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Milton's Satan as the Evolving Poet

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Abstract of the Thesis

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Beyond established associations between Milton's Satan and the poet himself, I argue that Milton's Satan, specifically in Book Nine of *Paradise Lost*, is a direct reflection of Milton, his career as a poet, and his precarious position in attempting to create a conclusion to his epic that does justice to the extraordinary narration of pre-fall history in Books I through IX. I will use a psychoanalytic approach in discussing what I believe to be Milton's overwhelming desire to solidify his own position in the English literary canon, and the anxiety he seems to experience in a state of creative limbo. In this approach, I offer interpretations of the text that take a slightly different direction from prominent psychoanalytic criticisms by William Kerrigan and Michael Lieb; however, their arguments (especially Lieb's) inform and enrich my own, as I attempt to extend his analysis of Milton's anxieties related to the mutilation of his body to my own discussion of Milton's creative anxieties. My analysis will also be supported with specific instances in both Milton's prose and poetry where he reveals his poetic aspirations. I will begin with both literal and allegorical close readings of Satan's soliloquy in Book IX, and other supporting pieces, including some of his earlier sonnets. The frame in which I examine Milton's poetic career is the Virgilian career trajectory, and how Satan's speech reveals Milton's own poetic transition and achievements that follow the Virgilian *rota* (wheel). I address and offer alternatives to current, accepted theoretical discourse related to Milton's treatment of Satan, specifically Milton self-identifying with Satan so closely, and the uneasy resolution he creates by ultimately distancing himself from Satan. Milton's several instances (throughout *Paradise Lost* and earlier works) of self-representation, his struggles for identity and permanence, and his attempts at reconciling his secular art with spirituality complicate the notions that Milton wholeheartedly accepts God, and that Milton's Satan is mostly an image of the poet in his earlier stages of development (as Kerrigan suggests). His decision to part ways with Satan seems more

prompted by an obligation to follow the post fall story line presented in the scriptures, rather than an intentional denunciation of the self and submission to the divine.

Dedication Page

To my sister, Kezia, whose constant encouragement has reaffirmed my faith in my scholarly pursuits.

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Introduction

The Virgilian career trajectory held great significance for Renaissance authors in its function as a guideline for the gradual, necessary transition from writing in the novice pastoral tradition to composing artistically advanced epic poems. As William J. Kennedy explains in his entry on Virgil in the *Spenser Encyclopedia*, “[c]ertainly the emerging nationalism of the Renaissance prompted many poets, not least Spenser whom his contemporaries called “the English Virgil,” to model their careers on Virgil’s” (717). Through examining Milton’s work and its chronological development, it becomes obvious that in many ways, much like his predecessors, (for example, Spenser), he embraced the Virgilian career tradition, beginning his poetic attempts with pastoral verse (for example, his early sonnets from his 1645 collection of poems) and successfully culminating his authorial career with epic. Milton includes and references himself throughout *Paradise Lost*, and many of these references speak to various creative hindrances that the author has had to face and the various religious philosophies and political stances that he has embraced and discussed in previous writings. One of the more poignant, incontestable examples can be seen in the invocation to the muse in Book III where the narrator mournfully reflects on his blindness and how it places him in both a blessed position as a poetic vessel and a wretched state of isolation and forced separation from basic human pleasures. In resigned agony, the narrator bewails:

...thee I revisit safe,
And feel thy sovereign vital lamp; but thou
Revisit’st not these eyes, that roll in vain. (III, 21-23)

Considering the fact that Milton was blind during the composition of *Paradise Lost*, it is likely that the narrator's grief reflects his own.

There is, however, a latent and perhaps more meaningful example of Milton placing himself in the text, through the character of Satan in Book IX. This specific embodiment might seem implausible, considering the abominable nature of Satan's actions in Book IX; however, given Milton's expansive education and literary knowledge, his deliberateness is seldom doubted. And so I must believe that this specific interpretation is likely no exception. Milton seems to have been aware of the Virgilian poetic tradition, and its stages appear to be referenced in Satan's soliloquy following his search for a mode to corrupt Adam and Eve. In this highly introspective and expository speech, Satan reveals his sense of wonder at the earth's beauty as well as his remorse at his inability to enjoy this beauty, because of his all-consuming vengefulness and focus on toppling God. What if we read this speech as reflecting Milton's career trajectory, as being reminiscent of his own lamentation at his progression as a writer and the pressure he undoubtedly feels in crafting his crowning achievement and preventing the mutability of his appeal? Throughout the monologue, we see multiple references to the pastoral and georgic that ultimately end in an admission of obsession, colored with undertones of anxiety and self-perceived inadequacy. This assertion only amplifies the problems with Milton associating himself so closely with Satan in that his ultimate rejection of Satan is rather uneasy, and seems prompted more by the necessity of adhering to the scriptural plot, rather than genuine submission to the will of the divine. By incorporating contemporary psychoanalytic theory in my discussion of Milton's representation of Satan in *Paradise Lost*, it becomes possible to view the soliloquy as an admission of self-doubt and the work as a whole as resulting from an attempt at resolving the author's own theological uncertainties while still allowing him to establish his own

literary greatness. Milton's lifelong resistance to predetermined paths and domineering patriarchal institutions, coupled with a driving desire for identity, independence, and distinction, is manifested in Satan's reflection and declaration of his culminating, ultimately futile act of aggression against God.

Part I

Poetic Progress: Satan's Didacticism, Despair, and Resolve

Satan's soliloquy at the beginning of Book IX presents him at the nexus of bewilderment and malevolent resolve. At this point in the story, Satan has left paradise after having his initial attempts at treachery exposed by Gabriel. He is overwrought and feverishly scans the earth in its entirety for a vessel to best corrupt Adam and Eve, finally, settling upon the serpent (*Paradise Lost*, IX.75-86). Having found a choice agent, he channels his deep sorrow outwards and gushes:

O earth, how like to heaven, if not preferred
More justly, seat worthier of gods, as built
With second thoughts, reforming what was old!
For what god after better worse would build?
Terrestrial heaven, danced round by other heavens
That shine yet bear their bright officious lamps,
Light above light, for thee alone, as seems,
In thee concentrating all their precious beams
Of sacred influence: as God in heaven
Is centre, yet extends to all, so thou
Centring receiv'st from all those orbs; in thee,
Not in themselves, all their known virtue appears
Productive in herb, plant, and nobler birth
Of creatures animate with gradual life
Of growth, sense, reason, all summed up in man. (IX.99-113)

From these fifteen lines, Satan's amazement with the magnificence of the earth becomes apparent. He describes the earth as equaling if not surpassing heaven in beauty, and as a fitter habitation for deities. Further, he presents the earth as perfection, not merely a unique creation but instead a revision of the celestial plane, a reimagining of previous creation with "second thoughts" (101). Satan rationalizes this improvement with a rhetorical question, "For what god after better worse would build?" (102) and in doing so evokes the often central struggle of much of Milton's poetry and prose: constant progression perhaps culminating in a *magnum opus*. For Satan, his ultimate intention to seek revenge upon God (which he articulates in the peroration of the soliloquy) comes to the center of his machinations in book nine. Up to this point in the poem, this vengeance is his white whale, filling him with inner turmoil and constantly eluding him. He ceaselessly ventures to spite the divine, against seemingly impossible odds. But prior to this monologue, Satan's desires seem much broader and less directed. In book two, Beelzebub, poses a suggestion (originally contemplated by Satan) to learn about the earth, man, and man's weaknesses, to persecute them or turn them against God for the purpose of "interrupt[ing] his joy" (II.371), thus accomplishing a task greater than simple revenge, which by method of force would prove impossible. Finding this plan agreeable, Satan sets about in his effort to interrupt God's joy; this act can be described as Satan's envisioned *magnum opus*.

