance, but rather based on the exercise of free will to choose what is ‘truly better’ despite the availability of the fruits of sin. During a discussion of Adam’s free will later in Areopagitica, Milton notes that ‘reason is but choosing’;81 God reiterates the doctrine in Paradise Lost when explaining why he endowed all his creations with free will: ‘reason also is choice’ (III.108). The comparison of the narrator with Abdiel that Fish draws is an apt one, though perhaps not for the reasons he suggests: Abdiel, like the narrator, literally stands ‘with dangers compassed round’, and firmly keeps his

80 CPW II:514-5
81 CPW II:527
course, understanding that faithful standing produces a ‘happy state more near / United’ (V.830-31) with God.82

Fish’s argument rests on the idea that to be part of the heavenly choir is to be situated negatively; that is, the divine unity, rather than producing the spontaneous joy of the angelic choir (‘No voice exempt, no voice but well could join / Melodious part, such concord is in heaven’ [PL III.370-71]) is an act of self-negation or decentering which is to be feared: ‘being situated universally (that is, not situated)’ (517) or ‘since this is a song that everyone sings, it is a song that no one sings’ (511). The corollary to this is the assumption that there is sufficient ego within the poet to warrant this fear of integration with God or the universal choir: ‘if one values, as one can hardly help doing, the sound of one’s own utterances […] the prospect of recovering that unity will be viewed as a threat’ (513). The ideal of submission, however, is a form of heroic action constantly celebrated through Milton’s poetry, even though Fish argues that the concerns Milton had over total submission were ‘acted out in the careers of even his most exemplary heroes’ (523). Samson was at his most heroic when ‘he stood, as one who prayed’ (SA 1637) between the pillars in the temple, finding his strength restored through his submission to God. In Paradise Lost the principle of submission as heroism is revealed through the Son and Abdiel. All of these characters understand, as Fish (and Satan) do not, that submission is not an identity-eliding subjugation, but instead an elevation to fuller communion with God.

The Son is represented at his most heroic moments as acutely aware of the will of God, and his part in expressing it. At the moment Christ offers himself as a martyr for fallen man, he

breathed immortal love
To mortal men, above which only shone
Filial obedience: as a sacrifice
Glad to be offered, he attends the will
Of his great Father.

(III.267-71)

82 For Abdiel and individuality, see below: On the identification between Milton and Abdiel, see Perez Zagorin, Milton: Aristocrat and Rebel: The Poet and His Politics (D. S. Brewer, 1993), p. 128.
Similarly, when preparing for battle against the Satanic host, he declares to the Father that ‘my whole delight/ That thou in me well pleased, declar’st thy will/ Fulfilled, which to fulfil is all my bliss’ (VI.727-29). Christ’s glory, in other words, is demonstrated only while and because he expresses the will of God.

If the pinnacle of biblical heroism is complete assimilation into the divine will (exemplified by Christ), then Adam comes as close as humanly possible in a moment of joyful recognition of, and submission to, divine grace. Indeed, he unequivocally expresses the doctrine of obedience and patience after Michaël finishes his prophecy:

Henceforth I learn that to obey is best,
And love with fear the only God
[...]
Accomplishing great things, by things deemed weak
Subverting worldly strong, and worldly wise
By simply meek; that suffering for truth’s sake
Is fortitude to highest victory,
And to the faithful death the gate of life;
Taught this by his example whom I now
Acknowledge my redeemer ever blest. (XII.561-73)

Michaël immediately offers his approval of Adam’s deduction, confirming that ‘thou hast attained the sum / Of wisdom’ (XII.575-76); this approval itself comes in a phrase borrowed from scripture, ‘the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom’ (Job 28:28). Adam’s language itself echoes this confirmation, with the high concentration of scriptural allusion here appropriating the standard pattern of the utterances of the Father.83

Moreover, the hero whom Fish believes to have been closest to the Miltonic ideal, Abdiel, has a perception of the universal choir that is significantly at variance with Fish’s own. He argues that ‘it is only when Milton creates a character out of whole cloth that he can even imagine what it would be like not to feel the stirrings he describes as “that last infirmity of noble mind”’ (524). However, Abdiel actively espouses unity at least partly because it is self-aggrandising; to be one with God is, he

understands, to have God be at least partly at one with you, as he points out to Satan:

nor by his reign obscured,
But more illustrious made, since he the Head
One of our number thus reduced becomes,
His laws our laws, all honour to him done
Returns our own. (PL V.841-45)

Abdiel’s conception of the divine unity is not that of an identity-eliding subsumation, but rather a symbiotic partnership which benefits and augments both parties. The existence of a system of angelic orders, with God as its head, is mutually affirming; Though Abdiel’s self-conception is bound up in divine service (‘none with more zeal adored / the Deity, and divine commands obeyed’ [V.805-806]), that service does not result in abnegation, but in a more secure sense of self, in which adoration is at once both a divine echo and, paradoxically, a method by which an identity can be established. The very fact of the angelic degrees enables a sense of angelic identity that is combined with God (‘one of our number’), yet also allows the individualised response suggested by ‘our own’ honour without the separation from God that characterises the fallen world.

This gives a twist to Satan’s preceding argument that the angels are ‘not equal all, yet free, / equally free; for orders and degrees / jar not with liberty, but well consist’ (V.791-93). Satan’s contention is that the hierarchical inequality need not necessarily lead to God’s monarchy; for the rebellious angels, ‘the sources and extent of God’s rights and power are’, as Empson puts it, ‘a matter still under debate’, the crucial question being whether the angels (and thus angelic orders) were created by God or developed naturally, in which case they would, of course, be ‘equally free’. 84 Abdiel’s conception of the angelic orders reveals Satan’s to be hollow: Without the communion with God that they enable, the angelic hierarchy is individualistic and even tyrannous. Thus Satan’s speech is filled with references to inequality, competing power, and submission, while Abdiel stresses the unity that the angelic orders offer, arguing that

84 Empson, Milton’s God, p. 46.
God is ‘bent rather to exalt / Our happy state under one head more near / United’ (V.829-31). As this chapter has already shown, that unity is most apparent in the celestial music, expressed by the loyal angels in the ‘song and dance about the sacred hill’ (V.619); participation in that song is perpetual bliss, and separation from it is the despair demonstrated by the devils’ ‘partial’ reproduction in hell.

On the Morning of Christ’s Nativity contains a framing device in which the poetic voice calls the muse to provide a gift to the newborn Christ that is presumably superior to anything the poet could produce: ‘Say heavenly muse, shall not thy sacred vein / afford a present to the infant God?’ (15-6). Yet the conclusion to the hymn (‘time is our tedious song should here have ending’ [239]) reveals the song to be shared between the poet and the muse invoked at its beginning. The song is ‘tedious’ because the interpolation of the earthly poet in the muse’s song removes it from the category of holy song. Unlike the constant, perfect, hymning of the angels, this shared (mortal-muse) song is required to ‘have ending’ because of its imperfection. The two participants are unequal, and so cannot produce the unified music in the ‘sacred vein’ required at the poem’s introduction. In Paradise Lost Adam raises the same issue:

Among unequals what society
Can sort, what harmony or true delight?
Which must be mutual, in proportion due
Given and received; but in disparity
The one intense, the other still remiss
Cannot well suit with either, but soon prove
Tedious alike. (VIII.383-89)

Adam is here asking God to create Eve (‘help meet for him’ [Gen. 2:20]) as better company than the beasts, but the metaphor is strikingly musical. ‘Harmony’ arises for Adam, as it does for Kepler, from ‘proportion’, and the musical puns on the moral disparity between intense (a string tuned too high) and remiss (too low), replicates, in effect, a

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85 On musical metaphors for social structures in the early modern period, see Alastair Fowler, Triumphal Forms: Structural Patterns in Elizabethan Poetry (CUP, 1970), p. 83ff.
jarring failure to produce polyphony due to improper comprehension; Adam, after all, cannot long converse with God or Michael because it is tiring (‘objects divine / Must needs impair and weary human sense’ [XII.9-10]). This passage allows a reading of ‘tedious’ as disharmonic in the Nativity Ode, further reinforcing the sense that the two singers of the poem are unable to properly join in the harmony that would replicate the music of the spheres.

The Nativity Ode nonetheless enacts the fantasy of mortal participation in the celestial song, as human voice seeks to provide a hymn, equivalent to the angelic choir, which is a fitting gift for the newborn Christ. As David Quint notes, ‘The fantasy of listening to the music of the spheres lies at the very centre of Milton’s hymn […] It is a fantasy devoutly felt and dispelled by the Nativity Ode, which itself seeks to approximate divine melody.’ The Nativity Ode does more than attempt to simply listen to that celestial music, it is an attempt (conscious of its own necessary failure) to restore humanity’s presence in that song. The ‘fantasy’ of the Nativity Ode is that ‘the lost music can be regained; there can be a new golden age’, yet, pathetically, the tedious song must end with that fantasy unfulfilled.

Hong Won Suh argues that within Milton’s early poetry ‘the quest for the authoritative voice is inherently endless’, suggesting rather a set of competing voices, located both within and outside the poems. Suh locates a Miltonic voice that is constantly under pressure both from the constraints of genre as well as the echoes of myth, history or even Milton’s own contemporaries. For Suh, these textual impulses find their clearest expression when they are identified with and through the characters of Milton’s poetry – the angels of the Nativity Ode, the eponymous villain of Comus or Peter in Lycidas. He argues that these

86 See also VIII.453-5.
87 Quint, ‘Expectation and Prematurity’, p. 204.
88 Wilding, Dragon’s Teeth, p. 18.
90 Even ‘Peter’ (read for ‘The pilot of the Galilean lake’ Lycidas 109) may in fact be too simple an identification here: see Mary Pecheux, ‘The Dread Voice in Lycidas’, MS, 9
‘echoes’ cannot, ultimately, be contained by the narrative voice; the search for an authoritative voice is ‘endless’ because it only ever leads to another point of contact between the competing voices of the poet and history.

The poetic voice(s) that Suh identifies therefore functions in a similar manner to the reading of fallen music that this chapter has presented: however much it attempts to synchronise competing tendencies, it can never reproduce the perfect expression that is the mark of divinity (whether in music, as discussed above, or in speech, as the next chapter will demonstrate).

*Lyidas* is the clearest example of this polyvocality in Milton’s early poems. The critical tendency has been to focus on the ‘choice, order and interrelations of the parts of the poem’ in order to demonstrate an underlying unifying theme of the poem, and assess its poetic ‘success’.91 In ‘*Lyidas*: A Poem Finally Anonymous’, Fish argues against this trend, suggesting that the poem is ‘a dramatic lyric and hence the expression of a united consciousness’, which in turn generates pressure ‘to discover a continuity in the narrative’.92 Fish’s article usefully opens the questions of the fragmentation of voice, and the reassimilation of those fragments into something approaching the heavenly chorus. Fish therefore performs a reading of the poem which emphasises the position of the initial pastoral speaker as one voice among many, and stresses that the disruption of that voice is crucial to the force and meaning of the poem: ‘the speaker loses control of his poem when another voice dislodges him from center stage’ (331). *Lyidas*, Fish argues, is unified precisely by these dislodging voices; rather than a poetically centred pastoral project, he reads the poem as ultimately defeating the swain’s attempt to produce an individualised response to Lycidas’s death by incorporating his song into a kind of heavenly choir producing the ‘joy which, since it binds all, need not

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be transmitted to any’ (338). Fish, unlike other critics such as Rosenberg who argue for a poem that is ‘broadly inclusive, integrating the disparate aspects of human experience’, suggests that it is in the voicelessness that is finally produced by *Lycidas* that universality is demonstrated.\(^93\) Thus, the production of this joyful chorus comes with the silencing of the swain; though the production of a unified lament appears a triumph, it is not one ‘achieved in terms that he would understand or welcome’ (338).

Fish’s methodology, to outline the ways in which the ‘energy of the poem derives not from the presence of a controlling and self-contained individual, but from forces that undermine his individuality and challenge the fiction of his control’ (322) is a useful one, though still itself undermined by an apparent desire for unity in the final linking of these voices, presumably by the poet, as a harmonic choir. That is, the apparent disunity within *Lycidas* must still, for Fish, be ultimately explained away by placing the disparate voices within the perfect, anonymous, divine unity of the heavenly choir.

Though Fish’s work usefully identifies the fractured nature of voice in *Lycidas*, and links it to the idea of the universal choir, his concerns over the idea of submission ultimately lead him to attempt to close down those disturbances and reunite the poem. I will argue here that the idea of the universal choir is important for precisely the opposite reason: it guarantees that the disparate voices of the poem can never be unproblematically reunited. The multiple speakers of the poem allow *Lycidas* to reflect upon the process of poetic construction itself. In its failure to unite the voices, it represents an elegy not just for Edward King (Lycidas), but for the poetic tradition: ‘a memory of two brother poets […] becomes an enquiry into the justification of the métier of poetry itself.’\(^94\) What is at stake in *Lycidas* is the value of fallen poetry, examined in its inability to construct a coherent voice, whether singular or choral.

There are eight distinct voices in *Lycidas*, which we might place into two categories. There are three narrative voices: the voice of the poet

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\(^94\) Donald M. Friedman, ‘*Lycidas*: The Swain’s Paideia’, *MS*, 3 (1971), 3-34 (p.11).
that begins the poem and is displaced and re-placed throughout; the
‘sisters of the sacred well’ (15) who must join in the song; and finally the
‘uncouth swain’ who closes the poem (186). There are also five
interruptions to the narrative voice: Phoebus (76-84) who remodulates the
concept of fame to heavenly accomplishment; the herald of the sea
[Triton] who questions the winds (91-92); Hippotades, who brings their
reply (97-102); Camus, who mourns his ‘son’ of learning (107); and
perhaps most significantly the ‘Pilot of the Galilean lake’(109) who offers
the prophecy of the fall of the corrupted clergy (113-131). Each of these
voices is in competition with the others, interrupting, displacing and
ultimately seeking to absorb and silence them.

Carey notes in his introduction to the poem that ‘only twice does a
paragraph exceed its predecessor by more than three or four lines’, and it
is the interventions of Phoebus and the Pilot that are thus ‘thrown into
relief’. 95 Milton’s adaptation of the canzone, which Prince contends results
in a sense of ‘continuous unfolding and developing’, allows these
interruptions even greater traction. 96 By closing them with end-stopped
couplets (‘as he pronounces lastly on each deed, / Of so much fame in
heaven expect they meed’ [83-4], and ‘But that two-handed engine at the
door, / Stands ready to smite once, and smite no more’ [130-31]), rather
than the usual chiave which links the sense and rhyme scheme across
the stanza, the poem articulates the structurally devastating nature of
these voices.

More significant than the interruptions of these voices is the
subsequent attempt on the part of the poem to restore the pastoral
equilibrium. After Phoebus’ reply, the poem stresses the discontinuity of
the voices, and returns to pastoral imagery: ‘That strain I heard was of a
higher mood: / But now my oat proceeds’ (87-88). Likewise, after the
Pilot’s denunciation of the clergy, the poet must perform a further
invocation to the pastoral: ‘Return Alphaeus, the dread voice is past, /

95 MCSP p. 239.
96 Prince, Italian Element, p. 88. See pp. 84-8 and Clay Hunt, Lycidas and the Italian
Critics (New Haven; Yale UP, 1979), for a fuller demonstration of Milton’s use, and
development of, the particular techniques associated with the canzone.
That shrunk thy streams; return Sicilian muse’ (132-3). The pastoral is a poetic form intimately concerned with its own generic tradition, where each poem must imitatively establish a relationship with its precursors, its ‘indebtedness to models’ that means the poem becomes ‘the climax of a tradition’. The assertion of the poem’s pastoral genre thus acts as a momentary check to the dispersion of voice; as Joy Connolly argues, the pastoral poem is ‘a realm where the individual voice is celebrated even as it is inexorably assimilated into the collective expression’.

The figure of the ‘uncouth swain’ (186) that closes the poem is the ultimate expression of this unifying pastoral tradition. The final eight lines contain a significant number of pastoral images and allusions, becoming, as Fish notes, a ‘perfectly, that is unrelievedly, conventional […] collection of pastoral commonplaces’ (339-40). The character of the swain appears to offer a binding resolution to the poem by providing a narrative voice that has been controlling the poem, and reporting on the interloping speakers, throughout. This, though, is an illusory coherence, a fact underscored by the sudden, discontinuous imposition of the framing device at the conclusion of the poem. In fact, as Robert Adams has noted, each of these moments of apparent unity within Lycidas manage to offer only a fleeting glimpse of harmony:

[T]he poem is unified, not as a structure of statements about the universe, or as a sequence of themes that fit naturally together, but as a momentary and fragile balance of centrifugal and centripetal forces within the reader’s mind.

Throughout Lycidas the moments of reconciliation come with the recognition that the attempt at synthesis is futile: the difference of the interrupting voices is recognised and foregrounded, even as the poem attempts to absorb them. Phoebus is a ‘higher strain’ than the poem can aspire to, just as the Pilot’s ‘dread voice’ is actually too dreadful for

pastoral poetry to contemplate. The return to pastoral comes at the cost of eliding or forgetting the problematic elements of the interceding voices, demonstrating the futility of the fantasy of the collective. No unification is really possible between the poetic voice of Lycidas and the voices that intrude upon the poem; their presence in Lycidas is precisely contingent upon their status as interruptions, as they cannot be contained in the collective that the pastoral voice proposes.

It is precisely this sort of unifying collective, however, that Fish concludes by proposing. He argues that the displacements of the voices within the poem ultimately results in a ‘choral voice’ (337) that closes the poem by pointing towards grief in general, rather than the death of King specifically: ‘the consolation is for “woful Shepherds”, the plural noun silently denying the speaker even the claim to have been uniquely grieving’ (337). By reading the line ‘And hears the unexpressive nuptial song’ (176) as the key to the poem’s tendency to replace the first person speaker with the universal (hence ‘unexpressive’\textsuperscript{100}) song which is ‘produced by everyone and therefore heard by no one’ (337), Fish’s interpretative action ultimately resolves along the same critical lines which he began by countering. In fact, Fish himself raises this concern, noting that ‘I am aware that this seems like a back door way into the usual reading of Lycidas’ (338), though he demurs by contending that he has reversed the standard schema such that the unity is found not in the strong presence of a speaker but rather in anonymity and sublimation.

Fish is correct to note that Lycidas performs, in part, a concerted attempt to sublimate its variety of speakers into one voice; what is crucial in the poem, though, is the impossibility of such an action. By consistently undermining its speaker, Lycidas demonstrates the impossibility of producing unified, sacred song in fallen language. The litany of pastoral imagery that the ‘Sicilian Muse’ offers (134-51) is dismissed as ultimately fruitless, an exercise in which ‘our frail thoughts dally with false surmise’ (153). Similarly, the muse invoked at the beginning of the poem is unable to offer any real consolation: ‘what could the muse herself that Orpheus

\textsuperscript{100} See n.73, above.
bore’ (58), asks the poet; the omission of the verbal phrase (presumably ‘have done’, as in the preceding line) reveals the powerlessness of the muse to take any real action. The only active reaction to the death of Orpheus comes instead from the universal song, as ‘universal nature did lament’ (60).

Lycidas, too, is properly commemorated not by the muse-inspired poetry, but by the divine music. The only true consolation for Lycidas comes in the form of the angelic choir:

There entertain him all the saints above,  
In solemn troops, and sweet societies  
That sing, and singing in their glory move,  
And wipe the tears forever from his eyes.

(178-81)

The singing of the heavenly choir is the only perfect way to mourn for Lycidas; the pastoral song is simply an approximation of their song, with the multiple competing voices that undermine the generic collectivity serving as a polyphonic reminder of humanity’s inability to properly replicate the joyful hymning of the ‘saints above’ or the lamentation of ‘universal nature’.

