

DEATH IN PARADISE LOST

by

LUKE TESDAL

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of
The University of Texas at Arlington in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS IN ENGLISH

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT ARLINGTON

May 2009

Copyright © by Luke Tesdal 2009

All Rights Reserved

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many people who have contributed to the process of writing this thesis. I must first thank Dr. Amy Tigner for her patience and support in what has become a much more time-consuming project than either of us originally envisioned. As the Chair of my thesis committee Dr. Tigner has been an invaluable resource for information about Milton, *Paradise Lost*, and the Early Modern period. I also owe a great debt to Dr. Desiree Henderson whose attention to detail and knowledge of the subject of mortality have shaped both the form and content of my thesis. I am grateful for the keen insight and straightforward criticism of Dr. Kevin Gustafson who refuses to let me settle for anything less than the best I can give. I would like to thank Ruth Gerik and Tray Clough for feigning interest in my topic and for their personal and professional encouragement in the development of my thesis. Finally, I must acknowledge my children, Jeremy and Kaccie, who have put up with their father reading an old book or sitting at his computer instead of playing games on many occasions.

April 15, 2009

ABSTRACT

DEATH IN PARADISE LOST

Luke Tesdal, M.A.

The University of Texas at Arlington, 2009

Supervising Professor: Amy Tigner

This thesis is an examination of the role that death plays in *Paradise Lost*. I argue that Milton's conception of death is a unified presentation of a complex but singular theological idea. My analysis examines the ways in which Milton's construction of death interacts with the traditions and interpretations of his contemporaries and with the theological views he explains in *De Doctrina Christiana*. Essential to my analysis is the connection between the monstrous form that Death takes in his physical appearances and the comforting promise that redemption offers by the end of the epic. These two representations are often viewed as contradictions but I conclude that they are two sides of the same entity.

I make the distinction between personified Death and conceptual death as a method of keeping the two presentations clear; however, I argue that Milton does not present them as separate representations of death but as interrelated and equally valid parts of the fall of mankind. Death's role as evil is intrinsic because of his infernal birth: in Hell as on Earth no good can come from Sin. In Milton's system only the divine mercy of God alters, but doesn't remove, the punishment for transgression.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
ABSTRACT.....	iv
Chapter	Page
1. WHY DEATH MATTERS FOR MILTON.....	1
2. MONSTROUS DEATH.....	12
3. DEATH AND HUMANITY.....	33
4. DEATH AS GOOD.....	49
5. MILTON'S PURPOSE.....	62
REFERENCES.....	66
BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION.....	69

CHAPTER 1

WHY DEATH MATTERS FOR MILTON

Essential to the explanation of the creation and transgression of man, which is Milton's chosen subject in *Paradise Lost*, is the nature of death. Recognizing this, Milton situates his conception within not only Christian traditions but also the larger theological construct that Christianity inherited from classical western civilization. Milton's interpretation of death involves both the condition that man faces after the Fall and the personification of said condition in Death. The importance of death within the epic is relatively evident, but the relation of Death the physical monster to that structure has presented more of a problem for scholars. Since Samuel Johnson called the appearance of Death in *Paradise Lost* "one of the greatest faults of the poem" examinations of death have treated Milton's idea as two distinct representations: the Christian belief in death as the passage to redemption and the monstrous being that is the incestuous progeny of Satan.¹ It is my contention that, despite the seemingly opposite nature of redemptive death and horrid Death, these representations are part of Milton's unified conception of death. Within the context of *Paradise Lost* death is represented in physical, allegorical, and conceptual ways depending on the situation, but using Milton's explanation of death from *De Doctrina Christiana*, his theological treatise, and *Paradise Lost's* own textual evidence I conclude that Milton is elucidating what he understands to be the complete picture of what death means for Christianity. Within this scheme Death must function as part of the physical reality that God and Satan inhabit, as a physical condition enforced as the punishment for sin, and as the point of release to paradise for the redeemed. Although these parts of death have often been ascribed to the differing views Milton had of death as a poet and a theologian, I

¹ Samuel Johnson, *Lives of the English Poets*, (London, 1925), vol. I, p.110.

argue that his poetic and theological motivations find a complex but unified concept in death.² Within Milton's construction of death the physical and ideological aspects are essential for a complete understanding of what death represents for Christianity.

Milton's stated purpose of "justify[ing] the ways of God to men" (l.26) and his chosen subject of the Fall necessitate that the eating of the forbidden fruit is the crux of his construction of death.³ His subject matter is necessarily an amplification of Genesis 3:1-24: "Of man's first disobedience, and the fruit of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste brought death into the world and all our woe" (l.1-3). The account of creation in Genesis is also the story of the advent of death; accordingly, Milton presents the mortal taste, in both the act of eating and in metaphysical property, as the point at which death enters the world. Milton is very clear, however, that Death existed prior to the moment of human sin. As the direct consequence of the actions of Satan, Sin and Death are born into theological reality well before the temptation and the Fall. Despite the horrible monster that is Death's physical manifestation within Milton's theology, after the fall of Man there is no relationship with God but through death; the creation of this paradoxical relationship is one of the central concepts of *Paradise Lost* and an integral part of Milton's religious thinking. The reader cannot have a complete understanding of the epic without following Milton's revelations about the nature of death and how it affects man's relationship with God. I argue that to "justify the ways of God to men" means nothing less than to explain the relationship between man and death within the framework of a just and loving God.

Within this thesis my analysis assumes that Death exists as a physically real entity. The subject of Death's reality was the subject of Philip J. Gallagher's analysis of Milton's conception of Sin and Death as both allegorical and physically real throughout the epic.⁴ Given

² John Erskine, "The Theme of Death in *Paradise Lost*," *PMLA*, 32.4 (1917), p. 573-82.

Philip J. Gallagher, "'Real of Allegoric': The Ontology of Sin and Death in *Paradise Lost*," *English Literary Renaissance*, 6 (1976), p. 317-35.

³ John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Ed. Merritt Y. Hughes. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997).

⁴ Gallagher, "Real of Allegoric," p. 317-35.

the textual evidence, Gallagher concludes that Sin and Death “are consistently real (i.e., physical and historical) throughout Milton’s major epic, their allegorical onomastics notwithstanding.”⁵ Sin and Death play allegorical functions that may be expected in an epic, but for Milton that does not limit their physical reality. Any interpretation of death in *Paradise Lost* must come to terms with this duality; as Gallagher asserts, “Milton expects his readers to accept his accounts as the most literal record of cosmic history available, perhaps even as truth itself.”⁶ Milton envisions himself as truthfully filling in the missing parts of the Genesis story, not as providing his interpretation of the events surrounding the fall. Not every critic agrees with this concept, including noted Milton critic Robert Fox, who argues that “the incest of Satan and Sin is of a different category; it is a myth, an imaginative embodiment of a moral truth, created to parallel the historical account of the fall of man.”⁷ However, both Biblical and societal precedents of inspiration through an agent of God existed in Milton’s time to allow him to believe that he was writing cosmological and theological truth. Not only was inspiration from the “Heav’nly Muse” a legitimate expectation of the saintly, but also Milton assuaged the pain of his lost vision by continuing to labor for God with this “second sight” (I.6). While Gallagher establishes the extent of Milton’s vision of Death, he ventures nothing about the role such a characterization plays in the overall structure of death in the epic. I argue that not only is Death physically real but also inseparable from the depictions of death as the release from Earthly suffering. Despite the seemingly incongruous representation Milton creates in his epic, many critics did not see Death as playing a significant role in Milton’s work; as Cherrell Guifoyle explains, “Death, like the Holy Spirit, has seemed to some of Milton’s commentators a subject in which the poet found little interest and less inspiration,” pointing out that many critics came to a conclusion similar to that of Denis Saurat, who states that Milton thought of death as no more

⁵ Ibid, p. 317.

⁶ Ibid, p. 319.

⁷ Robert C. Fox, “The Allegory of Sin and Death in *Paradise Lost*,” *MLQ*, XXIV (1963), p. 362.

than “a cosmological incident.”⁸ I argue that the evidence in *Paradise Lost* presents a clear and complete conceptualization: not only is Milton’s portrait of death quite complex, parts of his beliefs even arousing accusations of heresy, death itself is central to the poem.

Death is a central concept in Christianity: there is no Christianity without the death and resurrection of the Messiah. By the beginning of the Early Modern period, western attitudes toward death had become an amalgamation of various traditions and customs from the Middle Ages, which overlapped and complimented each other. Christianity, as the primary religion of the time, was intricately connected with social attitudes towards death. Not only had the art of the funerary chapels become staples of western culture, varying from the judgment after death to the macabre, but the church had published various *ars moriendi*, or books about how a good Christian should die, in response to the cultural fear of the afterlife. Early in the Middle Ages death was viewed as an assured waiting for the resurrection and paradise, but as Christians grew less certain about their salvation they sought earthly assurance of redemption through a church regulated “correct” death. The *Ars Moriendi*, or art of dying, is a body of Christian literature that provided practical guidance for the dying and those attending them. According to historian Frances Comper, “These manuals informed the dying about what to expect, and prescribed prayers, actions, and attitudes that would lead to a ‘good death’ and salvation. An English translation of the longer treatise appeared around 1450 under the title *The Book of the Craft of Dying*. The first chapter praises the deaths of good Christians and repentant sinners who die ‘gladly and wilfully’ in God.”⁹ The *Ars Moriendi* were mostly limited to the practical realm; writers assumed the faith of the reader and did not attempt to explain theology. Although many are quite extensive in scope, the *Ars Moriendi* can generally be summarized as an admonishment for Christians to “live in such wise . . . that they may die safely, every hour, when

⁸ Cherrell Guilfoyle, “‘If Shape it Might he Call’d that Shape had None’: Aspects of Death in Milton,” *Milton Studies XIII*, Ed. James D Simmonds, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1979), p. 35-57. Denis Saurat, *Milton: Man and Thinker* (London, 1994), p. 167.

⁹ Frances M. M. Comper, *The Book of the Craft of Dying and Other Early English Tracts concerning Death*. New York: Arno Press, 1977. p. 7.

God will.”¹⁰ Milton was undoubtedly familiar with the cultural traditions surrounding death, but in *Paradise Lost* death is examined on more than just the practical level. While Milton is dealing with death in a different way, his conception of death carries with it many of the ideological precedents of the *Ars Moriendi*.

The dominant theme of death to emerge from the Middle Ages and continue into the Early Modern period is that of commonality. During the early Middle Ages death was considered normal and acceptable in everyday life. Due to gradually changing attitudes, by the time of the *Ars Moriendi* and the macabre art movement, death had become something perceived as foreign to the human condition and a fearful situation. The societal development of the fear of death only reinforces its commonality: everyone must come to this now horrible end.¹¹ Though Christian iconography provided a wealth of resources, Milton did not base his characterization directly from any of the representations in macabre art common in his time. The most prominent representation of death in visual art was the *transi*, skeletal or corpse-like figures in various macabre stages of decomposition. Two of the major conceptions of death to both utilize the *transi* and carry over into the Early Modern period were the Dance of Death, or *Danse Macabre*, depicted in several European churches and manuscripts and the artwork classified under the title “The Triumph of Death.” The Dance of Death is most often led by many *transi*, each leading its living counterpart in the dance. The accompanying dialogue follows the dance’s equalizing function; “[Death] often talks in a threatening and accusing tone, sometimes also cynic and sarcastic. Then comes the argument of the Man, full of remorse and despair, crying for mercy. But Death leads everyone into the dance...Death does not care for the social position, nor for the richness, sex, or age of the people it leads into its dance.”¹²

¹⁰ Comper, *The Book of the Craft of Dying*. p. 9. See also, Beaty, Nancy Lee, *The Craft of Dying: A Study in the Literary Tradition of the Ars Moriendi in England*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1970).

¹¹ Philippe Aries, *Western Attitudes Towards Death*. Johns Hopkins UP: 1975. p. 106-110.

¹² For more information on the Dance of Death see Patrick Pollefys *Dance of Death*, <http://www.lamortdanslart.com/danse/dance.htm>, which displays images from several of the painted and manuscript sources.

Milton's Death undoubtedly shares the same status of equalizer as the many players in the dance: not only religiously through the universal punishment of original sin, but through the indifference of Death to what it destroys. The disregard of social positions is something only Death is able to do and the lesson that everyone dies served a similar function to the *memento mori*. Popular in Milton's time, *memento mori* are reminders to passersby that they are going to die. Ranging from the simple grave marker to the elegant skeletal figures the wealthy could afford to place in churches with their graves, they all served to remind people that death could come at anytime. These reminders of death served several clerical functions; often included were names, heroic deeds, or services to the church. More importantly, however, the *memento mori* often extolled passersby to pray for the souls of the deceased. This interest in caring for the soul of the deceased became widespread as the impression grew that people might be dying "before-their-time." Within Catholic churches *memento mori* were often meant to speed the soul through purgatory and always meant to remind the living of their mortality; Protestantism kept only the latter meaning, but increased the fear of the Last Judgment through absolutist theology. For Protestants like Milton it was even more important to be prepared to die: there was no second chance.

