ETHICAL SUCCESSION: THEOLOGICAL MOVEMENT IN ENGLISH RENAISSANCE LITERATURE

by

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(Under the Direction of Fran Teague)

ABSTRACT

Poetic and dramatic texts always stand in conversation with a larger world of letters, and in the English Renaissance, certain texts answer questions that theological and philosophical texts ask with an attention to sequence and contingency that advance rather than merely comment upon the projects that the discourses share. *The Faerie Queene*, Shakespeare's Roman plays and *The Rape of Lucrece*, and Milton's Biblical epics set the stage for theologians to pay genuine attention to the mediated character of all religious tradition, to the opacity and textuality of human will, and to the obscurity of evil in ways that standard theological polemics often neglect. In all of these cases, the poetic and dramatic texts perform the moves that later Christian theology will recognize as narrative theology, setting the stage for what theologians will do when they learn to give priority to the succession of complex moments. Moreover, as Milton's *Paradise Regained* demonstrates, the theological discipline of Christology has much to learn from the ways that a narrative poem situates Christ, always poised between the inadequate possibilities that the wilderness temptations represent and always performing His way into the role "Son of God." Ultimately, because certain modern theological traditions continue the

practices of putting sequence in the foreground and improvising within the bounds of tradition, some theologians have the potential to contribute to literary criticism in ways that return the favor that plays and poems first granted.

INDEX WORDS: Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, Theology and Literature

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DEDICATION

To Mary

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Because this project attempts to bring together some conversations that academic theologians and literary critics do not usually share, I should acknowledge those from both sides of my own academic history who have helped me along. Phil Kenneson and Craig Farmer, professors at Milligan College, guided me into the grand questions that this study attempts to complicate, and in seminary at Emmanuel School of Religion (now Emmanuel Christian Seminary), Kip Elolia and Fred Norris introduced me to the theologians, most notably John Milbank and George Lindbeck, whose work help me still to imagine literature as a theological enterprise (and vice versa). And although this dissertation does not do much with the world of critical Biblical studies, certainly Robert Owens and Rodney Werline played indispensable parts in shaping me as a careful reader and as an intellectual who values and challenges the body of scholarship surrounding any important texts. At the University of Georgia, conversations with Carolyn Medine and Jonathan Evans (both interested in theology and literature, and both readers of this dissertation) helped me to think my way into the problems of embodied convictions and action-embedded-in-story that led me to many of the dissertation's investigations.

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S.D.G.

Nathan P. Gilmour

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CHAPTER 1: Complex Act

Alasdair Macintyre's *After Virtue* approaches the question of human action with a seemingly simple picture, a man tending a garden. The question at hand is what the action of planting a seed means, and Macintyre's explanation does not propose a singular meaning so much as insist that any given explanation of meaning will involve explanations that are too complex to reduce philosophically:

> What is important to notice is immediately is that any answer to the questions of how we are to understand or to explain a given segment of behavior will presuppose some prior answer to the question of how these different correct answers to "What is he doing?" are related to each other. For if someone's primary intention is to put the garden in order before the winter and it is only incidentally the case that in so doing he is taking exercise and pleasing his wife, we have one type of behavior to be explained; but if the agent's primary intention is to please his wife by taking exercise, we have quite another type of behavior to be explained and we will have to look in a different direction for understanding and behavior. (106)

Because every human action is thus surrounded by story, questions of the goodness of an action and of freedom of the will are always at their root complex literary questions. And beyond the obvious assertion that "every act is likely mixed" one attempting to think

seriously still must say just what sort of mix this or that act might be and why such a mix might matter. Thus a philosophical or theological treatise is subject to literary examination just as much as an epic poem or a tragic play, and texts of all the genres involved must compete on a common intellectual field for the right to set themselves up as more or less adequate and compelling accounts of this or that class of human action. For the will to be free means something quite particular in the course of what theologian John Milbank calls "fiction governed by the trope of irony" (265). Milbank criticizes the modern tendency to separate strongly between historical or scientific “reference” and literary “sense,” noting that for most patristic and medieval thinkers, all reality, included historical reality, is always textual, authored by some degree of divine providence and some degree of human agency (266). Thus most of human life (with the possible exception of involuntary bodily functions, but even those get their meanings because they are distinct from willful acts) is fiction in some sense, and the roles that people take on as workers, parents, parishioners, soldiers, and all sorts of other parts are themselves textual constructs. Milbank suggests that the difference between a sentence about a soldier in Afghanistan in 2011 and a sentence about one of the soldiers around the fire in Shakespeare's *Henry V* is not as ontologically grand as some theories of reference and sense but relies mainly on the structural sense of irony that accompanies what this study will call literary text (265). This study will attempt to heed Milbank’s call and resist the urge to treat narratives read through the trope of irony as ontologically different from memory and future speculation, but the examination will maintain structural difference. Poetic and dramatic texts, as this essay will treat them, remain somewhat insulated from history and futurity because somebody has owned up to making them up.

The term “free will,” in an ironic narrative or dramatic text at least, connotes, as it has at least since Boethius, two capacities, one referring to the power for the will to affect the course of events even as events prior to the act set the context for the act. To assert this sort of free will is to take a stand over against all-encompassing accounts of fate or of external determination. To write about free will in a literary text highlights the irony most visibly on this point: given that characters in poetic and dramatic texts live and move and have their being in stories long since composed and printed, all investigations of their freedom of will must take into account the irony of saying that a character's act, written hundreds of years in the past, affects other things also written hundreds of years in the past in the way that the act of a living person affects what happens in the moments that have not yet passed in that person's life. (The events that befall Dr. Faustus or Milton's Samson have not changed for some time, but neither have the events that befell the historical Julius Caesar.) Because a literary text stands as a simultaneity of beginning, middle, and end (one can turn to the last act before reading the first if one chooses), literary narratives highlight that, whatever else is at stake in disputes about the future, at least the sequence of things and the names that convention assigns to parts of the sequence must be part of the investigation. Therefore the question of volitional free will, whether historical or literary, is always a matter of construction, and like Macintyre’s gardener, all agents, whether past or future, whether constructed from memory or constructed by imagination, stand subject to the same problems of memory, speculation, and selective attention.

The other connotation of free will, which always runs alongside the first, and which will be this study’s main focus, is the capacity for the will to do that which is

genuinely good. Among the many questions that arise surrounding this side of free will are whether, as a result of being genuinely good, a given human act genuinely pleases the God who created heavens and earth; and whether, given the visible nature of many human acts, the story of any given act can serve as a good exemplar for someone learning to live a good life.[1] Here the irony is subtler but just as real: because literary characters' acts happen in a text composed by human beings with various ends for the text in mind, the characters' actions, though they always might make sense within the world of the narrative of the drama, come from the intentions of an entity other then their own. Complicating things further, such characters' interiority, to the extent that they have interior lives, exists as text, and desire and will become, in addition to anything else in play, ironic private states articulated for public reading. This dual problem of the ability genuinely to actuate one's desires and the ability genuinely to earn praise or blame in meaningful interactions comes to the English Renaissance as a complex of texts and traditions, and even if every node in that network of arguments does not stand available to each individual poet and playwright, as a background it sets up a context within which the texts engage questions of free will. Within the bounds of each ironic narrative, ethical free will stands to become a question precisely because each text is influenced by the ongoing conversation about the goodness of acts and contributes to that same discussion by means of characters' words and acts, narrators' framing of events, and all sorts of other literary concerns.

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1 Part of what will be at stake in the texts examined in this study and for any texts exploring the nature of the good life is what will count as a good life. More on that question will arise as each particular text comes under examination.

As Protestantism rose to prominence, came under threat, and animated the common life of late-sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England, the poems and plays of the time (where laws would allow) often dealt with the rise and fall of kings, emperors, and other figures of great stature and power. Such changes of rule promise to be doubly meaningful in that they have consequences within their own dramatic worlds and they comment, directly or otherwise, on the dual questions of the source and goodness of actions. The scholarship on such plays and poems is not scarce, and this study will not attempt to uncover new archival material so much as to suggest connections between the kingly figures, new and old, and the theological questions concerning meaningful act that Protestant theology of the period attempted to articulate. Keeping in mind both ancient philosophical traditions (most notably Plato), in which one of the primary metaphors for mental states is the inner ruler; and from Biblical chronicles, in which the king on the throne often becomes metonymic for a good or a bad age in the spiritual life of Israel, succession will always have a double meaning in this study, referring both to the replacement of one complex moment by another and to the replacement of one authority figure, whether political or spiritual or intellectual of psychological, with another. In the texts that stand as the main *loci* of my argument, the two move in complex relationships that disclose the nature of human and (depending on the text) even sometimes of superhuman act.

Ultimately, those literary instances of act, because they lie open to examination in an ironic sort of temporality, end up exploring questions of agency and cause in manners that anticipate and perhaps even shape later theological accounts of meaningful act in terms of goodness and of temporality. Moreover, because they allow room for

participation and mediation as well as damnation and salvation, they often turn out to be more adequate to questions of the goodness of act than their status as "secondary" treatments might indicate.

With regard to questions of agency and goodness, the second central matter of free will, ethical freedom, will remain the controlling question of this study. Before progressing into the texts of Spenser and Shakespeare and Milton, some preliminary exploration of those ethical complications is in order. Whether or not any of the three literary writers whose poetry makes up the main subject matter of this study came into encounters with every or any of the following texts, their works, directly or indirectly, engage a host of questions from writers and thinkers who have complicated the horizons of ethical free will. The following brief account of theological and philosophical complications should stand as reminders that literary texts never have the uncomplicated option of picking a "side" with regards to such complex questions but always stand in conversation with an array of prior thoughts, and the task opens before every literary text to forge new imaginative responses, always in relationship to those who have attempted to answer the questions before.

Egyptian Gold, *City of God,* and Other Augustinian Concerns

To begin an investigation of such complications with Augustine and to end with Plato might seem out of order, but in the course of the late medieval and early modern periods in Western Europe, their priority of reception for English Christians makes sense of the non-chronological sequence. Because the original texts of Plato are largely lost to the West during the medieval period, and because they return to the intellectual life after a

separation so stark that said return gets called "Renaissance," treating Plato as a sort of reaction to the Augustinian corpus does make sense as an interpretation of some of Renaissance Europe's central intellectual struggles.[2] As with many writers whose careers span decades and whose works attempt to make sense of the historical moment at hand, Augustine's views on important questions shift in emphasis and sometimes even change in content over the course of his corpus. Those extremes set the stage for other Christian intellectuals for centuries to come, and the movement from approaches of appropriation in *De Doctrina Christiana* to those of strong suspicion in *City of God* stands as a framework within which questions of act find their answers in posterior (in terms of English intellectual life) texts. And because Augustine is always first and foremost a theological writer, the questions with which he wrestles are always questions of how goodness and agency operate in light of the advent, crucifixion, and resurrection of Christ.