In this way, *Lycidas* is the poetic result of two falls. It is a poem that demonstrates man’s exclusion both from the music of the spheres and the divine language that would allow the human singing of the unexpressive song. Even with the aid of the muse, the poet is unable to replicate this heavenly music, and the continuous interruptions and underminings that comprise *Lycidas* are emblematic of humanity’s falling away from the univocality inherent in communication with the divine. Fallen language entails the separateness of speakers, confusion and a multiplicity of meaning; *Lycidas* enacts the failure of these multiplying voices to produce the single ‘choral voice’ that Fish discovers. It serves as a lament not just for Lycidas, but for all those who know how ‘to sing and build the lofty rhyme’ (11) that can never, in fallen language, be lofty enough. *Lycidas* therefore presents the linguistic consequences of the fall, which are analogous to the musical metaphors of partialness and dispersal that this
chapter has already explored in *Paradise Lost*. *Lycidas*, however lofty its own rhyme, actively performs the consequences of the Fall; each interruption (and each failure by the pastoral mode to contain it) is a performance of the status of fallen song, and a reminder that the only properly sacred song is still unavailable.

**After Babel: Language after the fall**

This chapter has demonstrated that *Paradise Lost* (alongside Milton’s other poetry) is thematically concerned with the dispersal of music and language after the Fall. In its recurring metaphors, and reworking of generic motifs, *Paradise Lost* continually points to its own status as a postlapsarian attempt to imitate divine perfection; those metaphors also point to the inherent impossibility of such an attempt away from the unifying presence of God.

This section examines the second key metaphor for the inadequacies of fallen signification, the Tower of Babel. This metaphor was deployed in the seventeenth century to explain the proliferation of languages, and to support attempts to recreate the perfect prelapsarian language that existed before the Tower was built. The Babel myth was also used as both an attack on, and defence of monarchy, as both sides of the Civil Wars marshalled exegetical arguments of this biblical narrative. *Paradise Lost* presents Babel as a site of contention and confusion, both linguistic and political. In its narrative of confused language, as well as the tensions it produces in multiple interpretative possibilities, the Babel myth was doubly exemplary as a narrative of humanity’s fall away from the system of perfect signification that existed before Nimrod.

The biblical source for the story of Babel is relatively brief. After outlining the genealogy of Noah, Genesis records that, all having the same language, the inhabitants of Shinar (in *Paradise Lost* ‘Sennaar’ [III.467], following the Vulgate, perhaps to align it with the Catholic friars of III.475-80) set to building a city, saying
Let us build a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth. And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men builded. And the Lord said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do. Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech. So the Lord scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city. Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because the Lord did there confound the language of all the earth. (Gen. 11:4-9)

The moral of the story is clear: overreaching ambition, and attempting to approach God through secular, rather than spiritual, methods will result in punishment. The notation to the Geneva Bible glosses ‘there confound their language’ as ‘By this great plague of the confusion of tongues appears God’s horrible judgment against man’s pride and vain glory’ (GB Gen. 11:7n). This confusion, then, is a type of the Fall, signifying humanity’s second shift from immersion in the divine language, thought and music towards a phenomenological state of being.

The fantasy of recovering this lost universal language was prominent throughout the seventeenth century. The efforts of both the universal language movement and the cabbalists were directed towards reconstituting the harmony provided by a unitary language.¹⁰¹ Latin, which had so long served as a lingua franca for European scholarship, increasingly came under attack for its complexity and fragmented and dialectical nature, as well as its association with the Catholic Church. Language, in short, had been sullied, and now presented a barrier to

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understanding; the value of a universal language would be that it could better establish a clear relationship between sign and signified. As Knowlson puts it, ‘the seventeenth-century schemes of universal writing and philosophical language arose [...] from a keen desire to forge a new, more direct relationship between words and objects’.102

John Wilkins, perhaps the most active proponent of a universal language, made it clear that his proposal of a new system of communication in *Mercury: or, The Swift and Secret Messenger* was designed with the reversal of Babel in mind:

> The difference of characters, whereby several languages are expressed, is part of the second general curse in the confusion of tongues. For as before there was but one way of speaking, so also but one way of writing. And as now, not only nations, but particular men, may discover their thoughts by any different articulate sounds, so likewise by any written signs.103

Wilkins here sees speech and writing as linked but distinguishable parts of language, such that the ‘second’ curse is that the ‘confusion of tongues’ at Babel becomes ossified in codification. Wilkins’ proposal, clearly designed to rectify this ‘general curse’, is for a universal character (that is, writing system) that can reunify those tongues through the written word:

> there needs not be more signs for the expression of things, than there is now for the expression of words. Amongst those in China and Japan, there is said to be about seven or eight thousand. The perfecting of such an invention were the only way to unite the seventy two languages of the first confusion. (110)

Wilkins’ project, identifying ‘things’ with their ‘signs’, presupposes a universal understanding of those things that has simply been fragmented along with language. Thus he can confidently assert that ‘the picture of a man, a horse, or tree, which to all Nations do express the same conceit’

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(109), and all that is ultimately necessary for universal comprehension is for an international scholarship to establish those potential conceits, and assign unambiguous signs to them. *Mercury* thus marks a part of the shift (observable throughout Wilkins’ work) from the creation of ‘a real character universally legible among diverse language groups, to the construction of a philosophical language whose characters would be isomorphic with things rather than words’.  

Only the divine (and pre-babelic) speech-acts have this kind of direct connection which gives the ability for language to fully express the nature of a thing or concept with no possibility of misunderstanding. Thomas Urquhart expressed the view that language was a divine gift in his *Ekskybalauron*:

> there is hardly any that is not possessed with the opinion, that not only the three fore-named languages, but a great many other, whom they call originals (whereof they reckon ten or eleven in Europe, and some fifty eight more, or thereabouts, in other nations) were at the confusion of Babel, immediately from God by a miracle, infused into men [...] they deemed Languages to be of an invention so sublime, that naturally the wit of man was not able to reach their composure.

For Urquhart, language is a divine gift, so that even the derisive confusion of Babel is a type of fortunate fall, producing further examples of divine excellence. The perfect, universal language was, for seventeenth-century commentators, exemplified in Adam’s ability to find fit names for God’s creation, which proved his ‘instantaneous vocal abilities, which were [his] instinctive form of communication’.  

Genesis provides the biblical basis for this process of extemporaneous yet perfect naming: ‘whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof’ (Gen. 2:19). Adamic language was therefore conceived (not least by those who

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participated in the production of a universal language) to be ‘a nomenclature of essences, in which word would have reflected thing with perfect accuracy’. Thus, the preponderance of ambiguities such as confusing and contradictory synonyms was simply evidence of humanity’s falling away from this unitary language. This will be examined in greater detail, as the consequence (and even cause) of the Fall, in the following chapter.

It is striking, given the combination in *Paradise Lost* of musical and linguistic references to the Fall, that Francis Godwin’s *The Man in the Moon*, the ‘first published universal character’, established a universal language derived from music. Other scholars such as Mersenne and Leibniz had discussed the theoretical potential for universal communication through music, but Godwin’s text went further and outlined a (semi-)practical methodology by which universal communication could be achieved through music. *The Man in the Moon* concerned the imaginary voyage of Domingo Gonsales to the moon, wherein he was confronted with a language which he found ‘a marvellous thing to consider’. This lunar language was strikingly different from anything on earth, ‘because it consists not so much of words or letters, as of tunes and uncouth sounds, that no letters can express’ (93). The language is a combination of words and music, with the tonality of a word playing some part in determining its meaning: ‘you have few words but that they signify diverse and several things, and they are distinguished only by their tunes’ (93). Some of the language was even entirely musical (‘many words there are consisting of tunes only’ [94]), and it is this element of the system that suggested the possibility of a universal language on earth to Gonsalo/Godwin: ‘By occasion hereof I discern means of framing a

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110 Francis Godwin, *The Man in the Moon* (1638), p. 92. Further references are given in the text.
language (and that easy soon to be learned) as copious as any other in
the world, consisting of tunes only’ (95).

This may have been influenced by explorers’ descriptions of
Chinese as a tonal language. Paul Cornelius notes that ‘it is clear that [the
Lunarians] musical speech was derived, at least in part, from reports of
Chinese.’ Knowlson, while acknowledging this possibility, argues that a
musical code was relatively common in early cryptography, and that
Godwin’s innovation was ‘not that of thinking of the musical code in the
first place, but of suggesting its use not as a means of concealing
knowledge, but rather of communicating it’. Thus Godwin’s text moves
away from earlier systems primarily concerned with cryptology and
towards the real possibility of a universal language based on music,
combining in one system the return of Edenic universal communication
and a universe (given the lunar origin of the language) of harmonious
music.

The combinatorial or taxonomical systems such as that of
Comenius, already being discussed (not least by the Hartlib circle) in
manuscript, sought to resolve issues of linguistic comprehension by
organising knowledge more efficiently and rationally, so that it could, in
theory, become universally coded and decoded. Godwin’s brief schema
of a universal language takes as its base bodily performance rather than
written comprehension, as the ability to produce and distinguish between
differing tones and tunes is what enables universal comprehension.
Simultaneously, by setting his imaginary journey in the celestial sphere,
Godwin allows in his musical lunar language an allusion to the scientific-
philosophical debate concerning the music of the spheres.

In the same year as Godwin’s tract, John Wilkins produced a
popular treatise on the astronomical systems of Kepler and Galileo which

111 Paul Cornelius, *Languages in Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Century Imaginary
112 James Knowlson, ‘A Note on Bishop Godwin’s “Man in the Moone”: The East Indies
Trade Route and a “language” of Musical Notes’, *MP*, 65 (1968), 357-361 (p.361).
113 See Jana Privratská and Vladimír Privatský, ‘Language as Product and Mediator of
Knowledge: the Concept of J. A. Comenius’, in *Samuel Hartlib and Universal
Reformation*, ed. by Greengrass, pp. 162-73 (p. 168), and Knowlson, *Universal
Language Schemes* p. 31-4 and 98-9.
sought to prove that the moon might be inhabited, drawn from ‘the observation of Galilaeus, whose glass can show this truth to the senses, a proof beyond exception’.\textsuperscript{114} Wilkins closes the revised edition of his work by considering the value of a voyage to the moon, suggesting that (like the Americas), Europeans might have much to learn from the ‘persons, language, arts, policy, religion of those inhabitants’.\textsuperscript{115} Godwin’s allusion is strengthened by his own appeal to Galileo in the preface to the work, which speaks of ‘this our discovering age: In which our Galilæusses can by advantage of their spectacles gaze the sun into spots’ (sig. A4r-v).

Though the language he proposes is not explicitly designed to replicate prelapsarian unified language, it is notable that the nature of the lunar language is stressed as being ‘one of the same throughout all the regions of the moon’ (92). These proposals for universal language systems, then, are an attempt to repair the effects of the Fall by yoking each individual signifier to a single signified; that attempt reveals the fragmented and unsatisfactory nature of fallen language, with its ambiguities and multiple significations.

In \textit{Paradise Lost}, the linguistic fall happens in two stages: it is a potentiality at the first disobedience, and becomes a reality after Babel. It is not immediately true that, as Ricks contends, ‘with the fall of Man, language falls too’.\textsuperscript{116} Although the possibility that Sin will man’s ‘words [...] all infect’ (X.608) is opened as a result of the Fall, it is not a direct and immediate consequence of it. Communication between man and divine beings is seemingly uninterrupted. Christ comes down to Eden and ‘to Adam called aloud’ (X.102); Adam and Eve are able to understand Christ with no suggestion that he has modulated his language. Similarly Michael, sent to offer prophetic comfort, is able to conduct ‘direct instruction of Adam’, and although, as Swaim demonstrates, this is typologically accommodating, there is no sense that it is linguistically so.\textsuperscript{117} He

\textsuperscript{114} John Wilkins, \textit{The Discovery of a World in the Moon} (1638), p. 133.
\textsuperscript{115} John Wilkins, \textit{A Discourse Concerning a New World and Another Planet, in Two Books} (1640), p. 242.
\textsuperscript{117} Kathleen M. Swaim, \textit{Before and After the Fall} (Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1986), p. 211.
announces himself (‘his coming thus declared’ [XI.250]) and is able to converse with fallen man without any apparent change in his language: ‘the Angel interrupted mild’ (XI.286), ‘to whom thus Michael with regard benign’ (XI.333). Michael’s speeches are commonly preceded by the ‘to whom thus’ that frequently marks speech in *Paradise Lost*, suggesting that his speech is in fact in the same unitary language (presumably prelapsarian Hebrew) that has existed throughout the poem.\(^{118}\) Joad Raymond has demonstrated that the angels in *Paradise Lost* ‘speak and hear, participate in the production and reception of sound waves in a world that seems to be fully audible’.\(^{119}\) To do so they must share a language, and with no account of Michael undertaking angelic linguistic accommodation, we must conclude that Adam retains the perfect universal tongue.

The Genesis account, too, presents linguistic unity as remaining until the building of Babel, noting that before the construction of the Tower, ‘the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech’ (Gen. 11:1). Though this need not necessarily be the pure Edenic language, there is no suggestion in the biblical account of any linguistic punishment until Babel. In their prophecy, the Sin and Death of *Paradise Lost* are, in fact, speaking of future action (‘for destruction to mature / sooner or later’ [X.612-3]), which is a consequence, but not an immediate one, of the Fall. Michael’s prophecy to Adam includes the building of Babel:

\begin{quote}
A mighty hunter thence shall he be styled
Before the Lord, as in despite of heaven,
Or from heaven claiming second sovereignty;
And from rebellion shall derive his name,
Though of rebellion others he accuse.
He with a crew, whom like ambition joins
With him or under him to tyrannize.
\end{quote}

(XII.34-9)

The deployment of the myth places it into a typological structure of recurrent falls moving the protagonists further away from immersion in the

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\(^{118}\) See, amongst others, XI.453, XI.466, XI.604, XI.683, XII.285.

\(^{119}\) Raymond, *Milton’s Angels*, p. 322.
divine presence, language and song. Though Nimrod is not actually named by Michael, the description of a hunter matches that of the Genesis account (‘he was a mighty hunter before the Lord [...] and the beginning of his kingdom was Babel’ [Gen. 10:9-10]).

Nimrod is clearly a type of Satan here: not only do they share the derivation of their names, but also their crime (‘ambition’ and ‘rebellion’), the recruitment of followers to share that crime, and an attempt at self-justification by accusing their targets of their own faults (consider, for example, Satan’s accusation that God ‘sole reigning holds the tyranny of heaven’ [I.124]). Indeed, the language of this passage contains numerous echoes of the descriptions of Satan’s own rebellion: ‘crew’, for example, is used almost exclusively throughout Paradise Lost to refer to the rebelling angels, such as ‘he with his horrid crew / Lay vanquished’ (I.51-52); Satan’s rebellion is characterised as tyranny, as he aims to travesty the divine monarchy in his attempt to ‘to set himself in glory above his peers’ (I.39); and Satan’s ‘ambition’ is the first rationale given for that rebellion (‘with ambitious aim / against the throne and monarchy of God’ [I.41-42]). The parallels between Babel and the Satanic fall are made explicit during their constructions. Babel is described as being built from the ‘black bituminous surge / [that] boils out from underground, the mouth of hell’ (XII.41-42). Pandæmonium, conversely, is compared in an epic simile to Babel (‘let those / who boast in mortal things, and wondering tell / of Babel’ [I.692-94]). The comparison highlights the vainglorious elements of both projects, which serve as an ambitious affront to God.

Milton, by deploying Nimrod and the myth of his construction of the Tower of Babel, was drawing upon a suddenly crucial revitalisation of a well-established trope of Nimrod-as-tyrant. As Hardin puts it, 'Milton’s

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120 For the exegetical tradition connecting Nimrod and Babel (farther than the Genesis account does), see Flavius Josephus, Jewish Antiquities, trans. by William Whiston (Ware, Herts.: Wordsworth, 2006), p.13-14 (I.4).
121 Other uses of ‘crew’, in this sense occur at I.477; I.751; IV.573; IV.952 et al.; the exception is ‘diseases dire, of which a monstrous crew / Before thee shall appear’ (XI.474-5), though given Satan’s progeny are Sin and Death, the phrase may still refer at least figuratively to Satan’s ‘crew’.
Nimrod emerged from a long and dynamic tradition discernible in exegesis, sermons, poetry, and pictures of the previous sixteen centuries. This tradition, outlined by Hardin, stretched from Josephus to Luther and Calvin via Dante and Boccaccio, but continually stressed the overweening pride and rebellious nature of Nimrod.

During the civil wars, considerations of Nimrod’s role both as an early monarchic figure and as a type of tyrant took on renewed importance. As Achinstein notes, the myth of Babel was deployed on both sides of the political divides of the mid-seventeenth century, pressed into service as a royalist allegory ‘explaining and condemning the origins of political difference’ and a radical cautionary tale, in which Babel was the result of the disruptive ambition of Nimrod (commonly equated, etymologically, with Satan via Hebrew ‘mârad’ ['rebellion']), and so ‘confused speech was a consequence of tyranny’. Crucial to both of these conceptions, of course, is the sense that confusion is punishment, and that language itself can actually become a barrier to communication.

For seventeenth-century commentators, Nimrod was frequently cited (often alongside the Pharaoh of Exodus, as at PL I.694) as the prime example of tyrannous over-reaching. Edward Fleetwood’s translation of Agrippa called Nimrod ‘the first tyrant and idolater’, and this typified the standard reading of the Genesis passage. The eminent Protestant theologian Giovanni Diodati, in his commentary on the Bible, wrote of ‘Nimrod his tyranny, who usurped other mens parts’. The expatriate puritan minister John Allen similarly warned of ‘the tyrannous usurpations of some such as Nimrod' in the midst of a discussion on the establishment of forms of consensual government (‘families went out, and combining made cities, and so Common-wealths by mutual consent’).

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126 Diodati, Pious Annotations, p. 12 [Gen. 10].
127 John Allen, A Defence of the Answer made unto the Nine Questions or Positions (1648), p. 86
The Babel and Nimrod myths, in fact, became a crucial site of debate for the question of the biblical authority of forms of government, in particular the institution of monarchy. Opponents of Charles sought to demonstrate, by invoking the example of Nimrod, that monarchy tends towards tyranny and God would not have ordained such a system. William Bridge argued that Nimrod’s rebellion was not just in the building of Babel, but in the very founding of a monarchy, which he argued was the first after the flood:

For Nimrod comes of to rebel, as if in erecting his kingdom, he had rebelled against the way of government which before was used if not appointed. And it should seem strange if God had appointed that way of government by making the sons of Noah kings; that Cham, from whom came Nimrod, who was that cursed and wicked posterity of Noah, should keep that government alive which was set up by God; and that Shem, who was the godly posterity of Noah, from whom came Abram, should not.\(^\text{128}\)

Kingship, and the divine mandate for kingship, is here directly equated with merit. Bridge suggests that the wickedness of the line of Cham (including Nimrod) makes them intrinsically unsuitable for kingship, and concludes simply that God could not therefore have ordained such a system. This argument is echoed by Adbiel, who concludes that Christ is a rightful king and Satan is not because of their respective merit; He is incredulous that Satan considers himself a potential ‘[e]qual to him begotten son’, an equality which Adbiel contends could not be achieved even by ‘all angelic nature joined in one’ (V.834-5).