The plague brought an air of immediacy and contagiousness to death that previous generations had not experienced on such a large scale. For a culture so afraid of being found unworthy of salvation, especially those who denied Purgatory, death had become dangerous and terrifying. Although Milton experienced the shocking devastation the original eruption of the plague brought to the Middle Ages through cultural memory, the recurring epidemics and minor plague outbreaks of his own time each threatened a similar fate to his contemporaries. Milton and his readers lived and worked in a society which was intimately familiar with death. As Guilfoyle explains in her investigation into how Milton deals with death, "Milton could not fail to see, in the deaths of his friends, in the wars, and the appalling mortality of the plagues, the

nearness of premature death.”¹³ It is in this troubling time that Milton diverged from the established church’s ideological shift to immediate judgment of the dead. Furthermore, he ascribed to the heretical belief in the resurrection of the physical body. Milton was a mortalist: he believed that both the body and soul die and both are resurrected on judgment day. Milton did not originate this concept, and as Caroline Bynum explains, “Bodily resurrection is one of the three core beliefs of rabbinic Judaism and a tenet in the earliest Christian creeds.”¹⁴ Nonetheless, by the Early Modern period it was heresy to accept bodily resurrection and, in his brief synopsis of the argued origins of Milton’s mortalism, Harry Robins simplifies Milton’s mortalist heresy thus, “The wages of sin is death. Since the transgression of Adam and Eve, man has been totally mortal. He dies body and soul; he remains dead body and soul until the Day of Judgment; he is resurrected body and soul; he is judged body and soul; and he enjoys his reward or suffers his punishment body and soul.”¹⁵ Upon resurrection man’s body is recreated as “an immortal body capable of becoming one with God.”¹⁶ Bynum explains further that “although what survived death immediately was separated soul, soul was not person. Without its body, it was incomplete.”¹⁷ Though Milton set forth this heretical view as a proof against the necessity for purgatory, his view also indicated the level of control that he viewed Death as having over humanity. Man does not die in body alone, nor at all, strictly speaking, but Death destroys both the body and soul and has complete victory over life. This idea had supporters before Milton, evidenced by the decision of the Church of England to include a denial of the death of the soul in article forty of the Forty-Two articles of 1553, but his emphasis on it leads him to include the doctrine as one of the degrees of death outlined in *De Doctrina Christiana*.¹⁸ Although this heretical view does not directly influence the personification of Death,

¹³ Guilfoyle, “Aspects of Death,” p. 41.

¹⁴ Caroline Walker Bynum, “Death and Resurrection in the Middle Ages: Some Modern Implications,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 142.4 (Dec, 1998) p. 589-96.

¹⁵ Harry Robins, *This Be Heresy*, (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1963), p. 145.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* p. 179.

¹⁷ Bynum, “Death and Resurrection,” p. 594.

¹⁸ Robins, *If This Be Heresy*, p. 145.

it is integral in understanding his conception of the victory of the Son and in Death's overall function within the universe. It is no small matter that Milton grants Death power over the soul, even if it is temporary.

Milton was a proponent of personal interpretation of the Bible.¹⁹ He examined and dismissed theories based not on religious or literary tradition but on his own evolving understanding. Milton's views were undoubtedly in continual development, but given the compatibility of *Paradise Lost* and *De Doctrina* he clearly developed a complete working model if not an unshakeable theological system. Although Romans 6:23 states that, "the wages of sin is death," which Milton translates in *De Doctrina* as, "After sin came death, as the calamity or punishment consequent upon it," his explanation of what death means for mankind is much broader in scope.²⁰ There is no doubt that Death is a definite evil, something intricately tied to Sin, but as the punishment for transgression it is also paradoxically something sent by God. How God could use something so seemingly separate from his nature is one of the keys to understanding Milton's intention for the poem, and something that he felt traditional models of Death did not quite capture.

The construction of Milton's own model of death is laid out more explicitly in *De Doctrina Christiana* than in *Paradise Lost*, but the theology was composed concurrently. While some critics assumed that his heretical beliefs presented in the former do not appear in the latter, there is substantial evidence that Milton presents only one theological view.²¹ In *De Doctrina*, Milton uses several chapters to outline his four-degree view of the nature of Death, the first of which is titled "Of The Punishment of Sin."²² The first degree of death, "comprehends all those evils which lead to death, and which it is agreed came into the world immediately upon

¹⁹ Barbara K. Lewalski, *The Life of John Milton*, (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing), p. 120-3.

²⁰ KJV Roman 6:23. John Milton, *De Doctrina*, p. 203.

²¹ Because of the heterodox theology presented in *De Doctrina Christiana* many scholars attempted to deny Milton's authorship when it was recovered in 1823 and published in 1825. For a full argument on the subject see William Bridges Hunter, *Visitation Unimplor'D: Milton and the Authorship of De Doctrina Christiana*, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998.

the fall of man.”²³ The first degree of death is what Adam and Eve experienced immediately upon eating the fruit; the knowledge of good and evil allows for the knowledge of death. The first degree of death is also the state of mortality into which the world and man enters after the fall; furthermore, the first degree allows Death to be the punishment for sin without immediate physical death. According to Milton’s theology, the second degree of death is “spiritual death; by which is meant the loss of divine grace, and that of innate righteousness, wherein man in the beginning lived unto God.”²⁴ The second degree is what necessitates and allows for redemption by the Son: man’s spiritually fallen state can be “regenerated” or “born again” in the sense of being granted new life through the sacrifice of Christ. The second degree of death is also that of Satan and the reader can chart the fading of his divine glory along with the ever-increasing gap between him and God. Milton explains that those who remain spiritually dead continue to increase the punishments upon their heads, “The reason for this is evident; for in proportion to the increasing amount of his sins, the sinner becomes more liable to death, more miserable, more vile, more destitute of the divine assistance and grace, and farther removed from his primitive glory.”²⁵ Spiritual death describes equally well the increasing sins of man, which Adam is shown prior to the expulsion, and the condition of Satan throughout the epic. The third degree is “the death of the body” to which the toil and pain prescribed to man is “nothing but the prelude.”²⁶ Milton is very specific in outlining that this death included the temporal and eternal deaths in response to “those who maintain that temporal death is the result of natural causes, and that eternal death alone is due to sin.”²⁷ A division between these types of death would mean that, had man not fallen, he still would have died temporally: a position that is outrageous to Milton. His inability to allow for the separation of these types of death is also the basis of his

²² John Milton, *De Doctrina Christiana, The Works of John Milton*, Vol. XV, Eds. Frank Allen Patterson et. al. (Mount Vernon, NY: Columbia University Press, 1933)

²³ *Ibid*, p. 203.

²⁴ *Ibid*, p. 205.

²⁵ *Ibid*, p. 209.

²⁶ *Ibid*, p. 215.

²⁷ *Ibid*, p. 217.

mortalist heresy, as he explains, "The common definition, which supposes it to consist in the separation of the soul and body, is inadmissible."²⁸ For orthodox Christian theologians the soul cannot die, but Milton argues that, since the body is merely animated by the soul, it never had life in its own right, and therefore it is the body that cannot truly die. Furthermore, since God damned "the whole man" as punishment for sin both his body and soul must suffer "privation of life" and must be redeemed by Christ.²⁹ The death of the body is what takes on physical form in *Paradise Lost*; the manifestation of Death is given the power to kill man body and soul. No mortal can escape Death, and only those already redeemed through the Son's reversal of the second degree can escape the fourth, the destination of Satan and ultimately Death himself, "death eternal, the punishment of the damned."³⁰ The fourth degree, eternal torment in Hell, is the original destination of all who sin against God. Although the final degree is presented as straightforward in *De Doctrina*, occupying very little of the discussion, *Paradise Lost* specifically deals with this terrifying concept.

While many Christian leaders of Milton's time might have agreed with much of his treatise, Milton's mortalism takes him beyond the realm of orthodox Christianity; as Robins explains, "Milton's mortalism, his belief that Christ and men die body and soul, is contrary to the doctrines of both Catholic and Protestant churches, which postulate that Christ dies in his human nature only and that man's soul is immortal."³¹ What makes mortalism heretical is not simply that the body will rise with the soul; it is that Milton extends these conditions to Christ, who must die completely if he is to atone for the sins of man. For Milton "at the crucifixion, Christ dies in his entire nature, both body and spirit. He does not descend into Hell."³² Though these concepts are not major parts of *Paradise Lost*, they represent a major part in what some

²⁸ Ibid, p. 217.

²⁹ Ibid, p. 217-51.

³⁰ Ibid, p. 251.

³¹ Robins, *If This Be Heresy*, p. 58.

³² Ibid, p. 54. Also see Gordon Campbell, "The Mortalist Heresy in *Paradise Lost*," *John Milton: Twentieth-Century Perspectives*, Vol 4 New York: Routledge Press, 2003. p. 161-164. He argues that the characters in *PL* ultimately reject the doctrine of mortalism.

critics believe is Milton's suppression of his beliefs in the epic. As B. Rajan lays out in his discussion for Milton's heresies, "Milton seems to go out of his way to avoid harassing the reader with his personal beliefs and that in the effort to do so he 'tones down' his heresies as much as he can without becoming dishonest."³³ Rajan might be too quick to accept Milton's appeasement of his audience: it seems more reasonable that his heresies simply pertain to a different area of belief than occupy the majority of *Paradise Lost*. In general, Arnold Stein argues that Milton and his work tend to "show considerable moderation toward the subject of death. As a theologian he seems to have settled his thoughts and to have reserved his best attention and energy for other matters; however, Stein praises, "Milton's resourcefulness in expressing, for particular situations, strong but deliberately limited views of death."³⁴ Rajan argues that Milton's depiction is often poetic embellishment, stating, "Milton holds himself free to supplement, moderate, or modify his beliefs. His reasons for doing so are poetic rather than political; he does not consider *Paradise Lost* as a means of expounding a theological system."³⁵ It is true that *Paradise Lost* is not meant to serve the same purpose as *De Doctrina*; however as Harry Robins concludes in his study of Milton's debt to early Christian writers, "Milton's theology is coherent, philosophically sound, and consistently adhered to in both the treatise and the epic."³⁶ Milton's four degrees of death outlined in *De Doctrina* have explicit correlations in *Paradise Lost*; to argue that Milton was presenting a different or mollifying set of beliefs ignores the evidence of the text. Divorcing Milton's poetry from his theology is neither necessary nor practical, and his poetic development of death serves to augment his theology and not, as Rajan and others argue, to obscure it creatively. What *Paradise Lost* allows Milton to do that *De Doctrina* does not is explain why death functions in the way it does. The apparent paradox of death is among the many things Milton examines in his epic.

³³ B. Rajan, *Paradise Lost and the Seventeenth Century Reader*, (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 19670, p. 23.

³⁴ Arnold Stein, "Imagining Death: The Ways of Milton," *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 30.2, Special Issue: Distinguished Humanities Lectures II (Summer, 1996), p. 77-91.

³⁵ B. Rajan, *Seventeenth Century Reader*, p. 33.

CHAPTER 2
MONSTROUS DEATH

The relationship of death to humanity in *Paradise Lost* is not simple cause and effect; rather what Milton establishes is the ongoing and future interaction with death that man must endure. Milton's construction of the interaction between Adam and Eve, the event that allows Death to enter the world, defines death's relationship to man. The presence of death in the fallen world is ubiquitous and, although upon entering the world, Death is going to largely go "up and down unseen" (II.841), it is the outward signs of death that become Milton's focus. Much of *Paradise Lost* is an explanation of what death means for the humanity, what use men will put it to, and how it fits into God's plan. The beginning of Death's presence on Earth, and the most obvious outward sign is Death's door into the world: the forbidden fruit. As Milton's narrator describes:

next to Life

Our Death the Tree of Knowledge grew fast by,

Knowledge of Good bought dear by knowing ill. (IV.220-1)

The eating of the fruit and the flood of sin immediately after is the central scene of the epic, it accounts for the "Lost" of *Paradise Lost* and death is its result. Adam and Eve's evolving understanding of death, and the reader's parallel course of revelation, capture many of the questions that Milton feels death raises. Milton specifically returns to his doctrine of the four degrees of death when explaining not only the temporal gap between Satan's victory and Death's entry into the world, but also why death is not immediate and, perhaps most importantly, how the Son can conquer Death and not negate God's punishment.

³⁶ Robins, *If This Be Heresy*, p. 2.

In the events leading up to the entrance of Death into the world, Adam and Eve had been warned of death but did not comprehend the nature of their punishment, as Adam reminds Eve:

This one, this easy charge, of all the Trees
In Paradise that bear delicious fruit
So various, not to taste that only Tree
Of Knowledge, planted by the Tree of Life,
So near grows Death to Life, whate'er Death is,
Some dreadful thing no doubt; for well thou know'st
God hath pronounc't it death to taste that Tree. (IV.421-7)

The lack of knowledge of good and evil leaves them ignorant of the nature of death, but they know that it is the "dreadful" punishment for disobedience to God. Whatever their pre-lapsarian conceptions of death were, Adam and Eve conclude that immediately upon tasting the fruit God's sentence would come to pass. In human understanding, which in Raphael's visit with Adam proves to be limited even prior to the fall, the proclamation of God is that eating the fruit will result in death. This interpretation of God's one restriction on man becomes one of Satan's most powerful arguments with Eve. When Satan claims to have eaten the fruit to obtain the power of speech he uses himself as an example of untruth behind God's punishment; not only has he "touch'd and tasted" (IX.687) and not died but he has also gained "life more perfect" (IX.688), both of which he promises Eve should she follow his example.³⁷ Since Eve did not know what it meant to die, only that it is a negative consequence upon eating the fruit, she groups death together with the apparent lack of all consequences on the serpent. The serpent apparently enjoys multiple benefits, not the least of which is the ability to reason and speak, and leaves Eve wondering about the nature of death itself:

In the day we eat
Of this fair Fruit, our doom is, we shall die.

³⁷ Ibid. *Paradise Lost*. IX.687-92.

How dies the Serpent? hee hath eat'n and lives,

...for us alone

Was death invented? (IX.762-7)

Eve clearly states that she is aware of the punishment for eating; however, the serpent's apparent lack of death, or anything that she would interpret as death, becomes one of the final internal arguments she makes to herself before deciding to eat. Unlike Eve, Milton expects his audience to understand the unerring truthfulness of God but, given the condition that man was capable of deciding not to sin, Satan's lie about eating the fruit is not a sufficient explanation of how Eve should have avoided sinning. She could not have expected or anticipated a lie, having no knowledge of sin, and she calls the serpent an "author unsuspect, /friendly to man, far from deceit or guile" (IX.771-2), demonstrating her inability to recognize untruths. Milton would have expected his Christian audience to recognize the faulty argument despite Eve's inability to do so. God pronounced it death for man to eat of the fruit but the animals were not given dietary restrictions: the non-death of the serpent did not prove God's punishment void. While Satan knew that it was death to eat the fruit, he too seems to misunderstand the nature of the punishment, as he plots to himself:

Knowledge forbidd'n?

Suspicious, reasonless. Why should thir Lord

Envy them that? can it be sin to know,

Can it be death

.....

To keep them low whom Knowledge might exalt

Equal with Gods; aspiring to be such,

They taste and die: what likelier can enuse? (IV.515-27)

Satan seems to assume that physical death will be the immediate punishment for eating; nevertheless, he recognizes that both sin and death are tied to the fruit. In assuming God

denies man the knowledge of good and evil for “envy,” Satan not only formulates his argument for Eve but demonstrates his flawed view of the universe.