Augustine publishes *De Doctrina Christiana* largely as a handbook for those who interpret and preach the Christian Bible in Church settings. The first three books of the

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2 Augustine's corpus, of course, underwent its own Renaissance in this period, his writings published as a chronological sequence for the first time. My treatment here implies not that the published *Works of Augustine* were always available but that Augustine's patterns of thought to a large degree shaped the way that later Christians would engage with these questions of free will. Given that caveat, James Schiavone, in his essay "Spenser's Augustine," notes that Erasmus published an edited and annotated *Works of Augustine* in 1529, so the progression of Augustine's intellectual career might well have been part of the intellectual atmosphere for a generation or more before the poems and plays treated at length here come to the public.

work lay out a program of interpretation for the Christian teacher, encouraging an open-eyed and historically acute literal reading of texts at the same time as it encourages preachers to reach for allegorical and anagogical readings because such sermons generate the sort of meanings that edify the gathered faithful. Rejecting the move that Plato makes in the *Republic,* the excising of offensive passages out of the text of Homer, Augustine instead insists that those Bible texts which appear to run counter to an ethic of love must come to the gathered people in the forms of allegories so that the congregation always sees them clothed in the love of Christ. In the fourth book, Augustine turns to the arrangement and delivery of the material and a qualified praise for Greek and Roman rhetorical education, and his Ciceronian teachings on questions of arrangement and style rely upon an allegory of his own. To justify the use of pagan wisdom by Christian orators, the second book uses an allegorical reading of the Exodus to address the question of pagan texts and how they might serve to educate a preacher of the Christian gospel.

Augustine points to the account in Exodus 12:35-36 of how the Hebrews prepared to depart Egypt to note that, before they left, they took with them the gold of their Egyptian neighbors. Augustine suggests that, like the Hebrews, Christians should be willing to take the best of pagan learning on their journey through the wilderness of the world, provided that they intend to use that "gold" in ways that honor God. In a move that at once affirms the strong potential goodness of Classical rhetorical education and provides a caution to those whose confidence in such texts is excessive, Augustine notes that, like Egyptian gold, Classical learning in itself guarantees neither good nor evil but stands as instrumental to the will, which can tend towards good or evil:

Any statements by those who are called philosophers, especially the Platonists, which happen to be true and consistent with our faith should not cause alarm, but be claimed for our own use, as it were from owners who have no right to them. Like the treasures of the ancient Egyptians, who possessed not only idols and heavy burdens, which the people of Israel hated and shunned, but also vessels and ornaments of silver and gold, and clothes, which on leaving Egypt the people of Israel, in order to make better use of them, surreptitiously claimed for themselves (they did this not on their own authority but at God's command, and the Egyptians in their ignorance actually gave them the things of which they had made poor use)--similarly all the branches of pagan learning contain not only false and superstitious fantasies and burdensome studies that involve unnecessary effort, which each one of us must loathe and avoid as under Christ's guidance we abandon the company of pagans, but also studies for liberated minds which liberated minds which are more appropriate to the service of the truth, and some very useful moral instruction, as well as the various truths about monotheism to be found in their writers. These treasures—like the silver and gold, which they did not create but dug, as it were, from the mines of providence, which is everywhere—which were used wickedly and harmfully in the service of demons must be removed by Christians, as they separate themselves in spirit from the wretched company of pagans, and applied to their true function, that of preaching the gospel. (Augustine, *On Christian Teaching* 64)

The goodness of such learning always involves the use to which the posterior human being puts it, rather than the theological disposition of the original and therefore prior author, so that in the service of the Christian homily, the curriculum of Classical rhetorical education is a good thing, while those who take that classical education and put it to use for lesser causes (such as, but not limited to, the author's original purpose) render it evil not by making it anything but gold but by using the gold for wicked purposes. Thus the science of rhetoric and the stories that the pagans tell about their most moral countrymen stand as good in potential, waiting on the Christian orator to reframe the matter for better ends. Such texts therefore are neither things inherently to be avoided nor things that can produce genuine, God-pleasing goodness in themselves, but instead remain determined ultimately by their rhetorical moments, the contexts in which they abide and the ends towards which they move in any given moment. In a move that appreciates and respects the rich traditions of Classical learning and their power to benefit the ministry of the Church, Augustine is a good enough teacher to realize that, framed properly in the larger story of the gospel, the content of classical learning and by extension classical stories stand to be genuinely good things.

Later in his career, Augustine must respond to a resurgence of the worship of the Roman gods in the wake of the sack of Rome and a backlash against Christianity as people look for someone to blame when barbarians invade the Eternal City. Augustine's own master work is therefore a polemic of sorts and exhibits the aggressive tactics of a polemic when he discusses luminaries from the Roman Republic. *City of God* sets the tone for arguments against the goodness of pagan antiquity, raising the bar of what counts as goodness by adding an erotic element to the moral calculus. Platonic and Aristotelian

streams of the classical tradition that Augustine inherits are usually content to see legal categories of motive, intent, and consequence as determining the goodness or badness of individual lives and to focus attention rather on the civic character of acts. But Augustine, inheriting Saint Paul's strong sense of interiority and conscience as markers of genuine goodness and badness, divides the course of human history into the *civitas dei* and the *civitas terrena* not in terms of historical consequences of actions or even of good and bad constitutions as measured by their first principles (as Aristotle might) at all but in terms of the final causes (which Augustine calls loves) various figures and cultures in the course of human history have given or might give for what they do.[3] Augustine's evaluations of desire are stark: those in the course of human history who strive and pray and write and live for the sake of the one true God, the one proclaimed in the New Testament, are of the City of God, while those who do not are of the City of Earth. The latter is not inherently Satanic in the way that Luther later will make all of the unregenerate inherently Satanic, but nonetheless the ancients, be they Levantine or Latin or Hellenic, have in common that their greatest efforts, because motivated by something other than the Trinitarian God, are corrupt at their roots. Thus Augustine's massive work both collapses distinctions between individual and civic morality and frames the whole of moral discourse in terms of the objects of loyalty and faithfulness of confession and

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3 Book two of Augustine's *City of God* goes into great detail not only about the perversity of pagan rituals themselves but also about how the love of the pagan gods could not itself lead to anything resembling goodness, given that the gods do not seem to be intrinsically moral in themselves, at least not in the accepted books of divine stories. In the course of that evaluation Augustine, following Tertullian's lead, notes that he, a Christian, is not by any means the first to note as much, given that Plato and Cicero alike had much scorn to pour upon the traditional gods.

worship and idolatry, all matters of psychological desire and will rather than a sense of observable harmony with a good cosmic order; rendering difficult at least any attempts to raise up a Socrates or a Cicero as a moral exemplar and grandly complicating questions of good act and ethical freedom.

Boethius

Carrying on Augustine's work and to a large extent carrying forward the great African's theories of evil and of divine nature, Boethius's body of work appears in libraries throughout the middle ages and afterwards. His *Consolation of Philosophy,* one of the most important philosophical texts of the English middle ages, served as an entry into philosophy for much of Europe before Muslim philosophers brought Aristotle to Latin-reading European scholars. Following in the traditions of the ancients, Boethius's famous dialogue engages the ways in which ethical freedom depends upon volitional freedom, and his formulation of the relationship between earth and heaven, time and eternity, informs Christian philosophy all the way into the English Renaissance.

Making a complaint to Philosophy personified, Boethius complains that "there is no freedom left to hope for" (12) as he awaits his execution at the hands of Emperor Theodoric's agents. Boethius (the character) narrates his own situation in terms of Plato's Ring of Gyges thought experiment[4] from *Republic*: while Boethius, the righteous man,

4 Plato, in the *Republic* (360d-367e) relates the question for which *Republic* stands as an answer and which comes up later in this chapter when Erasmus alludes to it: which man is better off, the one who is moral but who has lost all earthly benefits and heavenly favor, or the one who is utterly immoral but who has earned the praise of and power over men by means of wickedness and the favor of gods by means of expensive sacrifice and sorcerers' charms? In Boethius's (the character's) case against

languishes in exile and awaits his execution, his wicked rivals thrive back in Rome, their bad deeds unpunished and even rewarded. After Boethius follows up his formal complaint with a song that echoes Job 7:17's complaint about humanity's special misery,[5] Philosophy begins her long retort with a classically-formulated statement about human freedom: "Submitting to [God's] governance and obeying His laws is freedom" (*Consolation* 17). Boethius's ultimate problem, according to Philosophy, is that he has forgotten his rational nature and has placed his hopes for happiness in the Fortune-governed world of imperial politics instead of the Reason-governed sphere of contemplation. Real freedom, Philosophy reminds Boethius, comes not from temporal power, which Fortune can take away at a moment's notice and thus which cannot give real peace, but from living a life ordered by Reason, desiring those eternal goods proper to humanity as humanity (20, 93ff.). Moreover, since the goods of the political life,

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Philosophy in book one of *Consolation*, he claims without saying so explicitly that he embodies the first man in *Republic*'s thought experiment. In this study all references to Plato texts will use the Stephanus numbering system so that readers using different editions of the works can find them more easily.

5 The speech about humanity's particular misery begins in Job 7:17 and reads thus in the Geneva Bible:

> What is man, that thou doest magnifie him, and that thou settest thine heart upon him?
> And doest visit him euerie morning, and tryest him euerie moment?
> How long wil it be ere thou departe from me? Thou wilt not let me alone whiles I may swallowe my spetle.

This dissertation will use the Geneva Bible as the translation of choice in the chapters dealing with Spenser and Shakespeare, largely as a reminder that, among Protestant readers, the Geneva was the translation of choice until 1611's publication of King James's Bible. In the Milton chapters, no direct citations of the Bible happen, but were I to cite the Bible, I would certainly use the King James translation.

namely money and power and fame, are not inherent to the rational human soul but are superadded, they do not have the power in them to lead a human soul to happiness in the first place. So Boethius combines a philosophy of goodness-as-orientation[6] with a modified theology of loyalty, borrowed from Augustine, and a sense of creation's goodness, combining and articulating volitional and ethical freedom in ways that would be massively influential for centuries in Europe.