Satan continues his lamentation, which quickly changes in tone from amazement to envy. He expounds that all other celestial creations exist to magnify the glory of the earth. Although the other heavenly bodies shine in their own right, their light illuminates the earth and is intended for the earth alone (IX.105). He then illustrates the geocentric model of the universe with the earth at the center, in order to draw a close comparison to the divine hierarchy where God is the center. There is a transactional relationship between God and all creation. God receives glory

from all creation and simultaneously extends his majesty to all creation. Paralleling this transactional relationship is that of the earth to the other celestial bodies. The earth receives their “precious beams” (IX.106), and also extends glory and value to them. This description of the physical nature of creation is where the image of the Virgilian *rota* becomes applicable, as it parallels the creative transitional phases that gave ideal structure to certain Renaissance poets. It is important to note that the idea of the *rota* (wheel) as serving as this formal structure is contested in more contemporary scholarship. As Wilson-Okamura asserts, the term, “Wheel,” “...originates with John Garland in the early thirteenth century; and (to [his] knowledge) it also dies there” (90). He also disagrees with the notion that it represented an explicit “progression of genres” (90), pointing out that the *rota* makes no mention of genre; instead, it is a guideline for decorum (90-91). He does give credence, however, to the significance of the *rota* in the careers of Renaissance authors and poets. While the specific term, “wheel,” might not have been used by Renaissance authors, “the conception of Virgil’s career, as extending to every level of style, was (as [he has] seen) classical and was also echoed in Renaissance commentaries” (91). Although the value of the *rota* for Renaissance authors is arguable, the divisions in the Virgilian career trajectory are still useful in deconstructing the soliloquy, as well as the transitional phases and varying subject matter illustrated in it.

Setting aside genre, one can see that the transactional nature of the relationships that Satan illustrates in the beginning of the soliloquy bear resemblance to the stylistic progressions of the *rota*. Traditionally speaking, we can say that the poet modeling his career after the *rota Virgilii* would begin with less advanced pastoral poetry, move on to didactic georgic poetry, and conclude with stylistically advanced epic poetry. Epic poetry would be inherently more difficult to master than pastoral poetry, considering elements such as: greater length, the experiential

limitations of describing battle, and its origins in orality, among others. Kennedy quotes and translates the Latin proem, found added to Renaissance era editions of the *Aeneid*, which illustrates these transitions: “*Ille ego, qui quondam gracili modulatus avena / carmen, et egressus silvis vicina coegi / ut quamvis avido parerent arva colono, / gratum opus agricolis, at nunc horrentia Martis*” (717). Kennedy translates the proem to, “I am he who, after singing on the shepherd’s slender pipe and leaving the woodside for the farmlands, urged the plowed lands ever so much to obey their eager tenant; my work was welcome to the farmers, but now I turn to the sterner stuff of Mars” (717). The progression of genre and style, from simpler matters of the pasture (pastoral) to more complex matters of the battle field (epic), is clearly articulated. The description of creation provided by Satan resembles this trajectory. Satan divides the creation of the universe into two phases, the first being the heavens and other celestial bodies, the second being the earth. As established by Satan in the third line, the earth is a revision of the heavens, a new creation with improvements over the old. If we assume that the creation story provided by Satan reflects the transitional phases of the *rota*, the earth cannot simply be read literally but invites the reader to bring to bear the biographical context of Milton’s career, thus the earth can be seen as part of God’s *magnum opus*. The transactional relationship between the earth and the other heavenly orbs can also be paralleled to the transactional relationship between the creative works of a poet embracing the *rota*, since the three distinct transition or stylistic phases of the wheel represent stages of maturation in the poet’s craft. God’s creation of the earth, following the creation of the rest of the universe appears to reflect the Virgilian career, in which the poet creates something new and of greater value than his previous work. Much like the earth is illuminated by the heavenly bodies and simultaneously gives them purpose and value, the poet’s crowning achievement (ideally an epic) would be influenced (107) by all of the poet’s previous

work and would simultaneously increase the value and appeal of those works. All his previous works would depict various stages of artistic maturity, while the ultimate achievement would depict the artist's perfection of his craft. Furthermore, it would give him completion as a poet, having attained the highest level of creative achievement.

This image of progression is continued by Satan in the next lines when he addresses life on earth. Again, his sense of awe and envy carries over, but more important is the way he elaborates on the progression of life, essentially following the great chain of being. The earth is

Productive in herb, plant, and nobler birth
Of creatures animate with gradual life
Of growth, sense, reason, all summed up in man" (IX.111-113).

The key word here is "gradual" (112), as it describes progress from less advanced life forms to more advanced, cognizant ones (for example, man). Satan represents humanity – in the form of Adam and Eve – as the pinnacle of life on earth, and like the earth, humanity can be seen as another part of the revision or perfection of previous creation. Looking back at Beelzebub's plan in Book II, although he describes man as less powerful, he admits that mankind is a similar, new race held in higher favor by God (II.348-351). This similarity and higher appeal makes humanity seem as another stage in creation. Man's position as this higher stage of creation is solidified when later on in Book IX, Satan assesses Adam's superior physical and intellectual features. Filled with envy and hatred, Satan fumes:

Her husband, for I view far round, not nigh,
Whose higher intellectual more I shun,
And strength, of courage haughty, and of limb
Heroic built, though of terrestrial mould,
Foe not formidable, exempt from wound,
I not; so much hath hell debased, and pain
Enfeebled me, to what I was in heaven. (IX.482-488)

It is evident that Satan sees Adam as superior enemy than he might have envisioned, especially when he bemoans the weakness of his current state compared to his lost heavenly glory.

Wilson-Okamura's insistence on the *rota* delineating decorum can also be substantiated with Satan's transitions in subject matter throughout the soliloquy. He presents an analogous pattern to the *rota's* conventional divisions of style (91), and the content that is considered appropriate for the three styles. He writes, "The purpose of the wheel, as explained in the text, is not to dictate which genre should be attempted first, but to teach decorum: for example, poems in the middle style should not feature swords or shepherds, because the former belong to the high style and the latter to the low. Again, there is no mention of genres, much less of progression" (91).