After Adam and Eve sin the immediacy of death in the world correspond not to the third degree, Death, but to the first two degrees of death: both the necessary condition of mortality and the removal of the divine spirit follow immediately upon the fall. However, Sin and Death remain in Hell for a time after the fall. Their late arrival is important not only thematically, they pave the easy path to Hell, but also theologically: God proclaims, as this thesis returns to later, that the stroke of physical death will not be immediate:

But fall'n he is, and now
What rests, but that the mortal Sentence pass
On his transgression, Death denounc't that day,
Which he presumes already vain and void,
Because not yet inflicted, as he fear'd,
But some immediate stroke; but soon shall find
Forbearance no acquittance ere day end. (X.47-53)

If Death had entered the world immediately after the fall he would surely have employed his “dart” against the most ready prey. Although not physically present, both Sin and Death experience the beginning of their presence on Earth as the event of the fall takes place. God clarifies this apparent lack of death at the moment of the fall, which Adam and Eve initially misinterpret because of Satan’s false promises. It is true that the third degree of death, embodied by Death, is still sitting in Hell even as the first two degrees enter into the world, but this correlation does not mean that the two aspects of death are theologically separate for Milton; one is physically representative while the other is connected to the sinful acts that necessitate death in a metaphysical manner. After all, when Sin feels the fall and Death smells the same event, they are feeling the changes within themselves. The aspects of Sin and Death that enter the world prior to their physical arrival are extensions of their power, not proof of their

conceptual difference. When they do arrive on Earth they are characterized as substantiating the presence they already have there in power:

Meanwhile in Paradise the hellish pair
Too soon arriv'd, *Sin* there in power before,
Once actual, now in body, and to dwell
Habitual habitant; behind her *Death*
Close following pace for pace (X.585-9)

Milton confronts the reader with the physicality of his portrayal of Sin and Death, denying a simply allegorical reading. If they were simply personified concepts they would have already entered the world at the point of the fall and there would be no reason to distinguish their physical arrival.³⁸ Sin and Death were present “in power” at the moment of the fall, God’s sentence of death passed as promised and only later enter the world “in body.” Their entrance also specifically reinforces the rule that Death follows Sin; they are “habitual habitants” and inseparably linked. The dual entrance of Death into the world is necessarily the plan of God who restrains Death’s fatal dart from the moment of original sin.

Although God knows what is going to happen, he does not cause it: death’s entry into the world is undoubtedly an evil resulting from the sins of man; however, Milton places Death’s origins not on Earth but in Hell. Death’s existence in Hell prior to the original sin of mankind reinforces its primarily evil nature and is indicative of Milton’s four-part conception of the nature of death. Despite his immortal status, Satan has “died” in the sense that he is deprived of the presence of God and doomed to the lake of fire; sinners are finally damned in a similar manner though they must also endure other forms of death. Of course it is not in Satan’s fall that Death is created, but in a literal and incestuous birth from Sin, as she describes to Satan:

my womb

³⁸ Philip J. Gallagher, “Real of Allegoric,” p. 317-35.

Pregnant by thee, and now excessive grown
Prodigious motion felt and rueful throes.
At last this odious offspring whom thou seest
Thine own begotten, breaking violent way
Tore through my entrails, that with fear and pain
Distorted, all my neither shape thus grew
Transform'd: but he my inbred enemy
Forth issu'd, brandishing his fatal Dart
Made to destroy: I fled, and cri'd out *Death*;
Hell trembl'd at the hideous Name, and sigh'd
From all her caves, and back resounded *Death*. (II.777-87)

The birth and naming of Death are not simply metaphorical or allegoric; Sin experiences a literal tearing of her entrails. As Gallagher asserts, "Milton's Death is no mere poetic fiction...as the structure of the language indicates, Death, like God's Son, is a *created thing*...along with his mother Sin, he is the literal incarnation of his father's words (*'non serviam'*), a parody of the Word made flesh."³⁹ This violent creation is not only starkly contrasted to the perfect creations of God, but it also represents the final ugly end of Satan's pride. Sin's birth pangs foreshadow the punishment that God gives woman: pain in childbirth. Unlike Sin's body, a woman's womb will heal and return from its temporarily "distorted" shape; however, the "fear and pain" of childbirth was certainly a reality in Milton's time. What permanently distorts Sin's body is the nature of the being that she bears: both Death and his dart are "made to destroy." While it might seem that producing offspring that only God and his Son can defeat is an impressive accomplishment for Satan, the reader must be wary of granting too much power to his situation.

For Milton it is clear that Sin and Satan did not create something that God could not have; the knowledge of Death was always already with God and he chose not to create it. In

³⁹ Gallagher, "Real or Allegoric," p. 323.

order for God to remain blameless in the fall, as Milton maintains he is, he must have no part in the creation of death. Any anticipatory creation of death on God's part would seem like an expectation of original sin as opposed to foreknowledge. It is essential to the conception of death that Milton is building that Death is born as far away from God as possible. Satan does not create Sin or Death as much as he brings them into being through his pride. Similarly, God only allows Death into the world insofar as he gives man the capacity to choose to sin. Therefore, for Milton, the blame for the Earthly presence of Death cannot rest with God, nor entirely with Satan, but must reside with humanity who chose to disobey God's commandment. The freedom of choice is necessarily reinforced by the sinner's creation of his or her own death; God knows what the punishment is but on both allegorical and physical levels sin brings death into being. While many critics attempt to locate a definite single source for Milton's birth of Death, Austin Dobbins points out that, "The view that Sin and Death were devil-begotten was a concept which was expressed frequently by Renaissance commentators."⁴⁰ The creation of Death through the incest of Satan and Sin is only possible after her formation has been completed and the birth of Death is closely tied to how Milton describes the creation of Sin.

Situating himself in conversation with classical representations of cephalic birth, Milton presents Sin as born straight from Satan's head as a direct result of his pride. Milton's readers would have recognized immediately that Athena sprang from Zeus' head in a nearly identical manner. Just as Milton incorporates standard Christian characteristics into his unique representation of death, he is also clarifying the partial truths he sees hidden in pagan theology. Milton was convinced that, "classical myth is a diabolical reworking of biblical history."⁴¹ His depiction of Sin's creation from Satan's head in is an allusion to Greek mythology because it is also the opposite: Milton is correcting the infernally altered account. It is true that the birth and nature of Sin can be traced to several sources: Error in Spenser's *Faerie Queene* (l.i.14-15),

⁴⁰ Austin C. Dobbins, *Milton and the Book of Revelation: The Heavenly Cycle*, (University, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1975), p. 93.9

⁴¹ Gallagher, "Real or Allegoric," p. 318.

the traditional interpretation of Scylla and Glaucus in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (XIV.1-75), and Hesiod's *Theogony* (ll.924-6), all of which can be argued to present precedents for the makeup of Milton's Sin and her relationship to her father.⁴² However, Milton interprets these sources as stemming from historical perversions of the actual birth of Sin; he views himself as writing the accurate account of the true source they imitate. As Gallagher points out, the infernal changes to the original Christian story work out in Satan's favor; in the *Theogony* Athena (Sin) is a virgin and Death "operates as a natural law, not as a consequence of sin."⁴³ While Milton is able, in his mind, to correct Greek mythology's perversion of this incident and at the same time situate himself within classical tradition, it is much harder to find a specific Biblical precedent for Milton's birth of Death other than in James 1.15 which states, "Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death."⁴⁴ Milton's interpretation of this passage incorporates several actions into one complete concept; the mutual lust of Satan and Sin, the "completion" of this act, and Death as the final result. It is Satan's self-love that sparks the incest between the two, much as his prideful self-love lead to the creation of Sin herself. Presumably if Satan had recognize Sin for what she was As "enamor'd" as he might have been in Heaven, Satan has spent much of the time in Hell denying the gravity of the events that took place in Heaven, and nothing demonstrates his selective memory better than forgetting anything relating to Sin (ll.765). Satan discovers, with the reader, that these grotesque characters are his progeny; taken aback, Satan asks Sin:

Why

In this infernal Vale first met thou call'st
 Me Father, and that Phantasm call'st my Son?
 I know thee not, nor ever saw till now
 Sight more detestable than him and thee. (ll.743-7)

⁴² Davis P. Harding, *Milton and the Renaissance Ovid*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1946), p. 95-9.

⁴³ Gallagher, "Real or Allegoric," p. 332.

Though Sin was once outwardly beautiful, the descent into Hell and the birth of Death have disfigured her into something unrecognizable to her own father/lover. Satan finds nothing attractive in her form because, even more than the gradual diminishing of Satan's own brilliance, Sin no longer resembles Satan's heavenly form. Although he is initially disgusted by Sin and Death, Satan quickly learns that these two guard the gate of Hell and that he will not be able to pass without their help.

Sin and Death's position as Satan's jailors brings yet another dynamic to their relationship: Satan immediately moves to manipulate these creatures. In her examination of Sin as a representation of incest victims, Harryette Brown points out that, "After insulting her and attacking her son, he [Satan] quickly turns into a pseudo-charming Petrarchan lover when he finds out who she is and what she can do for him."⁴⁵ Thus, despite his initial reaction, Satan puts his silvered-tongue into action:

Dear Daughter, since thou claim'st me for thy Sire,
And my fair Son here shows't me...
I come no enemy, but to set free
From out this dark and dismal house of pain,
Both him and thee. (II.816-24)

Satan's position as father and Sin and Death's inherent fallen nature, which renders them infinitely corruptible, present him with a means to reach God's newest creation and a weapon against it. Ultimately this meeting not only results in Satan's release from Hell, something which is theologically necessary, but also comprises the creation of an infernal trinity, or anti-trinity, as Austin Dobbins argues in his investigation of the influence of the Book of Revelation on

⁴⁴ James 1.15 (King James Version)

⁴⁵ Harryette Brown, "'Thy Daughter and thy Darling': The Incestuous Relationship of Satan, Sin, and Death in Paradise Lost," *CCTE Studies*, 58 (1993), p. 95-101.

Paradise Lost, "Satan rises to recognize his holy spirit, Death, and to anoint his messiah, Sin."⁴⁶

Dobbins seems to grant Satan an understanding that Milton does not: Satan rising "to recognize" Sin and Death might contradict his initial inability to recognize them (ll.743-7). However, the parallels between the Trinity and this meeting at the gates of Hell clearly demonstrate that Milton does have a direct comparison in mind.

The concept of the infernal trinity simplifies the questions of the origins of Sin and Death; as Robert White points out, "If this is all acceptable, and Satan, Sin, and Death constitute an infernal trinity, reflecting in hell and inversion of the Divine Trinity in heaven, then for an exact model, corresponding in precise detail, one need look no further than the orthodox and generally accepted doctrine of the Trinity as enunciated by Saint Augustine."⁴⁷ Milton's construction of Sin and Death is primarily a creation of an infernal trinity, an assertion that is backed up by a comparison of the two models: "If God has his only begotten Son, his perfect image, in whom he is well pleased, Satan has a beloved daughter, Sin, who is his perfect image. If God can transfer power to his Son, Satan can, adding his conquest, Earth, to Sin and their joint offspring, Death."⁴⁸ As he returns from his victory on Earth, Satan meets them on the road and anoints them to continue his work:

Whom thus the Prince of Darkness answer'd glad.
Fair Daughter, and thou Son and Grandson both,
High proof ye now have giv'n to be the Race
Of *Satan* (for I glory in the name,
Antagonist of Heav'n's Almighty King)...
My Substitutes I send ye, and Create
Plenipotent on Earth, of matchless might
Issuing from mee: on your joint vigor now

⁴⁶ Dobbins, *Milton and the Book of Revelation*, p. 87.

⁴⁷ Robert B. White, Jr., "Milton's Allegory of Sin and Death: A Comment on Backgrounds," *Modern Philology*, 70.4 (May, 1973), p. 337-41.

My hold of this new Kingdom all depends,

Through Sin to Death expos'd by my exploit. (X.383-407)

Although Milton's narrator limits Satan to a prince, Satan clearly sees himself not only as ruling in Hell but now in his "new Kingdom" as a King in opposition to God. By fully embracing the role of antagonist to God, his progeny are almost necessarily mapped against God's Son and Holy Spirit. Although Milton does not embrace the orthodox view of the trinity, his ideas of their relationship follows generally the same purposes; the Holy Spirit is the messenger to the Son and the Father, while it is only through the Son that man may come to the Father. In a further inversion of the Trinity, the head of the infernal family is actually the least powerful. Satan is the messenger that brings Sin, who leads people to Death. Furthermore, power is granted to Sin and Death to form a bridge over Chaos while Satan is forced to fight his way almost helplessly through the currents. Although it is clear that the physical powers of Sin and Death appear greater than Satan's, Satan is unfazed and assumes that their "matchless might" is a trait they inherited from him. The exposure of Earth to Sin and Death reiterates their equally literal and allegorical nature: both as Satan's children through his "exploits" in heaven and through the consequences of human disobedience. God sent his Son and then the Holy Spirit; Satan introduced Sin and then Death.

These theological parallels allow us to build a conception of Death as the complete inversion of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is an expression of God's love and Death is its opposite, as White explains, "Death personifies the lustful union of Satan and Sin; his violence, brutality, and arrogance constitute an inversion of the loving peace of the Holy Spirit."⁴⁹ Since Death is interpreted as the conceptual opposite of the Holy Spirit, it is interesting to note that most scholars agree on Milton's disinterest in the latter, "As a person, the Holy Spirit in Milton's theology is curiously unimportant. When Milton uses the word 'Spirit,' he sometimes refers to the Spirit of God, sometimes to angels who are granted God's Spirit...sometimes to the

⁴⁸ Samuel, *Dante and Milton*, p. 125.

Son...sometimes as a person or entity created by the Son and unequivocally inferior to him, and sometimes as the gifts of that person in the hearts of men.”⁵⁰ Indeed Milton only allots a small portion of *Paradise Lost* to any discussion of the Holy Spirit.⁵¹ Milton may have considered the Holy Spirit unimportant and was content to leave it as a vague concept, as Robins argues, “I do not think that the Holy Spirit exists as a *being* in *Paradise Lost*,” but Milton is deliberate and consistent about the nature of Death.⁵² In the inverted Trinity, Death is the last being to join, but he is the most powerful: the only one to whom the Son will submit for three days. Although not a large factor in Milton’s theology, the Trinity is arguably the closest basis for his conception of Death’s position in creation.