In the fifth book of *Consolation* Boethius explores the relationships between volition and divine foreknowledge. After Philosophy defines chance as the "conjunction of opposite causes" and thus still rule-bound and ultimately governed by the Providence of the one true God (117), Boethius asks the next logical question, namely whether human agency has any reality at all in a world entirely known and thus knowable in advance or from eternity. Boethius (the character in the dialogue) finds inadequate the conventional argument that divine foreknowledge sees but does not cause events. Anticipating that standard reply, Boethius notes the logical necessity of a seen event's prior occurrence if indeed the event is a real event. Moving to the next logical objection, Boethius presents the following counter-argument to Philosophy:

> For even if it is the case that they are foreseen because they are going to happen and not that they happen because they are foreseen, it is nonetheless necessary that either future events be foreseen by God or that

6 Cf. Plato, *Republic* 359c-361d. The metaphor of orientation is one of the primary teachings surrounding the Allegory of the Cave in *Republic*. In Plato's conception, explored later, education is not the implantation of good things in a mind originally lacking good things but a turning of the student's mind away from those objects unworthy of contemplation towards eternal reality and eventually upon Goodness of Beauty itself.

> things foreseen happen as foreseen, and this alone is enough to remove freedom of the will. (121)

Such binding of future events seems to follow necessarily from the immutability and omniscience of God, yet such a conception leads to impasses with regards to ethical free will:

> That which is now judged most equitable, the punishment of the wicked and the reward of the good, will be seen to be the most unjust of all; for men are driven to good or evil not by their own will but by the fixed necessity of what is to be. Neither vice nor virtue will have had any existence; but all merit will have been mixed up and undifferentiated. (122)

So Boethius presents to Philosophy herself the temporally contingent character of praiseworthy and blameworthy action as arguments against a fixed future from which human beings lack the power to turn. Here most clearly matters of good action and genuine agency are intertwined, and Boethius's answer will involve both sides of the question.

Philosophy's counter to these arguments is lengthy, but her basic move is to conflate time and space. Contingent creatures such as human beings, according to Philosophy, live *in* time. In order to make their way *from* one moment *to* another, they must *go through* the successive moments *between.* Thus every human experience of past or future is mediated by the intermediate moments. Boethius's error, according to Philosophy, is to assume that God lives *in* that same temporal mode: "The reason for this blindness is that the operation of human reasoning cannot approach the immediacy of

divine foreknowledge" (*Consolation* 124). In a model assuming that time is neatly analogous to space, the difference between temporal humans and eternal God is not a difference of fleeting versus everlasting, but of locality versus ubiquity. A human being is *here* but not *there* at any given moment on the cosmic timeline; God is immediately (no point can but touch God) *in all* moments in time:

> Eternity, then, is the complete, simultaneous and perfect possession of everlasting life; this will be clear from a comparison with creatures that exist in time. Whatever lives in time exists in the present and progresses from the past to the future, and there is nothing set in time which can embrace simultaneously the whole extent of its life: it is in the position of not yet possessing tomorrow when it has already lost yesterday. (132)

Because divine eternity is not mere temporal perpetuity, God cannot have a knowledge contingent upon what is yet to come but must have immediate access to all moments. Thus in divine reality, all moments exist, and God is *in all* of them, and not one is *separated from* him (still using the spatial metaphor).

Thus Boethius skirts close to calling the passage of time an illusion after the manner of Parmenides:

> If you say at this point that what God sees as a future event cannot but happen, and what cannot but happen, happens of necessity, and if you bind me to this word necessity, I shall have to admit that it is a matter of the firmest truth, but one which scarcely anyone except a student of divinity has been able to fathom. I shall answer that the same future event is necessary when considered with reference to divine foreknowledge, and

> yet seems to be completely free and unrestricted when considered in itself. (*Consolation* 135)

In the eye of divine knowledge, then, events are in fact already set, but "in itself," which seems to be a circumlocution, for in human sight, each event still stands contingent. The easy next step, which Boethius does not take, is that freedom is nothing more than a name for the ignorance of temporal creatures of the divine and thus real nature of moments. Within such a schema, the character of a good act in the course of human events would be identical with a good act in a published literary text. Irrespective of lack of agency in a closed system, an act could still be good or bad in terms of how it relates to other moments in the system but would not bear the same weight of responsibility that an act within a consistently contingent reality must bear.

Instead of taking that Parmenidean plunge, however, Philosophy retreats in the last paragraph of the dialogue: "God has foreknowledge and rests a spectator from on high of all things; and as the ever present eternity of His vision dispenses reward to the good and punishment to the bad, it adapts itself to the future quality of our actions" (137). A mere three sentences before he concludes the work, Boethius (the writer) seems to concede that the future is not a set of already-fixed moments to which God could be infinitely proximate but instead a realm of potential that waits on human action to take the shape that it will take. Importantly, in terms of his spatial metaphor, Boethius here makes a strong distinction between the "segments" of the line of time: in the moment to one side of the present moment, things are determined and fixed; on the other side, they remain open because of futurity. Within this very different picture of time, God becomes in some ways a character in the story, still waiting for certain moments to unfold even

though God remains immediate to the moments as they take their shape. Such a rendering of human existence and temporality opens up spaces within which literary imagination can explore the character of this complex temporal/ethical freedom, and because Boethius remains so influential right up into the English Renaissance, his vacillation at the end leaves to the Christian imagination plenty of room to play. Through the centuries and into the grand recovery of the ancients, first with Aristotle in the twelfth century and then with Plato in the sixteenth, Boethius's account of the future and its consequences for human responsibility invites just the sort of explorations that this study will present. Literary texts, because constituted by succession, tend to prefer Boethius's last-minute version of temporality, a rich matrix of relationships between moments in which the future takes on particular shapes based on momentary acts and in which a turn towards disaster can itself become a good moment precisely because a saving force "answers a prayer" and renders the moment part of a salvation-story rather than a tragedy. Boethius's Aristotelian version of temporality, combined with his strong sense of eternity as categorically different from time, becomes further complicated as the ancients return to medieval Europe.

Aristotle, Dante, and Ockham

As Frederick Copleston notes, in the centuries between medieval Europe's reception of Aristotle from the Arabs and the rise of Italian Neo-Platonism, Aristotle represented not one voice among many from an age gone by, but Greek philosophy itself. His ethics in particular gave Europe a working vocabulary for talking about human action, power, capacity, responsibility, and freedom, and when Saint Thomas and others

called him "the philosopher," they were not stating a preference for Aristotle over the Stoics or the Epicureans or the Academics so much as noting that his was the only philosophical system, developed independently of Christianity, available to them (Copleston, v. 2, 415). In particular his *Nicomachean Ethics* stands as a systematic study of human goods and a disciplined reflection upon what merits praise and blame inside a community, a set of tools with which one might analyze human act and discern goodness.

Book three of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* situates virtue and vice, praise and blame inside categories of voluntary and involuntary act. Aristotle places the primary difference between the kinds of act in the moment when someone or something initiates an act:

> Both the terms, then, 'voluntary' and 'involuntary', must be used with reference to the moment of action. Now the man acts voluntarily; for the principle that moves the instrumental parts of the body in such actions is in him, and the things of which the moving principle is in a man himself are in his power to do or not to do. (965)

For Aristotle, as for Boethius, human beings must themselves be the motive cause rather than mere instruments if ethical evaluation is to make sense at all. Actions outside of human capacity do not elicit blame when people fail to do them, and compulsory actions of various sorts do not warrant praise when people perform them. In the early salvos of Reformation theological debate on the ethics of act, this central relationship between capability and culpability will be a central point of contention.

Continuing his thought, Aristotle notes that certain mixed actions, in which an inner principle of courage or justice overcomes an outer threat of death or suffering, can

draw praise. In this and other discussions, Aristotle tends to emphasize the social phenomena of praise and blame rather than the privatized (and therefore more characteristically Christian) psychological events of self-esteem and guilt or the even-more theological categories of merit and pardon. Aristotle frames shame and praise so that one's standing as citizen or king or servant or freeman stands as integral to the process of moral deliberation as motive, intent, and other judicial categories remained in Augustine and after. Even as Aristotle moves away from the equivalence of knowledge and good action that Plato seems to assume, his categories of moral and immoral act remain firmly within a social universe in which one's status as king or slave determines the character of a praiseworthy life. Such a focus on social particularity exists in tension with a tradition that focuses on the inner self-narration before God for which Augustine's *Confessions* stands as paradigm, the sort of evaluative framework in which the commonality of inner discourse tends to supplant the particularity of social role. In the Christian era, where the class-ignoring[7] binary of sinner and saint becomes more important ontologically (though never entirely eliminating social and political class), doctrines of original sin and of a God, for whom "there is no respect of persons" (Romans 2:11, Geneva Bible) make the appropriation of Aristotle always a creative theological enterprise rather than a simple reception of tradition.

Aristotle holds that the capacity of ethical goods to attract the soul is not exclusively external for the sake of ethical judgment, for every inner drive is towards

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7 Of course no modern reader of any acuity will deny that certain “classes” of sinner are more socially determined than others. This assessment of the shift from Augustinian to Aristotelian understandings of human existence is more concerned with taking them on their own terms than with the important work of calling both systems to answer for their unstated blind spots.

some good, and to call all good-seeking actions externally initiated would be to eliminate the category of intrinsic action altogether, thus rendering praise and blame unintelligible. On the same theme he says that a truly wicked person does not act voluntarily because that person acts in ignorance of good, and properly willed actions always tend towards some good (*Nicomachean Ethics* 965-66). The discussion's contours lend themselves easily to the kinds of ethical vocabularies that arise in the Christian era: for some Christian writers (but not others), the ability not-to-do, or free volition, is the necessary condition for naming something sinful as much as it is for naming it blameworthy. At the same time, actions not directed towards good are not themselves free actions but, because they tend against the nature of human activity (which leads towards *arete* if acting according to its created, unfallen nature), stand as compelled by the force of vice, which stands intrinsically opposed to the good will. Aristotle does not develop a sense of total depravity for the Athenian imagination; any given action might or might not be directed towards a good by the powers inherent in the human *psyche* at any given stage of a human being's story. But nonetheless his ethics sets up categories in which freedom of action, though potentially bound by circumstances or by ignorance in the moral sense, nonetheless stand to be free actions because an agent has the power to perform or not to perform the action in question.

Although his direct influence on sixteenth-century England was limited, the Aristotelian literary alternative to Augustine's *City of God* that Dante articulates has a profound influence on the Italian Renaissance, and that influence means that he stands as a sort of antecedent to Erasmus, who will stand as one of the English Renaissance's intellectual options. Therefore the ancients and Christians as Dante imagines them

deserve a brief mention. Although Dante's *Comedy* makes room for strange cases like those of Cato of Utica and of the Emperor Trajan, moments in which divine decree welcomes the soul of a particularly suitable allegorical pagan into the realms of the saved, most of the luminaries of the classical world end up, in Dante's afterlife, in the circle of Limbo, the place in the *Inferno* where those people who practiced the four Platonic virtues of courage, wisdom, self-control, and justice reside. Because they were born out of season and thus did not receive the divine gifts of faith and hope and love, they sigh eternally for what they missed, but because of their natural wisdom, they know that their own failure to honor the true God while living on the planet resulted from no fault of God's. Dante's concession that pagan goodness is genuine goodness, though not saving goodness, will echo in later, Renaissance debates about the quality of human action, especially in those cases later known as virtuous pagans.