John Cooke, who had acted as solicitor-general in the trial of Charles I, also proclaimed that Nimrod was the first king, and first tyrant: ‘The first man then that we find taking upon him kingly power was Nimrod, Gen. 10:8-9, the mighty hunter, what did he hunt? The lives, liberties and estates of poor people’, and this example, he claimed, had set the

precedent for tyranny and oppression, as ‘ever since though never before monarchs and tyrants have hunted men’.129

Prefiguring Cooke’s argument, Milton noted in Eikonoklastes that Nimrod was ‘the first that hunted after faction [and] is reputed, by ancient tradition, the first that founded Monarchy’.130 Milton counters Charles’ defence of kings as the fount of justice, religion and order by appealing to the tradition of biblical exegesis that read biblical monarchs as tyrants:

[W]hat patrons they [kings] be, God in the scripture oft enough hath expressed; and the earth itself hath too long groaned under the burden of their injustice, disorder, and irreligion. Therefore to bind their kings in chains, and their nobles with links of iron, is an honour belonging to his saints; not to build Babel (which was Nimrods work the first king, and the beginning of his kingdom was Babel) but to destroy it.131

Milton here equates the general works of kings with the specific self-aggrandising work of Nimrod. The Babel myth allows Milton to construct kingship as a self-interested and transgressive institution that in continuing its own works actively acts against God. By equating the works of monarchy with Babel, Milton authorises by biblical precedent the destruction both of those works and the convention of monarchy itself. The allusion continues into Paradise Lost’s prophetic digression on the Paradise of Fools, filled with ‘things transitory and vain’ (III.447), whose inhabitants ‘still with vain design / New Babels, had they werewithal, would build’ (III.467-68).

Royalists did not dispute the charges of tyranny and usurpation laid against Nimrod; instead, they argued that this did not taint the divinely ordained nature of kingship. William Hall’s sermon on the coronation of Charles intervenes in the debate by invoking Nimrod as part of his confutatio. Pre-empting the argument that tyranny proves that God does not ordain Kings, Hall counters:

130 CPW III: 466. The ‘ancient tradition’ almost certainly refers to Josephus, op. cit. n.120.
131 CPW III: 598.
[H]ath he ordained tyrants and made them Gods on earth? Did he appoint Nimrod and Pharaoh? [...] To answer this, we must know that all tyranny is the corruption of government; it is not that sound and lawful authority of which god is the author.\textsuperscript{132}

Hall’s sermon contends that ‘government’ (by which he means monarchy) is divinely mandated, except that the actions of man corrupt it. Hall, in a standard royalist position, contends that, beginning with Adam himself, God set kings to govern on earth as his vicegerents in order to maintain order and justice. In \textit{Paradise Lost}, Adam’s horrified response to Michael’s relation of the Babel myth serves as a counter to this royalist discourse of Adamic monarchy. As Thomas Corns puts it

A long golden age of republican ‘paternal rule’ is shattered by the rise of kingship […] Those royalist apologists who would have us regard Adam as the archetypal king and a justification for monarchy have from his own mouth the rehearsal of the counter argument.\textsuperscript{133}

The ‘paternal rule’ of a man over a woman or a household cannot be broadened to a wider form of social organisation, as it would invite the usurpation of authority over equals. Thus, monarchy is specifically postlapsarian, Adam noting that Nimrod was ‘to himself assuming / Authority usurped, from God not given’ (XII.65-6). God, in fact, had only given man authority over the creatures of the earth: ‘man over men / he made not lord: such title to himself / Reserving, human left from human free’ (XII.69-71). Nimrod, then, is Satanic not simply because they both rebel, but because their rebellion takes the form of disruption of the natural hierarchy, as they attempt to usurp power, fame and glory in a system that should produce a submissive equality (Satan, of course, aimed ‘to set himself in glory above his peers’ [I.39]).

Hall’s argument was not one rehearsed only by advocates of absolutist monarchy. Sir John Spelman’s treatise \textit{Certain Considerations}

\textsuperscript{132} William Hall, \textit{A Sermon Preached at St. Bartholomews the Lesser in London, on the xxvii. day of March 1642; Being the Day of the Inauguration of our Sovereign Lord King Charles} (1642), p. 13-14.

upon the Duties both of Prince and People advocated a monarchical government with checks and balances provided by both the aristocracy and the people in the forms of laws and ancient customs, although he refuted the argument that the people derived the power to depose the king from such an arrangement. Rather, the laws and customs provided for the continuance of good and just governance, unlike those kings typified by ‘Nimrod: who being potent in his natural dominion, used his power to the oppression of his neighbours, and changed the state of government into tyranny [...] changed the natural government into that which is tyrannical’. Though Spelman and Hall both confront the spectre of the over-mighty monarch, typified for both by Nimrod, they ultimately conclude that such individual examples do not undermine the divinely and biblically mandated condition of monarchy.

The Nimrod myth could, in fact, even be pressed into service as an allegory for unjustified regicide, as it was by the ‘devout royalist’ George Alsop, who indentured himself to Maryland to escape the protectorship. In a poem attached to his exercise in colonial promotion, Alsop criticises the tumultuous times

When as the peasant he shall take his king,  
And without cause shall fall to murdering him;  
And when that’s done, with pride assume the chair,  
And Nimrod-like, himself to Heaven rear;  
Command the People, make the land obey  
His baser will, and swear to what he’ll say.

The deployment of Nimrod here allows the poet to reverse the charges of the regicides (which act becomes ‘murder’, and ‘without cause’), laying the charge of usurpation and tyranny against Cromwell himself. The peasant/king disjunction reinforces and exaggerates this sense of usurpation, as Cromwell was no ‘peasant’; like a significant number of the regicides, he was a member of the landed gentry, and grandee of the New

134 John Spelman, Certain Considerations upon the Duties both of Prince and People. Written by a Gentleman of Quality, a Well-wisher to both King and Parliament (Oxford; 1642), p. 3.  
135 ANB  
136 George Alsop, A Character of the Province of Mary-Land (1666), p. 78.
Model Army, opposed to the egalitarian demands of the Levellers. The commands given to the people and the land are therefore ‘baser’ than those given by the King, and the final two lines of the stanza point towards a ruler/ruled relationship based upon force (‘command’, ‘make obey’ and ‘swear’) reminiscent of Wase’s trope of a loyal England resisting violent subjugation in the poems attached to his translation of *Electra*: ‘Force can but in a rape engage / ‘Tis choice must make it marriage’. The addition of the Babel myth to this passage allows the poet to re-appropriate the charge of tyranny to the royalist cause, and simultaneously signifies the self-serving ambition of Cromwell, locating that ambition within a typological schema of futile, penalty-invoking, over-reaching.

The story of Nimrod, then, was a key site of debate, deployed and appropriated both as an individual myth in its own right, as well as a symbolic part of wider debates on social structure, obedience and responsibility. Whatever *intentio auctoris* the passage in *Paradise Lost* might appear to convey in its categorisation of him as the ‘tyrant’, the myth of Nimrod was a key site of seventeenth-century debate, and no simple reading of this passage is possible. Rather, it highlights the polyvocal nature of Milton’s text. Not only does the Babel myth uncouple the perfect sign of divine language, it also provokes confusion in its exegesis. *Paradise Lost*’s use of the myth thus reveals the difficulties of revealing divine truth in any fallen language, which is open to (wilful) misinterpretation. The very existence of Adam’s corrective rebuke of tyrannous kings recalls the counter-arguments rehearsed by contemporary royalists, revealing the inherently open and deferred nature of the fallen signifier.

In *Paradise Lost* the ultimate result of both Pandæmonium (or, more accurately, the council it enables) and Babel is punishment by linguistic confusion. The devils cannot offer acclamation to Satan on his triumphant return, only the hissing of snakes, and Satan himself loses the power of speech: ‘he would have spoke, / But hiss for hiss returned with

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137 Christopher Wase, *Electra of Sophocles, with an Epilogue Showing the Parallel in Two Poems* (The Hague[?]: 1649), epilogue p. 3.
forked tongue’ (X.517-8). God’s punishment of the builders of Babel is to introduce multivocality in place of the single, shared language, as he:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{in derision sets} \\
\text{Upon their tongues a various spirit to raze} \\
\text{Quite out their native language, and instead} \\
\text{To sow a jangling noise of words unknown:} \\
\text{Forthwith a hideous gabble rises loud} \\
\text{Among the builders: each to other calls} \\
\text{Not understood. (XII.52-58)}
\end{align*}
\]

The result of Babel is polyvocality, expressed as dissonant sound ('jangling noise' and 'hideous gabble'). This imagery unites the two key metaphors of the ambiguity of fallen expression that have been discussed in this chapter.

Throughout Paradise Lost (as well as Milton's other poetry) we can discern an attempt to replicate the music of the spheres, to enact the fantasy of earthly participation in the celestial choir. The imagery deployed to represent this ambition, however, reveals its futility: the song cannot yet be renewed, and humanity’s language must remain partial and polyvocal. Paradise Lost is a concerted engagement with the principles of polyphony: it consistently seeks to sublimate the multiple voices on which it relies into a perfect unity; however, just as Lycidas demonstrates, a singular voice offering a coherent utterance remains only a fantasy for fallen man.

Milton’s epic, like the devils’ song, is a fallen harmony, forced to engage with the postlapsarian, temporal context of its audience and production, even while it attempts to approximate the divine music to which it aspires. Its consistent references to these prelapsarian systems of signification ultimately point only towards its own position outside of those perfect systems of comprehension. In the music of the spheres, the Babel myth, the polyphony of the invocations to the Muse (shadowed in Lycidas), Paradise Lost thematically reveals that it, too, is a ‘partial’ song.
4. ‘A jangling noise of words unknown’: Fallen Language in *Paradise Lost*

The previous chapter examined how the imagery of *Paradise Lost* presents humanity’s relationship with the divine. It showed that, through the tropes of music and Babel, *Paradise Lost* vocalises an impossible difference between the productions of fallen creatures, and the divinity expressed or represented in those productions.

This chapter considers the linguistic presentation of that relationship. Following from the discussion of Babel that closed the previous chapter, it argues that *Paradise Lost* expresses at the level of language itself the irreparable divide between God and postlapsarian man. It shows that the characteristic mode of postlapsarian expression in *Paradise Lost* is the pun: once away from the divine guarantor of language, fallen creatures exploit the distinction created between signifier and signified(s). Satan’s rebellion, in fact, stems from a debate over the title of Messiah, as he fails, or refuses, to comprehend that the title is indicative of the merit of the Son. Adam, too, lapses into ambiguity after his fall (though without the joy that Satan finds). This chapter argues that the Epic Voice, too, is confronted with ambiguity in the similes and language it deploys to attempt prelapsarian representation. The impossibility of eliminating that ambiguity undermines the poem’s claims to divine inspiration, or perfect expression. Instead, the prelapsarian world can only be briefly glimpsed, or gestured towards, before fallen reality intrudes.

Just as with the Universal Language movement, the seventeenth century was concerned with how meaning was constructed in language, and how the différance inherent in postlapsarian, post-Babelian languages might be overcome. This was expressed in contemporary discourse over allegory, and allegorical reading, which centred on the
possibility (and problems) of language having multiple meanings. As such, the processes of reading and interpreting came under question; the seventeenth century responses to textuality reveal the difficulties of fallen language, which must be overcome or negotiated. It is with this episteme that Paradise Lost engages in its depiction of the divine.

Paradise Lost seeks to express the logos, the unmediated Word, the original, transcendentalist signifier (that is, unity), while at the same time recounting the very events that make the logos unavailable to humanity. Those events force any description of God to occur in the fallen realm of temporality and hermeneutics, placing the logos within a semiotic system of différance. The God of Paradise Lost is ultimately reduced to a symbol that must be activated and understood through the fractured (fallen) language that could never conceive of the divine totality. As Eagleton puts it:

[T]he transcendentalist signifier is concealed, and to justify its dealings with humankind demands an awkwardly discursive hermeneutic that is the precise reverse of the conceit […] the acts of Milton’s God] must be painfully decoded, elaborated and reassembled, in a narrative that can expose their logic only at the cost of laying bare its own devices.1

Paradise Lost is concerned, perhaps above all else, with the problems inherent in attempting a postlapsarian description of divine attributes and motives. It is a poem acutely aware of its own construction in fallen language, and the limiting effect that this has on its central project, which is ‘to justify the ways of God to men’ (I.26).

This tension (the ‘awkwardness’ Eagleton detects) is manifested at the level of language, not narrative. The poem itself appears to offer a description of God, allowing the reader a glimpse at the innermost councils (and wars) of heaven. Yet Paradise Lost consistently undermines its own theodicean status, continuously deconstructing the language it deploys. For Eagleton, this takes the form of the poem’s insistence upon foregrounding its own status as epic at the necessary cost of realism, with

1 Terry Eagleton, Walter Benjamin, or Towards a Revolutionary Criticism (Verso, 1981), p. 11. Further references are given in the text.
the attendant ‘entanglements of “epic” immediacy and hermeneutic
discourse, the fixing of significations at one level that produces a sliding of
them at another’ (12). This ‘sliding’, though, is not simply the result of a
tension between the theological and the hermeneutic (though this does
exist); it is a reflection on the limited (and limiting) hermeneutic itself.

The ‘awkwardly discursive hermeneutic’ Eagleton finds is nothing
less than an embodiment of the unspeakability of the divine. To encode
this unspeakability, while simultaneously proposing to offer an image of
God, is to continually and consistently stress the impossibility of the
project upon which *Paradise Lost* has embarked, to self-reflexively
deconstruct the language of fallen man and in doing so “expose” its
inherent unsuitability for the task it sets itself.

*Paradise Lost*, in some sense, anticipates Paul de Man’s
comments on the act of reading itself, when he notes that a text

is not a phenomenal event that can be granted any form of
positive existence, whether as a fact of nature or as an act of
the mind. It leads to no transcendental perception, intuition or
knowledge but merely solicits an understanding that has to
remain immanent because it poses the problem of its
intelligibility in its own terms.²

Reading and writing are inextricably enmeshed in a linguistic system that
admits no external ‘reality’ beyond its own endlessly deferred signifiers.
So too *Paradise Lost*, by seeking to describe (even to speak for) God,
necessarily reduces the divine to the fallen modes of signification, and
thus denies the possibility of any referral to the transcendental signified
beyond its own, self-consciously inadequate, system of representation.
Although the deferred eschatological dénouement of *Paradise Lost* –
which will ultimately collapse the distinction between sign and signified –
is gestured towards, Milton’s epic remains resolutely conscious of (and
limited by) that unresolved lacuna. The poem’s response to the traumatic
nature of its relationship to god is the subject of the conclusion; this

² Paul de Man, ‘The Rhetoric of Blindness’, in *Blindness and Insight*, rev. ed. (Methuen,
chapter will examine the consequences of that lacuna in *Paradise Lost*’s treatment of postlapsarian language.

The poem’s placement of God-as-symbol within the postlapsarian structure of its linguistic construction serves to articulate the absurdity of its attempts to fix signification (at any level), and the analogous impossibility of the grandiose theodicean claim of its *exordium*. The absurdity of those fallen attempts to fix signification are manifested in two ways throughout the poem. Firstly, the numerous falls that *Paradise Lost* enacts are at least partly linguistic: one of the markers, perhaps even causes, of a fall is that language itself is disrupted, made visible by lapsed characters through punning and consistent (and consistently misguided) contentions over the meaning of language. The previous chapter demonstrated that one of the effects of the falls was to cut oneself off from the divine music; analogously, to fall is also to remove oneself (quite willingly, in Satan’s case) from the totality of divine language, so that misunderstanding and ambiguities become possible, and even pleasurable. Secondly, *Paradise Lost* actively deconstructs itself, introducing ambiguity and uncertainty to what appear to be confidently unequivocal pronouncements. The loyal angels refer to their own speech as either insufficient for proper expression or even entirely allegorical; the poet-prophet narrator’s use of metaphor is suggestive of similar insufficiency, since those metaphors often contain their own negation.

**‘Ambiguous Words’: Punning as Disruption in Paradise Lost**

The Satan of *Paradise Lost* revels in the newfound presence of linguistic ambiguity during the taunting exchange that precedes the revelation of gunpowder, beginning the second day of the war in Heaven. Satan addresses his troops in a speech full of puns, the double meanings of which only the rebels can grasp:

Vanguard, to right and left the front unfold;
That all may see who hate us, how we seek
Peace and composure, and with open breast
Stand ready to receive them, if they like
Our overture, and turn not back perverse;
But that I doubt, however witness heaven,
Heaven witness thou anon, while we discharge
Freely our part: ye who appointed stand
Do as you have in charge, and briefly touch
What we propound, and loud that all may hear.

(VI.558-67)

Here, ‘open breast’, ‘overture’, ‘discharge’, ‘in charge’ and ‘touch’ all serve as puns on the placing or firing of cannon (‘touch’ is itself already laboured, having previously been used in similar double sense at VI.479-80 and 520). These puns are given particular force by their placement at the end of lines, forcing a momentary pause in comprehension which offers the possibility of a second meaning: ‘discharge / Freely our part’, for example, loses much of its force as a pun if ‘discharge’ is not isolated by the line break. Furthermore, ‘back perverse’ may gain a treble meaning here – ‘perverse’ is a pun on ‘evil’ and ‘facing the wrong way’, suggesting that the loyalty of the angels who oppose Satan is itself wicked or misguided – by pointing back to the metaphorical use of cannon earlier in the epic. Satan’s mind, which ‘like a devilish engine back recoils’ (IV.17) on Niphates’ top is compared to a cannon by a link to the prose prologue to Book Six, where ‘devilish engines’ is the phrase used for the invention of cannon. 3 ‘Recoil’ is the oppositional force applied on artillery by the explosion of the powder, which produced a huge stress on the cannon itself. As one contemporary account described it:

Who, without the certificate of experience could believe [...] so vast a weight as a cannon and its carriage bear, should at the same time be thereby driven backwards, or made to recoil? [...] [Firing the cannon] doth convert its impetus, or violence upon the breech [...] [Producing] a fragor, or report as loud as thunder, nay, by the commotion of the vicine air

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3 See also Satan’s soliloquy on his return to Eden, where he propounds that ‘Revenge at first though sweet / Bitter ere long back on itself recoils’ (IX.171-72), though Satan readily accepts the ‘recoil’ so long as he can gain some revenge on man. See also Comus, ‘evil on itself shall back recoil’ (593).
shakes even the largest structures and shatters glass windows situate in the sphere of its violence.⁴

The violent oppositional forces involved in firing a cannon could easily cause the breech (the rear of the barrel) to explode, especially as the casting process often resulted in a slightly imperfect chamber.⁵ The two phrases from *Paradise Lost*, when taken together, provide the image of a misfiring cannon, offering an unintentional Satanic pun on the self-destructive failure of his own ‘perverse’ enterprise.

Belial, after the initial volley, is found ‘in like gamesome mood’ (VI.620), and offers his own set of puns, conflating the rebel angels’ initial dialogue with cannonballs: ‘the terms we sent were terms of weight, / Of hard contents, and full of force urged home’ (VI.621-22). Punning is a consequence of fallen language, and so is available to all the devils, not restricted exclusively to Satan.

The ‘parlay’ between Satan and the loyal angels is not a replacement for, but rather a crucial extension of, the (allegorical) war in heaven. Both sides reject the ‘rigid spears, and helmets thronged, and shields’ (VI.83), the weapons with which they began the war in heaven and which, as Fowler notes, ‘are as allegorical as Spenser’s’ (VI.213n). The devils have turned to gunpowder, and the loyal angels respond by casting aside these weapons (‘their arms aside they threw’ [VI.639]) to hurl whole mountains at their adversaries. The gunpowder (especially in its association with the organ) signifies discord and disunity; the hills, by contrast, are uprooted as one entity (‘the seated hills with all their load / Rocks, waters, woods’ [VI.644-45]), and even this seeming chaos is immediately revealed to be the cohesive plan of God, who has ‘foreseen / This tumult, and permitted all, advised: / That his great purpose he might so fulfil / To honour his anointed Son’ (VI.673-76). Satan’s deliberate confusion (a permanent manifestation of his fallen state) is thus paralleled

militarily and linguistically with the temporary disarray of the loyal angels, also both linguistic (‘we suspense / collected stood within all our thoughts amused [puzzled] / Not long’ [VI.580-82]) and physical (‘down they fell / By thousands, angel on archangel rolled’ [VI.593-4]).