The first half of the soliloquy closely follows this guideline of decorum. There are several stylistic features of Satan's lamentation that make it seem categorized according to subject matter. The georgic didacticism of his descriptions of the universe and earthly hierarchies at the beginning then fade into pastoral imagery (IX.115-118), finally ending in an elaborate description of his militant, malicious intent and strife with God. In evoking the pastoral imagery, Satan's (and perhaps Milton's, if the two are in fact one) anxieties become more visible. Satan grieves a loss of pleasure that he might have once had when surrounded by the impressive natural beauty of the earth. He bewails:

With what delight could I have walked thee round,
If I could joy in aught, sweet interchange
Of hill, and valley, rivers, woods and plains,
Now land, now sea, and shores with forest crowned,
Rocks, dens, and caves; but I in none of these
Find place or refuge; and the more I see
Pleasures about me, so much more I feel
Torment within me, as from the hateful siege
Of contraries; all good to me becomes
Bane, and in heaven much worse would by my state,

But neither here seek I, no nor in heaven
To dwell, unless by mastering heaven's supreme; ... (IX.114-125)

The pastoral imagery here is evident, for example, "hill[s], [and] valley[s], rivers, woods, and plains" (116). It is clear, however, that Satan is bitter and even envious of these important natural formations. He wishes that he could enjoy their beauty and engage with them in a "sweet interchange" (115). He maintains a mourning and sorrowful tone, highly elegiac in its reference to his loss of satisfaction and his seeming inability to appreciate earth's magnificence. All pleasures have been taken from him and his obsession comes to the surface. Here on the verge of accomplishing his *magnum opus*, Satan's overwhelming desire to surpass God, has impeded his ability to experience any sort of extraneous pleasure; only upon completing his masterpiece can he find happiness again. Beyond the manifest position of Satan at this point in the story, he strongly resembles the poet despairing over the monumental task he has set out to accomplish. A task that has overtaken his life and given him a crushing sense of loss and anxiety. Satan's deep anguish here stems from an extreme sense of injury, and later on he reveals his contempt toward God for what he perceives as God's great injustices toward him, especially when he rages that God has shown undue favor to man, a creature of lower origin (150, 177-178). Satan's sense of inadequacy can be seen through these pointed accusations.

He transitions to militant, aggressive language, especially with words like "hateful siege" (122). The diction throughout the latter half of the soliloquy is rooted in war, and associated with battle, a topic central to epic. According to Table 2 provided by Wilson-Okamura, the appropriate topics of epic, or as he would put it, the "Weighty (*gravis*) style" include: "soldier, ruler, Hector, Ajax, horse, sword, etc." (91). Words like "advance," in line 148, and "spoils," in line 151, again establish images of war. And so, the stylistic requirements of the spokes of the *rota* seem to be subconsciously evoked here by Satan, and perhaps more consciously, by Milton.

The contested interpretation of the *rota* as dictating temporal and genre-based progression also has value here in that Satan's consuming, vengeful desire to "maste[r] heaven's supreme" (125) can be seen as his culminating achievement. Throughout the course of the epic, Satan's main goal has been to interrupt God's joy, and in the soliloquy, this goal is reiterated and made explicit. Many of his actions and "relentless thoughts" (130) up until this point have been for achieving his primary ambition of revenge against the divine. But perhaps equal to his desire for vengeance is his desire for recognition and permanence. Satan's ambitions to be lauded among the other fallen angels is made clear when he vocally envisions:

To me shall be the glory sole among
The infernal powers, in one day to have marred
What he almighty styled, six nights and days
Continued making, and who knows how long
Before had been contriving, though perhaps
Not longer than since I in one night freed
From his servitude inglorious well-nigh half
The angelic name, and thinner left the throng
Of his adorers: ... (IX.135-143)

Satan's hubris in the last four lines allows him to fit the mold of the tragic, anti-hero role he is often ascribed. But more specifically, his musings here allow him to be situated in a point of transition; he is on the verge of accomplishing his ultimate task. He essentially praises himself for what he has achieved through rebellion – turning numerous angels away from God (141) – and demonstrates his desire for external praise from his fallen brothers (135).

While Satan's anxieties, ambitions, and hubris are revealed in the soliloquy, he also expresses an awareness of the potential futility of his efforts and final accomplishment. He understands that his vengeance may not be as fulfilling as he envisions, and admits the old common place,

... Revenge, at first though sweet,
Bitter ere long back in itself recoils;

Let it: I reckon not, so it light well aimed,
Since higher I fall short, on him who next
Provokes my envy, this new favourite
Of heaven, this man of clay, son of despite,
Whom us the more to spite his maker raised
From dust: spite then with spite is best repaid. (IX.171-178)

He expresses an ardent resolve to finish his intended task, deciding that the satisfaction of its completion will be worth the grave personal consequences. His focus here is on the task at hand, regardless of the consequences. At this junction in the text, where Satan's despair meets his sense of resolve and his greatest work is near completion, he embodies the Virgilian poetic mold both in the common interpretation of it dictating the progression of genres and in Wilson-Okamura's interpretation of it dictating decorum.

Part II

Satan as a Reflection of Milton: Vocational Exigency and Resistance to Patriarchy

Using the Virgilian poetic tradition to frame this soliloquy allows Satan's characterization as a poet (Milton) seeking praise and canonical permanence to come to the surface. More specifically, his similarities to Milton make his characterization appear more reflective than merely associative. First and foremost, Milton's career followed a very similar trajectory to the one commonly associated with the wheel. His earlier sonnets and more pastoral works, such as *Lycidas* and *Arcades*, hold true to the pastoral traditions in content.

Later works such as *Comus*, the antiprelatical tracts, and the polemical works, while not necessarily georgic in the most traditional sense (involving agriculture) were heavily didactic and

bear resemblance, in purpose, to Virgil's georgic works. According to Kennedy, Virgil's georgic works, which emerged when he was under the patronage of Maecenas, trusted advisor to Octavian (717) "describe the labor needed to revive a land depleted by constant warfare" (717). In the heated, violent political atmosphere of England, from the civil war to the restoration, Milton's prose works reveal his personal philosophies in bringing about political and social stability, and ensuring personal liberty. Obviously, *Paradise Lost* marks a transition to epic, and is his crowning achievement. The greatest similarities between Satan and Milton, however, appear to be psychobiographical, as Milton's strong vocational desires, resistance to domineering patriarchs and patriarchal institutions, and extreme sense of anxiety are all present in Satan's soliloquy.

Milton's pressing vocational desires are echoed in Satan's goals to deal injury to God and win the praise of his fellow fallen angels. Milton's aspirations were intellectual and artistic, in that he wished from youth to be a poet and distinguish himself artistically from his contemporaries, and his earlier works are ripe with references to this desire and the anxieties stemming from it. A powerful example of his expression of his poetic desires is seen in *Ad patrem (To My Father)*, where Milton rationalizes his decision to forego religious service to pursue his secular calling, and pleads with his father for understanding. The poem is a skillful amalgamation of an apology that reveals Milton's affection toward his father, and a defense, revealing his strong poetic desires. It is also a form of resistance to expectations placed upon him by the primary patriarchal figures in his life, including his father and even God. In a deep expression of gratitude toward his father for his support, Milton writes:

I know not, dearest father, how this trifling song that I am meditating will please you, yet I know not what offerings from me can better repay your gifts, though not even the greatest can repay them, nor can any gratitude expressed by the vain return of empty words be equal to the obligation. (6-11)