The most peculiar exception to the Limbo-dwellers is that of Virgil, who serves as a figure for human reason: for a span of a few days and roughly sixty Dantean cantos, Virgil journeys not only through the lower circles of Inferno but up all of the rounds of Mount Purgatory, where he reaches the final limits of unredeemed reason at the Garden of Eden and therefore disappears. The other grand exception, Cato, stands allegorically as a figure for law, which is neither in nor out of salvation but stands as a guard and border between righteousness and wickedness. When Dante uses Virgil/Reason and Cato/Law as integral parts of the Pilgrim's journey, the literary and rhetorical force of those inclusions is such that reason as practiced by a pre-Christian poet and reason as practiced by Dante share enough common ground and serve well enough to edify the believer that both count as true reason or true law. And just as Virgil stands for reason

without respect to historical epoch, so Cato stands for law irrespective of his own death decades before the advent of Christ. Within Dante's imagination, a force that indirectly complicates the English Renaissance, the visible form of goodness stands as efficacious for instruction and for participation in divine matters.

An important transition figure between Aristotelian and modern ways of doing ethics, William of Ockham's philosophy of will marks a decided turn in the relationship between will and goodness. For Ockham, divine will takes priority over and defines divine goodness; he asserts not that the divine will must always be good but that the divine will unilaterally posits the good by virtue of its unquestionable authority. Ockham, in Frederick Copleston's translation, puts the matter in stark terms: "Evil is nothing else than to do something when one is under an obligation to do the opposite. Obligation does not fall on God, since He is not under obligation to do anything" (Copleston, v. 3, 103). Whatever the word "good" means, it might describe but never obliges God. Abandoning Patristic images of inherent and unfailing Trinitarian harmony, Ockham opts for an authoritarian voluntarist theology that renders arbitrary any linguistic formulations of goodness. That God is the arbiter keeps goodness from being the arbitrary decree of any human being, and Ockham proves in papal debates that he is no friend of political absolutism,[8] but nonetheless the will--not the nature--of God is primary in Ockham's philosophical theology.

Because human beings are creatures, their created status does render obligation to

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8 Copleston notes that, because of Ockham's tendency to imagine God as absolute will, he in turn would not acknowledge ontological gaps between human beings that in any way approached the gap between God and man. In fact, Ockham took the side of the Franciscans against the Pope in matters of evangelical poverty (Copleston, *History of Philosophy Volume 3*, 111).

God, the one who creates them, but still does not determine action. Ockham's overriding emphasis on freedom as tenet of ethics again shapes his take on the relationship between human act and divine knowing:

> I say to this question that it must be held without any doubt that God knows all future contingent events with certainty and evidence. But it is impossible for any intellect in our present state to make evident either this fact or the manner in which God knows all future contingent events. (qtd. in Copleston, v. 3, 92)

Unlike Boethius, who illustrates his philosophy of divine knowledge with metaphoric confidence, setting forth language of spatial immediacy and with the strong distinction between the subject's epistemological capacity and the object's natural ability to be known, in Ockham the relationship between divine knowledge and the contingency of events must remain shrouded in silence because every philosophical articulation runs into absurdity. As Copleston further notes, in Ockham's philosophy, "No statement that a future contingent event depending on free choice will happen or will not happen is true" (92). Whereas Ockham's authoritarian theology provides much of the vocabulary for modern atheism (not to mention for Satan's speeches in Milton's epics), his agnosticism concerning the freedom of human action and God's knowledge of the future shies away from definite assertions of the nature of the future, as opposed to Boethius's formulations which imply at least that actions have no inherent nature but nonetheless relate spatially to God. The main importance for the inquiry at hand is twofold: at once Ockham moves the discussion of divine will away from questions of the nature of goodness and posits God as sole arbiter of what is good and what is not good; and Ockham renders the future

inherently contingent in a philosophically rigorous way. When Martin Luther holds his famous dispute with Erasmus, Ockham's sense of the future recedes, but the question of whether or not goodness has inherent content becomes the center of the dispute over meaningful, free, and good action.

Luther and Erasmus on the Will

Desiderius Erasmus's basically Aristotelian view of freedom, choice, responsibility, and goodness, soon enough runs headlong into a return of the stark late-Augustinian denial that anything can genuinely (rather than just apparently) be good apart from divine decree and faithful and intentional response on the part of the saved. As the Renaissance's influence comes to bear on Northern Europe in the sixteenth century, the careers of those figures who would be the heads of the Continental Reformation began to introduce new sorts of tensions to the question of ancient virtue, ancient text, and ancient teaching. Late in the career of the Dutch humanist Erasmus, the rise of the young Martin Luther both thrilled and troubled the aging scholar. On one hand, Luther's project of ecclesial reform resonated with Erasmus's desire to see the Church return to the text of the Scriptures rather than the convoluted logic of the schoolmen and the corruptions of custom. On the other, Luther's radical syllogistic theology was breaking ground that must have seemed in Erasmus's mind merely a new iteration of the absolutism of the schoolmen. Erasmus's *On the Freedom of the Will* and Luther's response, *On the Bondage of the Will*, engage some of the more vexing problems of systematic theology, and part of the strangeness that results from the exchange is that the pieces have entirely different conceptions of what constitutes goodness. Their stark disagreement on ethical

freedom illustrates quite well the grand impasse that English Renaissance texts faced as they wrote their characters and those characters' thoughts and actions.

Erasmus, responding to a prior text from Luther, approaches questions of divine foreknowledge, human agency, the extent to which fallen humanity remains capable of goodness, and other theological riddles with the assumption that such paradoxes are too complex to admit simple solutions, perhaps even to be subject to human scrutiny:

> It is like that cavern near Corycos of which Pomponius Mela tells, which begins by attracting and drawing the visitor to itself by its pleasing aspect, and then as one goes deeper, a certain horror and majesty of the divine presence that inhabits the place makes one draw back. So when we come to such a place, my view is that the wiser and more reverent course is to cry with St. Paul: "O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!" and with Isaiah: "Who has heard the Spirit of the Lord, or what counselor has instructed him?" rather than to define what passes the measure of the human mind. Many things are reserved for that time when we shall no longer see through a glass darkly or in a riddle but in which we shall contemplate the glory of the Lord when his face shall be revealed. (38-39)

Such a reading strategy informs the whole of Erasmus's diatribe (a term that Luther later uses as a term of mockery). The entire piece proceeds in a tone of caution and reserve, preferring to lay out contours rather than to assert dogmatically what the text itself only hints at. Perhaps, being a man of letters, Erasmus has developed a respect for the literary surface of consciousness and prefers to see the patterns in his own conscious life as

analogous to those written in ancient times. Either way, caution is the way of Erasmean hermeneutics.

The doctrine of Original Sin does not go away in Erasmus, but he does locate ethical freedom within the parameters that the doctrine sets up. His treatise assumes but does not state directly that the philosophical ethical traditions that Christianity inherited and the Renaissance received again come from the same source of all good things as particularly Christian traditions:

> This power of the soul with which we judge, and it matters not whether you call it *nous*, that is, "mind" or "intellect," or *logos*, that is, "reason," is obscured by sin, *but not altogether extinguished*. The will with which we choose or refuse was thus so far depraved that by its natural powers it could not amend its ways, but once its liberty had been lost, it was compelled to serve that sin to which it had once for all consented. (48-49, emphasis added)

When Erasmus turns to the philosophers of pagan antiquity, he returns to the possibility that the darkened-but-not-snuffed reasoning faculty, along with certain human desires for goodness (likewise unsnuffed), might allow human beings to live good lives even without the benefits of the Revelation that shapes Israel and the Church through their particular histories. When he parallels the three, he implies a common source for all sorts of goodness and thus a hope that goodness remains constant across the ages:

> The Jews gloried in the Temple, in circumcision, in sacrificial victims; the Greeks gloried in their wisdom. Now in the gospel the wrath of God is revealed from heaven, and all that glory is withered. Yet not all human

> desire is flesh, but there is that part of man which is called his soul, and that which is called his spirit, with which we strive after virtue, which part of the soul is called the reason (or *hegemonikon*, that is, the "governing part"), unless there was not among the philosophers a single man who strove for virtue, who taught that we should sooner die a thousand deaths than commit evil, even when we knew that nobody would ever know of it, and that God would pardon it. (76)

Thus Erasmus issues the ultimatum: if goodness is something that the Christian can discern in the world and give thanks, then such goodness comes from the maker of good things, even if those exhibiting the goodness do not know that it does. In other words, to deny the presence of goodness where the form of goodness is apparent, in Erasmus's challenge, is to assert a divine judgment upon the inner lives of the old souls, something that Erasmus would prefer not to assert. Like Boethius, Erasmus alludes in the passage above to the central question of Plato's *Republic*, namely whether justice is worthwhile in its own right or whether only its consequences make an otherwise undesirable way of life worth bearing. In pointing to that mentality in the ancients, Erasmus alludes to Plato's two test cases, one man who lives an entirely just life, but who has a reputation in heaven and on earth for being the most wretched soul imaginable; and another who in fact is an utter wretch, but who enjoys public acclaim because of his stealth and divine acclaim because, with his considerable wealth, he can afford many pleasing sacrifices. Remembering that crucial moment in Greek philosophy, Erasmus, still conceding that Greek philosophy is inadequate to true divine righteousness, refuses to point to everything from the ancient world as motivated by vice underneath a virtuous veneer. As

with Dante's Virgil, Erasmus insists that the light of ancient philosophy is genuine illumination.

Perhaps Erasmus did not realize he was writing a salvo in a polemic battle, but his brief treatise seems more inclined to consensus than to victory, asking only that Luther and his disciples consider the character of the texts and people that actually inhabit the world outside of the theological classroom, that they grant that what looks good might look thus because they are in reality good. Luther's response, a treatise more than twice the length of Erasmus's, attacks the older scholar's work as the faithless wandering of a Pyrrhonian skeptic, and his own treatise assumes from the outset that questions of human action stand clear in light of Biblical revelation and that his own readings of those texts are the only ones that make sense or remain faithful to the core of Christian proclamation.