Unlike Milton’s depictions of Satan, Death provides a conceptual challenge: Satan is a fallen angel but Death is another sort of creature altogether. Representations of Satan can base their assumptions off the tarnishing of Lucifer through sin, but Death did not fall from a higher state; it was made, both literally and allegorically, through Satan’s incestual relations with Sin. Milton thought the classic representations of Death were inadequate and his departure from them has become the object of much speculation. Many critics group the origins of Milton’s Death with the existing precedents for his characterization of Sin. Rovang locates Death’s construction in Malory’s *Morte D’Arthur* and in Milton’s subsequent use of Satan as an anti-Aurthurian model, while Steadman says Death comes from St. Basil’s “Sixth Homily on the Hexaameron” and is part of a religious tradition of Sin physically giving birth to death.⁵³ Tatlock argues that the idea of Death’s origin is a “distinctly mediaeval one” though his support is somewhat minimal: similarities in John Gower’s *Mirour de l’ Ommе*, wherein the children of

⁴⁹ White, “Milton’s Allegory,” p. 341.

⁵⁰ Robins, *If This Be Heresy*, p. 50-1.

⁵¹ *Paradise Lost* I.6-26 as a muse to inspire his writing, and XII.484-530 in a reiteration of the Biblical presence and function of the Holy Spirit. Neither use attempts to depart from common scriptural traditions.

⁵² Robins, *If This Be Heresy*, p. 103.

⁵³ Paul R. Rovang, “A Malorian Source for Satan’s Encounter with Death in *PL*, Book 2,” *ANQ* 16.3 (Summer 2003), p. 3-5.

Satan are Mort and Pecche and they in turn give birth to the seven deadly sins.⁵⁴ The pairing of Death and Sin within the epic made investigation into their origins a logical starting point as they are first mentioned together; “Before the Gates there sat on either side a formidable shape” (ll.648-9). These shapes, the reader will come to see, are theologically and dramatically inseparable, but there is no reason to assume that any one source had primary influence over Milton’s characterizations. It was culturally acceptable to picture Death as the physical progeny of Sin. Many Christians would not have given this idea the same literal treatment that Milton manages, but the idea of the infernal family was not Milton’s. What is significant for Milton is the extent to which these familial connections drive the purpose of the epic. The physical reality of Death does not represent an aside to his allegorical functions: the allegorical functions are built upon the foundation of his family relations and his physical existence. Death is physical before he is metaphysical.

Despite Milton’s interpretation of Death as an actual physical being, he resists giving a clear picture of what form Death takes because Death’s form is difficult to picture clearly. Death does not physically resemble either of his parents, nor does Milton follow the pattern of contemporary iconography. If Milton had chosen to rely on precedent, the reader would have been presented with one of the familiar iconic version of Death: the skeleton with the hour-glass, the grim reaper with scythe, or the partially clothed *transi*. While Milton did retain some of the popular thematic elements the physical form of Death retains nothing traditional, as William Engel points out, “Milton selected from among the available iconographic traditions—especially the earlier Renaissance theme of Death as king, which he conflated with the ever-hungry Death, the destroyer...[but] there is no trace of organic imagery associated with Death in *Paradise Lost*: no shreds of bone or flesh, no worm-eaten maw, no vermin slithering in and out of eye-

John M. Steadman, “Milton and St. Basil: The Genesis of Sin and Death,” *Modern Language Notes*, 73.2 (Feb, 1958), p. 83-4.

⁵⁴ John S. P. Tatlock, “Milton’s *Sin and Death*,” *Modern Language Notes*. 21.8 (December, 1906), p. 239-40. The *Mirour* exists in a unique manuscript which was not discovered until 1895 so it does not seem likely that Milton was influenced by it.

sockets.”⁵⁵ Engel is commenting on the absence of the *transi*, the figure of popular macabre art, and presumably Milton’s contemporaries would have been surprised by the same. However, while *transi* are useful within the context of a morality tale about the equal state of all men in the face of Death, Milton is doing more than reminding people of their mortality. Milton has set out to explain the omitted concepts of the Bible and the Death he outlines in no mere allegory. Traditional iconography is insufficient for his purpose primarily because there is no reason to assume that Death, which comes equally for all things on Earth, would have any direct correlation to the appearance of man. Assuming that Death resembles a man who once lived reveals that these interpretations are necessarily human interpretations, the creation of an opponent for himself, and not as the monster born from Sin that Milton believes the Bible implies. Despite his conception in Heaven, Death is the first being born in Hell and, destined to rule there, seems to absorb his physical characteristics from it. Hell is a place “as one great Furnace flam’d” but rather than light the flames emit “darkness visible” (l.62-3). Amidst this realm of darkness reflecting on darkness the form of Death stands out:

If shape it might be call’d that shape had none
Distinguishable in member, joint, or limb
Or substance might be call’d that shadow seeme’d
For each seem’d either; black it stood as Night. (ll.666-70)

Death stands out as a mass of blackness even in the darkness of Hell: the limits of his form almost indistinguishable from the substance of Hell itself. Engel points out that Milton’s narrator is describing Death as much in terms of what one cannot tell about it as what one can.⁵⁶ Uncertainty is equally Milton’s admission that man is incapable of fully understanding the form that Death takes and his establishing Death as something other than traditional *transi* models. He explicitly describes the lack of “member[s], joint[s], or limb[s]” to emphasize how inhuman

⁵⁵ William E. Engel, “The Experience of Death and Difference in *Paradise Lost*,” *Milton Studies*, 28 (1992) p. 185-210. Also see Michael Neill, *Issues of Death: Mortality and identity in English Renaissance Tragedy*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997.

Death is. Milton is distancing himself from tradition by constructing a Death that is much more complex than an enemy to man. Throughout the epic, Death's physical form is not described in human terms; he is a "monster" (II.675), "Goblin" (II.688), "hellish Pest" (II.735), "that Phantasm" (II.743), the "black attendant" (VII.547) of Sin, and the "Sin-born Monster" (X.594). Death is more a presence than present even when physically embodied: Milton's narrator cannot discern what "substance," if any, comprises the body of Death. By representing Death physically as a horrible monster Milton is unabashedly explaining the evil that Death embodies.

Although Death exists in a physical form that almost defies description, Engel points out that Death is "accorded his traditional and identifying props of the 'deadly dart,' a crown, and late his 'Mace petrific'—which is both a tool for building the highway to earth and a symbol of his dominion."⁵⁷ Although Death is devoid of such easily describable appendages as a head and hands, he does retain the symbols of power that tradition, especially Triumphant Death, affords him. Much to the consternation of Satan, these regalia anoint Death as the ruler of Hell. As Death boasts to Satan during their confrontation, "I reign King, and to enrage thee more, Thy King and Lord" (II.698). It seems only natural that a being born as the ruler of a place of eternal darkness would exemplify those characteristics in his own form. Furthermore, not assigning limits to Death's "shape" allows for physical and metaphorical expansion as Death will consume everything that will live on Earth.

Among the various characteristics of Death, gluttony is the most indicative of his position in the creation scheme and stems directly from Milton's portrayal of Death's form as limitless. Furthermore, his gluttonous nature is a cornerstone of Milton's portrayal of Death as an evil used for good. Though upon his birth Death is immediately associated with lust--when he rapes Sin, she describes him as "more, it seems, /Inflam'd with lust than rage" (II.791-2)-- Death's most potent characteristic is gluttony. Death's gluttony is directly described by God, Sin, Satan, and Death itself while many of its other aspects are left to Milton's narrator. As

⁵⁶ Engel, "Death and Difference," p. 188-9.

Guilfoyle points out, "In action, Death, the son of Sin, personifies first lust and then, more significantly, greed."⁵⁸ Fox is more specific, arguing that Milton represents lust and gluttony released from the original sin of pride as Sin and Death.⁵⁹ Among Sin's many sinful traits lust is prominent, but it by no means defines her. Death, however, is undoubtedly gluttonous. Milton is working within Christian tradition and transposing one of the Biblical traits of Hell onto the character of Death; Isaiah 5:14 reads, "Hell hath enlarged herself, and opened her mouth without measure." Milton has already demonstrated that Death can enlarge himself, but his gluttony seems to extend even beyond that. While it makes sense that gluttony follows lust, as Guilfoyle explains, "Greed, the intestinal appetite, is for Milton the sin that can best illustrate, and to some extent subsume, the other deathly appetite of lust,"⁶⁰ Death's interaction with Sin is not a simple cause and effect relationship. Gluttony might follow lust, but Death desires to overtake and destroy Sin, as Sin explains:

Before mine eyes in opposition sits
Grim *Death* my Son and foe...
And me his Parent would full soon devour
For want of other prey, but that he knows
His end with mine involv'd. (II.804-7)

The reader might assume that the evil designs of both Sin and Death, or their familial relations, would prompt Death to not destroy Sin but only their mutually assured destruction keeps Death at bay. Death longs to devour Sin, as his offspring do, "for want of other prey," and he is indeed "half-starved" in Hell, but his reactions to the feast on Earth do not indicate any mollification of hostility towards Sin; the prey on Earth is only a temporary distraction and in the end Sin must also die. When Satan assures Death of a feast on Earth, his reaction is that of a slave to appetite, not one of satisfaction:

⁵⁷ Ibid. p. 190.

⁵⁸ Guilfoyle, "Aspects of Death," p. 36.

⁵⁹ Fox, "The Allegory of Sin and Death," p. 364.

There ye shall be fed and fill'd
Immeasurably, all things shall be your prey.
He cease'd, for both seem'd highly pleas'd, and Death
Grinn'd horrible a ghastly smile, to hear
His famine should be fill'd, and blest his maw
Destin'd to that good hour. (II.843-8)

Death's "famine" represents his want or desire to consume, a need he feels so primordially that it prompts his "ghastly smile." The reader recognizes in that smile Death's singular desire to be "fill'd immeasurably" and, unable to satisfy himself in Hell, Death relishes Satan's promise that he will have free reign on Earth. Death's desire simply to be filled, as opposed to delighted by what he is eating, is indicative of Death's indifference to what he destroys.

Death's constantly "half-starved" status allows him to fit equally well into the plans of Satan and of God, and become, as I explain later in this thesis, the agent by which both affect the future of mankind.⁶¹ Although Sin and Death agree to control Earth in Satan's absence, the reader finds that Death is an opportunist and has not simply enlisted to do the bidding of Satan. Death is self-aware of his singular motivational force and his response to Sin's pleasure at their arrival on Earth reveals it:

To mee, who with eternal Famine pine,
Alike is Hell, or Paradise, or Heaven,
There best, where most with ravin I may meet;
Which here, though plenteous, all too little seems
To stuff this Maw, this vast unhide-bound Corpse. (X.597-601)

Death is indifferent to location as long as he can attempt to satisfy his admittedly "eternal" hunger. This passage is similar to Satan's pronouncement that he carries Hell within himself because he is equally separated from God no matter where he goes; Satan cries out, "Me

⁶⁰ Guilfoyle, "Aspects of Death," p. 36.

Miserable! which way shall I fly/ Infinite wrath, and infinite despair?" (IV.73-4) While Satan's passage is marked with personal torment and even pangs of regret, Death does not feel separated from God because he did not fall from grace. He knows nothing of Heaven; since his creation Death has been sitting within the gates of Hell without anything to satisfy his hunger. Satan easily sways Death from his adversarial position because appetite is Death's sole motivation. Satan plays into Death's gluttonous nature to convince him to go to Earth:

there ye shall be fed and fill'd

Immeasurable, all things shall be your prey. (II.842-3)

Satan interprets Death's willingness to go as the recognition of paternal control and obedience but Death does not care about Satan's designs for revenge. When he explains that the best place for him is where he will find the most "ravin," Death is not simply repeating Satan's idea of damnation despite location, but explaining to Sin that he does not view himself as a follower of Satan. Neither, of course, does he feel himself to be God's servant: Death follows nothing but the impulses of his appetite. Although Death is undoubtedly the enemy of man, the physical embodiment of the punishment for sin, Milton does not categorize him as Satan's subordinate. Death is convinced to leave the Gates of Hell because of the promise of a feast not because he is loyal to his progenitor. Although Death has arrived in the world to destroy man, it was mankind itself that sinned and lured him there. It was the sin of man that created the "scent" (X.267) that prompts Death to join in the building of the bridge to Earth. Death is drawn to Paradise by "the smell/ Of mortal change on Earth" (X.272-3), and not, as is Satan, by a direct desire to destroy the works of God. Therefore Death's glee at devouring the world is a result of his hunger, not hatred of man or defiance of God. Death's position as inherently evil but relatively neutral in the scheme of the battle for souls allows him to be the tool that both God and Satan use to work their ends for mankind.

⁶¹ Milton, *Paradise Lost*, X.595.

Death's description of his intentions on Earth, "To stuff this Maw, this vast unhide-bound Corpse," reveal the voracity of the enemy that man has brought upon himself. Death is not simply going to eat life, to do so would be much too simple and natural; his appetite is such that he intends to satisfy himself not with the quality of what he devours but the quantity. Sin is eager to follow Satan's will and, speaking to Death "season him thy last and sweetest prey" (X.609), but Death's motivation is purely quantitative. Death will never know satisfaction: his "vast unhide-bound Corpse" eternally pining for more to devour. His "maw" carries the double meaning of both mouth and stomach, neither of which will cease to destroy until Death's end. Although Sin and Satan are happily disobedient to God and the adversaries of man, Milton's Death identifies himself as allied only to his hunger. When Adam is shown the lazar-house of Earth's future, which I will return to later, Death is standing triumphant over those who, most like him, suffer agonies created by their ungoverned appetites (XI.466-546). Milton did not originate the idea of the gluttonous guardian of Hell; Robert Fox points out Dante had a similar figure, "Not only is Cerberus himself a gluttonous monster, he is the guardian of the third circle wherein the gluttons are undergoing punishment."⁶² Milton's addition to the archetype is making Death aware of his own condition. Gluttony was an established trait of Death; however, in *Paradise Lost* Death is not motivated by hatred for man but by the "vastness" of his stomach. Death appears easily swayed from his adversarial position to Sin, indeed he seems gleeful to follow Satan and defy God command to guard hell, because his gluttony knows no bounds. The correlation between gluttony and Death is one of the traditions that Milton preserves with only a few changes.⁶³ The evidence of this trait in existing Christian traditions would have reinforced

⁶² Fox, "The Allegory of Sin and Death," p. 357.