Here, Milton acknowledges his father's role in funding his education and travels. In fact, his father's generosity allows him not only an expansive formal education but also "the leisure of several years of independent study..." (Goldberg, Orgel xiii). Milton's decision to become a poet, however, was initially met with resistance and distress. As Catherine G. Martin explains, Milton was cognizant of the anxiety this decision would cause his parents and writes *Ad patrem* as a "consolation" (106) to his father. She writes, "[t]he exact date or cause of his decision against taking holy orders is unknown, but *Ad Patrem* addresses his father's surprise and disappointment soon after the fact" (105). He does not, however, simply dwell on softening the blow and easing his father's concerns. He uses the poem as an opportunity to justify his decision and cites his father as a major source of inspiration. This defense can be seen in the double meaning of the word "gifts" (both his father's monetary support and his prowess and talents as a musician), which paints him as a muse from whom Milton has inherited both talent in and desire for artistic pursuits. He has sought to emulate his father's process and skill, instead in a sister field, as he "compares his father's talent at musical composition, harmonizing sounds to numbers and modulating the voice of singers, to his own dedication to the muses and to his developing artistry as a poet" (Poetry Foundation). It would seem here that Milton desires his father's blessing and seeks to appease him; however, his father also appears to be the oedipal father, as William Kerrigan might call him, the father in opposition with his son. Thus, the piece can also be seen as active, justified resistance. Harold Bloom's revisionist principle of *Clinamen* provides a useful theoretical frame for examining Milton's relationship with his father as one that is perhaps equally turbulent: the relationship between the poet and his predecessor. Milton's father can be described as his predecessor, not only biologically but also vocationally. Bloom defines *Clinamen* as a "corrective movement in [a poet's] own poem," in other words, a poet's decision

to move away from his precursor, suggesting that the precursor's work was only partially correct and that the poet's new direction is the one that the precursor should have gone (Bloom 14).

When Milton's relationship with his father is placed in this revisionist framework, Milton becomes the poet who idolizes his predecessor, but also desires to be seen separately. Rather than conform to his predecessor's plans and vocational decisions, he chooses a path that is simultaneously similar and markedly different. Milton's comparison of his and his father's respective callings makes Bloom's framework applicable here. Again Milton pleads with his father, asking him to consider their similarities and use them as grounds to rationalize their differences. In an attempt to reason with his father, he asks:

Now, if it has happened that I have been born a poet, why is it strange to you that we, so closely joined by the loving bond of blood, should pursue related arts and kindred ways of life? Phoebus, wishing to divide himself in two, gave some gifts to me, others to my father; and we, father and son, possess the divided god. (61-66)

Milton emphasizes the similarities between music and poetry, labeling them as "related arts," yet also emphasizes the unique skills that have been bestowed upon them both. While Milton's father takes an undoubtedly similar art and has certain aspirations for his son, Milton cannot abide and must tread a parallel, but unique path.

Milton's resistance is evident, and he does not relent in the poem. Milton demands his father to "[s]corn not the poet's song, a work divine, which more than aught else reveals our ethereal origin and heavenly race. Nothing so much as its origin does grace to the human mind, possessing yet some sacred traces of Promethean fire" (17-20). Milton's use of the imperative here is quite significant in that it is a rather pronounced transition from entreaty to command, revealing both his deep love for poetry and his resolve in pursuing it as a career. His justification embraces the Christian notion of humanity as divinely created, and also skillfully weaves in

Greek mythology, depicting poetry as a source of illumination. The thematic juxtaposition of Christianity and classical antiquity also sets a division in their “related arts.” In other words, Milton seems to suggest that one cannot indulge in both secular and religious vocation, and he presents secular poetic gifts as not endowed by God. Martin explains that “the young Milton’s “divided god” of secular music and poetry was already remote from the Calvinist deity who required the exclusive devotion of human gifts to his service” (105). Regardless of this demand, Milton’s aversion to a life in ministry becomes all the more obvious throughout the poem. He names Phoebus as the source of both his and his father’s talent. God, capital G, would not give such skill that would not be used for his glorification. It is this resistance that permeates Milton’s *corpus* and can be translated as deep-seated desire for independence and distinction.

There are several instances where Milton reveals these desires just as, if not more, directly. Chapter eight of Diekhoff’s comprehensive compilation of Milton’s “utterances upon himself,” (vii) both in prose and poetry, presents explicit instances where Milton reveals his poetic aspirations. The very first example is from *At a Vacation Exercise*. In this passage, Milton’s poetic desires and boldness are clearly seen as he “had been chosen to preside over the festivities marking the beginning of the Cambridge long vacation in July 1628, at which this poetic oration was originally delivered. It was preceded by a Latin oratorical performance (*Oratio in feriis aestivis collegii*; the sixth of Milton’s prolusions) – the inclusion of English verses in such a ceremony was Milton’s innovation” (Goldberg, Orgel 778).

In explaining the significance, Diekhoff writes, “It is characteristic of Milton that he should feel obliged to acknowledge his high poetic ambitions even upon so unsuitable an occasion” (107). We see that in his youth, Milton exhibited some rather presumptuous behavior and a pressing need to bring attention to his capabilities. In a setting where Latin would be the expected and

acceptable lexical mode, Milton chooses to explore the potential of English. He pays homage to English as his “native language” (*At a Vacation Exercise*.1), and proclaims the inadequacy of Latin in bringing about his intended effect on his audience. He ridicules the affectations of the expressive trends embraced by his contemporaries and requests:

But cull those richest robes, and gayest attire
Which deepest spirits, and choicest wits desire:
I have some naked thoughts that rove about
And loudly knock to have their passage out;
And weary of their place do only stay
Till thou has decked them in their best array;
That so they may without suspect or fears
Fly swiftly to this fair assembly's ears; ... (21-28)

Milton's personification of his thoughts makes his aspirations quite clear. They are “naked” and “rove about,” knocking loudly they are aggressive, raw, and restless, and he wishes to use the simplicity of his native tongue to boldly and efficiently address his audience. What can also be seen here is Milton's desire to distinguish himself from his contemporaries, or the “deepest spirits” and “choicest wits” (22).

“Sonnet 7” is also a prime example of Milton communicating his poetic desires, and a lack of self-efficacy. “Sonnet 7” depicts time as a malevolent figure, robbing him of his youth and thus reducing the window of opportunity that he has to establish his greatness. In lines one through four of “Sonnet 7” he writes:

How soon hath time the subtle thief of youth,
Stol'n on his wing my three and twentieth year!
My hasting days fly on with full career,
But my late spring no bud or blossom shew'th. (1-4)

Clearly this anxiety over his temporal progression as a writer and living creature has been present since his youth. Milton chooses the pastoral “bud” and “blossom” to symbolize his more advanced work, while suggesting that he seems to have come to a standstill in his poetic attempts

(Sonnet 7.4). If Milton had such fears so early in his literary career, then it is more than plausible that Satan's soliloquy reveals an ongoing internal struggle between the author and his work as well as his struggle with self-efficacy and realization.