Luther's treatment of the relationship between God, humanity, action, and sin becomes one of the most horrifying moments in Christian theology on account of his confidence that the motives of a human act can have only two motivating forces, never more than one at a time, and that another mortal can, based on religious-historical markers, discern those motives. The mind-reading becomes necessary because of prior commitments to a certain kind of theology that in turn requires a certain kind of Biblical interpretation. Luther's immutable rules for interpreting the Bible are that the interpreter must not use "tropes" in order to make God's actions more palatable than the worst possible reading would render them; and that after all that, the same interpreter must declare God good. That dedication to hard-nosed Bible-reading means that the reader cannot bring any prior content to the concept of God’s good will. Luther tests the principle for himself in the place where he demonstrates that "good" signifies the will of

God, not subject to humanity's reasonable investigations. That moment in Luther's theology comes when he looks at the damnation of the majority of humanity:

> Many things as seen by God are very good, which as seen by us are very bad. Thus afflictions, calamities, errors, hell, and indeed all the best works of God are in the world's eyes very bad and damnable. What is better than Christ and the gospel? Yet what is more execrated by the world? Consequently, how things can be good in God's sight which are evil to us only God knows, and those who see with God's eyes, that is, who have the Spirit. (231)

The strong difference from Erasmus could not be clearer: following a hermeneutic of continuity between the ancient and Christian eras, Erasmus insists that the predicate "good" maintains at least an analogical connection between eras, that a deity who would condemn eternally masses of souls who had no real responsibility (because they could do nothing other) stands as a monster rather than the good God of the Bible, that human agency is necessary for an intelligible ethics. Luther insists as a counter-argument that any deity whose goodness was not utterly free to differ from the totality of human assertions as to the content of goodness was no God at all, but merely one more moral actor on the same stage as other actors. Where the absoluteness of divine power gives way in Erasmus's account, the consistency of meaning of goodness gives way for Luther.

When Erasmus writes, he does not seem anticipate the force of Luther's certitude or the venom with which he expresses that certitude. Responding to a prior text from Luther, Erasmus approaches questions of divine foreknowledge, human agency, the extent to which fallen humanity remains capable of goodness, and other theological

riddles with the assumption that such paradoxes are too complex to admit simple solutions. Luther mocks that general stance as weak-minded. When the text of the Bible sometimes forces both writers to deal with apparent contradictions that arise in the course of interpretation, Luther, for whom the Bible must be perfectly clear on matters of importance to the redeemed, responds to the difficulties in ways that would be entirely out of character for his interlocutor. Where Erasmus points to the array of hermeneutical possibilities that such theological questions leaves open, Luther fixes on two particular rules of reading, the first being the absolute separation of indicative sentences from imperative. He does so while responding to a point Erasmus makes about Cain in Genesis 4:

> Here is the truth of the matter in a nutshell. As I have said, by such sayings man is shown what he ought to do, not what he can do. Cain therefore is being told that he ought to master sin and keep its appetite under control; but this he neither did nor could do, as he was already held down under the alien yoke of Satan. (189)

In example after example drawn from the Bible, Luther insists again and again that, when God issues commands to mortals, in every case the mortals are not able to do what God commands, and that is precisely the point. Responding to Erasmus's suggestion (informed by classical ethical philosophy, not least Aristotle's) that the imperative mood implies the potential for the one commanded to obey or not to obey, Luther mocks that connection as mere ignorance of grammar. The second rule of reading is that the implications of the first rule, if they seem to contradict the express indicative statements of the Bible, derive not from the written will of God, but the inscrutable will of God.

When Erasmus cites Ezekiel 33:11, which reads, "I desire not the death of the wicked; return and come home,"[9] Luther faces a theological dilemma: either mortals can thwart the desire of God, or damnation must be a matter not of unilateral divine decree but of human choice. Positing a third option, Luther lays out an interpretive rule dependent upon the mysteries of divine act:

> God does many things that he does not disclose to us in his word; he also wills many things which he does not disclose himself as willing in his word. Thus he does not will the death of a sinner, according to his word; but he wills it according to that inscrutable will of his. It is our business, however, to pay attention to the word and leave that inscrutable will alone, for we must be guided by the word and not by that inscrutable will. (200)

Luther never does explain why the damnation is inscrutable and the salvation disclosed, but he has already drawn the boundary lines: damnation for the many, because decreed by God, is by definition good. What counts as goodness as far as mortals are concerned is of no import when one reads the Bible; only the declarations of God's omnipotence, coupled with a definition of goodness as whatever God wills, whether explicitly or in secret, matter.

Two things that stand most interesting, for the purposes of thinking about literary treatments of the same questions, both arise within Luther's broadside. For one, although Luther mocks and condemns Erasmus's skepticism, his own treatment of Biblical prooftexts does reach a point when he also must fall back on an appeal to the hidden.

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9 Erasmus quotes this passage in Ezekiel in *On the Freedom of the Will* page 56 to establish a case for human choice.

Luther being Luther, of course, his appeal to mystery comes with damnation for anyone who attempts to speculate beyond the limits of the mystery as he reads it, but nonetheless his own investigation, like Erasmus's, must eventually acknowledge that the data of revelation, because not in themselves exhaustive of divine reality, ultimately will not submit to an airtight system of logic. Luther's treatise proceeds as polemic and thus runs into such limits because, as a discourse purporting definitively to answer questions that arise in the course of human experience and Biblical narrative--and to destroy other modes of reading either-- polemic as a genre tends to treat ethical questions as strict binaries and seldom seeks to engage in more complex ethical thinking. Luther's treatment of the relationship between God, humanity, action, and sin cuts off most of the complexity of Classical ethical philosophy on account of the nature of polemic. The literary texts that this study examines stand, in roughly the same period of intellectual history, as attempts to transcend the strictly binary approach of Luther, and Luther's idea, as filtered through Calvin and challenged by a resurgence of Classical Greek and Roman texts, will serve as the starting point for their investigation: attention to literary details ultimately discloses ways of theological writing more adequate to the realities of Christian history and confession than are Luther's theological moves, even when the content of the two bodies of text seem to land in the same places.

Calvin's Interior Moves

The Latin version of *Institutes of the Christian Religion* was in publication as early as 1536, and English translations begin to appear in 1561. During the reign of Elizabeth I, *Insitutes* rose to prominence as a theological textbook, and his modifications

of Luther's positions became an intellectual force in their own right. Calvin by and large follows Luther on questions of ethical freedom of the will: except in those cases when God elects to redeem a soul, the reprobate will continue on in life, consumed by her or his own wickedness; and eventually the soul's own rottenness will consume the self, leading the wicked into eternal punishment for rebellion against God (Calvin 320). As did Martin Luther, John Calvin attributes all efficient causes to God but insists that the blame rests with the rebellious mortal. Such a position relies upon two fixed points: the omni-causal sovereignty of God and the flawless goodness of the arbitrary divine will, irrespective of its content.

When those two points come to interpret the acts of the wicked, Calvin asserts both that all wicked deeds are willed by God and that God does not bear any moral guilt for willing them. In his defense of this pair of assertions, his prose drifts into a sort of dialogue with himself as he answers the objections he anticipates from the reader:

> I grant more: thieves and murderers and other evildoers are the instruments of divine providence, and the lord himself uses these to carry out divine providence, and the Lord himself uses these to carry out the judgments that he has determined with himself. Yet I deny that they can derive from this any excuse for their evil deeds. Why? Will they either involve God in the same iniquity with themselves, or will they cloak their own depravity with his justice? They can do neither. In their own conscience they are so convicted as to be unable to clear themselves; in themselves they so discover all evil, but in him only the lawful use of their evil intent, as to preclude laying the charge against God. Well and good, for he works

> through them. And whence, I ask you, comes the stench of a corpse, which is both putrefied and laid upon by the heat of the sun? All men see that it is stirred up by the sun's rays; yet no one for this reason says that the rays stink. Thus, since the matter and guilt of evil repose in a wicked man, what reason is there to think that God contracts any defilement, if he uses his service for his own purpose? Away, therefore, with this doglike impudence, which can indeed bark at God's justice afar off but cannot touch it. (217)

As with Luther's and Ockham's moves towards naming divine sovereignty as unquestionable will, Calvin here relies on an equation of divine will and goodness that turns goodness in the equation into a variable: whatever value "the will of God" ends up taking, the character of goodness is a function of that value. Thus, as in Luther's treatise, the classical (and in many cases the Christian) task of articulating the character of goodness and using that conception as a constant to make sense of revelation remains inverted in Calvin: the content of revelation (interpreted through the radical gospel of unaided divine favor) comes to be the constant, and the character of good becomes the variable whose value only emerges at the end of the equation.

Beyond the inversion of goodness and the interpretation of divine phenomena, Calvin's moves to make the acts of the wicked part of the content of providence and to declare God clear of the guilt associated with evil acts means that morality, for Calvin, becomes an even more radically interior matter than it did for Augustine. Because every phenomenon in creation, seen and unseen, has as its most proximate cause the precise will of God, predicates about this or that action shift radically in character, doubling in

connotation in cases where acts traditionally considered crimes occur. In those cases, the act itself (in this doubling Calvin begins to resemble Boethius) is at once divine act and the effect of causes like bad desire, wicked habit, and rotten impulse. Because the act itself is always involved in providence, only the interior state is left when Calvin locates the evil of an action. Thus Calvin's main complication of ethical freedom, like Luther's, is to remove the visible form of goodness almost entirely from serious ethical discussion, leaving an impassible gulf between exemplary action and the desires of the agent. For Calvin, the logic of invisible motivation extends even further, rendering even the most heinous evil part of the arbitrary will of God and therefore insisting on its goodness, even as the human beings involved remain blameworthy. Therefore the form of goodness, or at least its negation, comes back into the equation somewhat, but only for the sake of establishing more firmly the arbitrary and invisible nature (and therefore the inaccessibility) of goodness. Against this vector of establishing divine will as absolute and invisible and therefore goodness as unintelligible, the recently-recovered works of Plato mark a return to form, offering a sharp alternative to the Ockham-Luther-Calvin strand of post-ethical thought.