⁶³ Hymn XXXV of *Ephraim Syrus: The Nisibene Hymns*, is one Christian precedent, its sixth verse reads, "Gluttonous Death, lamented and said, I have learned fasting, which I used not to know; lo! Jesus gathers multitudes, but as to me, in His feast a fast is proclaimed for me. One man has closed my mouth, mine who have closed the mouths of many. Hell said I will restrain my greed; hunger, therefore, is *mine*: this Man triumphs as at the marriage, when He changed the water into wine, *so* He changes the vesture of the dead into life."

Milton's belief that gluttony is Death's main characteristic, and that this unbound hunger plays a role in the divine plan that God creates for death.

The desire to devour the world takes up much of the description of Death, much more than any of his other characteristics, and even warrants an epic simile in the Homeric tradition:

Such a scent I draw

Of carnage, prey innumerable, and taste

The savor of Death from all things there that live...

So saying, with delight he snuff'd the smell

Of mortal change on Earth. As when a flock

Of ravenous Fowl, though many a League remote,

Against the day of Battle, to a Field,

Where Armies lie encamp, come flying, lur'd

With scent of living Carcasses design'd

For death, the following day, in bloody fight.

So scented the grim Feature, and upturn'd

His Nostril wide into the murky Aid,

Sagacious of his Quarry from so far. (X.267-81)

From across Chaos, sitting at the gates of Hell, Death perceives the fallen state of the world as he is granted the ability to destroy it. Within Milton's theology, the first degree of death and the quality of mortality, is interpreted by Death as a palpable smell. The interpretation of mortality through the senses and not intellectually reinforces his gluttonous nature. If Death had felt or intuited the change on Earth, as Sin says she felt it, then he would be more directly linked to Satan's designs, sensing Satan's victory, but Death is ultimately God's tool, which I return to later, to clean up the filth of the world and responds accordingly. The smell of sin in the world is equally the source of Satan's joy at Death's eagerness and the fulfillment of God's plan. Furthermore, his reaction is to "all things there that live" and not, as Satan might have

emphasized, to the mortality of humanity. To this point in the epic, Death has not been granted any facial feature except a mouth, but the perception of his prey allows Milton to grant him a nostril comparable to the carrion birds that are drawn to battles. It is impossible to discern if other beings in the cosmos are affected by the stench of mortality; Sin feels the victory of Satan within her and heaven already knows it is going to happen (X.243-7, III.92-4). The stench is that of sin, as Sin explains she intends to “season” (X.609) mankind for Death’s consumption.

CHAPTER 3
DEATH AND HUMANITY

The monster Death is undoubtedly evil and the conditioning of sin opens the Earth to his influence. In the actions of Adam and Eve during and after the fall, Milton presents further evidence of the direct tie of the perceptible condition of mortality to Death. The taint of mortality on Adam and Eve seems to grant them insight into the nature of Death; as they contemplate suicide to avoid their fate, they describe him:

So Death

Shall be deceiv'd his glut, and with us two

Be forc'd to satisfy his Rav'nous Maw. (X.989-91)

Though they do not yet know Death, yet they accurately describe him, just as Death had not seen Earth but is already slaving over the prey there. It would seem that gluttony is not only a major component of Death but that the realization of humanity's "seasoned" nature allows Adam and Eve insight into the nature of "the destroyer."⁶⁴ The act of eating the forbidden fruit also ties humanity to the gluttonous nature of Death. Although the text of *Paradise Lost* clearly states that Eve was "yet sinless" (IX.659) prior to her conversation with the serpent, in the fatal moment she decides to eat she immediately participates in the gluttony that represents Death:

Greedily she ingorg'd without restraint,

And knew not eating Death: Sate at length,

And hight'n'd as with Wine. (IX.791-2)

Eve was both "eating Death" and eating like Death, devouring the fruit "without restraint" mirroring the way Death will devour man with the same abandon. The Fall through the act of eating had a large impression on the early church fathers, including Tertullian (AD 230) and

⁶⁴ Engel, "Death and Difference," p. 190.

Nilus (AD 430), who “argued for gluttony as the first sin.”⁶⁵ As a glutton Eve takes on the characterization of Death, as Arnold Stein observes, “The greedy eating echoes and anticipates the monster Death and his almost unbounded hunger.”⁶⁶ Equally as importantly, however, Eve does not notice the moment of mortality, an event so powerful that Sin and Death perceive it from Hell, and neither does she notice the separation from God to which she is now subject. Eve does not perceive her newfound corruption; however, Milton lets the reader know her imperceptions are due to the sin of eating the fruit which has left her “hight’n’d as with Wine.” With her sense of reality thus impaired, Eve’s mind is separated from the divine spirit by in the second degree of death and succumbs to all nature of sins.

Certainly by the time she decides that Adam must share her fate, whether good or ill should result, she is no longer thinking righteously. It is a rapid progression from being sinless to deciding what Adam’s fate will be, and it is at this point that death first enters the human heart. The “wisdom” that Eve receives from the Fruit allows her to briefly believe that God might not have noticed her sin; however, just in case God finds her out, she comes to this conclusion:⁶⁷

This may be well: but what if God have seen,
And Death ensue? then I shall be no more,
And *Adam* wedded to another *Eve*,
Shall live with her enjoying, I extinct;
A death to think. Confirm’d then I resolve,
Adam shall share with me in bliss or woe:
So dear I love him, that with him all deaths
I could endure, without him live no life. (IX.826-33)

⁶⁵ Ann W. Astell, *Eating Beauty: The Eucharist and the Spiritual Arts of the Middle Ages*, (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2006), 28-29.

⁶⁶ Stein, “Imagining Death,” p. 79.

⁶⁷ Milton, *Paradise Lost*, IX.810-5.

Of course, living without him is no longer the problem; it is whether he would be content to live without her, and she does not think he needs to find out. As C.S. Lewis argues in his *Preface to Paradise Lost*, “I am not sure that critics always notice the precise sin which Eve is now committing, yet there is no mystery about it. Its name in English is Murder. If the fruit is to produce deity Adam shall have none of it: she means to do a corner in divinity. But if it means death, then he must be made to eat it, in order that he may die—for that reason and no other.”⁶⁸ Eve has decided that Adam should share her death, but despite Lewis’ assertion this is not properly murder; though corrupted by her fallen reasoning, her motivation is still ostensibly love. The reader is able to see that Eve is motivated out of jealousy, but she seems unaware of any sinful change within herself. Her new sinful logic is one of the most compelling instances of human relations to death in the epic even if Milton does not dwell on it; indeed Adam is so willing to die with her that she does not have to press the issue much with him. However, the reader clearly knows that she is lying when she assures Adam of the fruit’s benefits:

Were it I thought Death manac’t would ensue
This my attempt, I would sustain alone
The worst, and not persuade thee, rather die
Deserted, than oblige thee with a fact
Pernicious to thy Peace...but I feel
Far otherwise th’ event, not Death, but Life. (IX.977-84)

Despite her words to Adam, Eve is motivated out of the fear of Death and specifically of being killed and replaced. Her assurance to Adam that she would “sustain alone” the punishment of death is directly opposite of the true reasons she compels him to eat. What she has “resolved” only moments earlier is to be sure that Adam dies with her if whatever consequence results. In her sin Eve has taken on Satan’s silver-tongue, presenting half-truths, and assuring Adam that God’s promise of death is void. Although at this point she is still unaware of the spiritual death

⁶⁸ CS Lewis, *Preface to Paradise Lost*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1946). p. 121.

she has incurred and the physical death she is now subject to, her argument that if she “thought Death menac’t” she would not offer him the fruit is clearly contrary to the conclusions she reaches only a little more than a hundred lines earlier. The parallels between Eve’s eating of the fruit and Death’s hunger are indicative of her transgression, but her willingness to inflict death upon Adam is the most chilling sign of her fallen state. Eve has become an agent of death, much like the future generations of sinful man will be. Through her sin, death enters into her as much as it enters into the world.

When Eve comes to Adam with fruit in hand she has a much more compelling argument than that one Satan used on her. She is no mere animal who has eaten and attained speech; Eve is Adam’s helpmate, a being made from his rib, and she is alive despite eating the fruit. Furthermore, Eve is able to lie to Adam about her motivation for giving him the fruit, and he has no reason to doubt that she is motivated by love. Despite these extenuating circumstances, Adam is not deceived. Milton is very deliberate in pointing out that Adam is deceived by neither the logic of the serpent, nor Eve’s promise of a more perfect life after eating the fruit:

How art thou lost, how on a sudden lost,
Defac’t, deflow’r’d, and now to Death devote?
Rather how hast thou yielded to transgress
The strict forbiddance, hot to violate
The sacred Fruit forbbi’n! some cursed fraud
Of Enemy hath beguil’d thee, yet unknown,
And mee with thee hath ruin’d, for with thee
Certain my resolution is to Die. (IX.900-7)

Eve might lie about the “Life” that the fruit has brought her, but Adam immediately recognizes that she is “lost, how on a sudden lost.” Adam is able to recognize that she is “now to Death devote,” though if this is an outward sign or a reasoned conclusion is not explained. Adam goes from the realization that Eve is doomed to the decision that he will share her fate within the span

of a few moments and, in doing so, he echoes Satan's decision "Evil be thou my Good" (IV.110), when he says:

However I with thee have fixt my Lot,
Certain to undergo like doom; if Death
Consort with thee, Death is to mee as Life. (IX.952-4)

Adam correctly identifies the situation; Eve has been tricked into eating the forbidden fruit, but, beyond that, his faculties fail him, bringing him to the fatal conclusion and dooming mankind. When Eve assures Adam that what ensues is "not Death, but Life," he is not deceived and he realizes that she is "ruin'd;" his decision to eat aligns him not only with Death but with Satan as he willfully brings damnation upon himself. Eve's transgression was the primary one, but Adam, who eats comprehending the consequences, is more culpable:

She gave him of that fair enticing Fruit
With liberal hand: he scrupl'd not to eat
Against his better knowledge, not deceiv'd. (IX.986-99)

Once he has fallen, he mirrors Death's gluttonous nature just as Eve had; however, in an allusion to Death's infernal birth, Adam initially experiences this appetite as lust. As momentary for Adam as lust was for Death, it soon abates and he realizes the gravity of the situation; he begins to think seriously about death and much like Eve his initial examination is almost entirely self-centered. Adam vacillates between lamenting his newly-mortal position and accepting a quick and painful death in order to escape his fallen state and the pain of separation from God. Unlike Eve, Adam almost immediately feels the spiritual separation from God of second death. Adam's laments on the nature of death provide an instance for Milton to present his mortalist ideas in *Paradise Lost*; Milton's belief that men die body and soul does not arise until men can die. After the fall and judgment but before the conversation with the angel and the promise of salvation, Adam attempts to figure out what death will mean for him:

Yet one doubt

Pursues me still, lest all I cannot die,
Lest that pure breath of Life, the Spirit of Man
Which God inspir'd, cannot together perish
With this corporeal Clod; then in the Grave,
Or in some other dismal place, who knows
But I shall die a living Death? O thought
Horrid, if true! yet why? It was but breath
Of Life that sinn'd; what dies but what had life
And sin? the Body properly hath neither.
All of me then shall die: let this appease
The doubt, since human reach no further knows.
For though the Lord of all be infinite,
Is his wrath also? be it, Man is not so,
But mortal doom'd. How can he exercise
Wrath without end on Man whom Death must end?
Can he make deathless Death? (IX.782-98)

As far as Milton is concerned, Adam correctly identifies the different parts that comprise man: body and soul. Furthermore, he realizes that the "clod" never had life and only the soul that animates the body can die. What Adam does not yet realize is that both the "living Death" and the "deathless Death" are both entirely possible and the original punishment for sin. The living death is the horror of living in a sinful world apart from God's presence. The deathless Death, or the fourth degree of death, is eternal punishment in Hell; the place where God indeed exercises "wrath without end." Rajan points out that the reader need not trust Adam's explanation of Milton's mortalist heresy, as "It occurs after Adam's fall and before his repentance. Consequently, it can be taken to represent the product of and understanding that

is both degenerate and unredeemed by grace. Adam in other words can say what he likes and the audience would accept it as post-lapsarian folly.”⁶⁹ Milton may have couched his more volatile theology in uncertain terms to keep religious critics at bay, but Adam’s fallen understanding still allows him to intuit the existence of hell, where “deathless Death” is a reality despite the eventual conquering of Death by the Son; therefore, the reader need not dismiss Adam’s mortalist conclusions altogether either, especially as they mirror Milton’s own. Adam’s distinction between the spirit of man and the body of man, the first inspired by God and the second made from clay, is the same one Milton makes when he argues that the soul must die. Adam does not specifically mention sleeping until the Day of Judgment, but his assumption that the spirit shall follow the body into the grave implies a similar idea. At this point in the narrative Adam does not enjoy the assurance of redemption from eternal punishment and he responds with understandable trepidation when he considers the possible eternal consequences of what he has done.