While these poems clearly reveal Milton's vocational desires, they do not necessarily reveal his intention to write an epic, and essentially complete the *rota*. These intentions are made much clearer in his other early works, particularly in his correspondence with his dear friend Charles Diodati. Milton's letter to Diodati before his death are quite intimate in that they reveal Diodati to be a close confidant of Milton. Milton's desires for, what Diekhoff calls "literary immortality," (124) are seen in extract 57: "Familiar Letter 7" (To Charles Diodati). Prior to explicitly addressing his intentions, Milton admits that he is engaged in ceaseless effort to find the "image of supreme beauty," (125) and makes a classical comparison to Ceres searching for Proserpina to illustrate the earnestness and eagerness with which he searches for this beauty in all creation (125). Here, Milton's poetic aspirations and efforts become apparent. In the subsequent lines, he appears to jest and confides in Diodati:

But now I know you wish to have your curiosity satisfied. You make many anxious inquiries, even as to what I am at present thinking of. Hearken, Theodotus, but let it be in your private ear, lest I blush; and allow me for a little to use big language with you. You ask what I am thinking of? So may the good Deity help me, of immortality! And what am I doing? Growing my wings and meditating flight; but as yet our Pegasus raises himself on very tender pinions. Let us be lowly wise! (126)

His intent is relayed in a very light-hearted fashion, undoubtedly stemming from his familiarity with and affection toward Diodati; this playful tone, however, does not diminish the sincerity of plans he lays out in this passage. He desires "immortality" and the simile comparing his preparations for this immortality to Pegasus taking flight exhibits Milton's affinity for classical

antiquity and his poetic aspirations as Pegasus is “the winged horse of the muses, emblematic of poetry” (Goldberg, Orgel 958).

Another text that is similar in its friendly intimacy but more specifically reveals Milton’s plans to have a “future as an epic poet” (Diekhoff 128) is extract 59, from “Damon’s Epitaph,” a poem written in Diodati’s memory after his death (128). The metaphor of the poet leaving his pipe for the “sterner stuff of Mars” (Kennedy 717) is seen here when Milton mournfully admits:

I myself too – my pipe was sounding forth some lofty strain, I know not what – another day is come, the day following the eleventh night – I myself, as it chanced, had set my lips to pipes of hemlock, pipes that were new: none the less, bursting their joinings, they leap asunder, and could brook no longer the weighty strains. I misdoubt that I am over-swollen with pride. Still I will tell the tale. Yield, ye woods. (130)

The *rota* is evoked here as Milton speaks to the simpler pastoral tradition (pipe) and how he can no longer participate in it as the “weighty strains” (or matters) in his mind require him to move on. This transition in subject matter and perhaps genre, deemed necessary by Milton, is solidified when Milton commands the woods to “yield.” In other words he makes it known that he is moving on from the poetic endeavors of his youth to ones of greater gravity.

Milton’s overwhelming desire for literary permanence through constructing a canonical masterpiece can surely be seen throughout these texts, and Satan’s ambitions in the soliloquy are extraordinarily similar to Milton’s both in nature and in the ways they are articulated. As previously mentioned, Satan admits that he cannot enjoy, or find comfort in any creation until he “master[s] heaven’s supreme” (IX.125). The pastoral formations are a source of “torment,” (121) and he needs to destroy in order to be comforted (129). There is a significant level of similarity here to the way Milton expresses his poetic ambitions to Diodati in “Familiar Letter 7.” He claims, in his classical embellishment, to search for beauty with greater fervor than the grieving Ceres, searching for her abducted daughter (Diekhoff 125). While the comparison is not rooted

in a desire for destruction, it reveals an equally urgent effort on Milton's part. More telling is the shared diction in the soliloquy and the letter, specifically the word "supreme." The word "supreme" carries several distinct meanings in both passages. The more apparent one, in line 125 of the soliloquy refers to God; ("heaven's supreme") however, "supreme," as it applied to humans, could also have meant, "... highest or greatest in achievement; designating a person who is the greatest or most accomplished of his or her class" ("Supreme"). Given Milton's desires for literary greatness, it seems highly unlikely that his phrasing here is anything short of deliberate. The verb "master" also seems to have double meaning here, in that in the more manifest sense, it means to overtake or subjugate; however, master could also mean, "[t]o make oneself master of, attain expertise in (an art, science, skill, etc.); to acquire complete knowledge or understanding of (a fact, subject, etc.) ..." ("Master"). Milton's version of "mastering heaven's supreme" (IX.125) would be the completion of his epic, thus solidifying his position as a true poet according to the Virgilian tradition. Culminating his poetic career with epic would also allow him to separate and distinguish himself from his contemporaries and the literary giants that came before him, specifically Virgil, Shakespeare, and Spenser. Having an epic to his name would undoubtedly rid him of the anxiety of influence and permanently establish his literary prowess and timeless significance. By completing his epic, he will essentially master the poetic arts since epic (or its subject matter thereof) is the third stylistic stage of the *rota*, and by far, the most complicated. And so, it is possible that this section of Satan's soliloquy demonstrates Milton's bitter understanding of the position of poets in relation to their work, and also his own fears pertaining to his ability to create a lasting, iconic work, completing the poetic circle.

"Supreme," as used in the letter to Diodati, also seems rooted in this desire to attain distinction above others. Milton admits to constantly seek "supreme beauty" (Deikhoff 125), and

while Diodati is a manifestation of the “good and beautiful” (124), it is Milton’s admission of affinity for those like Diodati that makes his desire to be the “supreme” more evident. In fact, Milton disparages the vulgar and claims to, “attach [him]self forthwith by a kind of real necessity,” (125) to those who express choice wisdom and ridicule foolishness. It is in the subsequent lines that Milton expresses his high aspirations with a level of humility, not seen in some of his other works. He explains “If, whether by nature or by my fate, I am so circumstanced that by no effort and labour of mine can I myself rise to such an honour and elevation, yet that I should always worship and look up to those who have attained that glory, or happily aspire to it, neither gods nor men, I reckon, have bidden nay” (125-126). The practical humility of this statement is rather uncharacteristic of Milton; (considering the subsequent lines of the letter and the tone of pieces like *At a Vacation Exercise*) however, he foregrounds this humility with the condition that only nature or fate (things out of his control) can hinder him from attaining the greatness he seeks.

Part III

Milton’s “Prophetic” Calling and Fear of Mutability

But what exactly is the “Idea of the beautiful” that Milton claims to seek in his correspondence with Diodati? As Milton articulates in the letter, he seeks it in the “forms and faces of things” (125), specifying that things of divine nature take many forms. Milton’s association of beauty and the divine seems inherently centered in his understanding of truth.

While the biblical connection between divinity, beauty, and truth would have been apparent for someone as theologically informed as Milton, this connection seems to have a deeper, psychological underpinning for him. In other words, Milton's constant quest for beauty (divine attributes) in his surroundings, speaks to his perception of his desired role as a vessel of truth/knowledge (here I use them interchangeably). A definition of "beautiful" that would have applied at the time is, "Realizing an ideal of intellectual or moral excellence; pleasing to the mind, esp. in being appropriate or well suited to a particular purpose..." ("Beautiful"). Milton's particular purpose (or the one he envisions for himself) is as a possessor and thus an obligatory wellspring of truth. Alongside his poetic aspirations, Milton reveals an awareness of this, perhaps self-assigned, burden as a man endowed with heightened knowledge. Diekhoff provides the beginning of the second book of *The Reason of Church Government* to prove Milton's awareness of his almost prophetic burden. In his preface to this particular passage, Diekhoff explains that Milton "sp[ea]ks of the burden of knowledge and of the obligation of the men who bear it to speak what they know" (4). In expounding on this uncomfortable role, and the often ill reception of truth, Milton claims "But when God commands to take the trumpet and blow a dolorous or a jarring blast, it lies not in man's will what he shall say or what he shall conceal. If he shall think to be silent as Jeremiah did, because of the reproach and derision he met with daily, and 'all his familiar friends watched for his halting,' to be revenged on him for speaking the truth, he would be forced to confess as he confessed ..." (3).