Plato

The Stephanus Greek edition of Plato became available in the 1580's, and before that Ficino's Italian translation of Plato's works was widely available in England (Parker 27). And before those primary texts were readily available to English readers, Italian humanists like Francesco Petrarca and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola were popularizing a philosophical vision informed by Plato and thus differing radically from Calvin's

picture of irrevocably depraved human nature. Among the classically educated in England, Plato's explorations of desire, goodness, and education's potential to shape those desires would have likely stood in tension with the priority of divine will over any inherent nature of goodness that came both through Calvinist channels and in more moderate Church of England literature. For Plato, goodness and badness are not functions of obedience and disobedience of the absolute and revealed divine will, as the magisterial reformers formulated moral goodness and badness, but take their impulse from intelligible (even if not visible) desire and their shape from forms universally available to reason. And like Aristotle rather than the Lutheran/Calvinist traditions, Plato's dialogues approach such questions entirely without reference to the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Jesus. Therefore Plato, because his Greek texts stand as a new arrival for much of Europe, stands as a peculiar challenge to the Protestant intellectual of the late sixteenth century, as Aristotle must have to the Christian intellectual of the twelfth century. Faced with a system of ethical thought independent of particular Biblical revelation, literature in the English Renaissance, in addition to all the other things that the texts do, engages with a system that has nothing to say directly to Christian theology. Such a system demanded assimilation, opposition, concession of valid points, denial of the power to speak to the Christian soul, and all sorts of other reactions, and literary texts often serve as sites for those responses.

Plato's points of departure from the late-Augustinian and Calvinist positions on ethical free will are numerous: Plato's *Phaedrus* holds up erotic desire (desire that Christian traditions often forbid, no less) as the motive force behind desire for eternal

things,[10] and his *Meno* holds that true knowledge is not revealed by a personal God but lies latent in the souls of men, available to those properly educated.[11] Running further with the idea of education, *Republic* presents a moving picture of education as orientation, indicating that the faculties of reason are perfectly adequate to comprehend the ultimate Good, but simply pointed in the wrong direction by custom.[12] Perhaps the biggest challenge is the *Euthyphro,* in which Socrates never solves the riddle of whether goodness is posterior to ontological divinity or whether the gods can be called good or bad based on the acts that they commit. As a body of texts standing in tension with Protestant theologians' writings on the will, on knowledge, and on goodness, Plato represents a coherent, aesthetically compelling alternative that cannot simply stand alongside Calvin; the two must always struggle for the soul of a text where both are present.

The impulse to resist the old philosophers' easy relationship with ethical free will and their disregard for the fallen nature of human desire must always have been in tension with the earlier Augustinian call to plunder Egyptian gold, and those dueling impulses lead to even more interesting complications as the questions journey into narrative and dramatic texts. When old Christian traditions come into contact with the questions for which the old-and-new Platonic corpus demands answers, and the ways that the texts answer in the forms of characters' stories and interactions bring new sorts of illumination to the tensions between these families of ethical thought. One place where

10 *Phaedrus* 250c-255b

11 *Meno* 82b-85e

12 *Republic* 518c

Calvin and Plato share common ground, and a place where the common ground heightens rather than lessens the tension, is in their shared notion that inner rulership ultimately frames and limits a soul's capacity for goodness.

The question of knowledge and goodness turns out to be the primary source of the the tensions between long-preached Biblical and Augustinian traditions and the ancient philosophical texts recovered from the East. The same literate tradition must at once live with an origin story in which the end of an original and intimate life in the presence of God ends with the consumption of the fruit that grants knowledge of good and evil; and with a newly-prominent Socratic tradition in which nobody does what is bad except those who do not know what they do (*Apology* 25d-26a). Plato's Socrates spends the *Republic*, moreover, arguing for a system of selecting governors based not on heredity, as the David narratives and the Davidic genealogies (and the designation "Son of God") in the synoptic gospels would set forth as legitimating Jesus, nor on the laying-on of hands that defines legitimate authority in the ecclesial system of Apostolic Succession, but on natural ability to think abstractly and a rigorous course of mathematical education that sharpens that natural ability (*Republic* 412b-414b, 521c-540c). The first few centuries of Christian thought featured a sustained debate about how such teachings could stand as part of a Christian teacher's own education, and responses were as various as Tertullian's famous "What has Athens to do with Jerusalem" and Justin Martyr's claim to be doing "Christian philosophy" after the manner of the Greeks, but fulfilled by the truth of Christian revelation.[13] And if the question of knowledge was one fraught with tensions

13 Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity 54.* Gonzalez notes that these two are but a fraction of the Christian writing in the first few centuries of the Christian era dedicated to understanding how the new

between the ancients and the Christians in the first few centuries of the era, the English Renaissance, when such teachers returned from a long historical exile, was certainly likewise fruitful.

This study's readings of Spenser and Shakespeare and Ford and Milton therefore have as their initial task to see how drama and poetry work out the seemingly irreconcilable tension between Calvin's vision of the world, in which devotion to God begins with the divine initiative to save human souls from their own wretchedness and stands as the only possible source for ethical goodness; and the Platonic and Aristotelian views, in which the human psyche always has access to goodness but which, because of various vices and customs and other factors, sometimes does not turn towards it. As the selected literary texts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries engage with those grand questions, their contribution turns out to be something that late-modern theology discovers much later, namely the priority of succession rather than of stasis as the most important ethical reality, the real core of human nature.

Reading Literature as a Forerunner to Theology

One temptation of any philosophical or theological examination of literary texts is to reduce them to treatises with decoration, to ignore the constitutive particularities of the poems and plays in favor of an abstract set of "positions" that the texts hold. Another, perhaps the mirror of the first, is to treat literary texts as if all of them arose out of the post-Romantic world and thus have no "politics" or "ideology" beyond the pursuit of art itself or, perhaps even worse, beyond the establishment of literary fame and fortune.

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revealed faith should relate to the grand traditions of Classical antiquity.

Against both of these temptations certain strands of contemporary theology offer frameworks that both pull on the classical resources that would have influenced the English Renaissance and allow room for interesting and perhaps even truthful models of interaction between the intellectual complications discussed above and the ways that dramatic and narrative texts explored below engage with the central ethical questions of freedom. If indeed English Renaissance literary texts exhibit the moves that later theology will discover by its own means, then calling the texts themselves theology does not diminish their literary particularities but approaches the texts in a spirit of respect and gratitude, noting that early-modern drama and poetry and late-modern theology are cooperating with one another to answer important questions, even as the early-modern literature remains far more entertaining and thus more engaging than do late-modern academic theology texts.

Of the late-twentieth- and early-twenty-first-century theologies that exhibit influence from literary traditions, none has been quite so helpful for articulating literature's contributions to theology as David Bentley Hart. Noting that Christianity has historically been a rich Scriptural and iconic tradition rather than an abstract system, Hart insists early on in his grand book *The Beauty of the Infinite* that "the content of Christian faith abounds in particularities, concrete figures, moments like the crucifixion, which cannot simply be dissolved into universal truths of human experience, but stand apart in their historic and aesthetic singularity" (27). In light of the particularity of Christ and of the presence of Christ in "the least of these," irrespective of the contexts and contours of their manifestations, Hart asserts that Christian "Ethics is a social love, born from the preoccupations of the flesh: it is a refinement of want, an education of vision, a revelation

within one's innate desires of the beauty present in all otherness (even when deeply hidden)" (84). The combination of educated desire and regard for the least among the world fuses Matthew 25's apocalypse of the sheep and the goats with Plato's *Phaedrus*[14], indicating that the aim of theology, for Hart, is precisely to inspire the love for the lowly when normal human capacities prefer otherwise. This fusion of disciplined philosophical inquiry and the content of revelation allows for a conception of God that makes sense of the question of ethical free will and allows an examination of literary text as a celebration within a particular sort of ethical vision, reflected upon with the best tools of disciplined language:

> God, in short, is not a hierarchy of prior essence and posterior manifestation, indeterminate being and then paradoxical expression, but is always already expression, already Word and Likeness; to speak of his *ousia* is not to speak of an underlying undifferentiated substrate (a divine *hypokeimenon*), but to name the gift of love, the glorious movement of the divine persons, who forever "set forth" and "converge." (182)

Over against philosophical articulations of goodness that require the negation of the disorderly and the offensively particular, Hart draws from Eastern Orthodox and ancient Western Catholic theology to assert that Christian theology, when at its best moments, is an intellectual tradition most suited to the production and the appreciation of the visible and textual particularities of this or that given phenomenon and the relationships of affinity and distance between them.

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14 For further discussion of *Phaedrus* and the nature of desire, see chapter two.

Hart also offers tools for articulating the shape of ethical free will in English Renaissance text because, in his theological account of human consciousness, he emphasizes that, for Christian theology and its emphasis on reality as created, no hermetic seal separates the "interior" from the "exterior" so much as those labels name places where creation lies open to casual observers (in the former case) and places where the surface is folded over on itself (in the latter), obscuring what occurs in the conscious and unconscious mind from surrounding people and sometimes from the thinker's self, but never escaping the textuality of created reality. As a response to Calvin's and Calvinists' strong distinctions between the apparent on one hand and the invisible and interior on the other, Hart insists that creation is a perpetual multiplication of surfaces rather than a process of negations-of-surfaces and negations-of-negations, and his following of Milbank's lead brings to light the particularly interesting ways that literary characters' mental lives, be they the brief musings of Spenserian heroes or the long speeches of Miltonic devils, consist of the same textual stuff as do the same characters' wars and couplings and speeches and other public actions:

> Every creature, in its terrible fragility, is perfected in a radically unfounded condition of dependency (upon God) and interdependency (with all creation), and the human soul is a particularly rich contour of the surface of being, a particularly deeply folded interval, enclosing a more nocturnal interiority than other folds, a richer capacity to reflect otherness, a specular "profundity"; but this inwardness is a detail of the aesthetic whole of creation, not an isolated enclave that exists prior to or apart from the aesthetic, linguistic, and communal occasion of its unfolding. (286)

Thus Hart offers good tools for examining a dramatic character just as much as a poetic persona. The relationship between the words in the text and the spiritual and mental reality beyond those words is not a simplistic identity so that the tension between words spoken (even to self) and other facets of the personality collapse into reductionism. Neither is there any sort of Cartesian split, however, between the super-linguistic "mind" and the contingent and textual "expression." Rather the asides and soliloquies and other literary devices within dramatic and narrative texts stand not as identical with, but analogous to the real relationships between the "inner" and the "public" as experienced by all human beings. Although he never cites the Aristotelian concept of *mimesis*, Hart, in step with Milbank, offers the reader of English Renaissance literature a set of intellectual tools with which to make sense of the mirror-image relationships between literary characters and the human beings who read literature.

Furthermore, the succession of events and psychological and spiritual states of characters in drama and narrative highlight the dialectic character of the moments in a character's or a world's career: the moment just after a fall takes on its rich sadness of meaning precisely because the prelapsarian status of the world or character was so good, and the goodness of prelapsarian existence always stands in relationship to what comes after. A character who has come back from a grand lapse of faithfulness is not the same as an innocent character who has never been tested, and a character who forgets his or her place in the proper scheme of things differs from a character who never had the capacity to know. Thus, following Hart's lead, what narratives and dramas stand to teach the theologian is the painstaking attention to context, sequence, and other literary realities that save an observation about one soul from becoming dogmas governing all souls.