The first two degrees of death in Milton’s theology immediately enter the world even while Death remains at the Gates of Hell until he physically enters the world some time after the victory of Satan. Both the first degree of mortality, or that which “comprehends all those evils which lead to death” and the second degree of spiritual death are evident in the actions and reactions of Adam and Eve to their fallen state.⁷⁰ The Bible ascribes only one sin to Adam and Eve, disobedience, but Milton quickly has the two people closest to perfection in history contemplating some of mankind’s worst sins. Their mutual fate is no source of solidarity: Adam is quick to point out to Eve that he “might have liv’d and joy’d immortal bliss, /Yet willingly chose rather Death with thee” (IX.1166-9). With this initial animosity as a building block, they fall deeper into despair about the nature of mortality. As Davies points out, they seek the answers to questions that are still being asked, “Milton’s reflections on death, as immediately focused upon the fall of Adam as they are, nevertheless remain many-faceted and extend into the wider

⁶⁹ B. Rajan, *Seventeenth Century*, p. 28.

crises and self-questionings of man and women. He puts into Adam's mouth words that many others have uttered or entertained as painful thoughts."⁷¹ When Adam asks, "why should all mankind for one man's fault thus guiltless be condemn'd" (IX.822-3), the reader recognizes a question passed down through Christianity. Milton does not answer Adam's questions by divine proclamation but allows Adam to reason out many of his answers. In this instance Adam intuits original sin rather quickly, admitting that nothing can issue from him but corruption.⁷² No escape exists for any life that is brought into the world after death has control. Realizing that all their progeny must pay for their transgression, they demonstrate both their flawed reasoning and their new familiarity with conceptual death by contemplating suicide. Together, Adam and Eve demonstrate the same sort of breakdown in thought that allowed Eve to assume her intentions in giving Adam the fruit were motivated out of love. Their contemplations of suicide are ostensibly motivated out of love for the future generations: if their progeny are to be damned it would be better to not bring them into existence. It is Adam who first considers the problem:

O voice once heard
Delightfully, Increase and multiply,
Now death to hear! for what can I increase
Or multiply, but curses on my head. (X.729-32)

Although he has already broken one commandment, Adam realizes that the heavenly command to "multiply" indicates that they are designed to do so. But it is Eve who considers and dismisses remaining childless, eventually coming to the worst conclusion possible:

If care of our descent perplex us most,
Which must be born to certain woe, devour'd
By Death at last...
That after wretched Life must be at last

⁷⁰ Milton, *De Doctrina*, p. 203.

⁷¹ Douglas J. Davies, *A Brief History of Death*, (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), p. 94-6.

⁷² Milton, *Paradise Lost*, X.824-5.

Food for so foul a Monster, in thy power
It lies, yet ere Conception to prevent
The Race unblest, to being yet unbegot.
Childless thou art, Childless remain: So Death
Shall be deceiv'd his glut, and with us two
Be forc'd to satisfy his Rav'nous Maw.
But if thou judge it hard and difficult...
Then both ourselves and Seed at once to free
From what we fear for both, let us make short,
Let us seek Death, or he not found, supply
With our own hands his Office on ourselves;
Why stand we longer shivering under fears,
That show no end but Death, and have the power,
Of many ways to die the shortest choosing,
Destruction with destruction to destroy. (X.979-1006)

The reader recognizes once again Eve's ability to describe the "monster" of Death despite not seeing him; the knowledge of good and evil is specifically the knowledge of Death. Wanting to deny Death his "glut" of their now "unblest" race, Eve first asserts that they can simply remain childless. Eve concedes that remaining childless might be "difficult" and thus concludes that the best way to "free" themselves and their posterity is to "seek Death." Much like Adam's earlier desire to be simply unmade, the pair contemplate escape more than repentance. To ask forgiveness does not even cross their mind until it is offered by the Son. Their contemplations of self-murder reinforce just how quickly Death follows after Sin; furthermore, as they fall deeper into sin their embrace of death becomes more prominent. Here Eve is able to describe Death as if she had heard Satan's offering of the world to Death's appetite. The presence of death is a growing feeling within Adam and Eve; with this knowledge, Eve takes Adam's willingness to die

and his complaints about the slowness of his execution a step further and argues that they should be the agents of their own destruction. Not only should they choose to die, she asserts, but she has figured out “many ways” to perform said action.

The rapid degeneration of her once-perfect mind into something so obsessed with death is not simply womanly weakness: despair allows for the flawed logic of sin to seem reasonable. While Milton does place the first murderous thoughts and the first suicidal thoughts in Eve’s mind, Adam proves to have been thinking along the same lines. Adam does not even oppose suicide on moral grounds; instead he realizes that God’s punishments can and probably would extend after death.⁷³ Though they initially argue that their intentions are selfless Adam’s response demonstrates their true allegiances:

much more I fear lest Death
So snatch will not exempt us from the pain
We are by doom to pay; rather such acts
Of contumacy will provoke the Highest
To make death in us live. (X.1024-8)

Just as Eve decided Adam would “share with [her] in bliss or woe” so the pair together decide that they are unwilling to risk eternal punishment to save their “unbegot” race. As Erskine points out, they are no longer thinking of their responsibilities to the rest of mankind, “We sometimes fail to observe that whereas Adam and Eve before the fall represent the whole race allegorically...after the fall they are two individuals, suffering the consequences of a particular sin which they alone committed, and representing the race not allegorically but poetically.”⁷⁴ Though Adam and Eve will beget the rest of humanity, their attempt to escape punishment was motivated out of fear for themselves. They continue in self-pity until the Son, who has come to explain their punishment, promises revenge upon the serpent through their children. Though

⁷³ Ibid. X.1025-8.

they have not yet been told about God's decision to redeem them from Sin, Adam picks up on revenge against Satan as a reason to live on, however miserable they may be.⁷⁵ Revenge on the agent of their destruction is some comfort to people facing "a long day's dying to augment our pain" (X.962-4), but it is not exactly a reason to rejoice. Though pain in childbirth and toiling over the land had been pronounced, they are still trepidatious about living with death in their lives: "th' instant stroke of Death" (X.210) may have been "remov'd far off" (X.211) but it is all that is on their minds.⁷⁶ Only now, after they have considered all the means of escape, do Adam and Eve beg for God's forgiveness. They face a similar set of terrible consequences that Satan faced, but while he chose to follow his own direction they repent and earn the mercy of God. Unlike Satan, Adam and Eve recognize the limited control they have in the face of punishment. It is their repentance that allows the Son to intercede and save them from damnation, but the punishment of death remains because God cannot contradict himself. Because death is originally presented as the punishment for sin, even when Milton later presents death as a beneficial event for the redeemed it cannot lose its original God-given definition. Even after the Son has declared his intention to ransom mankind from the fourth degree of death, eternal damnation, Michael is still sent to explain to Adam all the evils that death will bring to the world.

While Johnson located the poem's major problem in the depiction of Sin and Death proper, C.S. Lewis locates his "grave structural flaw" in the "untransmuted lump of futurity" and he even argues that Milton's writing style at this point becomes "curiously bad."⁷⁷ Discussions of the poetic merit of Milton's "lump of futurity" aside, he deems it necessary to describe the work of death on Earth. The angel Michael is sent "To show thee what shall come in future days to thee and to thy Offspring" so that Adam can best prepare for his "mortal passage when it comes" (XI.356-66). Michael then proceeds to describe some of the most horrific events in the Bible, as Arnold Stein points out, "Training for the new life is directed toward the new end of

⁷⁴ Erskine, "The Theme of Death," p. 576.

⁷⁵ Milton, *Paradise Lost*, X.1035-40.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* X.206-11.

life...nothing in the course description leads one to expect easy pleasure, or to fill relaxed moments by contemplating the prospect of graduation."⁷⁸ The road to redemption is neither short nor sweet, and Adam is shown the future and the terrible things that are going to happen. The first human death and the first murderer are necessarily Adam's sons. The point at which Adam can stop thinking about death conceptually and physically observe it is also a prophecy concerning his children:

Whereat hee inly rag'd, and as they talk'd,
Smote him into the Midriff with a stone
That beat out life; he fell and deadly pale
Groan'd out his Soul with gushing blood effus'd. (XI.444-8)

Perhaps it is because Milton is getting down to the details of death that Lewis finds his writing worse in this section of the epic; the "gushing blood" from Abel's midriff can hardly compare on the poetic level to the twisted inner workings of the mind of Satan or the perfect reasoning of God. Monstrous Death is no sliver-tongued devil like his father. Unlike his formerly angelic parent, Death has no wing with which to alight on things and contemplate his thoughts; Death comes in the most simple and brutal ways possible. When Adam witnesses how his son "Groan'd out his Soul," Adam comes to a full realization of what he has let into the world:

Alas, both for the deed and for the cause!
But have I now seen Death? Is this the way
I must return to native dust? O sight
Of terror, foul and ugly to behold,
Horrid to think, how horrible to feel! (XI.461-5)

Adam is confronted with the first incarnation of death, and cannot contain his horror at the sight. The repetition of "horrid" and "horrible" not only reinforce Adam's reaction but tie the event back to many instances when Death is described as a horrible monster: Adam has now seen the

⁷⁷ CS Lewis, *Preface*, p.125.

monster's work. To Adam's questions Michael does not offer comfort and solace but further instruction in the increasingly sinful ways of man. This particular death is grim and detailed, but there will be much more suffering and destruction than Adam can comprehend, as Michael explains:

Death thou hast seen
In his first shape on man; but many shapes
Of Death, and many are the ways that lead
To his grim Cave, all dismal; yet to sense
More terrible at th'entrance than within.
Some, as thou saw'st, by violent stroke shall die,
By Fire, Flood, Famine, by Intemperance more
In Meats and Drinks, which on the Earth shall bring
Diseases dire, of which a monstrous crew
Before thee shall appear; that thou may'st know
What misery th' inabstinence of *Eve*
Shall bring on men. (XI.466-77)

Michael reinforces the ideas of the *ars moriendi* and the Dance of Death: there are "many shapes" to Death but they all lead to a single "grim Cave." In some respects what Milton removes from other artistic representations of death is the sanitation; the *transi* are terrible but the people they lead in the Dance of Death appear perfectly healthy. Milton's universal acknowledgement of death is not an innocuous invocation of an event; it is a personal "misery" equally terrible for everyone. Michael's initial categorization of ways to die is certainly ghastly, but when Adam is shown the physical forms these "diseases" take he can barely contain his horror. Seemingly indifferent to Adam's reactions, Michael continues to relate to Adam a list of the terrible ways to die that have now come into existence:

⁷⁸ Stein, "Imagining Death," p. 86.

Immediately a place

Before his eyes appear'd, sad, noisome, dark,
A Lazar-house it seem'd, wherein were laid
Numbers of all diseases'd, all maladies
Of ghastly Spasm, or racking torture, qualms
Of heart-sick Agony, all feverous kinds,
Convulcions, Epilepsies, fierce Catarrhs

.....

And over them triumphant Death his Dart
Shook, but delay'd to strike, though oft invoc't
With vows, as thir chief good, and final hope. (XI.477-493)

Death presides over an extensive list of maladies. Adam is shown the faces of Death working within this "Lazar-house" to destroy his descendants. This reminder of the seemingly infinite misery that he brought into the world was supposed to be teaching him how to live out his days. Clearly Milton is saying that there is a lesson to be learned from death, however un-poetic it might be to include it within his epic. Notice that these "diseases dire" are brought on by "intemperance" symbolically linking the dying to the gluttony of Death who shakes his dart "triumphant." In the face of these horrible ways to die Adam asks if there is any other way that he might encounter death.⁷⁹ Michael's answer is in the affirmative, but no essential hope is carried in the message:

This is old age; but then thou must outlive
Thy youth, thy strength, thy beauty, which will change
To wither'd weak and gray. (XI.538-40)

Adam and his descendants do have a way to die that does not involve "ghastly spasm" or "racking torture," but as Arnold Stein points out, "Nothing in old age is presented as in itself

⁷⁹ Milton, *Paradise Lost*, IX.527-9.

good, nothing to be hoped for, no ameliorative touch.”⁸⁰ No matter their end, Adam and his descendants must pass through the horrible experience of death: there is no intrinsic hope in the prolonged death over the short and bloody one. The only reason not to despair is the promised redemption by the Son. When the dying man has chosen to follow God he must still experience the third degree, physical death, but he can escape the eternal damnation of the fourth degree.

Mankind has become mortal and subject to death; there is no hope of escape from Death. Even with this absolute rule, Adam is confronted with the Biblical exception: Enoch who “walked with God: and he was not; for God took him” (Genesis 5:24); of him Michael says:

Hee the sev'nth from thee, whom thou beheld'st
The only righteous in a World perverse,
And therefore hated, therefore so beset...
Him the most High
Rapt in a balmy Cloud with winged Steeds
Did, as thou saw'st, receive, to walk with God
High in Salvation and the Climes of bliss,
Exempt from Death; to show thee what reward
Awaits the good, the rest what punishment. (XI.700-10)

In the case of the flood the wicked world deserved the “depopulation” (XI.756) that God visits upon it, but in Enoch’s case his closeness to God allows him to be rescued from the curse of Death. Enoch’s pardon might seem like a contradiction in terms because everyone was supposed to be subject to Death, however, Michael is careful to point out that there were extenuating circumstances that warranted his rescue. Enoch was exempt because he was the only one able to remain righteous in a “world perverse.” He is a corporeal example of what the sacrifice of the Son means spiritually. If the horrible deaths in the Lazar-house are analogous to

⁸⁰ Stein, “Imagining Death,” p. 89.

the spiritual death separate from God, Enoch represents not the immediate physical redemption from death but the spiritual redemption from damnation. Adam's sole but sufficient solace is that in the midst of the brutality that his descendents visit upon each other is the coming of Christ to pay the price for sin and redeem the world from Death. While Enoch enjoyed exemption from physical death, the Son changes spiritual death for the redeemed into "a gentle wafting to immortal Life" (XII.435). Where Death once signified the loss of paradise, it is now, for the believers, the way back to direct communion with God. Although it would be vanity to hope to be caught up as Enoch was, Christians who live their life mindful of Death can paradoxically look forward to the monster's visit. Although the entrance of death into the world was not God's intention, his omnipotence is such that he can use even the most evil beings for his ends.

CHAPTER 4

DEATH AS GOOD

I have already argued that Michael makes it clear that death is nothing to be hoped for; the lazar-house is not presented with any comfortable rooms. Milton's mortalist beliefs make even the deaths of the redeemed terrible occurrences: both the body and soul die and await judgment. Adam lengthy examinations of "deathless Death" (IX.798) demonstrate his perception of the lasting pain of separation from God, but when he exclaims that death is "Horrid to think, how horrible to feel" (XI.465) he is commenting on the shock and pain of physical death. The pain of the death of the body, which Milton argues is not properly alive, surely pales in comparison to the death of the living soul. Although believers enjoy a renewed connection with God, one which is necessarily inferior to the original communion Adam and Eve enjoyed, physical death is by no means less of a trial. In the face of the problem of painful demise, Milton constructs his answer to the mystery of salvation. Although he does not believe the fall to have brought people into a more perfect relationship with God, he explains God's use of a horrible tool for positive ends.