Here, the prophetic role is explained as being full of hardship, which results in reluctance of the divine vessel; however, shortly afterward, Milton makes it a point to say that he sees this role as righteous and necessary. He makes a conscious decision to "lay up the best treasure and solace of a good old age, if God vouchsafe it for [him], the honest liberty of free speech from [his] youth,

...” (4). His youthful, self-aggrandizing idealism is revealed, as he is happy to carry out the instruction of the Lord, and his stance on the truth as beautiful is affirmed, contrasting the bitterness he develops later on. He accepts the burden of knowledge, and actively seeks the company of others who bear it, so that he can reach the level of intellectual and moral excellence that he aspires to.

But this role as an inspired vessel seems to be divided and paradoxical for Milton, creating reactions of both admiration and deep seated anxiety. In other words, his poetry and prose often betray a fear of mutability. Michael Lieb, one of the most prominent contemporary Milton scholars, articulates this fear as being predominantly centered in a fear of bodily harm and destruction, making it a more physical fear. His iconic work, *Milton and the Culture of Violence* explores Milton’s pervading fear of bodily harm, as well as its paradoxical nature: the regenerative potential of destruction (10). The Greek term for violence as a part of religion is *sparagmos*, (14) and Lieb elaborates on the importance of it as it relates to Dionysus and the cult sacrifices made to him, which often involved the rending and occasional consumption (*omophagia*) of the sacrificial animal or human (14). Thus the physical rending of the body is central to this notion of *sparagmos* (14). The destruction in these rituals is rooted in certain mythical versions of Dionysus’ history in which he is “torn to pieces by the Titans or as the result of Hera’s orders” (15). However, balancing this brutal mutilation of the deity is that these myths present him as being resurrected (15). Here, the regenerative power of *sparagmos* is established. As Lieb puts it, “... destructive violence has the potential for becoming generative violence in a dialectic through which the annihilative and restorative may be seen as counterbalancing and fostering each other” (16). This paradox melds nicely with Milton’s paradoxical approach to the burden of truth, where he declares it to be sorrow laden, but instead

dwells on its potential blessings. In fact Lieb explores this notion of truth, particularly as it appears in *Areopagitica*, with Milton's inclusion of Plutarch's symbolic "portrayal of the myth of Isis and Osiris" (17). Plutarch parallels Dionysus with Osiris, as both share a similar fate (17). Along these lines, the licensing requirement that Milton argues against can be seen as the destruction of the truth, and Lieb explains that Milton uses the Osiris myth, particularly the destruction of Osiris' body, and Isis's subsequent search for its parts as a reflection of the rending of truth, resulting from the efforts of men who seek to enforce licensing (17). Borrowing Milton's own usage to further explore Milton's allegoresis, Lieb writes, "The same may be said of Truth: her physical presence is that of supreme loveliness and perfection. To mutilate and dismember her "lovely form" amounts accordingly to a desecration. It is a rape of the most heinous sort" (18). Lieb seems to draw from Milton's lexicon and equates "supreme loveliness" (beauty) with truth. This loveliness, or truth, can be interpreted as what Milton asserts to constantly seek in his correspondence with Diodati.

But the horror at the desecration and dismemberment of truth at the hands of those who wish to stifle it, ties in well with what I see to be a fear that is both centered in the physical and creative spheres. In other words, what Lieb articulates as Milton's fear of actual physical harm, can be extended to his *corpus*, along the lines of mutability. As mentioned before, Milton constantly expresses a desire for greatness, specifically (perhaps canonical) literary greatness. His aspirations for immortality via the completion of an epic that he playfully expresses to Diodati, prove that he wants to attain lasting influence. But his desires do not go unchecked, as Lieb points out, in that he echoes a fear of ultimate loss and destruction, despite his faith in his own poetic abilities (42). According to Lieb, the fear of *sparagmos* that Milton reveals throughout his *corpus* is based in an "awareness of the fate of the archetypal poet, the Thracian

Orpheus ...” (38). Orpheus, a poet who holds “transcendent and transformative powers,” (39) is ultimately unable to “tame the uncontrolled and overwhelming strength of those whose savagery was too powerful to be contained” (42). Lieb suggests that Milton’s understanding of the *sparagmos* that Orpheus is unable to prevent manifests itself as anxiety over futility (45) and ultimate destruction throughout his body of work (43-44). Lieb uses *Lycidas*, where Milton “... projected himself and his uncertainties onto King as a kind of Miltonic other,” (45) to substantiate his claims. Of course, Lieb does not ignore the fact that the “poet of *Lycidas*” (49) comes to the realization that the pagan world does not offer the regenerative power of *sparagmos* (49) and “learn[s] the fate of Orpheus is to find its fulfillment in that of Christ” (50). I will focus more closely on Lieb’s claim that this separation from the pagan world is better seen in the proem to Book VII, where Milton calls upon Urania for protection from the same fate Orpheus is made to endure (60). It is important to note that the vocational division addressed in *Ad patrem* is still present in the sense that Milton’s poetic desires are not solely intended for the purpose of glorifying God; nevertheless, he remains rooted in his faith and seeks the aid of the Christian muse. The reasons for this sort of “return” to the faith may be many, but one in particular involves Lieb’s argument that Milton is aware of the potential arrogance of his aspirations.

In *Confessions of Faith in Early Modern England*, Brooke Conti, Renaissance literature professor at SUNY Brockport, discusses the problematic nature of autobiography in the polemical and anti-prelatical writings of several prominent English renaissance and neoclassical authors, including Milton. She aims to show that admissions or declarations of faith in multiple Renaissance authors were not as straightforward as they may have intended them to be, due to the authors’ complicated “personal and familial histories” (3). Like Lieb, she takes a historicist approach in connecting the authors’ confessions with the tumultuous sociopolitical atmosphere

of the time. Chapter three begins with Alexander More's criticism of Milton's prose, including his *Second Defence of the English People*. With this particular criticism, More points out that Milton's writing is most vivid and animated when it involves himself, and that his hubristic, idealized self-descriptions are the result of latent feelings of inadequacy and distance from God (77). Conti takes this criticism a step further, suggesting that Milton's feelings of anxiety are not necessarily rooted in "denominational identity or institutional allegiance, but they are still provoked by and dependent on a public audience" (78). In other words, his shifts to autobiography are more worldly than spiritual, and do not reflect standard conventions of spiritual autobiography; however, it would seem that his struggles to "discern his political, spiritual, and literary vocation," (78) are often colored with an uncertainty that forces him to express his faith as a safety measure. Milton's dependence on his audience that Conti addresses, plays in nicely to my belief that his latent anxiety and self-inclusion throughout his works reveals his need for validity and canonical permanence, or as he might call it, "immortality." Conti's criticism also complements Lieb's suggestions regarding Milton's sparagmatic fears, particularly when she asserts, "Instead, Milton's autobiographical passages show a man deeply anxious about both present and future, hoping for great things but half convinced that they will pass him by" (79). In an effort to avoid the Orphean *sparagmos* of his work (for example, in More's criticism) and a possible drift into obscurity, as seen in the tragic fate of Bellerophon, Milton seeks Urania's aid, but as both Lieb and Conti note, he retains doubt.