Beyond that, a doctrine of analogy stands to make sense of the relationships between the world of the poem or narrative or drama and the printed or written artifact called script or book; the tensions between paginated simultaneity and the sequence of events in the worlds of the characters (including the character known as the narrator or even the playwright) allow for an ironic[15] but sustained and serious examination of how a character's acts cause events in a narrative or drama and yet exist simultaneously with their effects in the pages of the book. Such analogies between human and literary act mean that the texts of the English Renaissance stand to offer their own particular and robust complications to the central questions of ethical free will, and the way that such complications manifest in moments of royal or imperial succession will be the points of this study's focus.

This dissertation will examine some commonly anthologized texts of the English Renaissance, starting with Spenser's *Faerie Queene.* The chapter dedicated to the Redcrosse Knight, Sir Guyon, Sir Artegall, and Queen Mercilla will examine the ways in which narrative sequences, each a mixture of Christian conversion and of Platonic orientation, inform the ways that the first two books' heroes confront, defeat, and sometimes stand subverted by their enemies. The meaningful act will largely be a function of what impulses, educated and fallen and redeemed, move the knights to do as they do, and the loci that will constitute that examination will largely consist of the quest to re-instate the King and Queen of Eden and to dethrone Acrasia. The chapter will

15 Milbank (*Theology and Social Theory* 265-267) once again becomes helpful here: one of his signature contributions to theology-and-literature studies is precisely his break with a metaphysics that would separate stage-acting and literary narratives too easily from the stories that make up the rest of life.

conclude with a section that examines the trial of Duessa as a function of right rule and meaningful act.

Chapter three will examine some of Shakespeare's poems and plays set in pre-Christian Rome, and the theological question of meaningful act will be the extent to which the characters who do selfless, noble, and otherwise good things retain that sense of goodness as the texts proceed. Although Shakespeare does not employ all-knowing characters who can give reliable glimpses into characters' motives, nonetheless when characters shift from public to private moments, continuities and departures do tell tales about the potential for genuine goodness on the parts of the old Romans.

Chapters four and five will examine Satan as he comes to power and then to his serpentine demise in *Paradise Lost*; and then Christ as he establishes his true place in the world as Son of God in *Paradise Regained*. Because each of these characters is at the apex of created reality in his own way, each undertakes particular courses of action (and of stasis) that become interesting as super-human and entirely-human acts when examined in light of the complicating factors with which Christians in the seventeenth century examine human action.

Finally, the final chapter will return to the question of ethical free will, indicating how the English Renaissance plays and poems anticipate some of the more sophisticated theological moves of the late-modern period and suggesting ways in which theological and literary-critical scholarship and theory can continue to inform one another.

CHAPTER 2: Spenser and Storied Act

In the world of *The Faerie Queene*, characters enter a world already saturated with Christian symbols and never leave the *saeculum* of the Christian era,[16] yet in the first book the main character journeys to Eden and acts out the apocalypse. The poem names characters, brings them into relationships and conflicts with one another, leaves things unresolved (as befits poems composed in the *saeculum*), and situates characters relative to Christian salvation and Classical education using the literary tools of succession and thus making more sense of the Greek, Roman, and Biblical sources than many non-narrative commentators of the day do.

The poem does so beginning with a series of clever changes to the abiding philosophical and theological questions within the conventions of the Romance genre. In *Faerie Queene,* Spenser practices the art of variation that Hart sees at the core of Christian theology: as Spenser's knights fight their enemies and wander along the paths before them, Platonic interests in erotic desire and its suspension meet with Christian narratives of spiritual warfare between divine and demonic impulses and end up

16 R.A. Markus's *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine* discloses an important historical distinction between meanings of "secular": whereas in modern usage "secular" indicates a sphere of influence, usually separated from the sacred, for Augustine and most medieval writers after him, "secular" names not a territory but a time, namely that time between the resurrection of Christ and the coming of Christ to judge the quick and the dead. Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* is a secular poem in that older sense: although the king and queen of Eden feature, and although the dragon does die, nonetheless the entirety of the story seems to happen in a faerie-haunted version of the Christian era.

addressing many of the questions of desire and mediation that are at the heart of the debates between Luther and Erasmus. Where Luther frames such relationships in terms of a zero-sum game, where an act stands isolated and must be entirely for the glory of God or entirely as a thrall of Satan, *The Faerie Queene* situates all human actions in the Christian era in a complex network of sequence and influence that will not allow simplistic absolute evaluation yet certainly allows for and practices deliberation on the relative adequacy of Classical and Christian resources for helping a redeemed mortal to live in the time between the times. Spenser's complications of human action, in other words, highlight the in-between character of Christian existence in the *saeculum*. In *The Faerie Queene* existence always contains the beginning and the end of things in every moment, always derives its aesthetic and thus moral force from what comes before and what comes after, and always stands to learn from the Classical ways of philosophy as much as it stands redeemed and being-redeemed within Christian narratives of conversion.

Redcrosse and Guyon: Entering and Extending the Good Life

When in the opening of Spenser's *Faerie Queene* a knight is "pricking on a plain," he wears borrowed and battered armor, a sign early in the course of things that, like the wayfaring Christian readers, Redcrosse will always encounter the texts and tales of the Classical world alongside such things as the Bible and the story of Christ. Redcrosse is always and already part of the Christian tradition when he enters, and his armor immediately provides readers with echoes of St. Paul's image of the armor of God in Ephesians 6. His status in the poem is always a complex mix of the innocent, the sinner,

and the redeemed. The allegory of Redcrosse will at least initially not reveal much about the origins of things (though Arthur, along with Guyon, will later look into those), but like the Christian-era reader, the characters will learn about themselves as circumstances disclose truth. More dangerously, though, the poetic text will bring the reader along as someone, like Redcrosse, thrown into a world filled with Errour and Duplicity, who always seem to precede wisdom and truth. Such an approach to the world already acknowledges a degree of complexity that, as future chapters will show, does not appear prominently in the strong polemics of Luther against Roman and Greek pagans' helpfulness as moral exemplars. In Redcrosse's world (and in the world the *The Faerie Queene* writ large), ethical differences and contradictions lie not between clearly defined spans of historical years (not even when those years are marked by the birth or the death of the Savior) but within each moment of each human existence because of the ways that different sorts of theological imagination imagine relationships between goodness, sin, and the proper human response to the same. The paradoxes, in other words, often tell the same knight's story differently in different moments, and salvation in *The Faerie Queene* means, among other things, submitting to the events that let the soul retell the story and resolve those contradictions. In David Hart's terms, only the particular moments and intervals allow for judgments of good and evil. In *Faerie Queene* as in Hart's theology, no *a priori* scheme allows a reader (or any mortal in the text) to get past the mediated seeming and on into immediate being. In the quests to Eden and the Bowre of Blisse, the reigns of realms and of souls in *The Faerie Queene* serve as laboratories for the mediated relationships between Classical and Christian virtues and their capacity to respond to evil in the world.

Sir Guyon's appearance posterior to Redcrosse is not accident but itself a theological statement: where historians (or poems and plays, as the next chapter explores) might speculate on what morality and order might have looked like in a pre-Christian era, this allegorical romance will only imagine the classical philosophers as they come to the confessing Christian. In the course of the poem they arrive only after the catechism and baptism of Redcrosse, just as the philosophers' texts arrive for most English Christians only in formal schooling, after the Church has set up the life of conversion and faithfulness as a context into which the philosophers enter. Thus the questions that the classical philosophers ask of the human being always, for the Christian-era soul in Spenser, come already mediated through the teachings and the conflicts of the Christian tradition.

When the opening stanzas refer to Redcrosse as faithful and true, the reader can assume, rather than having to guess, that his faith and truth are for entities intelligible in Christian categories (Levin 5). And for the course of Redcrosse's and Guyon's adventures, any mortal human being enters into a world in which Jesus is already "his dying Lord" (1.1.2) and where every pre-Christian text always comes to those mortals as supplementary to the system of Christian symbols and practices that appear so prominently in those opening stanzas. Guyon himself, though initially tempted by a disguised Archimago promising an occasion "great [Guyon's] selfe to make" (2.1.8.8), nonetheless repents of his attack on Redcrosse with a reference to his "Redeemers death / Which on [Redcrosse's] shield is set for ornament" (2.1.27.6-7), signaling that, although his tale explores one of the classical virtues, Temperaunce, his exploration always happens in the Christian *saeculum*, and Guyon always stands responsible for achieving or

failing a particularly Christian synthesis of philosophical virtue and theological grace.

In this world, the young George, carrying on his shoulders the weight not only of a cross and the armor of God but the name and the mantle of the patron saint of England, faces monsters and deceptions and moments of triumph that do not stand as figures for humanity in general or even Christianity in general but English Christianity in an age of false piety, the only sorts of challenges and obstacles that a Christian in *The Faerie Queene* can possibly encounter, given the inescapably historical and contingent character of human existence that the poem maintains. Likewise Guyon ventures forth to seize (Greek *crazein*) power from Acrasia (the negation of seizing) in the context of a symbolic order that introduces Aristotelian and Stoic philosophical possibilities into an order already Christainized. *The Faerie Queene* makes the pilgrims and adventurers of its romantic plot in significant ways intellectual peers, not of the fifth-century Welsh warlord Arthurus, but of sixteenth-century English Protestants, and that intellectual situation means that every pagan is one who has already rejected God (as have the Sans brothers) and where the legendary and romantic menaces to the characters are linked allegorically not to an intellectual moment too distant for memory so reconstructed historically, but immediate to Spenser's moment, recast in the trappings of the Romance.

The Dark Horse, Desire, and Redemption

In the *Phaedrus*, Plato's dialogue about love and the soul and rhetoric, one of the central images for the soul is a pair of horses, one white and beautiful and obedient, and the other dark and energetic and hard to control. Following from the dialogue's long exchange of speeches about the relative merits of the one in love with the beautiful boy

and the one who is not in love with the same, Socrates brings forth the image of the two horses to illustrate the sexual passion without which the higher *eros,* that for the soul's goods, never comes within reach. Only when the dark horse pulls the lover towards the beautiful boy's body, does the lover ever gain the opportunity to discipline the desire, heighten the tension, and transcend the moment to reach for the love of spiritual beauty.[17] The prospect of a higher, transcendent *eros,* one explored in the *Phaedrus* and in the *Symposium* as desiring neither a beautiful body, nor even a beautiful soul, but beauty itself, faces a pair of dangers: one the danger of desire's never dragging the intellectual soul (figured as the charioteer) towards the goal; and the other the danger of indulging the bodily desire and thus dispelling the tension that brings the higher beauty into view, robbing the soul of the building energy that might allow an ascent to a higher *eros,* one whose object requires powers beyond the individual will, a propelling force that only *eros* can supply.