Nigel Smith notes that here ‘Satan confuses parlaying with actual combat’. Such a reading fits with the conception of Satan as a parody of the great heroes of classical epic, which is ‘developed in several scornful flying matches recalling exchanges between heroes’, although to his discredit ‘Satan vaunts excessively but then foregoes single combat’. Yet the vaunting is a natural consequence of Satan’s linguistic fall – the exchanges, not least that between Satan and Michael (VI.262-95), form a part of the rebellion; both parties strive to set the very terms of that rebellion. Michael addresses Satan as ‘Author of evil, unknown till they revolt / Unnamed in heaven, now plenteous’ (VI.262-63), suggesting that for heavenly creatures knowing and naming are the same event (as for Adam when naming the animals). That is, angelic intuition is linguistic: once an object or concept exists, angelic language expands to accommodate a name for it, and since angelic language is the perfect, divine language, the name and the thing are perfectly synchronous – to know the name is to know the thing. Satan’s reply contests Michael’s construction, and interrogates his use of the neologism ‘evil’: ‘Err not that so shall end / The strife which thou callst evil, but we style / The strife of glory’ (VI.288-90). The reversal makes explicit Satan’s position, already revealed to the rebels at his council which questioned the name ‘Messiah’, that he is better placed than Michael (and, indeed, God) to understand the true nature of things. Satan’s response here reveals the fundamental nature of the war in heaven, which is, at its root, a contest over language: Satan denies that Michael (and, indeed, God) has the right to name, which is to define, good and evil.

The verb ‘style’, however, is deployed throughout Paradise Lost to signify false naming. Beëlzebub uses the term at the Council of Hell as he (rhetorically) ponders the correct titles for the devils: ‘Thrones and imperial

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6 Smith, Literature and Revolution, p. 224.
7 Lewalski, Rhetoric of Literary Forms, p. 59-60.
powers, offspring of heaven, / Ethereal virtues, or these titles now must we renounce and changing style be called / Princes of Hell?’ (II.310-12). The devils, of course, no longer have any claim to titles, as Satan reveals upon his return after the temptation. Addressing the devils by a similar list of titles, he (falsely) declares them now to be ‘in possession such, not only of right’ (X.461), revealing that before his conquest of Earth the titles were indeed ‘merely titular’ (V.774) – which of course they remain, God’s punishment of the transformation to serpents serving ‘to dash their pride’ (X.577). Michael, offering comfort to Adam, and commenting on human history, uses the verb in his accounts of Enoch and Babel. The contemporaries of Enoch strive ‘for glory done / Of triumph, to be styled great conquerors’ (XI.694-95). The titles given by humans, though, are immediately derided as false, as Michael provides the true alternative: ‘Destroyers rightlier called, and plagues of men’ (XI.697). Nimrod, too, is described as taking a title not bestowed by the superior understanding of heaven: ‘A mighty hunter thence shall he be styled / Before the Lord, as in despite of heaven’ (XII.33-34). The corrective offered against Nimrod is political-theological (he has ‘Authority usurped, from God not given’ [XII.66]), in line with contemporary discourse. However, this is reflected linguistically, since he ‘from rebellion shall derive his name’ (XII.36).

Satan himself uses the verb to further his claim that God is a usurper, referring to him as ‘He almighty styled’ (IX.137). This periphrastic naming of God is common among the devils, who avoid the name of God (as at I.95, 122, 131, 169, II.59, 137 and so on), but also serves to underscore the linguistic difference that Satan represents, since ‘styled’ here serves to reflect Satan’s doubt on the nature of God’s claim to the title ‘almighty’ by provoking a potential difference between the name and the attribute. Such a meaning is invoked by Satan in his response to Michael, speaking of ‘him named almighty’ (VI.294). Just as with Messiah, by denying God the name ‘almighty’, Satan presumes he can also deny him the attribute.
The contest over naming is played out in Satan’s earlier parlay with Abdiel, concerning the nature of ‘servility’ and ‘freedom’. Satan contends that Abdiel is part of an army that serves because they know no better:

At first I thought that liberty and heaven  
To heavenly souls had been all one; but now  
I see that most through sloth had rather serve,  
Ministering spirits, trained up in feast and song;  
Such hast thou armed, the minstrelsy of heaven,  
Servility with freedom to contend. (VI.164-69)

The distinction Satan draws between ‘liberty’ and ‘heaven’ reveals his misunderstanding of the nature of divine hierarchy. For Satan, the idea of serving is equivalent with ‘servility’. However, as Gabriel makes clear, the only servility involved in obeying and praising God is when that service and obedience are false. He asks Satan, when discovered next to Eve, ‘who more than thou / Once fawned, and cringed, and servilely adored / Heaven’s awful monarch?’ (IV.958-60). Gabriel is referring here, as revealed by his phrase ‘sly hypocrite’ (IV.957), not to all of Satan’s praise of God, but the day after the anointing of Messiah which the angels spend in dance, though for Satan it is only feigned joy (‘all seemed well pleased, all seemed, but were not all’ [V.617]). As John Leonard notes, this outward show, not the physical war in heaven that follows it, is indicative of Satan’s move away from God, since ‘Lucifer’s Fall does date from his insincere protestation of loyalty and love’.\(^8\) Again, the distinctive characteristic of a fall is a separation of sign from signifier, the ability to ‘seem’. It is for this reason that Satan can deceive Uriel, since ‘goodness thinks no ill / Where no ill seems’ (III.688-90). The parlay with Abdiel centres on both the act of angelic servitude itself, but also the name, as Satan’s succession of puns and jibes makes clear. The very fact of competing naming systems is evidence of Satan’s fall away from perfect intuition demonstrated by Michael and Abdiel in heaven, and Raphael in narration, who immediately intuit both the nature of Satan, and the new names of the devils.

\(^8\) John Leonard, “‘Once Fawn’d and Cringed’: A Song and Dance About Satan’s Servility”, MQ, 19 (1985), 101-105 (p. 102).
Satan’s inability to understand the nature of servitude had already been demonstrated in his discussion with Abdiel during the rebellious conclave that preceded the outbreak of war; Satan argues that Messiah has ‘us eclipsed under the name / Of king anointed’ (V.776-77). The next section will return to Satan’s distinction between signifier and signified; here, we can note that it represents the failing of his angelic intuition, as he misunderstands the nature of service, and the nature of Messiah Himself. This is manifested, punningly, in his cosmological (mis)understanding on Niphates:

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O thou that with surpassing glory crowned,
Lookst from thy sole dominion like the God
Of this new world; at whose sight all the stars
Hide their diminished heads; to thee I call
But with no friendly voice, and add thy name
O sun, to tell thee how I hate thy beams.
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(IV.32-37)

John Leonard notes the Sun/Son pun here, suggesting that the cosmological relationships established reflect the hierarchy of Lucifer and Messiah: ‘Just as the morning star must fade before the sun, Lucifer the angel must yield precedence to the rising Messiah.’ Yet in heaven this does not mean a reduction: in fact, to stand in proper proportion to God and Messiah is a glorification, as the imagery of the celestial choir discussed in chapter three demonstrated. Satan, however, falsely intuits the necessity of a reduction: if the sun stands allegorically for the Son, and the star for Lucifer (and the other angels), then the phrase ‘diminished heads’ adopts a significance beyond the purely physical (stars cannot be seen in the day-time). In this allegorical scheme, it demonstrates Satan’s belief that the elevation of Messiah entails an eclipsing of all other forms of angelic virtue. Satan’s misunderstanding of his relationship with God impinges upon all of his understanding of His creation.

Adam, like Satan, begins to dissociate the name from the thing after the Fall, addressing Eve as ‘thou serpent, that name best / Befits

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thee’. Adam is fallen away from his innate understanding (the same understanding that allowed a perfect link between what he named the animals and their being and qualities). The lines themselves may also be a pun on the Hebrew ‘Heva’ [believed to be the root of ‘Eve’, and commonly translated as ‘life’]: as D. C. Allen notes, there was a substantial tradition that noted that when ‘Heva’ was pronounced with an aspirant it became ‘serpent’, so that ‘a little tradition and some bad Hebrew stood behind [Adam’s] remark.’ Adam’s ‘remark’, then, is either a pun or a mistake; in whichever sense (and it may be both), it reveals that while he still has access to the universal language (prelapsarian Hebrew), it is nonetheless ‘infected’ by Sin (typologically pre-empting the allegorical Sin’s prophecy that she will man’s ‘looks, words, actions all infect’ [X.608]), since Adam, like Beelzebub and Satan, is now also dealing in ‘ambiguous words’ (V.703 and VI.568).

The ability of language to signify in multivalent ways is one of the conditions of fallen language; its very openness serving as evidence that it has fallen away from the divine logos. For Satan, this is a legitimation of rebellion; for Adam, a constant reminder of his fallen state. However, the remembering and repeating of sin even infect the prelapsarian language of Paradise Lost. Christopher Ricks has argued that the Epic Voice deploys exclusionary puns; that is, words that produce a meaning only to deny it. For Ricks, terms such as ‘serpent error’ (VII.302) or ‘wanton ringlets’ (IV.306) have their ‘evil meaning consciously and ominously excluded’, becoming “winding (not sin)” and “unrestrained (not lascivious”). In this interpretation, it is the reader, not the narrator, who is fallen; the narrator can consciously exclude the contradictory or sinful ambiguities which the fallen reader cannot fully escape.

However, the very fact that the possibilities have to be excluded reveals the openness and ambiguity of the language in which the poem is

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11 Ricks, Milton’s Grand Style, p. 110. ‘Serpent’ (from serpere) and ‘error’ are both Latinisms for ‘winding’. On the positive connotations (as a demarcation of prelapsarian love) of Adam and Eve’s ‘wanton’ hair, see Stephen B. Dobranski, ‘Clustering and Curling Locks: The Matter of Hair in Paradise Lost’, PMLA, 125 (2010), 337-353.
constructed: “lascivious” is suppressed at a price.\textsuperscript{12} Descriptions of the serpent as ‘sly’ or ‘Insinuating’, like the ‘Gordian twine’ and filled with ‘fatal guile’ fit into the same pattern of punning that this chapter has shown to be the condition of all postlapsarian expression in \textit{Paradise Lost}.\textsuperscript{13} John Leonard argues that these puns (or anti-puns) are ‘a variety of prolepsis – the type of anachronism which treats future events as past. Milton’s prolepses usually anticipate the Fall’.\textsuperscript{14} It is that very prolepsis that reveals the traumatic effects of the Fall on the poem. Even as \textit{Paradise Lost} seeks to represent an unfallen world, it is disrupted by the Fall it can never fully escape.

These anti-puns collapse the poem’s attempted distinction between fallen and unfallen language. They invoke the ‘ambiguous words’ characteristic of Satan and Adam, and however much the ‘evil’ meaning can be ‘consciously’ excluded, it lingers as an absence that is never entirely closed off. \textit{Paradise Lost} thus reveals the impossibility of its own linguistic project; paradoxically, the closer it comes to a perfect unity of signifier and signified, the more that unity is revealed to be unreachable by ‘mortal voice’ (VII.24). The Fall remains as the moment beyond signification; more precisely, it is the moment that resists signification precisely because it produces difference – the Fall is the movement from certainty to ambiguity, and so is the moment that remains completely unutterable by fallen tongue. The typological metaphors discussed in chapter two perform the same function, and the next section will examine the ways in which \textit{Paradise Lost} examines its own claim to represent prelapsarian perfection.

\textsuperscript{12} Fish, \textit{Surprised by Sin}, p. 102.
\textsuperscript{13} The descriptions are given at IV.347-49. See Philip J. Gallagher, \textit{Milton, the Bible and Misogyny} (Columbia, MO: U of Missouri P, 1990), p. 24 and 60 for an analysis of the ambiguity inherent in that passage.
Truth and Myth After the Fall

In the invocation to book VII (discussed in more detail in chapter 3), the narrator claims that ‘the meaning, not the name I call’. This is partly a prophetic or inspired moment: the Epic Voice can see through the ‘shadowy types’ to the ‘truth’ (XII.303) that lies beyond them, as it invokes the true meaning of the Christian muse. Yet simultaneously, in light of the poem’s concern with punning and double language outlined above, this moment reveals the very limits of the Epic Voice. By choosing between the meaning and the name, the narrator reveals that to call both simultaneously is impossible; the prelapsarian conjunction of the sign remains unobtainable in fallen language. The same hesitation is seen in the hymn to light, as the Epic Voice wonders ‘may I express thee unblamed?’ (III.3). That hesitation stems from the inability to correctly signify the divine light, which may be ‘offspring of heaven first-born / Or of the eternal co-eternal beam (III.1-2; my emphasis). This section will show that the narrative voice is forced to express even its most prophetic sentiments in fallen language, which can point towards, but never adequately express, divine perfection. Instead, the language of the poem points most fully to its own failings; like the puns of fallen creatures, the slippage between signified and signifier in the utterances of the Epic Voice reveals the insurmountably fragmented nature of the sign (and thus language itself) after the Fall.

Areopagitica outlines, in allegorical form, a conception of truth shattered after the Fall. It presents a story of postlapsarian seekers after knowledge, able to access truth only imperfectly by a fruitless search to rediscover all her fragments:

Truth indeed came once into the world with her divine Master, and was a perfect shape most glorious to look on: but when he ascended, and his Apostles after him were laid asleep, then strait arose a wicked race of deceivers, who as that story goes of the Egyptian Typhon with his conspirators, how they dealt with the good Osiris, took the virgin Truth, hewed her lovely form into a thousand pieces,
and scattered them to the four winds. From that time ever since, the sad friends of Truth, such as durst appear, imitating the careful search that Isis made for the mangled body of Osiris, went up and down gathering limb by limb still all they could find them. We have not yet found them all, Lords and Commons, nor ever shall do, till her Master’s second coming; he shall bring together every joint and member, and shall mould them into an immortal feature of loveliness and perfection.\textsuperscript{15}

Truth, here, is literally deconstructed once it is removed from the divine presence. Thus it is that ‘truth may have many forms’, since it is best discovered (for Fallen man) through the ‘much writing, much arguing, many opinions’ that \textit{Areopagitica} seeks to promote.\textsuperscript{16} As David Ainsworth notes, ‘[c]ontention shares a place in Truth’s reconstruction, not because Truth lacks a complete form, but because that form remains inaccessible and imperceptible to fallen humanity.’\textsuperscript{17}

Away from the protection of Christ, the idea of a fully reconstructed truth becomes impossible, though this does not (and, for Milton, should not) prevent the ‘sad friends’ of truth from nonetheless attempting to reconstruct it. Truth remains present, but not in its whole form; as Milton notes in \textit{De Doctrina}, God has left ‘so many traces of his presence through the whole of nature, that no sane person can fail to realise that he exists’.\textsuperscript{18} Like the system of allegorical signification (‘book of nature’) discussed in chapter one, or the music of the spheres, truth is not fully accessible to fallen man, but rather available only in ‘traces’ of what it was before the Fall, yet the attempt to recover it is an important part (and indicator) of an improving relationship with God. The passage immediately preceding that from \textit{Areopagitica} quoted above makes the point clear:

[B]ut he who thinks we are to pitch our tent here, and have attained the utmost prospect of reformation that the mortal

\textsuperscript{15} \textit{CPW} II:549.
\textsuperscript{16} \textit{CPW} II:554.
\textsuperscript{17} Ainsworth, \textit{Milton and the Spiritual Reader}, p.28.
\textsuperscript{18} \textit{CPW} VI:130.
glass wherein we contemplate can show us, till we come to beatific vision, that man by this very opinion declares that he is yet far short of truth.\textsuperscript{19}

Even though discovering perfect truth is impossible in a postlapsarian world, the struggle to do so is important for its own sake, not least because it involves a recognition that in man’s imperfect state the task is impossible; this is the cause of the uneasy relationship with the Muse established in the previous chapter.

The intertextual reference here is to Corinthians, ‘For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known’ (1 Cor. 13:12). Milton was certainly extremely familiar with Corinthians, ‘citing these books over 600 times in De Doctrina’, including two direct references to 1 Corinthians 13, though to verse 13, not 12 (CPW VI.479 and 565).\textsuperscript{20} Both of the letters to the Corinthians also form a crucial intertext with Comus, as Felch elucidates, and, as Gordon Campbell reminds us, ‘on the evening before Comus was performed, the family would have heard 1 Corinthians 13 read’.\textsuperscript{21} The two books of Corinthians were, for Milton, key source-texts for understanding many, varied aspects of the Christian mystery.

The verse is interpreted in Areopagitica to refer to the perfect truth and knowledge only available in God’s presence (in the same fashion that perfect music is only available in concert with an immanent God). The ‘beatific vision’ (glossing ‘face to face’) is extended, by completing the allusion to the biblical text, beyond bliss to knowledge as this is the means by which man ‘shall know’ and ‘be known’. Milton was here following the Geneva commentary, which suggests ‘taught of God’ as an explanation for ‘shall I know even as also I am known’ (GB 1 Cor. 13:12n). This is itself a reference to a preceding gloss, on ‘for we know in part’, which is expanded as:

\textsuperscript{19} CPW II:549.
Knowledge itself shall be perfected in the world to come, and not abolished: but the manner of knowing and teaching shall cease, when we shall be before God’s presence, where we shall neither need schools nor teachers. (GB 1 Cor. 13:8n)

The thrust of all the commentary to this chapter is that true knowledge is only revealed fully in the divine presence.

Even the explanation of the deconstruction of truth in *Areopagitica* must take place through the pagan myth (‘that story’) of the dismemberment of Osiris. The seekers after (Christian) truth nonetheless find themselves ‘imitating the careful search that Isis made for the mangled body of Osiris’. In doing so, they also place that search within an imitating historical schema that at once reveals and distorts truth. The fracturing of this perfect truth creates a system of universal allegory, in which all the language and myths of fallen man point, however indistinctly, to the original truth of which it is a fragment; the pagan mythic schema can, seemingly, provide a typological reading which enhances understanding even for the true believer.

Ernest Sirluck notes that a probable source for this passage is Plutarch’s ‘On Isis and Osiris’ from the *Moralia*, which ‘repeatedly insists that it must be understood as an allegory’. Philemon Holland’s translation suggests that this reading of Plutarch was commonplace in the seventeenth century, decrying those who hold and affirm such fables as these touching the blessed and immortal nature, whereby especially we conceived in our mind the deity, to be true and that such things were really done or happened so indeed […] you see very well, that these be not narrations like unto old wives tales, or vain and foolish fictions, which poets or other idle writers devise out of their own fingers ends, after the manner of spiders, which of themselves without any precedent, & subject matter, spin their threads, weave and stretch out their webs: for evident it is that they contain some difficulties and the memorials of certain accidents.  

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22 *CPW* II:549 n221.
The story of Isis and Osiris, then, is not to be understood literally, but it is not entirely fiction either. It must, in fact, be read allegorically as a method by which the fact of these ‘certain accidents’ might be ascertained. Holland, in the commentary attached to each chapter of Plutarch, finds the text engaged in ‘discovering in few words an infinite number of secrets hidden under ridiculous & monstrous fables’ (1286); the reader is implicitly challenged to perform the same kind of decoding.