Lieb suggests that Milton's call to Urania in the proem of Book VII is quite intentional. Urania is a child of heaven and thus associated with the realm of the father that "Milton associates with his own poetic vocation and lineage as epic poet" (62). And so Milton is compelled to seek guidance and protection from Urania, in turn disassociating himself from the

pagan realm. Lieb points out Milton's use of Bellerophon's tragic fall from grace, to signal an awareness of the precarious position that he is at as the epic poet seeking transcendence (66). This incorporation of pagan myth is very similar to Milton's linking of Pegasus with his poetic aspirations in his correspondence with Diodati; however, the tone here is very different from the playful, presumptuous tone in the letter. Like Orpheus, Bellerophon descends to a depth from which he is unable to return, a fate that Milton seeks to avoid. Lieb suggests that Bellerophon is symbolic of Milton's anxiety over the fact that his aspirations might very well be "bordering upon presumption" (66). Considering the monumental, possibly heretical task that Milton has undertaken in "justify[ing] the ways of God to men," (*Paradise Lost*.I.26) this anxiety would likely have been present from the start. Upon his failure, Bellerophon, being blinded and mad, ends up "wandering aimlessly, erroneously, and forlornly on that field of wandering ..." (67). Aside from the similarities in physical hardship that both poets endure (blindness) the image of aimless and erroneous wandering can apply to Milton's work and his legacy if he fails at his attempt of creating this lasting, iconic work. As Lieb notes, Milton "remains painfully aware of what the failure to realize his destination will entail," (67) and so he can be seen as seeking refuge in Urania, fearing the destruction of his work, and the loss of his legacy.

Yet according to Lieb, the anxiety over potential *sparagmos* never leaves Milton (68). Lieb suggests that the proem to book 7 is a transitional point where Milton truly realizes his precarious position as an outsider in heaven, (68) which then prompts him to request reaffirmation of his safety (68). Lieb notes Milton's qualifying of his confidence in lines 25 through 28, suggesting that "their articulation emphasizes the poet's own sense of isolation, his feeling of being surrounded by alien forces that threaten to engulf him" (68). Like Lieb, I equate Milton with the narrator here, and agree that the proem reflects an enduring fear of loss. It might

seem that Lieb embraces a more historicist approach, suggesting that Milton's fear is grounded in sharing a fate of dismemberment, and being turned into a spectacle, like several regicides after the restoration; (79) however, he does prevent this misconception by admitting that a "causal relationship between historical circumstance and poetic creation" (79) is not "established conclusively" (79). I too admit that my own argument, by nature, should not be considered factual, but stems from an attempt at "recreat[ing] Milton's state of mind at the time of composing [Book IX]" (44). I believe that his fear in Book IX is more internally than externally driven. Differing slightly from Lieb, who presents the possibility that the political atmosphere of the time amplified a long held fear of physical mutilation and embarrassment, I feel that Book IX also reveals a Milton (narrator) who is afraid of a similar fate in the creative sphere. Lieb present's Milton at a critical transition point in the proem to Book VII, much like I present Satan (a character I have tried to equate with Milton) at a similar transition point in his soliloquy in Book IX. In addition to this transition point faced by Satan, the narrator faces a major turning point, stylistically speaking, in the proem to Book IX. The similarities in the narrator's and Satan's temporal positions further supports the possibility that Satan and Milton are one and the same in the soliloquy (provided that Milton and the narrator are also one and the same).

Part IV

A Helpless Muse and Milton's Begrudging Return to the Fold

Just as Milton seeks the protection of Urania in Book VII, the narrator invokes the muse, (the same) in the proem of Book IX. In his previous invocations, Milton is both confident and assertive, particularly in the first one, where he explicitly demands:

Instruct me, for thou know's't; thou from the first
Wast present, and with mighty wings outspread
Dove-like sat'st brooding on the vast abyss. (I.19-21)

Here, Milton openly requests inspiration from the muse and is certain of the muse's ability to aid him. Earlier in the invocation he demands that the muse "sing" and he declares his need and purpose openly. (I.6) However, the invocation in book nine reveals a dramatically altered tone.

Milton bitterly admits:

No more of talk where God or angel guest
With man, as with his friend, familiar used
To sit indulgent, and with him partake
Rural repast, permitting him the while
Venial discourse unblamed: I now must change
Those notes to tragic; foul distrust, and breach (IX.1-6)

Milton's diction, particularly in the last two lines, is especially important, as he claims that he must shift his theme of friendship and fellowship between man and God to one involving separation and betrayal. He continues this doleful tone in line twenty, where he wonders, "If answerable style [he] can obtain" (IX.20). Milton's anxiety here can be interpreted as him realizing the limitations that he now has to work with in describing a post-fall world. Now that he has come to the major turning point in the text, certain insurmountable stylistic obstacles have been placed in his way, impeding his creative abilities. The major contributor to these limitations is the permanently damaged dynamic between man and the divine. Milton claims that the familiar intercourse between man and divinity has come to an end, and so he must now change his approach to one that foregrounds betrayal. In writing about the fall itself and the post-fall story, he can no longer include the lengthy, intimate exchanges between man and God. He can

no longer truly describe the divine or Adam and Eve's understanding of divinity as a permanent state of separation has been established between them and God, and thus him as their "descendant." This stylistic limitation is acknowledged in his uncertain request for an "answerable style."

Milton's drastic shift in tone can also be seen as possibly representing his own anguish at having to write within certain established stylistic limitations put in place by a loss of complete access to the divine. Satan claims that he can only find "ease" in destruction. Perhaps Satan's ironic conundrum is also Milton's. Granted, this shift in style is made necessary by the change in subject matter, but this requirement would have created a heightened anxiety all the same. If we consider the time and effort that Milton has invested into the creation of the work thus far, and the attachment that he has developed to the characters and his nuanced style, his impending disunion with said qualities of the work would likely have led to a state of despair. Lieb's belief that Milton's awareness of the consequences of his failure coincides with my argument in that the stylistic shift could have very well dampened the creative brilliance that Milton exhibited up till this point in the text. Whether or not it did is purely a matter of opinion.