Integral to Milton's conception of death as equally good and evil is his rejection of the doctrine of the fortunate fall. If the fall had been within the scope of God's original plan for mankind, an essential component of a full relationship with God, then it would essentially be good. Milton specifically denies the fortunate fall, explaining that God left the entrance of Sin and Death into the world up to man:

no Decree of mine

Concurring to necessitate his Fall,

Or touch with lightest moment of impulse

His free Will, to her own inclining left

In even scale. (X.43-7)

Much like the angels, man is left to decide whether to take the path of obedience or the path of sin. Man's "free will" as it concerns death is an essential component of the explanation that Milton is building. In choosing to eat the fruit, man not only chose sin over God's commandment, but they also chose death, sin's promised result. Both Eve and Adam choose the easy path of sin, but how they reach the conclusion to sin is drastically different. Historically the majority of the blame is placed on Eve, but Milton's explanation requires that Adam is the more guilty party. Only God is blameless in this process; he explains that he did not issue any "decree" which would "necessitate" their fall. Adam and Eve fell freely, and although the sacrifice of Christ allows for the reversal of the second degree of death, spiritual death, and the avoidance of the fourth degree, eternal damnation, there is no reason to believe that man is now better off because this new covenant. The end result of the Son's actions are that "Heav'nly love shall outdo Hellish hate" (III.298), in the penitent while, of course, "those who, when they may, accept not grace" (III.302) are still subject to all four of death's degrees. Milton is extracting this straight out of Romans 6:23, which states, "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." The Son is the deciding factor in salvation, not only does he offer himself as the sacrifice and act as intercessor on mankind's behalf, he is also the judge as Milton explains:

The Son will return,
With glory and power to judge the quick and the dead,
To judge th' unfaithful dead, but to reward
His faithful, and receive them into bliss. (XII.460-3)

The "bliss" that the Son offers allows for the theological possibility of the fortunate Fall, as Erskine notes, "it seems to have crossed Milton's thought that perhaps we should have lost something, had our original parents clung to their innocence; perhaps we should have lost some

spiritual benefit.”⁸¹ Indeed, upon hearing of the redemption and reward offered through Christ Adam exclaims:

Full of doubt I stand,

Whether I should repent me now of sin
By mee done and occasion'd, or rejoice
Much more, that much more good thereof shall spring
To God more glory, more good will to Men
From God, and over wrath grace shall abound. (XII.473-8)

The theory of the fortunate fall postulates that the second covenant through Christ allows humanity to create a more personal bond with God than if mankind had remained sinless in the Garden; as Adam argues, “to God more glory” for his forgiveness, and “more good will to Men” because they can now share heavenly paradise with God. In order for this new relationship to be forged with God, Adam and Eve could not stay in the Garden. They had to leave to allow humanity’s faith to be tested; therefore death was necessary to release people from the testing phase of existence. The fortunate fall argues that Adam and Eve necessarily sinned and brought death into the world so that man might be brought into a more perfect union. Milton might have some interesting ideas about death, but he clearly rejects the fortunate fall. Adam’s overreaction to the promise of redemption parallels the assumptions of a few Christian theologians, but Adam is specifically forgetting what Raphael said would happen if they remained sinless:

Your bodies may at last turn all to spirit,
Improv'd by tract of time, and wing'd ascend
Ethereal, as wee, or may at choice
Here or in Heav'nly Paradises dwell;
If ye be found obedient, and retain

⁸¹ Ibid, p. 574.

Unalterably firm his love entire

Whose progeny you are. (V.493-503)⁸²

Within the scope of God's intentions no possibility of a fortunate fall exists; as the heavenly messenger makes clear, humanity would have been much better off remaining without sin. As Mollenkott concludes, "apart from the loving nature of God, there is no necessary connection between the fall and the Atonement."⁸³ That God's grace allows the Son to redeem us from our sins does not mean that the sin allows us to be redeemed. As God proclaims in Heaven, "Happier had it suffic'd him to have known Good by itself, and Evil not at all" (XI.88-9). Within the world of *Paradise Lost* even the primary focus of God is necessarily on the death of man and what to do about it. In the final analysis, God's grace allows for a second chance but even this second chance has a limit. When the Son returns and conquers Death in the last days he not only rids mankind of its greatest enemy, but he also removes the pathway to eternal life: judgment passed on all the living as they are.

Redemption through Christ sheds light on the contradictory positions death holds within the epic as the loss of Earthly Paradise and the release to Heavenly Paradise. What is made plain in the fall and the immediate narrative are the evils of death and what they represent; the intercession of the Son and his actions identify the other side of Milton's concept. Because God is omniscient discussion of the need to redeem errant mankind begins even before the fall. God foretells of the event and explains the need for a savior:

Man disobeying,

Disloyal breaks his fealty, and sins

Against the high Supremacy of Heav'n,

Affecting God-head, and so losing all,

To expiate his treason hath naught left,

⁸² See Virginia R. Mollenkott, "Milton's Rejection of the Fortunate Fall," *John Milton: Twentieth-Century Perspectives*, Vol.4, Ed. J. Martin Evans. (New York: Routledge, 2003) p. 187-91.

⁸³ Mollenkott, "Fortunate Fall," p. 189.

But to destruction sacred and devote,
He with his whole posterity must die,
Die hee or Justice must; unless for him
Some other able, and as willing, pay
The rigid satisfaction, death for death. (III.203-12)

By breaking the one existing commandment of God, Adam has lost his claim to everything in creation, including his life. Unlike Adam, God knows that the stroke of Death will not be immediate, including in his proclamation Adam's "whole posterity." In asking for "some other able" to take Adam's place, God is also asking that "some" to redeem the rest of humanity. The Son volunteers freely to be sent, but within the structure of *Paradise Lost* Milton's mortalist ideology changes how the reader must view the Son's decision. When the Son foretells of his encounter with Death, there seems to be nothing controversial about the account:

I for his sake will leave
Thy bosom, and this glory next to thee
Freely put off, and for him lastly die
Well pleas'd, on me let Death wreck all his rage;
Under his gloomy power I shall not long
Lie vanquisht; thou hast giv'n me to possess
Life in myself for ever, by thee I live,
Though now to Death I yield, and am his due
All that of me can die, yet that debt paid,
Thou wilt not leave me in the loathsome grave
His prey, nor suffer my unspotted Soul
For ever with corruption there to dwell;
But I shall rise Victorious, and subdue
My vanquisher, spoil'd of his vaunted spoil;

Death his death's wound shall then receive, and stoop
Inglorious, of his mortal sting disarm'd...
While by thee rais'd I ruin all my Foes,
Death last, and with his Carcass glut the Grave. (III.238-59)

Christ dies to pay the debt for sin and then rises victorious three days later, eventually defeating Death altogether after the second coming. The difference for Milton and orthodox theologians is what the Son means by "all that of me can die." Milton accepts that the Son was fully human when he was Christ, which necessitates Christ's death body, soul, and whatever of the divine nature extended to Earth on the cross. In his study of Miltonic heresy, Harry Robins explains, "Since Christ is a being, in whom are inextricably united God and man, he may act as God or he may act as man; but he cannot separate his one nature of God-man into two. Therefore, when Christ dies, he dies body and soul. He dies totally, as all men die, because he is a man. He dies as God, too; because in him God and man are united in a single being."⁸⁴ Milton includes the passage about how the Son is assured of "life in myself forever" not to argue that there is part of Christ who does not die, if that were the case Milton would consider the sacrifice for sin incomplete, but to include the Son's knowledge of his complete self. Robins explains this particular conceptual problem, "since the Son as Logos exists in Heaven even while the incarnate Christ performs his mission and undergoes his sacrifice upon earth, the Son is immortal."⁸⁵ Christ was entirely human; he cannot undergo death in a manner that allows part of him to escape the punishment. What happens to Christ post-mortem is what separates him from the rest of humanity, as Michael explains to Adam:

So he dies,
But soon revives, Death over him no power
Shall long usurp (XII.419-21)

⁸⁴ Robins, *If This Be Heresy*, p. 150.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 179.

Christ dies as a man and, under normal human conditions, would need to wait to be resurrected body and soul on the Day of Judgment, Milton makes it clear that it is God's intervention that keeps Christ's soul from dwelling "forever with corruption," when the Son says "by thee rais'd." For Milton the idea that the divine nature of Christ must also die, for whatever of his was on Earth was to be sacrificed to pay the price for sin, was not theologically contradictory. The Son is immortal, Christ was not; for him to rise from the dead the intervention of God was necessary.

It is exactly this distinction between the power of Christ and the power of God that Adam fails to interpret when Michael explains how man is to be redeemed. Much like the dubious Jews of the New Testament who expect a conqueror messiah who will destroy the Romans, Adam expects Christ to punish Satan:

Needs must the Serpent now his capital bruise

Expect with mortal pain: say where and when

Thir fight, what stroke shall bruise the Victor's heel. (XII.383-5)

As Michael explains to Adam, something much different is meant by what Adam supposes to be a physical confrontation:

Dream not of thir fight,

As of a Duel, or the local wounds

Of head or heel: not therefore joins the Son

Manhood to Godhead, with more strength to foil

Thy enemy; not so is overcome

Satan, whose fall from Heav'n, a deadlier bruise,

Disabl'd not to give thee thy death's wound:

Which hee, who comes thy Saviour, shall recure,

Not by destroying *Satan*, but his works

In thee and in thy Seed: nor can this be,

But by fulfilling that which thou didst want,

Obedience to the Law of God, impos'd
On penalty of death, and suffering death,
The penalty to thy transgression due. (XII.386-99)

As Michael explains, the doom of Satan is already assured, his punishment afforded him when he rebelled against God and was cast into Hell receiving a “deadlier bruise;” Christ does not need to physically assault him. The bruise that God promised is that of destroying Satan’s “works /In thee and in thy Seed,” rescuing man from spiritual death and eternal damnation. Indeed Christ “Shall bruise the head of *Satan*, crush his strength defeating Sin and Death, his two main arms” (XII.425-6) but it will be through the act of dying not through force. What is necessary to defeat Satan is not force but obedience to God. For Adam, and for all of the Christians in Milton’s audience, the lesson is that Satan and his evil designs for Death can be counteracted by obedience to God. Since the Son pays “the penalty of death,” man can look forward to “a death like sleep, /A gentle wafting to immortal Life” (XII.434-5), which demonstrates that despite Satan’s worst intentions Death has a part to play in God’s master plan.

Sin believes that there is going to be a battle between Christ and Death; however, as Adam learns, man should not fall for Sin’s idea of a grand battle (II.810-4). As C.S. Lewis points out concerning the supposed battle prowess of Satan, “It is, of course, important to realize that there is no war between Satan and Christ. There is war between Satan and Michael; and it is not so much won as stopped, by Divine intervention.”⁸⁶ Neither is there war between Death and Christ: Christ will submit for three days and then he will rise; it is a promise not a challenge. Both hellish characters fool themselves when they believe that they are true opponents of the Son. Milton does imply that both Satan and Death will again meet an opponent of the same caliber that they face when fighting each other but, though Death the warrior is described as “all conquering” (X.591), when he meets the Son there will not be any question about the outcome.

⁸⁶ CS Lewis, *Preface*, p. 127.

The Son is willing to submit to Death to redeem mankind; he will, in effect, be taken captive by humanity's enemy. Although mankind is assured of his victory, the suffering of the Son is one of the cornerstones of Christianity and Milton's portrayal of Death is full adequate to enhance that suffering.

Although Satan intended his proclamation "Evil be thou my Good" (IV.110) to describe his resolution to work against God in all things, the actions of the Son allow God to reverse Satan's meaning. Evil is effectively Satan's good because God is able to change the ends of his evil intentions. For Satan himself Milton allows no mystery behind his motivations, as his arrival on Earth finds him "devising Death /to them who liv'd" (IV.197-8). Upon returning to Hell, Satan reports to Pandemonium of his success:

Him by fraud I have seduc'd
From his Creator, and the more to increase
Your wonder, with an Apple; he thereat
Offended, worth your laughter, hath giv'n up
Both his beloved Man and all his World,
To Sin and Death a prey, and so to us. (X.485-90)

Satan's arrogance allows him to believe that he has somehow beaten God and that both man and the world are not subject to him, but Milton does not allow the reader to share his delusions. While Satan intended the release of death into the world as a way of destroying people and keeping them from God, God has turned the tables and made death the very instrument that allows the redeemed to reach eternal bliss. Erskine points to this distinction as a contradiction in terms, "Death, then is peculiarly Satan's gift to man...yet in the last two books of the epic Milton apparently contradicts himself; he tells us that death is not a curse but a comforter, not the gift of Satan but the gift of God."⁸⁷ While I admit that both these representations of death exist in the epic, despite their appearance I disagree with Erskine that they represent a

⁸⁷ Erskine, "The Theme of Death in Paradise Lost," *PMLA*, 32.4 (1917), p. 573-82.

contradiction. Death is horrible and an instrument of God at the same time: it should terrify the sinner and comfort to the saint. As C. S. Lewis explains, “[Satan] is allowed to do all the evil he wants and finds that he has produced good. Those who will not be God’s sons become his tools.”⁸⁸ In the same way, Death believes himself to be wantonly engorging himself with the bounty of the Earth but he is also following heaven’s designs. God reveals that not only is he in control, but that everything is happening according to his plan for salvation if not, because of man’s disobedience, his original intention for creation:

had not the folly of Man
Let in these wasteful Furies, who impute
Folly to mee...as if transported with some fit
Of Passion, I to them had quitted all,
At random yielded up to their misrule;
And know not that I call'd and drew them thither
My Hell-hounds, to lick up the draff and filth
Which man's polluting Sin with taint hath shed
On what was pure, till cramm'd and gorg'd, nigh burst
With suckt and glutted offal, at one sling
Of thy victorious Arm, well-pleasing Son,
Both *Sin*, and *Death*, and yawning *Grave* at last
Through *Chaos* hurl'd, obstruct the mouth of Hell
For ever, and seal up his ravenous Jaws. (X.619-37)

Man’s sin is “polluting” the Earth and God calls Death to clean up the “filth.” Sin and Death might be intending to follow the command of Satan, they even “impute /Folly” to God and assume that he has “yielded up to their misrule” the whole of creation. Death, enslaved by his appetite, seems to merely be killing all that he can; however, he is unwittingly following God’s

⁸⁸ CS Lewis, *Preface*, p. 66.

will that he remove everything that carries the “taint” of Sin. God’s designs for death on Earth, however, are not merely limited to the destruction of the corrupted world. The “taint” of sin is not only on the damned but also on those that God intends to redeem. Since humanity on Earth is now apart from the presence of God, he wants to provide a way for man to once again return to him, as he informs heaven:

I provided Death; so Death becomes
His final remedy, and after Life...
to second Life,
Wak’t in the renovation of the just,
Resigns him up with Heav’n and Earth renew’d. (XI.57-66)

According to plan, Death serves both the function of consuming the filth of sin and allows for those saved by Christ to return to paradise. While John Erskine is content to conclude that “it is unnecessary to reconcile them with each other” because the two depictions of death “can be reconciled with Milton’s character,” Milton’s theology allows for the synthesis of these extremes.⁸⁹ The idea of Death as the passage to life is, of course, not limited to Milton; the fourth chapter of the *Ars Moriendi* asks the dying to imitate Christ’s actions on the cross and provides prayers for “a clear end” and the “everlasting bliss that is the reward of holy dying.”⁹⁰ What Milton is capable of doing is combining these disparate ideas into one entity through his four-part nature of death.