In the Early Modern period, allegorical reading was a means of accessing the truth behind language, founded in exegetical biblical commentary. So Thomas Wilson, in his *Christian Dictionary*, defined allegory as ‘A sentence consisting of sundry strange and borrowed speeches, which sound one thing, and covertly show forth another [...] a strange sense for better instruction of our minds in some points of faith or manner’.24 Allegory, in effect, was a kind of sustained metaphor:

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Observe, that in a Metaphor there is a translation of one word only; in an Allegory, of many; and for that cause an Allegory is called a continued Metaphor. And as a Metaphor may be compared to a star in respect of beauty, brightness and direction; so an Allegory may be likened to a constellation, or a company of many stars.25
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Commentators made a sharp distinction between literal and allegorical readings of the bible: Luther, for example called allegory ‘inane speculation, and therefore the froth of scripture’ in his *Commentary on Genesis* since it distracted from the literal, historical meaning of the text, where salvation was to be found.26 The Church of England minister Thomas Taylor qualified that position, noting that over-literal interpreters ‘did such things as were commanded, but went no further; they washed the outside, but not the inside’.27 Equally, he accepted the danger in over-allegorisation, since ‘many heretics have defended their heresies only by translating of Scriptures into allegories’ (142). Groups as diverse as

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26 Martin Luther, *Commentary on Genesis* (1554), vol. III, fol. 177. ['Allegoriae sunt inanes speculationes & tanquam spuma sacrae Scripturae'].
Anabaptists, Socinians, Arminians, Familists and Antinomians were charged with this kind of ‘liberal’ interpretation of scripture throughout the seventeenth century. Taylor advocated instead a mediation between literalness and allegory: ‘Neither stick too fast to the letter, nor yet insist too much in allegory or metaphors.’

Allegorical reading was not a constant necessity, but rather the skilful drawing out of meaning from the particular texts or passages that supported allegorical reading. The physician John Smith (1630-79) noted in his commentary on Ecclesiastes that ‘[W]isdom, where there be two significations of a word, shall rather prefer the Allegorical’. Despite Smith’s privileging of the allegorical exposition of scripture, he concedes the necessity for the ‘two significations’ to be somehow already present in the text. So too James Durham, in his commentary on the ‘Song of Solomon’, noted that allegorical explanation was only necessary for the opening and expounding of some dark Scripture (wherein the mind of the Spirit is couched and hid under Figures and Allegories) making it plain and edifying, by bringing out the sense according to the meaning of the Spirit in the place, though at first it seemed to bear out no such thing.

Durham warned against using allegory to interpret ‘historical’ passages, claiming he only ‘teacheth how to draw plain Doctrines out of Allegories, and not to draw Allegories out of plain Histories, or Doctrines’ (23). Passages required allegory only when ‘the literal proper meaning looketh absurd like, or is empty, and nothing to edification’ (23). It is Christ’s parables, not statements of doctrine, which require exegesis, a point also made by George Sikes, who argued that

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28 For examples of these attacks, see: On Anabaptists, Michael Harrison, Infant Baptism, God’s Ordinance (1694), p.10 (‘still be inventing some shift or other to ward off the force of any text’); On Arminians and Socinians, Francis Cheynell, The Rise, Growth and Danger of Socinianism (1643), p.15 (‘pervert that scripture by a devilish gloss’); On Familists, Henry Ainsworth, An Epistle sent unto Two Daughters of Warwick (Amsterdam, 1608), p.40 (‘No word of God telleth him this, but he forgeth it out of his fleshly heart.’); On Antinomians, Joseph Hacon, A Vindication of the Review (Cambridge, 1662), p. 156 (‘your Antinomian spots do now and then break out […] you may think to honour Christ, while you wrest and abuse his word’).
29 John Smith, King Solomon’s Portraiture of Old Age (1666), p. 101.
30 James Durham, Clavis Cantici (1669), p. 23. Further references are given in the text.
Must not he then that truly expounds those parables, allegorize them? But how must he do it? Parable in the Hebrew is a word that signifies sharpness, as proceeding from a sharp wit, and needing the like to interpret it. That sharp wit must be no less than spiritual discerning.\textsuperscript{31}

The purpose of allegorisation, then, is to reveal, albeit through the darkened glass of Corinthians, the spiritual truth that transcends language. The ‘spiritual discerning’ that Sikes requires is commensurate with the mode of reading that Christ propounds in \textit{Paradise Regained}:

\begin{quote}
who reads
Incessantly, and to his reading brings not
A spirit and judgement equal or superior,
(And what he brings, what needs he elsewhere seek)
Uncertain and unsettl’d still remains,
Deep versed in books and shallow in himself.
\textit{\textsuperscript{PR IV.322-27}}
\end{quote}

The spirit and judgement Christ is advocating here seem to be similar to that encompassed by ‘allegorical reading’, the combination of fallen literature with the ‘spiritual’ sense that can explicate it. Christ’s model of true reading finds its height in works ‘from God inspired’ (IV.350), which are therefore ‘divinely taught, and better teaching’ (IV.357). \textit{De Doctrina} makes this explicit: ‘Every believer is entitled to interpret the scriptures […] He has the spirit, who guides truth, and he has the mind of Christ.\textsuperscript{32} This is a model of active reading in which human understanding comes closer to the divine mystery through the gift of the Spirit, though it cannot fully comprehend it even then.

That concern with the limits of representation is played out in \textit{Paradise Lost} through angelic discussion. Both Michael and Raphael express the difficulties of representing God’s work(s) to Adam, since those works are ultimately only explicable by reference to themselves. Michael at first presents Adam with a vision, achieved not through description, but drawn from the divine: ‘from the well of life three drops instilled. / So deep the power of these ingredients pierced / Even to the

\textsuperscript{31} Sikes, \textit{Life and Death of Sir Henry Vane}, p. 66.
\textsuperscript{32} \textit{CPW} VI:583.
The ‘well of life’ is, as Fowler notes, the ‘source of Christian grace’; Adam therefore only has access to the visions Michael presents as a gift direct from God. Yet even this grace proves overpowering for Adam (just as, even in his unfallen state, conversing with God tired him [VII.453-59]), with Michael noting his weariness and accompanying lack of understanding: ‘I perceive / Thy mortal sight to fail; objects divine / Must needs impair and weary human sense’ (XII.8-10). Michael resolves to accommodate Adam by relating the rest of his knowledge orally. However, Raphael had already outlined the difficulties involved in relating divine action to non-heavenly creatures.

Raphael begins the story of the war in heaven by asking ‘how shall I relate / To human sense the invisible exploits / Of warring spirits’ (V.564-66), and gives as his answer a form of accommodation that cannot fully represent the reality of heavenly action, since it functions ‘By likening spiritual to corporeal forms / As may express them best’ (V.573-74).

Raphael’s narrative, in spite of his angelic nature, offers not perfect signification, but merely the closest relationship between signified and signifier he can devise. He restates the point twice, revealing he is ‘measuring things in heav’n by things on earth’ (VI.893) and that the works of God he recounts are ‘told as earthly notion can conceive’ (VII.179). The problem, though, is linguistic as well as hierarchical, as the preceding lines clarify, since those works ‘to human ears / Cannot without process of speech be told’ (VII.177-78); the previous chapter outlined the discourse around ‘human ears’, and though Raphael is speaking to prelapsarian Adam, the question of hearing right still remains. The difficulty is stated most eloquently by the plaintive question that begins Raphael’s account of creation: ‘to recount almighty works / what words or tongue of seraph can suffice / Or heart of man suffice to comprehend?’ (VII.112-14). Though man, even intuitive unfallen man, is unable to fully

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33 PL XI.413-5n, citing as biblical precedent John 4:10 and Psalms 36:9. See also Of Reformation, in which understanding comes when we ‘purge with sovereign eyesalve that intellectual ray which God hath planted in us’ (CPW I:566).
comprehend the works of God and angels, the ‘tongue of seraph’ would in any case be insufficient to describe them: God functions as the inexpressible limit at which even angelic language falters.

It is Uriel’s conversation with Satan (disguised as a cherub) that most fully reveals the limits of representation. Uriel responds approvingly to Satan’s statement that he intends to see and understand the works of God (‘to know/ The works of God, thereby to glorify / The great work-master […] merits praise [III.694-97]); yet this approval is delivered with a warning on the impossibility of fully completing that task:

But what created mind can comprehend
Their number, or the wisdom infinite
That brought them forth, but hid their causes deep.
(III.705-7)

Uriel here traces the difficulties inherent in seeking to understand, and therefore those in seeking to explain, or describe, God. As Milton makes clear in *De Doctrina*, angels are not omniscient, nor able to fully comprehend the divine mystery:

The good angels do not see into all God’s thoughts, as the Papists pretend. They know by revelation only those things which God sees fit to show them, and they know other things by virtue of their very high intelligence, but there are some things of which they are ignorant.  

Although the angels of *Paradise Lost* impart knowledge, they are themselves also bound by the conditions of the incomprehensible or unutterable: as Raphael makes so clear, angelic language as well as human understanding are lacking in the quest to make divine action intelligible. All knowledge of God, of course, emanates from and through him, since ‘[n]o man or angel can know how God would be worshipped and served unless God reveal it’.  

Of *Reformation*, similarly, outlines that ‘The wisdom of God created understanding, fit and proportionable to truth,

36 *CPW* VIII:419
the object and end of it’. The crucial phrase here is ‘fit and proportionable’; God’s creations are given wisdom, but only sufficient to understand their own state and relationship to God, not to understand God himself.

Dante’s *Commedia* displays a similar reluctance to describe Heaven. It refuses even the consolation of metaphor, with descriptive lacunae serving sufficiently as gestures towards the ineffability of the divine. The *Paradiso* opens with a stark warning that it cannot be successful in the attempt to capture the glory of Heaven: ‘I saw things that he / who from that height descends, forgets or can / not speak’ (*Par* I.5-7). Dante eventually closes his journey with a rapturous inability to properly describe the beauty of the immanent divine: ‘what I could see was greater / Than speech could show: at such a sight, it fails’ (*Par* XXXIII.55-56).

Robert Hollander notes that Dante’s encounters ‘were so great that they shook his memory, the rememberance of them is shadowy; but as they were also true, they are *ombre*, and that kind of shadow is real’. For Dante, then, the failure to represent is graphological – his experiences literally cannot be written – yet within this failure is contained some sort of typological truth: he has experienced something so far beyond signification that it denies the processes of the sign. Dante’s Heaven is the unified source of all meaning, gathering up fallen signs into itself, as Beatrice notes when she speaks of the allegories within the scriptures (*‘this is why the bible condescends / to human powers, assigning feet and hands / to God, but meaning something else instead’* [*Par* IV.43-45]). The only purpose of any signification of God is to provide a cohesive centre for that very signification:

> While the perfection of Godhead overpowers Dante’s lower faculties, the poem is not radically undermined in its epistemology or aesthetically “fragmented” in any essential way by the inescapable human failures of its narrator […] Dante’s faltering and limited human subjectivity repeatedly

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37 *CPW* I:566.
subsumes initial fragmentary impressions and apprehensions in ever more virtuous unifying experiences and images.\textsuperscript{39}

In Demaray’s reading, Dante eventually reaches enlightenment by gathering up those fragments, just as Milton finds truth in \textit{Areopagitica}. As he is educated in divinity, Dante becomes capable of greater understanding, his progression through the spheres of Heaven serving as metaphor for his growing perception of their nature.

The apotheosised Beatrice also forms a barrier to representation: ‘I heard / “Asperges me” so sweetly sung that I / cannot remember or, much less, transcribe it’ (\textit{Purg} XXXI.97-99). So too St. Peter’s song, at which ‘the pen passeth on and leaves a blank’ (\textit{Par} XXIV.25). We are asked simply to imagine the most perfect version of these liturgical chants as possible, providing a ‘mode of writing in which the discontinuity between representation and experience of the transcendent has come to consciousness most clearly’.\textsuperscript{40} Yet \textit{Paradise Lost} denies this discontinuity, presenting as actual fact (and lived experience), not only the innermost council of Heaven, but its music; ‘Milton’s song spans the leap of fiction to partake of that citizenship’s choiring’.\textsuperscript{41} The song actually begins by suggesting it is a report: ‘Thee Father first they sung omnipotent’ (III.372), but the following forty lines make it clear that this is an introduction, not a summation, since the song is apparently reproduced within the poem.

It is in this regard that \textit{Paradise Lost} differs sharply from the works of Christian epicists that had gone before. Dante’s \textit{Commedia} expresses the divine mystery in negative terms: it expresses, in fact, only the point at which signification ceases to have meaning. Yet at the heart of Dante’s inability to communicate (just as for Spenser, when confronted by the New World) lies the potentiality of expression, were human frailty to be overcome: if only the song were of a higher strain, or memory less fallible, then the experience could somehow be communicated. As Maureen


\textsuperscript{41} Maureen Quilligan, \textit{Milton’s Spenser: The Politics of Reading} (Cornell UP, 1983), p. 137. Further references are given in the text.
Quilligan notes, the ‘song Spenser does sing, in being lower, may yet suggest by analogy the song that is too high for him’ (140). There is, within Dante and Spenser, the sense that the very inexpressibility of the divine is in fact a marker of divinity, a route by which the Godhead can be comprehended and contemplated. The biblical precedent for this is Paul’s exhortation to the Romans that they consider the works of God in order to better know him:

Forasmuch as that, which may be known of god, is manifest in them: for God hath showed it unto them. For the invisible things of him, that is, his eternal power and Godhead, are seen by the creation of the world, being considered in his works, to the intent that they should be without excuse.

(Rom. 1:19-20)

Though God cannot be adequately described in the Commedia, the description of his works (heaven, or the Empyrean) offers a potential, if murky, signification of the divine, since they can provoke in the reader sufficient faith to begin to grasp at the divine mystery.

Dante’s examination by St. Peter draws upon this idea. Citing, then glossing, the definition of faith from Hebrews (it is ‘the evidence of things which are not seen’ [Heb. 11:1]), Dante argues that:

The deep things that on me bestow
Their image here, are hid from sight below,
So that their being lies in faith alone
And on that faith their highest hope is founded
And thus it is that faith is called a substance.
And it is from this faith that we must reason,
Deducing what we can from syllogisms
Without our being able to see more.

(Par XXIV.70-77)

For Dante, then, faith is the guide by which the innermost workings of God can be intuited from his creation; yet in Paradise Lost, such attempts at intuition are dangerous. We have already seen that Uriel cautions the disguised Satan against attempting to comprehend the works of God, exhorting him instead merely to worship him through them, since he ‘hid their causes deep’ (PL III.707). The narrator ends the encomium to
married love with a note of caution, since Adam and Eve are ‘happiest if ye seek / no happier state, and know to know no more’ (IV.774-75). Raphael warns Adam, after he asks to know of the creation, that only a certain amount of knowledge is permitted: ‘If else thou seekest / Aught not surpassing human measure, say’ (VII.639-40). Not only is some knowledge outside of the bounds of Adam’s knowledge, but he is twice specifically enjoined against speculation on what is not explicitly revealed:

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 such commission from above
 I have received, to answer thy desire
 Of knowledge within bounds; beyond, abstain
 To ask; nor let thine own inventions hope
 Things not revealed, which the invisible King
 Only Omniscient, hath suppressed in night.
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(VII.118-23)

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The rest
 From man or angel the Great Architect
 Did wisely to conceal and not divulge
 His secrets to be scanned by them who ought
 Rather admire.
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(VIII.71-75)

Raphael is only willing to reveal aspects of divinity – and only allegorically, since he is ‘measuring things on heaven by things on earth’ – when it is of direct, pedagogical benefit to Adam and Eve: ‘let it profit thee to have heard, by terrible example, the reward of disobedience’ (VI.909-10). As Maura Brady has pointed out, in Paradise Lost ‘proper admiration comes only from being thoughtfully perplexed’.42 Satan, as ever, provides the contrasting view. On overhearing Adam and Eve discussing the forbidden fruit, he contemplates the meaning of the prohibition:

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One fatal tree there stands of Knowledge called
Forbidden them to taste. Knowledge forbidden?
Suspicious, reasonless. Why should their Lord
Envy them that? Can it be sin to know?  (IV.514-17)
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What Satan fails to understand is that the ‘only sign of our obedience’ (IV.428) is not merely (or even) the act of not eating, but rather an understanding that sufficient knowledge has already been granted to God’s creations. It is this subtle distinction that Satan manipulates to convince Eve to eat of the tree, arguing that the fruit ‘gives you life / To knowledge’ (IX.686-87) and questions the necessity of the interdiction:

And wherein lies
Th’offence that man should thus attain to know?
What can your knowledge hurt Him or this tree
Impart against his will if all be His?
Or is it envy? (IX.725-29)

Satan’s evasions here function in part by suggesting the tree is magical, having some property not given by God; they also work more subtly by exploiting and uncoupling the syncretism between the limits of knowledge and humanity’s proper state in relation to God. Unfallen Man is prohibited discursive access to divinity, though he is permitted to utilise that discursive reasoning, so long as he remains conscious of the proper limits of knowledge: ‘O yet happiest if ye seek / No happier state, and know to know no more’ (IV.774-75). Satan’s temptation here is to uncouple that link, suggesting that better knowledge is a divinely willed method of growth, eliding the limits placed on knowledge (of which both Adam and Eve have been warned) that the tree represents.

In *Paradise Lost* it is the very nature of language that forms this barrier to fully expressive comprehension - constantly undermining and fracturing itself, irreparably, until the ‘divine master’ of *Areopagitica* is once again come into the world. Despite the claims of his poem, to express truth in fractured postlapsarian language remains impossible: ‘the Fall produces a sense of drastic discontinuity between finite intelligences

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44 The angels, too, have a hierarchy, as Abdiel points out, since God ‘formed the powers of heaven / such as he pleased, and circumscribed their being’ (V.824-25), and they were ‘By him created in their bright degrees’ (V.838). Abdiel is discussing the traditional division of angels into ranks, but more broadly the way in which they take their proper places in relation to God – not each other – according to the limits that God has (correctly) set upon them.
Peter Herman argues convincingly for a poem founded on what he calls ‘a poetics of incertitude’, contesting that Paradise Lost systematically establishes oppositions (structurally, narratively and metaphorically) which are left deliberately unresolved. He demonstrates that the use of ‘or’ in the epic simile is primarily deployed to allow a ‘choice between different items but without indicating a preference between them’ (185), and this unresolved (and indeed irresolvable) choice is the origin of a general sense of disorientation and indeterminacy in the poem, especially when the properties of the supernatural agents are under discussion (as at III.1-8 and II.666-70 [186-88 in Herman]). Milton thus places the reader ‘in the same space that “or” inhabits, i.e. between the choices it separates’ (192).

This metaphoric indeterminacy is also, Herman argues, played out structurally as ‘a series of voices that often present radically different versions of the same event’ (193) – such as the creation of Adam and Eve (Raphael and Adam), and the Elevation of the Son (Raphael and the ‘Epic Voice’ [199]) – between which the reader must select. Such a conception could also be extended to that ‘Epic Voice’ itself; as Miner points out, Paradise Lost has ‘a fallen narrator who recognises the need for accommodation to “human sense”, and his narrative may pose some problem of reliability’ (9). Yet Herman rejects this view, as he sees in this poetics of incertitude not a recognition of ‘the limits of fallen cognition, as Fish might have it’ (186), but rather anxiety over what he reads as Milton’s failing ‘assurance that God is on the republican’s side’ (203) after the Restoration.