Again, Milton lauds his "celestial patroness" (IX.21) who up to this point, nightly inspired him freely (IX.22). As a gesture to the muse, he reveals his "ignorance" in undertaking his task, in the sense that he is neither, "skilled nor studious" (IX.42) in the heroic (*gravis*) subjects of epic. Despite his inexperience in matters:

Of patience and heroic martyrdom
Unsung; or [in] describe[ing] races and games,
Or tilting furniture, emblazoned shields,
Impresas quaint, caparisons and steeds; (IX.32-35),

she has provided him with the ability to articulate these themes. Yet Lieb's argument that Milton's sparagmatic fears (the way I extend them) never disappear, holds true even at this point

in the text, two books after the proem of Book IX. The last four lines of his invocation echo this sentiment. He qualifies his hopeful request and writes:

That name, unless an age too late, or cold
Climate, or years damp my intended wing
Depressed, and much they may, if all be mine,
Not hers who brings it nightly to my ear (IX.44-47).

Again, Milton reveals an awareness of the potential of his presumption, or excessive reliance on his own poetic abilities, and so he admits that his creative abilities may suffer if Urania abandons him at this critical point in the text. But Milton must have understood, that this request, by necessity, would go unanswered, considering the rigidity of the scriptural plot that outlines several details of the fall, and the expulsion of Adam and Eve from paradise.

And so Milton's ultimate rejection of Satan, becomes one that is created not just from Milton's seemingly habitual "return" to faith in moments of self-perceived weakness and vulnerability, but also from an awareness of stylistic limitation. Some would argue that his disassociation with Satan is an intentional display of maturity and genuine submission to the will of the divine. William Kerrigan postulates this notion in his iconic psychoanalytic criticism, *The Sacred Complex: On the Psychogenesis of Paradise Lost*. In chapter four of the text, Kerrigan examines Milton's ability to complete *Paradise Lost* despite his physical limitations, namely his blindness. Supporting Milton's embrace of the *rota*, Kerrigan claims that Milton's blindness coupled with his multiple, preceding familial losses serves as the catalyst for his transition from the treatise, or didactic, to the epic. He states that following his blindness, Milton initially decides to compose his *De doctrina* as a continuation of his "Index Theologicus" in his Commonplace book (128). He links Milton's decision to start the treatise with his second marriage, and thus representing a possible renewed sense of faith in the potential of his future as a writer, despite the obvious political transition in England from commonwealth to monarchy

(128). Kerrigan writes, “If Milton started on the treatise in 1656, as the evidence suggests, he was simultaneously commencing with a second marriage. We do not know whether this was another impulsive union. Its timing might imply that, his theology taking shape, Milton had managed to renew his lifelong intimacy with the future even as the nation devolved toward the old servility of kingship” (128). Here Kerrigan implies that Milton acquired new strength from his state of loss and disillusionment, resulting in his decision to pick up where he left off in his work. He continues this thought by suggesting that Milton’s ultimate decision to transition from treatise to epic was influenced by a similar renewal. Regarding the period of poetic inactivity in Milton’s life and his subsequent embrace of the epic, Kerrigan writes, “The second hiatus of waiting in his life, punctuated by marriage and bereavement, moved towards fulfillment along the line leading from treatise to epic” (128-29). He seems to agree that Milton’s poetic career follows a Virgilian path, in which the transitions are influenced by loss and eventual acceptance.

Kerrigan’s concept of renewal is particularly important in a psychoanalytic approach as he compares Milton’s resurgence to that of the Phoenix (129). Prior to examining this claim it is important to consider the risk involved in Milton’s embrace of epic. How might Milton have transcended the inherent heretical nature of his task of justifying God’s nature? One explanation could be in Milton’s understanding of his blindness. Kerrigan suggests that Milton was grateful for his blindness in that it allowed him to inhabit the role of the blind seer. Milton is required to be a vessel of illumination through access to the divine, granted by his loss. In describing this phenomenon, Kerrigan writes, “We know that blindness for Milton was a sign of artistic power and spiritual favor, linking him to God in proportion as it distanced him from men” (132). Through Kerrigan’s statement, it seems that Milton embraced his blindness. However, as Kerrigan points out, this embrace did not come without initial despair. In the conclusion of the

chapter, Kerrigan points out, “The truth is that in his way he did feel regret and shame for his lot, did discern and endure the anger of God, and for this reason enjoyed his ““fatherly mercy and kindness”” (192). Kerrigan explains Milton’s acceptance of his state as resulting from the development of a sort of superego allowing him to break free of the oedipal relationship he has with God, a relationship made evident through his various treatises, related to the complexities of the Christian faith in relation to humanity, and perhaps in his task of justifying the ways of God. Regarding Milton’s supposed acceptance of his plight and his suppression of the narcissistic ego, Kerrigan writes, “It is in this sense no merely symbolic truth that only the Father can dispense the presence of the Muse. Finding this sense, Milton ended the antagonism between the oedipal father and the narcissistic ego whose symbol was once the paralysis of *Comus*” (181). In paralleling Milton’s literary development to the Freudian approach to a child’s development, Kerrigan seems to be suggesting that Milton’s acceptance of his blindness represents his developed maturity as a writer. According to Kerrigan, Milton may have reconciled with God, despite his earlier reluctance and come to the realization that in order for his piece to have enduring life, he must submit to and internalize God’s providence.

Completely accepting Kerrigan’s assertion that Milton is able to transcend the narcissistic ego and submit to God would require one to place limited value on the constant literary aspirations and expressions of anxiety that pervade Milton’s entire *corpus*, even up to this rather late point in the text and Milton’s career. His entreaties to Urania in Books VII and IX suggest that his inspiration, while associated with the divine, is not quite from the Father. As noted by Lieb and Conti, Milton’s admissions of faith often appear in his moments of heightened awareness and sensitivity to his potential failure. Milton, with limited stylistic freedom, and no help from his “celestial patroness” is arguably forced to disassociate from and condemn the

almost sympathetic Satan he paints for his reader, a Satan that I believe directly reflects the conflicted, canonical bard. The resolve that Satan internalizes in his decision to actualize his ultimate act of defiance, is decidedly similar to (if not the same) resolve which Milton uses to limit the effects of his vocational, spiritual, physical, and creative anxieties, cementing his position as an enduring, canonical Renaissance figure, and the archetype of poetic genius he is considered today.

Concluding Thoughts

Ultimately, after reading through several psychoanalytic criticisms of Milton's work, it becomes apparent that subscribing to any of them becomes subjective, especially considering the speculative nature of such approaches. And so, this piece is not intended to diagnose what appear to be Milton's deep-seated misgivings and psychological distress related to his career, rather it is an attempt at arguing that Milton poetically links himself with Satan in this first soliloquy of Book IX. If my argument is taken as such, then the soliloquy can be read as Milton's attempt for cathartic reflection. Whether or not he achieves this catharsis is impossible to prove, but (what I believe to be) the mirrored resolve of the author and his most controversial and perhaps most celebrated character at this major turning point of the text, allows for a critical approach that makes Milton a more accessible and sympathetic canonical figure. Milton, who seems to be well aware of the great breadth of his creative potential, also appears to be a deeply conflicted individual. From a personal standpoint, reading the soliloquy in this fashion has allowed me to

develop an affinity for and attachment to this monumental work, that otherwise might dictate an inherent level of remove in other readers. Milton's actual intent will likely forever remain indeterminable, and as we know authorial intent does not often have primacy in the development of literary scholarship. But a psychoanalytic reading of this brief portion of the text can shed light on his internal path to the completion of the *rota*, an accomplishment that led to the ultimate triumph of his literary career.

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