At first glance the two sides of death appear to be quite contradictory: the figure of Death with his “ravenous maw” and the assertion that “to the faithful” Death represents “the Gate of Life” do not seem like compatible doctrines.⁹¹ In Erskine’s treatment of the theme of Death in *Paradise Lost* he concludes that this incongruity is something Milton might not have noticed, “[Milton] may not have been conscious of the extent to which he changed his original

⁸⁹ Erskine, “The Theme of Death,” p. 581.

⁹⁰ Comper, *The Book of the Craft of Dying*, p. 31.

⁹¹ Milton, *Paradise Lost*, XII.571.

scheme, nor of the contradictions he was setting up in the treatment of sin and of death...The significance of the contradiction in the accounts of death and of sin is that in the later accounts the larger Milton speaks, the poet rather than the theologian."⁹² The gravity of the difference between the two positions leads Erskine to believe that they must be generated from different sets of goals, and he argues, "The theologian in him was persuaded that death was a curse, the result of sin; but the poet in him uttered his true opinion, after a long and exhausting life, that death is a heaven-sent release."⁹³ Erskine's distinction between the two parts of Milton's death is unacceptable, I agree with C.S. Lewis when he argues that "Milton's thought, when purged of its theology, does not exist."⁹⁴ The poet Milton and the theologian Milton are one in the same: there need be no separation in ideology. Although it is undeniable that the personification Death serves certain poetic functions within the epic, it is as real as the condition of death that is equally an evil and a good for mankind. Erskine argues that death cannot carry a singular meaning: "The death that follows Satan's disobedience, for example, can hardly be identical with the death that follows Adam's sin, for there is no prospect that Satan will cease to exist."⁹⁵ However, these differences in death do not make them incompatible with Milton's unified theological construct of death. Indeed Milton's four-part conception of death specifically allows for certain part to be negated while others are still in effect. Both man and Satan experience the second degree, spiritual death, when they disobey the commandments of God. Simply because Satan is exempt from the third degree, physical death, does not mean that the eternal damnation of the fourth degree is any less real for him than it is for unredeemed mankind. What Erskine does not include in his consideration is God's ability to turn Satan's infernal designs into good ends. In his conception of Death Milton includes the assertion that God takes all the negative designs of Satan and uses them for good ends. Taken in this light, the seemingly incongruous nature of Death is much easier to reconcile. That God is able to turn evil designs

⁹² Erskine, "The Theme of Death," p. 580.

⁹³ Ibid. p. 581-2.

⁹⁴ C.S. Lewis, *They Asked for a Paper*, (London, Geoffrey Bles, 196) p. 181.

into good does not therefore make those designs good, and though God is able to use Death as his agent to clean the earth and provide a passage to salvation does not make Death any less a monster.

⁹⁵ Erskine, "The Theme of Death," p. 575.

CHAPTER 5

MILTON'S PURPOSE

Even though Death physically appears only twice in *Paradise Lost*, it is possible to construct Milton's conception of him and his role in the overall theological scheme of death that Milton builds. In these two appearances, supplemented by both the heavenly and earthly conversations about death and dying, Milton manages to compile a Death that is more complex than the notion of two cameos implies; as Arnold Stein explains, "in *Paradise Lost* death has many shapes and is elicited in many ways: by images, or references, or suggestions at one or more removes; and by anticipations, memories, glimpses."⁹⁶ Although Milton allows the reader to find out that Death is ultimately the agent of God summoned to "lick up the draff and filth" (X.630), Death himself seems unaware of his situation. Though Death's knowledge of his place in God's ordered universe is limited, Milton fully develops his gluttonous self-awareness. The limits and extent of Death's being will only be decided when he is ultimately conquered by the Son. Prior to his demise, every mortal thing on Earth must pass through Death's jaws. His destruction of life and the potentially infinite area within the blackness of Death which this task implies are the murky limits of Death undefined at his creation; when the Son puts an end to Death it will be both a physical termination and a volumetric limit.

The mistake that Satan and Sin make is assuming that God's plan requires their obedience; they purposefully act contrary to what God has told them to do in order to defy him. Milton's characterization of Death does not gleefully defy God so much as he takes every opportunity afforded him to destroy. Death is born with the necessary attributes to perform the task that God has for him, arguably the most important task within the world of *Paradise Lost*: Death is both the sentence and part of the solution. The dual function of death as the

punishment and the solution is also the primary allegorical function that the monster plays. Just as Death is created by Satan's interactions with Sin, humanity creates its own death, both physically and spiritually, through sinning. Once the sentence is passed it cannot be reversed; mankind must serve out the punishment of death. It is through Milton's four part conception that we can separate the physical death from both spiritual death and eternal damnation, allowing mankind to be redeemed despite the necessity of punishment. In the final analysis, once Christ has paid the price for Sin, Death is once again working for God, this time as a janitor cleaning up the "filth" (X.624) of sin that man let into the world. The Son might provide the way back to God, but man must still pass through Death to get there. That man must still suffer and die to return to God solidifies Death's terrible power, but in the examination of this paradoxical relationship Milton admonishes the Christian not to have the same reactions that Adam and Eve had. When Adam and Eve despair they do so out of ignorance, *Paradise Lost* is Milton's explanation of how to temper the fear of suddenly dying with the assurance of salvation.

Drawing upon the tradition of the *momento mori*, Milton repeats throughout *Paradise Lost* the immediacy of death when Death strikes. The goal of reminding readers that they too must die is complimentary to his goal of explaining the existence of death in a just creation. Guilfoyle argues that, "It has to be remembered that modern sensibilities had not yet been awakened in the seventeenth century, and brutality was then a part of civilized life, as were the loss of tens of thousands in recurrent plagues, and the death of nine out of ten children in infancy."⁹⁷ However, this seemingly nonchalant view of death cannot be extended to Milton, when Adam reacts to the "infinite Man-slaughter," the reader also receives a clue about Milton's reaction to the horrors of his time:

O what are these,
Death's Ministers, not Men, who thus deal Death
Inhumanly to men, and multiply

⁹⁶ Stein, *Imagining Death*, p. 84-5.

Ten thousandfold the sin of him who slew

His brother. (XI.675-679)

Although common, death was still something terrible to behold, and Death was still a monster waiting to devour man in the midst of sin. However, Milton sees death as more than just a blanket punishment for sin; for him, death has an interaction with man, both in the anticipation of the event and in the visible scars that death leaves on the world. *Paradise Lost* is a story that necessitates a role for Death, but Milton's use of it goes beyond necessity: Death is equally the monster Satan wanted to use to separate man from God and what God uses to give man a second chance at connection. Death is equally the deadly blackness from Hell, an instrument of Earthly destruction, and part of God's plan for salvation. Milton's Death is the ultimate example of God turning evil into good. As Adam exclaims:

O goodness infinite, goodness immense!

That all this good of evil shall produce,

And evil turn to good (XII.469-71)

Although God reclassifies Death's role as "the Gate of Life" (XII.571), there is no doubt that death is something to be feared: as Michael explains to Adam, even the quiet death in old age is accompanied by its own form of suffering. For Milton, the way that people deal with death is central to *Paradise Lost*, it is at the fall that death enters into the world and therefore it is at its most illuminative. While it might be easy to side with Robins and argue, "What Milton believed, because it is couched in the imperishable language of great art, is interesting to all of us."⁹⁸ It seems more accurate to say that Milton is discussing one of the fundamental human questions; after all "we are dust, and thither must return and be no more" (XI.200). Milton wrote *Paradise Lost* while blind and increasingly subject to illness, and though Adam was afforded 930 years

⁹⁷ Guilfoyle, "Aspects of Death," p. 44.

⁹⁸ Robins, *If This Be Heresy*, p. 1.

before he died, the admonishment of the *momento mori* reverberates for both in the knowledge that:⁹⁹

Death comes not at call, Justice Divine

Mends not her slowest pace for prayers or cries. (X.858-9)

What Milton has to say about death is not only central in *Paradise Lost*, but in the lives of those for whom he wrote it. What Milton presents is a reminder that Death is terrifying, but that through a death mitigated by Christ humanity might escape divine wrath and rejoin our creator in harmony.

⁹⁹ Genesis 5.5 KJV

REFERENCES

- Aries, Philippe. *Western Attitudes Towards Death*. Johns Hopkins UP: 1975.
- Astell, Ann W. *Eating Beauty: The Eucharist and the Spiritual Arts of the Middle Ages*, (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2006).
- Beaty, Nancy Lee, *The Craft of Dying: A Study in the Literary Tradition of the Ars Moriendi in England*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1970).
- Brown, Harryette. "‘Thy Daughter and thy Darling’: The Incestuous Relationship of Satan, Sin, and Death in *Paradise Lost*," *CCTE Studies*, 58 (1993), p. 95-101.
- Bynum, Caroline Walker. "Death and Resurrection in the Middle Ages: Some Modern Implications," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 142.4 (Dec, 1998), p. 589-96.
- Campbell, Gordon. "The Mortalist Heresy in *Paradise Lost*," *John Milton: Twentieth-Century Perspectives*, Vol 4 New York: Routledge Press, 2003. p. 161-164.
- Comper, Frances M. M. *The Book of the Craft of Dying and Other Early English Tracts concerning Death*. New York: Arno Press, 1977.
- Davies, Douglas J. *A Brief History of Death*, (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), p. 94-6.
- Dobbins, Austin C. *Milton and the Book of Revelation: The Heavenly Cycle*, (University, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1975).
- Engel, William E. "The Experience of Death and Difference in *Paradise Lost*," *Milton Studies*, 28 (1992), p. 185-210.
- Erskine, John. "The Theme of Death in *Paradise Lost*," *PMLA*, 32.4 (1917), p. 573-82.
- Fox, Robert C. "The Allegory of Sin and Death in *Paradise Lost*," *MLQ*, XXIV (1963), p. 354-64.
- Gallagher, Philip J. "‘Real of Allegoric’: The Ontology of Sin and Death in *Paradise Lost*," *English Literary Renaissance*, 6 (1976), p. 317-35.

- Guilfoyle, Cherrell. "If Shape it Might he Call'd that Shape had None': Aspects of Death in Milton," *Milton Studies* XIII, Ed. James D Simmonds, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1979), p. 35-57.
- Harding, Davis P. *Milton and the Renaissance Ovid*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1946).
- Johnson, Samuel. *Lives of the English Poets*, (London, 1925), vol. I, p.110.
- Lewalski, Barbara K. *The Life of John Milton*, (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2003).
- Lewis, C.S. *Preface to Paradise Lost*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1946). p. 121.
- . *They Asked for a Paper*, (London, Geoffrey Bles, 196) p. 181.
- Milton, John. *De Doctrina Christiana, The Works of John Milton*, Vol. XV, Eds. Frank Allen Patterson et. al. (Mount Vernon, NY: Columbia University Press, 1933)
- . *Paradise Lost*, Ed. Merritt Y. Hughes. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997).
- Mollenkott, Virginia R. "Milton's Rejection of the Fortunate Fall," *John Milton: Twentieth-Century Perspectives*, Vol.4, Ed. J. Martin Evans. (New York: Routledge, 2003) p. 187-91.
- Neill, Michael. *Issues of Death: Mortality and identity in English Renaissance Tragedy*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997.
- Rajan, B. *Paradise Lost and the Seventeenth Century Reader*, (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 19670, p. 23.
- Robins, Harry. *This Be Heresy*, (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1963), p. 145.
- Rovang, Paul R. "A Malorian Source for Satan's Encounter with Death in *PL*, Book 2," *ANQ* 16.3 (Summer 2003), p. 3-5.
- Samuel, Irene. *Dante and Milton*, (Ithaca NY, Cornell University Press, 1966)
- Saurat, Denis. *Milton: Man and Thinker* (London, 1994), p. 167.
- Steadman, John M. "Milton and St. Basil: The Genesis of Sin and Death," *Modern Language Notes*, 73.2 (Feb, 1958), p. 83-4.

Stein, Arnold. "Imagining Death: The Ways of Milton," *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 30.2,
Special Issue: Distinguished Humanities Lectures II (Summer, 1996), p. 77-91.

Tatlock, John S. P. "Milton's *Sin* and *Death*," *Modern Language Notes*. 21.8 (December, 1906),
p. 239-40.

White, Robert B. "Milton's Allegory of Sin and Death: A Comment on Backgrounds," *Modern
Philology*, 70.4 (May, 1973), p. 337-41.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Luke Tesdal graduated from Oregon State University with a Bachelors of Arts in English. He is currently a graduate teaching assistant at the University of Texas Arlington. His areas of academic interest include death in literature, composition studies, and humor in modern media. He plans to pursue his Ph.D. in the area of Rhetoric and Composition.