Herman therefore imposes a supra-structure of biographically-derived meaning onto his argument, suggesting that these ambiguities are the deliberate conception of Milton himself, a result of ‘Milton’s unsettled state after the Revolution’s demise’ (183). The poem, for Herman, is finally stabilised by ‘equally powerful opposing forces, like massive

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46 Peter C. Herman, ‘Paradise Lost, the Miltonic “Or” and the Poetics of Incertitude’, SEL, 43 (2003), 181-211 (p.182). Further references are given in the text.
tectonic plates pressing against each other’ (203). That is, the poem’s very ambiguities are bounded and controlled by a narrative figure to produce a unified meaning from the system of self-conflicting metaphors. I wish to extend Herman’s argument towards a different conclusion, arguing that the poem’s ambiguities and oppositions are the necessary effects of its post-lapsarian production, and they are never finally resolved.

Thomas Martin has demonstrated that Satanic language is Derridean in its emphasis on decentring, imposing an opposition to the *logos* that relies upon ‘substitution, reversal, inversion’ to act against the perfect hierarchical unity of God’s creation (and the language of that creation). Satan’s rebellion is in one sense linguistic, for the council he calls after Messiah is anointed is in large part to express his doubt that the name and the merit of Messiah are equal. Satan, having ironically supposed that the positions of the rebel angels are become ‘merely titular’ (V.774), contends that the Son has ‘us eclipsed under the name / Of king anointed’ (V.776-77). The line break highlights the disjunction between title and reality that Satan attempts to create, as if Messiah’s title of ‘king anointed’ were just a title and he did not ‘by right of merit [reign]’ (VI.43). Satan, as Peter Berek notes, is arguing that if the Son ‘were called by some name other than “King”, His power would be less’. Satan certainly misunderstands the nature of hierarchical merit, but I suggest it is especially revealing that he does so by stressing the ambiguity of language; in attempting to separate the title ‘Messiah’ from its deserving recipient (indeed, the only recipient it could ever signify), Satan is attempting to undermine the throne of God by denying the perfect unity of divine language. Satan endeavours to destabilise the perfect unity of

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48 Peter Berek, “Plain” and “Ornate” Styles and the Structure of *Paradise Lost*, *PMLA*, 85 (1970), 237-246 (p. 239).
49 This is stressed especially clearly at the elevation of Messiah, which finds the angels ‘United as one individual soul / For ever happy’ [V.610-11]; that happiness is expressed through the ‘harmony divine’ [V.625] of their song and dance.
sign and signifier as expressed by divinity, constituting ‘an attack on language at the level of difference’.\textsuperscript{50}

Martin, though, like Herman, attempts to limit the effects of this deconstructionist impulse. He does so by confining it to a single character, without considering the wider implications of the presence of “play” in fallen language. For Martin, Milton remains in control of the poem, ‘able to open up an entire range of possible meanings and to gesture among them, to select some and cancel out others’ (46).

Martin, in fact, has highlighted only a part of the larger schema within \textit{Paradise Lost}. The tension between the \textit{logos} and the free play of signifiers exists at the fundamental level of the poem’s linguistic presence, is in fact a result of the poem’s presence in postlapsarian language. The theodicean element of the poem’s project relies upon an ability, perhaps only momentary, to express the perfect language of God, while the very fact of the fallen nature of language prevents the poet, even aided by the muse (or Holy Spirit), from being able to do so; this is the same tension that we saw in the previous chapter manifested in the concept of the music of the spheres.

This discontinuity is not played out allegorically, as for Spenser and Dante, but within language itself, as \textit{Paradise Lost} deconstructs the metaphoric structures it deploys even in the act of deploying them. These are the moments at which the poem deliberately undercuts its own metaphoric structure, establishing a comparison that is then shown to be false.\textsuperscript{51} The dissimiles thus reduce (at least partially) their subjects to the realm of the metaphorical or allegorical.

Stanley Fish, focusing primarily on the description of Satan’s spear (‘to equal which the tallest pine / Hewn on Norwegian hills to be the mast / Of some great admiral were but a wand’ [I.292-94]), demonstrates that many of Milton’s metaphors function by suggesting an equivalence that is

\textsuperscript{50} Martin, ‘On the Margin of God’, p. 43.
\textsuperscript{51} The phrase is Earl Miner’s, from ‘The Reign of Narrative in \textit{Paradise Lost}, MS. 17 (1983), 3-26 (p. 14). Further references are given in the text. Miner’s usage is slightly different to mine; he uses the phrase in a more specifically technical sense to mean a moment at which the poem appears to be offering a simile, but then establishes that it is not.
subsequently shown to be false. Fish contends that for the reader (noting that since ‘the reading experience takes place in time’ the image is constructed gradually, albeit too quickly for conscious deliberation), ‘the impression given is one of equality’; this equality, though, is immediately corrected by the half-line ‘were but a wand’ (I.294), which provides to the audience ‘a perspective that is beyond the field of its perception’, and thus ‘a sense of what cannot be described and what we cannot apprehend’. Fish, in support of his thesis, reads these moments as types of experiential education, reminding the reader that they are fallen and cannot comprehend the supernatural elements of the poem to the same extent as the narrator; I contend that they also demonstrate the limits of the narrative voice itself, which cannot render the divine or diabolic without recourse to scripture or inadequate comparative, which is all that is available through fallen language.

On two occasions this understanding is shown to be temporary or transient by placing it within the mode of ‘dreaming’. God dismisses man’s (presumed) belief that the tree of life is the material gateway to immortality by placing it in the province of the dream:

Lest therefore his now bolder hand
Reach also of the tree of life, and eat,
And live for ever, dream at least to live
For ever.  

(XI.93-96)

That the tree of life offers only the ‘dream’ of immortality is Milton’s addition to the Genesis source material in which the expulsion arises partly from fear that man will eat from the tree of life, and so countermand God’s punishment (‘and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever: Therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden’ [Gen 3:22-23]). In Paradise Lost the tree of life seemingly offers no such guarantee of eternal life, suggesting that the trees of knowledge and life are metaphorical pledges of obedience and God’s covenant respectively, rather than literal, material

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52 Fish, Surprised by Sin, p. 23-7.
conveyors of those attributes whose names they bear; this aspect of the tree of life (as fulfilled by Christ) will be explored more fully in the conclusion.

This passage’s status as a dissimile is highlighted by the use of ‘dream’, which links it to other passages within the poem at which presumed knowledge is undercut by making it dreamlike. In the prologue to book seven, Urania is described as superior to the pagan muse Calliope because ‘thou art heav’nly, she an empty dream’ (VII.39). Adam informs Eve that dreams cannot be trusted since they fragment and distort reality: ‘misjoining shapes / Wild work produces oft, and most in dreams / Ill matching words’ (V.111-13). The dismissing of experience as a dream also forms the basis of another dissimile, describing the devils in their entrance to Pandaemonium as they:

Throng numberless, like that pygmean race
Beyond the Indian mount, or faerie elves,
Whose midnight revels, by a forest side
Or fountain some belated peasant sees,
Or dreams he sees, while overhead the moon
Sits arbitress, and nearer to the earth
Wheels her pale course, they on their mirth and dance
Intent, with jocund music charm his ear.

(I.780-87)

Here the long description of faerie revelry has, almost literally at its centre, a corrective that calls into question the reality of the comparison. The phrase ‘Or dreams he sees’ is prosodically powerful, as the sentence carries over a line break to provide rhythmic emphasis for the corrective; this emphasis is further enhanced because it marks the shift from description of location to description of action, becoming in the process a short clause distinct from the two longer clauses surrounding it. The passage is therefore doubly reductive; not only are the devils diminished to pygmys or faeires, but even that comparison is shown to be incorrect. At the very moment they swarm in huge numbers into their new-raised capitol, the devils’ power is undermined and made equivalent only to a peasant’s dream.
The dissimile occurs most frequently when comparing the Christian supernatural to classical mythology, in the same manner as the typological metaphors examined in chapter two. The prime example is the description of Mammon’s fall(s):

in Ausonian land
Men called him Mulciber; and how he fell
From heaven, they fabled, thrown by angry Jove
Sheer o’er the crystal battlements: from morn
To noon he fell, from noon to dewy eve,
A summer’s day; and with the setting sun
Dropped from the zenith like a fallen star,
On Lemnos the Ægæan isle: Thus they relate,
Erring; for he with this rebellious rout
Fell long before. (I.739-48)

A long sequence outlining the classical myth is constructed (competing, as Fowler notes, with *Iliad* I.591-95), only to be confounded by the narrative intrusion of ‘Erring’. The prosody, as in the example of the faerie elves above, enhances the effect of the intrusion, the line break emphasising the devastating effect of the corrective ‘erring’. Yet the break also reveals a fracture in the narrative voice itself: it marks a shift from second-hand narration of a fable back to the seemingly omniscient narrator. This provides a second function to the corrective intrusion, as what was initially taken to be the epic voice is shown to be a momentary imposition of another heteroglossia, controlled but not eradicated by the ‘main’ voice of the poem (functioning in the same manner as *Lycidas*, outlined in chapter three). It may be true that when ‘Milton supports a Christian theme or event with a classical myth, he usually invokes “the meaning” rather than “the name”’; the name is nonetheless invoked as well.53

The standard reading of these dissimiles – indeed, Milton’s deployment of classical myth in general – is that they are moments at which the narrative voice privileges its higher understanding or greater insight over that of previous generations. Earl Miner notes that Milton

uses 'his dissimiles to distinguish between his truth and earlier falsehood' (15); Leah Whittington similarly argues that Milton 'sees a typological relationship between the classical past and the Christian present.'

In this distinguishing, the falsehood becomes myth, a way of interpreting truth that is not itself true. The dissimiles, therefore, are moments in which the poet 'makes sense of the connections between myth and experience', so that the fall of Mulciber prefigures – and simultaneously (re-)enacts, since we are 'dropping from line to line as we read' – the fall of man.

The falsehood of interpretative systems outside of *Paradise Lost* – and by extension the Christian tradition which it articulates (and refashions) – is appropriated to provoke a fuller understanding of the truth the poem seeks to impart. MacCaffrey expresses it thus:

> [A] broken image is reconstituted by fitting together the fragments that fallen man has been able to collect in his myths, and at the same time the status of the image as the original of and superior to all the fragments is established.

The reader of *Paradise Lost* is thus invited to recognise the typological element of truth in these mythic ‘fragments’, even while rejecting them in favour of the restored ‘original’ truth the poem promises to articulate.

Jeremy Tambling argues that *Paradise Lost* does not work in a fashion ‘whereby the classical pagan prefigures the Christian. Milton refuses the consolations of symbolism, or rather mortifies them’.

The pagan, though, is not refused quite as neatly as Tambling suggests; the fact of the fable’s relation (albeit ‘erring’) by both the Ausonian people and the narrator provides the reader with, and invites speculation on, the typological elements of the dissimile even as they are ultimately denied. As Raphael reveals, Messiah’s expulsion of the rebels from heaven (occurring later in the poem than the Mulciber dissimile, but before it in the narrative time-scheme) bears significant similarities to the Ausonian fable:

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for he meant
Not to destroy them, but root them out of heaven:
The overthrown he raised, and as a herd
Of goats or timorous flock together thronged
Drove them before him thunderstruck, pursued
With terrors and with furies to the bounds
And crystal wall of heaven.  
(VI.854-60)

Both Mulciber and the rebel angels are thrown from crystal walls by an angry deity; both falls are described primarily in terms of their length (the satanic host falls for a longer time ['Nine days they fell' (VI.871)], though the fact of this lengthier fall is belied by the terse half-line of description, in contrast to the drawn-out, pastoral, description of the full, but single, day Mulciber falls); both falls involve fire in some sense, since Mulciber is ‘like a falling star’ (visible only after the ‘setting sun’), and the devils are ‘hurled headlong flaming from the ethereal sky’ (I.45). The similarities in the descriptions of both falls reveal that the Ausonian mythologisers are essentially (re)telling a true story; they have grasped a fragment of truth, even if they do not understand it completely, or (re)signify it correctly. The exclusivity of the narrator’s claim to divinely inspired truth is thus undermined by its relationship to another kind of fallen ‘truth’, the allegory which is a necessary part in the process of understanding.

Allegorical construction is itself revelatory of a dislocation between signifier and signified: ‘The more things and meanings disengage, the more obvious become the material operations of the allegories that fumble to reunite them’. 58 The previous chapter demonstrated that the fall (in Eden, and typologically at Babel) fractured the perfect prelapsarian language, reducing it to an inadequate system of imperfect, fractured signifiers that prevent the unambiguous transfer of meaning. By examining the ‘material operations’ of the competing allegory in Paradise Lost, we can observe the poem’s attempt to deploy fallen language in order to surpass it, in spite of the self-limiting futility of such a task.

58 Eagleton, Towards a Revolutionary Criticism, 19.
The fractured and ambiguous nature that *Paradise Lost* is thus forced to adopt undermines claims such as that of John Lawry, that Milton would hold that his great Argument mirrors – and, in a sense, *is* – reality. His work is to be, not a Platonic imitation of an imitation, but the direct act of revelation [...] matter is not divorced from spirit nor eternity from time.\(^{59}\)

This reading of Milton, as able to reproduce the ‘sacred song’ (III.29), is sustained only while Lawry does not question what it means to attempt to do so, and so accepts the claims the poet makes at face value. In fact, he argues that there is no real distinction between pre- and post-lapsarian production, since it ‘does not matter greatly whether we participate in the divine action at the infernal level, or earth with its mixed choices, or in Heaven [...] they will eventually come to be and to mean almost the same’ (vii-viii). The aim of *Paradise Lost* may be to reproduce perfect song, yet to do so on Earth, with its ‘mixed choices’, is to subject that perfect to imperfect understanding and expression; by attempting to place biblical truth within a postlapsarian historical schema (with its attendant conditions of fallen knowledge expressed through fallen language), *Paradise Lost* actually articulates the very limits of that schema. In claiming that his poem is reality, what is instead revealed is the insufficient potential of that fractured reality to express perfect truth.

Thus, in *Paradise Lost*, the dissimiles provide moments of indeterminacy. They are occasions on which the epic voice that claims to speak with the authority of the *logos* becomes subject to the fragmentary forces of fallen time, language and myth. The dissimile reveals the faultline, which the narrative voice continuously attempts to close up, between fallen knowledge and the perfect language and comprehension of God, the heavenly muse, or narrating angels. Adam and Eve declare God ‘unspeakable’ (V.156) even in their Edenic hymn; the Epic Voice displays the same incapacity to express God through its fractured, ambiguous language.

Conclusion: *Paradise Lost* as Trauma

This thesis has worked to place *Paradise Lost* in conversation with its episteme. By broadening the methodology beyond the biographical, it has shown the ways in which a consideration of the poem’s context is illuminating at the ‘micro’ level of particular tropes, images or even individual words. The first chapter gave a theoretical impulse to the project, challenging the distinction between epic and novel as an anachronistic imposition. By returning to contemporary reactions to (and definitions of) epic, what can be observed is the Early Modern sense that epic was a genre expected to intervene in the moment of its production, and a genre that retained considerable influence in the period. Epic, by rewriting its classical precedents in terms of the debates of its episteme, was able to respond to current questions of morality and heroism; this function of the genre was explicitly outlined by the contemporaneous commentary attached to epic in the seventeenth century.

Extending this argument, each subsequent chapter of the thesis has focused on a particular way in which *Paradise Lost* is inflected by contemporary debates and discourses. The second chapter demonstrated that the epic simile is not contained to the mythopoetic past, but instead is a point of temporal contact between the mythic narrative and the moment of production. This was explored in more detail with particular reference to the effect of newly emergent global trade networks on conceptions of nationality and heroism. This context allowed the mercantile metaphors used to describe Satan to be unpacked, revealing the interaction between the classical, typological and contemporary contexts of those metaphors. It is only through reading the metaphors as a complex interaction between these versions of history - as *bricolage* – that their full implications for Satan, and the poem, can be revealed. As well as serving as an illumination of an under-considered aspect of *Paradise Lost*, this work establishes the broader value of my methodology for reading the poem.
The third chapter examined the manifestations of a two individual, though connected, tropes: the music of the spheres and the Tower of Babel. This combined the kind of detailed local readings of specific metaphors (such as the pipe organ) established in chapter two with a broader sense of the accretion of meaning produced by the repeated depictions of singing and music within the epic. These depictions refer to the music of the spheres, a perfect harmony no longer available to fallen creatures: the search to recover that harmony is, in fact, a condition of fallenness. *Paradise Lost*, by frequently returning to this musical theme, describing songs in which the epic song can no longer participate, transcribes this futile effort at a return; in doing so, it thematically emphasises the concomitant failure of its own singing.

The fourth chapter widened the focus of the thesis again, building on the imagery discussed in chapter three to explore the implications of punning and différance within *Paradise Lost*. It demonstrated that the poem presents (not least through the key thematic phrase ‘ambiguous words’) the language of postlapsarian creatures as open-ended and uncontrollable; unlike the divinely ordained meaning of God’s speech, fallen creatures lapse into ambiguity – and Satan revels in this linguistic rebellion. That chapter also returned to some of the structural questions that occupied chapter two. It re-examined the epic metaphor, though not in terms of its temporality, but as a linguistically ambiguous unit. It outlined the use *Paradise Lost* makes of the ‘dissimile’, arguing that the uncertainty embedded in the rhetorical device is the same ambiguity that is a linguistic consequence of the fall, being played out within the language of the poem itself. The ‘dissimile’, by foregrounding its own status as uncertain language, is instructive of the poem’s failed attempt to reach past the Fall.

That *Paradise Lost* is in some way a linguistic response to the Fall is not, of course, a new conclusion. That the language of the epic is inflected by the original sin it represents is perhaps most eloquently expressed by Christopher Ricks in *Milton’s Grand Style*, though the (potential) failure of language in the epic is recorded as early as Marvell’s
fear that Milton ‘perplexed the things he would explain’. However, as the local readings in the preceding chapters have shown, *Paradise Lost* responds to the Fall at a thematic and linguistic level in its depictions of music, Babel and ambiguous language. That is, the reaction to the Fall exists not solely in the author-driven exclusionary punning that Ricks identifies, but rather animates the entire poem as the uncontrollable différance produced by the text’s relation to its *episteme*.

This thesis has produced a reading of *Paradise Lost* which outlines the tension produced from the dialectic ‘unity/disunity’ (played out, variously, as ‘harmony/disharmony’, ‘truth/ambiguity’, and so forth), derived in large part from the contrast between pre- and post-lapsarian worlds. These new historicist approaches to the particular details of *Paradise Lost* have demonstrated the vitality and contemporaneity of the epic. Moreover, they have shown the ways in which *Paradise Lost* relies on its contextual interactions to create meaning, functioning in precisely the same manner as Bakhtin’s ‘novelistic discourse’. In this conclusion, I will draw those individual instances together towards a ‘macro’ reading of *Paradise Lost* as a poem that is concerned with the failure of language as a tool for representation. It is only by combining the local readings presented in the previous chapters, establishing a methodology of unpacking the contextual effects upon an open and multivalent text, that the continuous concerns of the poem with representation can be fully realised.

I suggest that *Paradise Lost* engages with the Fall as a traumatic event – that is, an event that is too terrible or destructive to be fully comprehended at the moment it occurs. Instead, a compulsion to repeat the event is produced, since it is only in repetition that the full implications of the original trauma can reach the conscious mind, and be assuaged. I contend that *Paradise Lost* appropriates the dialogism and richness of the epic form to linguistically re-perform, not simply reproduce, the Fall; the Fall is repeated through the text of the epic.

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1 Marvell, ‘On *Paradise Lost*, l.15.
This reading draws on the trauma theory pioneered by Cathy Caruth (developed through her reading of Freud). She defines trauma as a 'wound of the mind – the breach in the mind’s experience of time, self and the world'.

The traumatic event is, by definition, experienced as a lacuna, a ‘breach’ in experience that cannot be accounted for; and so it is destined to be re-enacted. Yet this re-enactment occurs outside of conscious memory, since the original trauma cannot be comprehended on its own terms, but only through the simulacra of re-performance. Any attempt to recollect the trauma becomes ‘the story of a failed return: the attempt, and failure, of the mind to return to the moment of the event’.

It is this aspect of trauma, ‘an unprocessed memory-trace’ that prompts ‘the mind’s recursive attempts to master what it has in some sense failed to experience’, which will be used to synthesise the points made in this thesis into a reading of Paradise Lost. Trauma (and the Fall, as I will demonstrate, is presented as trauma in the poem) produces a compulsion to repeat, inducing an ‘act, that while recalling and repeating the past as it was, re-enacts it, gives it space and time, and thus repeats it as something different’. However, as chapter four demonstrated, the potential for difference is the mark of fallen nature; unfallen creatures repeat the music or language of God perfectly, whereas postlapsarian creatures are condemned to difference (which is différance, openness, ambiguity). Paradise Lost, in its theodicean claims to ‘justify the ways of God to men’ (I.26), or to be raised by the muse, attempts to surpass this difference; its failure to do so (which I have already shown occurs at a thematic and linguistic level) marks the Fall as a trauma that cannot be healed, but only ‘recalled and repeated’. Paradise Lost (and Regained) demonstrate the futility of any fallen attempt to recreate perfection; until Christ ‘restores us’, the limits to representation outlined in chapters two and four can only be delineated, not surpassed.

5 Fritz Breihaupt, ‘The Invention of Trauma in German Romanticism’, Critical Enquiry, 32 (2005), 77-101 (p. 82).
This kind of psychoanalytic analysis risks becoming an anachronistic imposition on the text. The discourse of psychoanalysis was obviously unavailable to the Early Modern world; however, the idea that the Fall was a rupture whose effects were still being felt was – as the preceding chapters have shown – a key component of the seventeenth-century world-view. Carla Freccero, defending her similarly ‘anachronistic’ Queer reading of the Early Modern subject, argued that since early modern European textuality foregrounds the status of the subject as linguistically structured, contingent, textual and fragmented, then early modern subjectivity has more in common with poststructural and psychoanalytic notions of the subject than it does with the modernity that appears in the intervening period of Western European philosophical and literary discourse.

For Freccero, Queer theory is no anachronism, since it is a methodological tool for confirming what is already inherently present in the text (and textual subject). Carolyn Dinshaw, similarly, explaining her Queer methodology in relation to the medieval text, argues that the label ‘sex’ should be seen as ‘fissured and contradictory. Its meaning or significance cannot definitively be pinned down without exclusivity or reductiveness’, and it is precisely this ambiguity that demands a Queer sense of history. That is, without a reading of history which can disrupt the teleological process towards the present (a process which produces exclusivity, since the meaning of ‘sex’ then must, by definition, be in some sense the reading of ‘sex’ now), these ‘fissured’ and ‘contradictory’ texts would be flattened to become a pale reflection of the modern. Instead, Dinshaw and Freccero emphasise the primacy of the text itself; it is this principle that informs my conclusion. A range of texts are deployed as

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6 This danger was anticipated by Stephen Greenblatt, ‘Psychoanalysis and Renaissance Culture’, in Literary Theory/Renaissance Texts, ed. by Patricia Parker and David Quint (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1986), pp. 210-24. For a survey of responses to his article, and a rebuttal, see Elizabeth Jane Bellamy, ‘Desires and Disavowals: Speculations on the Aftermath of Stephen Greenblatt’s "Psychoanalysis and Renaissance Culture"’, Clio, 34 (2005), 297-316.


evidence that, while the word ‘trauma’ (in the sense of a repressed ‘psychic wound’) was unknown to the early modern mind, its effects were felt and conceptualised. It is through the discourse of that seventeenth-century conception of ‘trauma’ as a lost paradise that *Paradise Lost*’s struggle with the Fall, and with representation itself, can be most fully observed.

In order to read *Paradise Lost* as a response to trauma, it will first be necessary to examine the traumatic event that it seeks to represent: Eve’s temptation and original sin. I will demonstrate that the metaphors that surround the eating of the fruit, as well as nature’s response to the event, mark the temptation as a ‘wounding’. This, as well as the protagonists’ inability to understand their actions, marks the event as traumatic. For Adam and Eve the event demands (almost) instant repetition in order to be comprehended; in this way the poem actively presents the Fall as trauma.

The Fall and the divine judgement, however, do not form the conclusion to the poem. Instead, Michael offers Adam a consolatory vision, which holds out the same promise as the initial invocation, that ‘one greater man’ will ‘restore us, and regain the blissful seat’ (I.4-5). Michael’s assurance that Adam and Eve can regain some measure of paradise within themselves is inflected by seventeenth-century discourse on the possibility of overcoming the Fall. Contemporary texts contain, deploying the same phraseology as Michael, an explicitly eroticised potential for regaining paradise: the ‘paradise within’ could be found, however fleetingly, through sex. The redemptive possibility of sex, however, is rejected by *Paradise Lost*, in which postlapsarian sex is the means by which the full extent of original sin is revealed. I suggest that *Paradise Lost*, in eschewing this sexualised response, as well as any potential for human action to ‘restore the blissful seat’, condemns itself to repeating the traumatic event that it suggests cannot be assuaged by fallen man. Redemption for the Fall in *Paradise Lost* comes only through

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9 *OED*, first instance 1894.
the sacrifice of the Son, in which humanity ‘from a second root shall be restored’ (III.288).

That redemption, however, is only promised by the poem; in this way it joins the Early Modern texts that Anderson characterises as performing ‘acts of mediation that bear witness to what is always in excess of those attempts at representation’.¹⁰ In the same manner as the music of the spheres explored in chapter three, the redemptive, trauma-erasing, presence of Christ is continually gestured towards, but never actually present. Instead, *Paradise Lost* constantly reminds the reader of their fallen-ness in its narrative, poetic structure, and language. Like Adam and Eve cast out from Eden, no redemption is yet possible; all that remains is the memory and repetition of sin. I close by examining Jesus’ resistance to temptation in *Paradise Regained*. Even (or especially) at the moment the brief epic presents Christ’s victory over sin, the language of the poem resolutely emphasises that it is composed of the ‘ambiguous words’ of fallen creatures which was delineated in chapter four. By deferring Christ’s victory in *Paradise Lost*, and undermining its depiction in *Paradise Regained*, the epics stress the impossibility of relating divine perfection, in a combination of the metaphorical and linguistic structures already examined in this thesis.

**Losing and Regaining the ‘Paradise Within’**

At the moment Eve breaks the prohibition, her action is presented as having an instantaneous macrocosmic effect:

So saying, her rash hand in evil hour  
Forth reaching to the fruit, she plucked, she ate:  
Earth felt the wound, and nature from her seat  
Sighing through all her works gave signs of woe,  
That all was lost.  

*Paradise Lost* IX.780-84

The immediate response from personified nature is pained and visceral; Eve’s ‘plucking’ of a single fruit becomes an almost-literal ‘wound’ on the grandest possible scale. Eve herself, just as in Caruth’s definition of trauma, suffers a ‘breach in her experience as she remains unaware of the damage she has caused: ‘[i]ntent now wholly on her taste, naught else / Regarded’ (IX.786-87). The same scene plays out as Adam eats the fruit:

Earth trembled from her entrails, as again
In pangs, and nature gave a second groan,
Sky loured, and muttering thunder, some sad drops
Wept at completing of the mortal sin
Original; while Adam took no thought
Eating his fill. (IX.1000-1005)

Again, it is Earth’s bodily reaction that is presented as the most immediate reaction to the Fall, with ‘pangs’ and ‘entrails’ combining to inject the image (of an earthquake) with the sense of corporeal pain and wounding. As with Eve, Adam is oblivious to anything but his own sensations: the ‘sad drops’ and ‘thunder’, the first storm in Paradise, are insufficient ‘signs of woe’ for Adam to understand the full trauma of his action. The poem reiterates this structurally by placing Adam at the centre of the acrostic WOE, precisely at the point he ‘took no thought’ of what surrounded him. The presence of ‘WOE’ here is a structural addition to the accretive force of the word identified by Isabel MacCaffrey; it serves as a reference to the third line of the poem (where ‘all our woe’ is a consequence of the Fall), as well as numerous iterations throughout the poem which cast ‘light back and ahead to illuminate past and future’. In

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11 Cp. the description of the realignment of the planets (X.648-91, discussed on p. 125, above) as a result of the Fall, which deploys significantly colder scientific language.
12 On wounds as a general metaphor, see Covington, Wounds, Flesh and Metaphor in Seventeenth-Century England, and the discussion of the war in heaven in chapter one. On the power of ‘imaginary sympathy’ as a threat from wounds, and thus the traumatic possibility of imagination working upon the body, see Seth Lobis, ‘Sir Kenelm Digby and the Power of Sympathy’, HLQ, 74 (2011), 243-60 (esp. p. 251-55).
13 Paradise had previously been watered only through a mist from underground (IV.227-30 and VII.33-35), which occasionally became a gentle shower (V.185-190). See Gen. 2:5ff.
14 MacCaffrey, 'Paradise Lost' as Myth, p. 87. MacCaffrey identifies echoes of the first ‘all our woe’ (I.3) at II.872, X.935 and VIII.333.
doing so, ‘WOE’ disturbs the smooth typological linearity of fall-and-redemption, reminding the reader that their ‘WOE’ surrounds them in the same way Adam’s does. The acrostic disrupts the act of reading, and so ‘we are reminded by this downward text that the poem we are reading is, as a consequence, written in fallen language’. The moment of the Fall thus resists a static interpretation; the structure and language of the poem, in a downward and disrupting movement, insist upon the reader undergoing a momentary repetition of the event.

Adam and Eve initially believe themselves to be feeling the effects of the fruit promised by the Serpent, not by God, as ‘[t]hey swim in mirth, and fancy that they feel / Divinity within them’ (IX.1009-10); their nakedness does not immediately produce shame, but rather ‘amorous intent’ (IX.1035). The full understanding of the effects of the ‘wound’ is only reached after they have sex (which is ‘of their mutual guilt the seal, / The solace of their sin’ [IX.1043-44]) and fall asleep. It is only after they ‘seal’ their guilt that they can begin to understand their initial action:

Up they rose
As from unrest, and each the other viewing,
Soon found their eyes how opened, and their minds
How darkened; innocence, that as a veil
Had shadowed them from knowing ill, was gone.
(IX.1052-55)

The line break at ‘minds / How darkened’ reinforces the change in Adam and Eve’s state. The line, taken in isolation, offers the possibility that ‘opened’ runs on from ‘eyes’ to also modify ‘minds’, providing the knowledge (with no ill-effects) that the serpent promised. However, the following line shows that their minds have instead been ‘darkened’; the correction forces the reader to relive, however momentarily, the same misapprehension as our first parents. For the first time, Adam and Eve perceive their sin, and only now (in its second iteration as shame) can it fully ‘darken’ their minds. This recalls the promise of the serpent, that Eve’s eyes shall be ‘Opened and cleared […] Knowing both good and

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evil’ (IX.708-709); it is not the original sin, however, that performs this change, since that evil is too large to comprehend, but the secondary action that follows it. The Genesis account shows Adam and Eve reaching a similar understanding of cause through effect, as ‘the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked’ (Gen. 3:7). Just as for trauma victims, it is in the repetition, through the ‘guilty shame’ – that the narrator explicitly attempts to exclude from prelapsarian sex – that Adam and Eve begin to perceive and comprehend the true implications of their actions.

The poem closes with Adam and Eve on their ‘solitary way’ (XII.649) out of Eden, with only the vision of the future to console them. Dryden notes, in his discourse on satire, that the poem appears to offer no real consolation:

As for Mr. Milton, whom we all admire with so much justice, his subject is not that of an heroic poem; properly so called: His design is the losing of our happiness; his event is not prosperous, like that of all other epic works.\footnote{16}

Leaving aside the ‘prosperous’ doctrine of the felix culpa, Dryden is correct to note that Paradise Lost is concerned in its narrative only with ‘the losing of our happiness’.\footnote{17} The opening invocation promises ‘One greater man / [to] restore us’ (I.4-5); Christ offers himself as a future


\footnote{17} See Adam’s expression of the doctrine at XII.469-76. The history of the doctrine is traced by Arthur O. Lovejoy, ‘Milton and the Paradox of the Fortunate Fall’, ELH, 4 (1937), 161-79. See also Millicent Bell, ‘The Fallacy of the Fall in Paradise Lost’, PMLA, 68 (1953), 863-83 (Dryden is specifically refuted on p. 868); William G. Madsen, ‘The Fortunate Fall in Paradise Lost’, MLN, 74 (1959), 103-105; William H. Marshall, ‘Paradise Lost: Felix Culpa and the Problem of Structure’, MLN, 76 (1961), 15-20; Diana Benet, ‘Satan, God’s Glory and the Fortunate Fall’, MQ, 19 (1985), 34-37 suggests that Satan misappropriates (or misunderstands) the doctrine to suggest his fall can (will) make him more glorious than before, whereas Adam gains ‘greater knowledge of his maker’s benevolence’ (p. 37). John Creaser, “Service is Perfect Freedom”: Paradox and Prosodic Style in Paradise Lost’, RES, 58 (2007), 268-315 suggestively links the paradox of felix culpa to paradoxical stylistic flourishes such as ‘darkness visible’ (p.313-15). Empson, Milton’s God, argues that the fall is not fortunate, but proof of God’s cruel lack of justice, since ‘God was working for the fall all along’ (p. 190). Danielson, Milton’s Good God, refutes this argument, noting that Arminian doctrine rejected God’s positive decreeing of the Fall (p. 207-208), and suggests instead that it is an Unfortunate Fall, by a sinner who is fortunate to be saved by God’s grace (p. 214-27): that is, grace is freely given, not dependant on sin, as the principle of felix culpa supposes.
sacrifice (‘I for his sake will leave / Thy bosom, and this glory next to thee / Freely put off and for him lastly die’ [III.237-39]), and his triumph over
the rebel angels is a prefiguring of the greater triumph to come. That
triumph, however – the felicitas that should accompany Adam and Eve’s
culpa – is nowhere present in the poem, which closes with the image of
humanity cast ‘solitary’ (XII.649) out of Eden. Adam and Eve carry with
them the traumatic memory of sin, as Michael tells Adam:

    ye may live, which will be many days,
    Both in one faith unanimous though sad,
    With cause for evils past, yet much more cheered
    With meditation on the happy end.

    (XII.602-605)

Michael’s words offer hope to the expelled couple. However, that hope
(the ‘happy end’) is only a promised future state; until then, Adam and
Eve will be ‘sad, / With cause for evils past’. They are, in effect, punished
with the memory of their sin in the same way as Satan, who always has
‘the bitter memory / Of what he was, what is, and what must be / Worse’
(IV.24-26). For both Satan and humanity, the ‘evils past’ are a cause of
future evils. Satan, as with ambiguity, revels in his perceived inability to
repent: ‘farewell hope, and with hope farewell fear […] Evil be thou my
good’ (IV.108-110). For Adam and Eve, as Michael’s visions and narrative
reveal, their temptation is the first in a typological series that spans
history, from the murder of Abel - death’s ‘first shape on man’ (XI.467),
thus literally transferring Adam and Eve’s punishment to their son – to
Nimrod, whose claims of ‘second sovereignty’ (XII.35) mirror Eve’s false
claims to Godhead, to the Church similarly corrupted by ‘lucre and
ambition’ (XII.511). Michael’s apparent consolation is in fact a typological
reading of history, a ‘sense of history as the irreversible progress of
connected events’. However, Michael’s vision does not represent direct
progress, since sin and temptation are seemingly never eradicated.
Instead, the vision runs from typological allusion to typological allusion,
providing a cyclical history in which sin constantly repeats itself until the divine intervention provides an eschatological conclusion in Christ’s sacrifice. This version of history signifies, in fact, a cyclical repetition of the trauma of the Fall that humanity must undergo until Christ ends the typological cycle in his ‘ages of endless date’ (XII.550).

The Fall, then, is traumatic for the entire universe; the Earth itself is wounded, space is reconfigured, Adam and Eve are expelled from the garden; and their descendants, too, share in their punishment. *Paradise Lost* is therefore also fallen: ‘the mediating representation is not inoculated from the impact of the event that it depicts […] the medium itself imparts a residue of the loss that it was designed to mitigate.’

Throughout the poem, the Fall remains an obstacle the narrator is struggling to comprehend and surmount: As discussed in chapter three, he must be ‘raise[d] and support[ed]’ (I.23) by the Holy Spirit to sing at all. Consequently, the narrator suffers from the fear of his own fall (spatial and typological), which is sublimated into the myth of Bellerophon in the invocation to book seven: ‘Lest from this flying steed unrefined […] on the Aleian field I fall / Erroneous’ (VII.17-20). Even with the aid of the Holy Spirit, the Fall cannot be overcome by human means alone:

> Our sense of our own fallenness, of our existence in a history sentenced by death, must be partial, because Milton, more than any other narrator of this myth, makes the fall an unacceptable shock, the thing that at once defines us and resists our knowledge.”

Mikics’s implication is that ‘Milton’ has somehow accepted the ‘unacceptable shock’ of the Fall, the existence of the narrative serving as evidence of an author able to acquire the ‘knowledge’ that is forbidden or unavailable to the audience. I suggest that the poem itself enacts this lack of knowledge: the unavailability of perfect imagery and unambiguous language (as discussed in chapters three and four) to even an inspired bard serve as a delineation of the limits of fallen expression itself. The

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impossibility of the narrator’s task, despite his calls for divine intervention through the muse, forces him to repeat the trauma of the fall in the failure of his own project. Dante, in a similar manner to those writers faced with the new world examined in chapter two, restrains himself to signifying the ineffability of God, who is ‘greater than speech could show; at such a sight, it fails’ (Par XXXIII.55-6). *Paradise Lost*, conversely, attempts a depiction of the ineffable; this, however, is always undermined by its own fallen status, since the celestial music and prelapsarian language the poem attempts to show are infected by the failings and différance of postlapsarian speech. The Fall, then, is the ultimate and original trauma, provoking a breach that cannot be bridged by the subject of it, but must be assuaged by an external, restorative presence. As Michael informs Adam, Christ’s final victory is not martial, but in the ending of the trauma of sin: Christ ‘shall recure, / not by destroying Satan, but his works / In thee and in thy seed’ (XII.393-95). The curiously medical term ‘recure’ (‘cure’ or ‘recover’) serves as a reminder of the (continuing) wounding effects of the Fall.

The seventeenth century saw a number of attempts to restore a prelapsarian condition, two of which (the music of the spheres and pre-Babelian language) have already been discussed at length in this thesis. These are, in effect, attempts to negate the consequences of the Fall; in Dominick LaCapra’s psychological argument, the Fall necessitates a desire to seek redemption:

> When understood as lost, divinity becomes hidden or dead – lost because of some sin or fault that could be compensated for in order for redemption or salvation to occur, allowing a return to unity with the godhead. Paradise lost [sic] could be regained, at least at the end of time.⁴¹

The possibility of regaining some version of paradise before the ‘end of time’ was a key concern of seventeenth-century writers. Whether through faith, or the actions of the flesh, there was a sense that humanity could

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take some action to move towards salvation. This action, however, is always a reminder of the Fall itself, as the prominent Church of England preacher and theologian Henry Hammond outlined:

> It is not possible for us so to put off the memory of our sufferings, so to divest ourselves of our great concerns and interests in the welfare of Jerusalem, which now is despoiled of her inhabitants.\(^2\)

‘Jerusalem’ here stands for all of lost paradise, the phrase ‘despoiled of her inhabitants’ suggestive of the Fall itself (with concomitant expulsion from Eden). Those ‘sufferings’ are, for Hammond, a constant reminder of the trauma of the Fall, inextricably linking the ‘concernments’ of salvation to the ‘memory’ of original sin: in LaCapra’s terms, the search for redemption is itself a constant reminder of a fault, just as Adam and Eve are to be continually confronted with the sadness of sin. The God of *Paradise Lost* offers prevenient grace to humanity (‘the rest shall hear me call, and oft be warned / Their sinful state’ [III.185-6]), conditional upon ‘prayer, repentance and obedience’ (III.191). The acceptance of salvation (which acceptance is a sufficient action towards grace) is thus conditional upon that memory of sin. Grace comes initially with a reminder of man’s ‘sinful state’ (‘oft be warned’), and ‘repentance and obedience’ rely upon the memory of past sin as a guide for future action. To emphasise this point, the line is itself a subtly altered repetition: ‘To pray, repent and bring obedience due. / To prayer, repentance and obedience due’ (III.190-91).

Michael’s final consolation to Adam, after his didactic vision, is that he can restore his Edenic state through

> virtue, patience, temperance, add love
> By name to come called charity, the soul
> Of all the rest: then wilt thou not be loath
> To leave this Paradise, but shalt possess

\(^2\) Henry Hammond, *A Paraphrase and Annotations Upon the Book of the Psalms* (1659), p. 666. Hammond also held broadly Arminian views on grace (biographical information from *DNB*); prevenient grace demands only an acceptance of grace, not a human action to solicit it.
A paradise within thee, happier far. (XII.583-87)

Adam’s ‘paradise within’ is brought about by faith coupled with signs of virtue; Michael offers Adam hope of redemption if he can resume his interrupted obedience. As Fowler notes (581-7n), the passage is an almost direct scriptural quotation of 2 Peter 1:5-7, which teaches that these human virtues can combine to produce better ‘knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ’ (II Pet. 1:8). The ‘paradise within’ becomes a form of felix culpa, in which the Fall can produce salvation (and with it a better, ‘happier’ state) through Christ’s mission. However, the phrase ‘paradise within’ carried considerable contextual significance. It was used in other seventeenth-century texts to suggest a more direct and earthly methodology for regaining the lost paradise; just as with Satan and the spice trade, an examination of those other uses is suggestive of the ambiguity in Paradise Lost, produced through allusive intertextuality.

The Presbyterian (later Independent) politician and theologian Francis Rous, comparing paradise to a marriage between the soul and Christ, wrote that:

Yea again and again, be not discouraged, though hitherto thou hast not felt the spiritual kisses of Christ Jesus, the ecstasies of his wine, nor the ravishments of his union. It may be the hour of thy Lord & Saviour is not yet come, nor the day wherein he shall say, This day shalt thou be with me in Paradise. This day was the last day to him, to whom it was first said, and it may be one of thy latter days wherein it shall bee said to thee, this day will I be with thee, and make a Paradise within thee.

The identification of the soul’s union with Christ as a marriage is a well-established Christian trope, beginning with the Bible itself. The passage, with its central message of waiting for the divine bridegroom, allegorically

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23 Francis Rous, The Mystical Marriage (1631), p. 328-29. Similarly, Richard Sibbes argued that for the soul married to Christ, ‘However outwardly it seems yet there is a Paradise within’ (Bowels opened, or, A Discovery of the Near and Dear Love, Union and Communion betwixt Christ and the Church [1639], p. 211).
24 For example: ‘Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; ‘the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready.’ (Eph. 5:25; Rev. 19:7).
recalls the biblical story of the ten virgins (Matthew 25:1-13). This image is used in *Paradise Lost* to symbolise the perfection of Adam and Eve’s ‘rites / Mysterious of connubial love’ (IV.742-43), in which love ‘lights / his constant lamp’ (IV.763-64). The contrast created – just as in the anti-puns – is between Adam and Eve’s perfect love before the fall, and their sinful love/lust afterwards.

Rous, however, deviates from his source texts in the highly charged language of the marriage – ‘spiritual kisses’, ‘ecstasies’ and ‘ravishments’. His language, like that of *Paradise Lost*, reveals the futility of any attempt to discuss perfection in fallen tongue, since it will always be infected by this sinful manner of secondary meaning.

The court poet Thomas Carew presented a similarly sensual version of the ‘paradise within’ in his poem ‘A Deposition from Love’:

> Yet I believ’d, to crown our pain,  
> Could we the fortress win,  
> The happy lover sure should gain  
> A Paradise within.²⁵

Carew, like Rous, eroticises the spiritual message he presents. Though love is presented as a state of perfection (a feast at which ‘Jove were too mean a guest’), the central metaphor of the poem is not transcendent, but resolutely bodily. The lover overcomes the ‘scorn’ of his beloved to ‘enter, and enjoy’ the ‘gate’ that symbolises love. This having been achieved, he can ‘kiss, and sport, and toy / And taste those sweets of love’. The sexual punning runs throughout, coupling the divine love Carew identifies with the earthly act of sex that must, apparently, accompany it. In Carew’s *carpe diem* poetry, it is not virtue but the numinous act of coitus that provides restoration of the lost paradise.²⁶

So too for John Donne, whose Holy Sonnets combine the earthly erotic with the divine. Like Carew, Donne finds spiritual pleasure through

his lover: ‘Here the admiring her my mind did whet / To seek thee God’. 27

The passions and delights of Earth prompt Donne to a contemplation of the holy, and this theme continues throughout the sonnets:

> Show me dear Christ, thy spouse
> […]
> And let mine amorous soul court thy mild Dove
> Who is most true, and pleasing to thee, then
> When she is embraced and open to most men. (XVIII, 1-14)

In this sonnet, Donne explores the multiple manifestations of the church (not least Catholic and Protestant), posing the paradoxical question ‘Is she both truth and errs?’ (6). This question is resolved with the conclusion that the true church is any that can accommodate the soul of a believer. Yet Donne, just as Rous, envisages a corporeal aspect to the spiritual ‘marriage’ between Christ and the church; through the ‘amorous’ nature of belief, the poem modulates the image of the constant virgin into that of a polygamous bride whose ‘embrace’ is ‘open to most men’.

The same sensuous imagery can be observed in ‘Batter my heart’, the next sonnet in the sequence. Here, however, instead of the ‘soul court[ing] thy mild Dove’, the speaker pleads for grace in terms that, while still sexually charged, are closer to rape:

> That I may rise, and stand, o’erthrow me, and bend
> Your force to break, blow, burn and make me new
> […]
> Take me to you, imprison me, for I,
> Except you enthral me, never shall be free,
> Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me. (XIV, 3-14)

Donne’s sonnets, though they do not contain the phrase, clearly engage with the notion of a ‘paradise within’, and the concept is suggested in sonnet fifteen: ‘God the Spirit, by angels waited on / In heaven, doth make a temple in thy breast’ (XV, 3-4). The sonnets demonstrate the early modern conception that the ‘paradise within’ could be provoked by a bodily, earthly response to grace. Heather Hirschfeld has argued that

27 John Donne, ‘Holy Sonnet XVII’, 5-6 in The Works of John Donne (Ware, Herts.: Wordsworth, 1994). Further references are given in the text by sonnet number and line.
precisely this kind of sexualisation of experience is a consequence of the trauma of original sin; the Fall becomes

a foundational moment of transgressive sexuality and irretrievable loss, a construction that in its own telling constitutes an incomprehensible exposure to eros and death, and which determines all subsequent ways of being and knowing. Indeed, the scene cannot be located or recognized apart from such subsequent effects.  

The eroticisation of the relationship between man and God serves as testament to the trauma of the Fall. Once humanity has fallen, the awareness of lust and death, (like Paradise Lost’s allegorical Sin) ‘his thoughts, his looks, words, actions all infect’ (X.608). Any move towards salvation becomes not only a memory, but also a repetition (in some fashion) of original sin:

it remains tragically paradoxical that Adam's suffering should be the means to his knowledge of such infinite goodness. And in this way the distinction between the earthly, phoenix paradise and the paradise within is explained.  

The ‘paradise within’ will ultimately be superior to Eden, at the end of time; until then, humanity is forced to continually confront the trauma of the Fall in the 'suffering' that conditions all postlapsarian experience. Milton, in Of Education, bemoans the fact that because of ‘the ruins of our first parents […] our understanding cannot in this body found itself but on sensible things, nor arrive so clearly in the knowledge of God and things invisible’. Bodily experience is a necessary step on the way to understanding ‘infinite goodness’, but that mode of knowing is always infected by sin.

It is clear that ‘Milton's poem tries to instruct the reader to reckon with his fallen state’, but rather than the eroticized lyrics of Carew and

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30 CPW II:366-69.
Donne, *Paradise Lost*'s instruction aims to provoke that reader to 'reclaim some semblance of lost innocence and delight in the redemption of biblical truth and memory'. The sense *Paradise Lost* is evoking is probably something more akin to that found in another Independent, John Everard, who translated Sebastien Frank’s ‘The Tree of Life’:

> [T]he Scriptures likewise witness that the City of God, and the Heavenly Jerusalem, and the Kingdom of God, is a Paradise within us; And further that God and His Almighty Word, is our Paradise, the Tree of Life, the temple where we dwell, walk, sacrifice and pray.

Robert Croft’s pamphlet *A Paradice within Us* likewise suggests, like *Paradise Lost*, that if ‘our minds once come to be truly raised (in divine contemplation) to Heaven, to God himself, the desires thereof do remain even satisfied, contented and most sweetly pleased on Earth’. However, this restoration of paradise is only gestured towards, not enacted, by *Paradise Lost*.

By invoking the phrase ‘paradise within’ the poem appropriates, though only to reject, the possibility that human action can produce anything that even approximates paradise. Though the ‘love / By name to coma called charity’ is a necessary condition of the individual for the acceptance of grace, it does not of itself produce or demand it: instead, ‘All proceeds from god and returns to him – all creation and all charity’. The poems of Donne and Carew actively perform the eroticism that is a result of the Fall, and in doing so suggest human agency can (however fleetingly) recapture paradise. *Paradise Lost*, however, refuses these consolations and demonstrates the consequences of the Fall not directly

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at the level of action (prelapsarian love is pure, as the narrator goes to great lengths to remind the reader\textsuperscript{35}), but in the very language it uses.

*Paradise Lost* enacts the bard (standing synecdochically for all of fallen man) attempting to reverse that fall, and restore himself to the prelapsarian condition of Adam, with the attendant knowledge of God – since it is only by restoring that unfallen state that the narrator could with any confidence claim to ‘justify the ways of God to man’. In this way, ‘the Miltonic / Christian account strives to work through the trauma of what it cannot fully confront’, since this is a project aware that in its failure to properly represent the fall, it must reinscribe and repeat it.\textsuperscript{36} Nicholas Royle argues that ‘the experience of a self-presence [is] only possible on the basis of a logic of writing, that is of repetition and difference, of traces and remains’ (p.20).\textsuperscript{37} But *Paradise Lost* seeks (futilely) repetition without difference, since that difference (différance), as demonstrated in chapter four, is characteristic of the fall; the introduction of uncontrollable difference into the poem’s doubling of biblical narrative is an inevitable result of the poem’s (and reader’s) fallen nature.

The trauma of the Fall, then, can only be comprehended by fallen man, not assuaged. As Adam is assured, on behalf of his descendants, Christ will give ‘his merits / To save them, not their own’ (XII.409-10); that is, only through the sacrifice of Christ, not their own works, will fallen man be saved. The Son has two victories over Satan, one in *Paradise Lost*’s war in heaven, and then in the desert of *Paradise Regained*. Yet the victory of Christ is (endlessly) deferred by *Paradise Lost*. Even the dénouement of *Paradise Regained*, the moment of Christ’s destruction of Satan’s works, is infected by the ambiguity of fallen language that marks both epics; what it truly presents is ‘the primacy of textuality itself, not the presence of God, but the triumphant presence of the signifier’.\textsuperscript{38} Language itself becomes the subject of the poems, although I contend

\textsuperscript{35} See IV.741-775.
\textsuperscript{38} Belsey, *Language, Gender, Power*, p. 43.
this is less a ‘triumphant presence’ than a necessary, endured and inescapably traumatic presence.

In *Paradise Lost*, Satan is not destroyed by Messiah’s military strength (which is checked anyway, ‘for he meant / Not to destroy, but root them out of heaven’ [*PL* VI.854-55]), but rather is overcome by His glory: ‘they astonished all resistance lost, / All courage’ (VI.838-39). The same astonishment greets Jesus’s standing on the temple pillar: ‘Tempt not the Lord thy God, he said and stood. / But Satan smitten with amazement fell’ (*PR* IV.561-62). Satan, in these moments, confronts the trauma of his own fall: these glimpses of the glory of Christ expose his vainglorious claims to be ‘self begot, self-raised’ (*PL* V.860), and with it his right to challenge the title of ‘Messiah’, which was discussed in the previous chapter.\(^{39}\)

Crucially, however, Jesus’s final victory is not celebrated as a defeat of Satan, but rather the inward force to which Adam and Eve (albeit seduced by Satan) succumbed. Christ’s victory is a victory over trauma, finally removing the sin with which humanity began history. Even at the moment of that victory, however, the language of the poem forces us to confront that traumatic event, in the knowledge that the full restorative effect of Christ has not yet been felt.\(^{40}\) As Anne Krook notes, ‘at the end of the poem, Christ is said to have already to have regained Paradise and to have frustrated Satan’.*\(^{41}\)* The angels salute Jesus, after Satan’s fall, singing ‘heavenly anthems of his victory / Over temptation’ (*PR* IV.594-95). That the angels do not sing of Christ’s victory over Satan is a surprise to the reader who has just seen this conflict play out; even the opening invocation stresses Christ’s defeat of ‘the tempter foiled / In all his wiles, defeated and repulsed’ (I.5-6). The lines frustrate the

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\(^{39}\) The same realisation takes place, briefly, on Niphates (*PL* IV.32-113), when Satan is confronted by the ‘bitter memory / Of what he was’ (IV.24-25): his former state, lost through vanity.

\(^{40}\) On Christ’s rejection of Satan’s ‘multiplicity’ (for example, presenting the psalms as a singular rebuke to ‘Satan’s numerous examples of learning, poetry, and philosophy’), see John T. Shawcross, ‘Milton’s *Paradise Regain’d* and the Second Temptation’, *ANQ*, 21 (2008), 34-41 (p. 38).

\(^{41}\) Krook, ‘The Hermeneutics of Opposition’, p. 133-34.
reader’s expectation of a victory over Satan, instead proclaiming a higher victory of ‘temptation’ itself, whatever the outside cause.

The substation of the vice (‘temptation’) for the agent (‘tempter’) is repeated more forcefully a few lines later

now thou hast avenged
Supplanted Adam, and by vanquishing
Temptation, hast regained lost Paradise.

(PR IV.606-608)

The line break at ‘vanquishing’ again creates an unfulfilled anticipation, since, as Stanley Fish has noted, the ‘military language and the scene just past would seem to dictate’ that Christ has vanquished ‘Satan’. In creating and then correcting these expectations, the poem demonstrates that Christ’s victory is not a furthering of cosmic warfare in the destruction of Satan, but rather a corrective motion for ‘Supplanted Adam’. Yet the very ambiguity which Paradise Regained harnesses in this moment serves a memory of that ‘lost Paradise’. The poem’s triumph comes at the cost of a reminder of its fallen nature; even Christ's victory cannot transcend the openness of fallen language.

Jesus is carried down from the Temple by angels to a feast which is, typologically, equally as important a moment as the falling of Satan:

A table of celestial food, divine,
Ambrosial, fruits fetched from the tree of life,
And from the fount of life ambrosial drink,
That soon refreshed him wearied, and repaired
What hunger, if aught hunger had impaired,
Or thirst, and as he fed, angelic choirs
Sung heavenly anthems of his victory
Over temptation and the tempter proud.

(PR IV.588-95)

The feast restores humanity through the tree of life, which was expressly denied to Adam after the Fall: ‘Lest therefore his now bolder hand /
Reach also of the tree of life […] to remove him I decree (XI.93-96). The

granting of its fruit to Christ in his position as both God and Man, at the moment that temptation is defeated, reveals the fully restorative power of Jesus: at the feast he fulfils the prophecy both of scripture and *Paradise Lost* itself, as he manages to ‘regain the blissful seat’ (*PL* I.5) by once again tasting its fruit.\(^{43}\) However, the moment of triumph is again portrayed in ‘ambiguous words’. The line break at 588-89, interrupting the list of attributes, allows ‘Ambrosial’ to modify both the ‘celestial food’ and the ‘fruits’, echoing the description of the tree of life in *Paradise Lost*, which is shown ‘blooming ambrosial fruit’ (*PL* IV.219). The phrase ‘hunger had impaired’ also works ambiguously. Christ does suffer hunger in the wilderness (‘now I feel I hunger’ [*PR* II.252]), but he continues his fast with his own pun, claiming he is ‘hung’ring more to do my Father’s will’ (II.259). The proximity of ‘hunger had impaired’ to the trees of Paradise instead recalls Adam and Eve’s unsuccessful defence against the temptation of eating – and so the description of the feast which ‘repaired’ hunger serves both a literal and typological meaning. The perfection of Christ’s triumph is once again undermined by a memory of the trauma of original sin, and a linguistic reminder that its effects are still being felt.

As this thesis has demonstrated, this descriptive failure runs across both epics, which ‘[embody] poetic indeterminacy to such an extent that the text itself will always resist the imposition of static interpretative grids’.\(^{44}\) Wordplay and ambiguity are inescapable; the angels of *Paradise Lost* cannot be shown to sing in celestial harmonies; Adam and Eve cannot be shown to speak in pre-Babelian language. Ultimately, ‘poetic discourse *takes root* in a wound’, is inescapably bound to the Fall it represents and so can never overcome.\(^{45}\) *Paradise Lost* and *Regained* harness the ambiguity of epic form (including the self-consciousness of when language fails) to express the trauma of the Fall at a linguistic level.

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\(^{43}\) Cf. ‘For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive’ (1 Cor. 15:22).


The epic thus resists the claims of Bakhtin (and others) that it is a monolithic text. The first two chapters of this thesis demonstrated that, far from being a ‘dead’ or ‘monolithic’ genre, seventeenth-century epic was a highly dialogic text. In fact, it is only in its very dialogism that the full meaning of *Paradise Lost* can be comprehended; a comprehension that relies on a turn away from biographical or Milton-centred readings of the poem. Its metaphors are defiantly ahistorical, continuously denying any attempt to relegate the text to a ‘past’, mythic or otherwise. It engages with key shifts in seventeenth-century thought, not simply mapping but intervening in contemporary debates on subjects as diverse as heroism, astronomy, music, food and language itself. As chapter three demonstrated, not only does *Paradise Lost* contribute to these debates on their own terms, it also harnesses them to its overarching theme. Music, astronomy and the universal language movement are all utilised by *Paradise Lost* to explore the futility of fallen man’s search for prelapsarian perfection. Ultimately, as chapter four showed, *Paradise Lost* is a poem intimately concerned with ambiguity, and the openness of fallen language itself.

This thesis has shown how *Paradise Lost* recombines epic form with its *episteme* to construct its meaning; the conclusion demonstrates the limits of that process as it comes up against unspeakable divinity. *Paradise Lost* engages with its trauma by repeating it, foregrounding its own status as a fallen construction by juxtaposing the ambiguity of its own language with the prelapsarian perfection it seeks to imitate. *Paradise Lost* continuously evokes the Fall, serving as a traumatic reinscription of humanity’s fall away from God. In its conceits, metaphors and at the level of language itself, the poem constantly undermines its own project of portraying divinity. *Paradise Lost* ultimately refers only to paradise inexpressible, the unreachable *logos* that can now be comprehended only as a fractured set of signifiers.
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