In the stories of Redcrosse and Guyon, both sorts of horses, Guyon's well-controlled steed and Redcrosse's steaming stallion, figure as dangers to the Church militant, and like *Phaedrus, The Faerie Queene* situates both sorts of dispositions not as opposing powers, the alien to be driven out and the guardian to keep watch over the city, but each as a dangerous tendency that, if unchecked by the other, stands to rob a knight in the Church militant of the discipline or of the desire to continue standing as a witness to the Gospel. Spenser's pricking knight's horse, itself fighting the bit like Plato's energetic horse,[18] signals to the educated reader that all of this knight's Christian adventures will

17 *Phaedrus* 256 a-d

18 *Faerie Queene* introduces Redcrosse's horse thus:

take place under the auspices of some version Plato's allegory of desire. Like the charioteer in Plato's allegory, this knight strives with a dark horse who figures some sort of erotic desire. What stands open at the beginning of the epic is whether the knight must channel that desire for the sake of an energetic-and-disciplined heroic virtue, the sort that Plato identifies with vatic madness over against rhetorical calculation, or whether he must discard the horse, casting aside the erotic entirely. The object of the central character's erotic pull cannot be a beautiful boy[19] (this is Spenser, not Marlowe), but the presence of the beautiful maid Una serves nicely as a Christian-era substitute, and in the course of Book 1, as Redcrosse departs from Una and faces other challenges to his moral character, the tension between immediate desires for glory, sex, and other lesser goods always imperils his ultimate quest to liberate the kingdom of Eden from the grand dragon, a perennial figure for Satan (Revelation 12:9) as well as an echo of the serpent in the garden of Eden. Only the course of the Romance, which concludes with a betrothal to the object of his desire, tells what the fate of Redcrosse's desires will be.

What should strike a reader familiar with Erasmus's and Luther's disputes about the nature of goodness is that, following Plato's lead, *The Faerie Queene* does not separate those desires from the pursuit of holiness but brings them into the circle of legitimate goods that the quest pursues. Redcrosse does become betrothed to Una, not as a concession to his concupiscence but as a good reward for a successful quest. And although his marriage to Una is deferred, that deferral is not a denial that the union would

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His angry steede did chide his foming bitt,

As much disdaining to the curbe to yield; (1.1.1.6-7)

19 As early as Paul's letters to the Corinthians, the written Christian tradition (certainly shaped by Paul's early influence) has taken a stand against Hellenic and Hellenistic pederasty.

be a good one but remains a temporary spur so that Redcrosse can go off questing in behalf of the Faerie Queene, always suspended in the tension to return and the pursuit of the high queen's requests of him. For Redcrosse, then, the queen and Una do not represent a choice, one of which the knight must reject in favor of the other, but two goods that the same knight can seek in sequence, each heightening the goodness of the other.

Guyon, in his own encounter with Mammon, reveals that his own failure to heed appetite can leave him without the strength to struggle. Even though nobody tricks Guyon into forsaking Gloriana, he does take to the water with Phaedria without the Palmer along, and the results of that journey are near-fatal in a fight with Cymochles and eventually Guyon's journey into the underworld which leaves him defenseless at the hands of both sons of Atin. Both tales work together to point to human existence as always in tension, in the Christian era, always waiting for the fulfillment of the Kingdom of Heaven but always waiting as a human body.

Redcrosse finds Duessa more impressive than Una, and an Arch-Mage (also an Arch-Image) leads Guyon to attack Redcrosse for a crime that he did not commit. As with Redcrosse's tale, in Guyon's case Plato's *Phaedrus* serves nicely to illuminate each knight's failure to live well with desire and each knight's later redemption into transcendent desire. Given the tension between Protestant narratives of unilateral divine redemption and Platonic narratives of desire as the root of goodness, Spenser synthesizes the two by placing them in a narrative, one which allows for plural moments of fall, redemption, refinement, and reorientation. *The Faerie Queene*'s synthesis of the Christian redemption story and the Platonic narrative of transcendent desire, each situated

relative to the other by means of narrative sequence, should set the stage for the large questions of rulership, mediation, and succession that come into play later in Book 1 and in the course of Book 2. If the two knights are to complete their quests for the glory of Gloriana, their desires must both be redeemed and disciplined, given the gracious reorientation of redemption and the ongoing sharpening of the ethical life. Though one knight mainly needs redemption and the other mainly wisdom, both fall due to their shortcomings and thus stand in need of grace before their own efforts can effect the ends of their missions.

When Redcrosse and Una, fleeing a great storm, flee for shelter into Errour's den, another classical echo begins, book six of Vergil's *Aeneid*, a tale (from certain traditions of reading) of the questing hero, pursuing the great end of establishing the roots of Rome, distracted by desires for erotic connection. When the Redcrosse and Una stumble upon the monster Errour, the danger of another Carthaginian delay falls away only to be replaced, after Redcrosse dispatches the physical manifestation of bad doctrine, with the threat of emotional manipulation at the hands of Archimago, a sorcerer who seems to know, upon seeing the pair, that the jealousy that arises alongside erotic attraction will be the vehicle by which he separates them. Because Holiness is, for the Protestant, always first and foremost a gift from God, the danger is never that God will withdraw that gift once given or that there will not be enough to go around but that the rebellious soul will reject its goodness and choose instead to pursue a way of life that will lead to destruction. Each triumph and escape in turn takes its particular character specifically from the danger that follows, and a common thread of dangers ends up dooming Redcrosse to leave Una, then fall victim to Duessa and Orgoglio. Because he is unable to transcend a particular

kind of love story, Redcrosse interprets the goodness of Una in carnal-erotic manners, and as he rejects the infinite as finite-and-given-away, he turns to double-mindedness itself, Duessa.

That Holiness is a gift makes perfect sense within the Christian story, but the nature of gift is ambiguous. In certain ways of imagining divine gifts of saving grace, for instance, such grace is irresistible, so that if God elects to save this or that soul, the soul in question has no capacity to reject the gift in its giving or to renounce the gift later. In other readings, later labeled Arminian, a gift is always open to acceptance or to rejection, and those who reject the divine gift of saving grace have the capacity to do so, thus allowing God to remain an intelligibly good giver of intelligibly good gifts to all even as some do not end up enjoying the benefits of those gifts. *The Faerie Queene* has Redcrosse both beginning his story with Una (though explaining the pair only later), rejecting Una in favor of duplicity, and later coming to receive again the gift of the One True Church, but only after he has been rescued graciously by Arthur and sanctified and strengthened at the House of Holinesse. By means of a succession of moments rather than a static state of the soul, Redcrosse is both one who receives and rejects truth, and both of those realities become more vivid precisely because they stand in relationship to one another within the same story.

To explore the ways that all good things are gifts, *The Faerie Queene* makes the engine of temperance, that reasoned deliberation on the probabilities of the situation and the practice of responding in ways most in accord with those deliberation, something that a hero can leave behind or take along. That the Palmer sometimes gets separated from Guyon and at other moments is returned to him as a gift indicates that, in *Faerie Queene*,

prudence is as much an imputed grace as it is a virtue inherent in humanity (Cooney 186). The poem does not settle in any definite way, however, the precise mechanisms by which the gift comes and goes by Providence or against the wishes of the divine. But whatever the case, Guyon's decision to leave the Palmer when he sets out in the boat for the Bower of Bliss signals to the reader that, just as Redcrosse is always capable of giving up his Holinesse in favor of duplicity, so Guyon can at any turn in the story surrender his practical reason, leaving a vacuum in his judgment and later laying him low in the lair of Mammon.

Returning to *Phaedrus*, in Socrates's grand speech in praise of *Eros*, the body for whom the crass lover experiences desire is not entirely important: equally bestial, in his speech, are the man who lusts after women and the man who succumbs to his desire and mounts a beautiful young man (250e-251a). Spenser, working within Christian traditions of marriage, and especially with Saint Paul's allegorical treatment of marriage as related typologically to the relationship between Christ and the Church, cannot allow for such an equivalence of desires but nonetheless maintains the form and the tension, transforming Christian marriage into the higher desire, not opposed to bodily contact itself but in contrast with bodily contact outside the bounds of Christian liturgy. *The Faerie Queene* narrates Redcrosse into a compound of sins when he seeks satisfaction in Duessa's arms and at the very least by implication consummates his sexual desire (1.7.6-7). Beyond dissipating the Platonic desire that otherwise might lead him to eternal things, Redcrosse indulges the lusts of the flesh with Duessa in particular, whose clothing and other visible markers identify her fairly clearly with the prostitute of Revelation 17[20] and indirectly

20 The Geneva Bible's description of the Whore of Babylon begins in Revelation 17:4 and runs thus:

invokes Paul again, this time in his call to the Corinthians to abandon their sports with prostitutes:

> Knowe ye not, that your bodies are the members of Christ? Shal I then take the mebers of Christ, and make them the mebers of an harlot? God forbid. Do ye not knowe, that he which coupleth him self with an harlot, is one bodie? For two, saith he, shalbe one flesh. But he that is ioyned unto the Lord, is one Spirit. Flee fornication: euerie sinne that a man doeth, is without the bodie: but he y comitteth fornicatio, sinneth against his owne bodie. (1 Cortinthians 6:15-18, Geneva Bible)

Redcrosse's dalliance with Duessa therefore partakes in a complex of classical failure and Christian sin, forsaking the carnal-volitional tension that Plato holds up as the road to higher kinds of desire as well as uniting his own body, which displays the Cross as an icon, with a figure who is no ordinary prostitute but who is figured as the very Whore of Babylon, the embodiment of Roman corruption and violence and persecutor of true Christians. The young knight ends the episode without any warrant to claim later that his

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> And the woman was arraied in purple & scarlat, & guilded with golde, & precious stones, and pearles, and had a cup of golde in her hand, ful of abominations of the earth. And I sawe the woman drunken with the blood of Saintes, & with the blood of the Martyrs of Iesus: & when I sawe her, I wodred with great marueile.

Spenser's initial description of Fidessa/Duessa runs thus:

> A goodly Lady clad in scarlot red,
> Purfled with gold and pearle of rich assay,
> And like a *Persian* mitre on her head
> Shee wore, with crowns and owches garnished,
> The which her lauish louers to her gave (1.2.13.2-6)

own right action, right thought, faithful steadfastness, or any other combination of human goods allows him to return to Eden and to face the dragon as the moral hero.

As later stanzas reveal, such a separation and reattachment stands in damning relationship to previous expectations for Redcrosse and puts at peril the very reason that Una sought Redcrosse, namely that he was a young and untested knight who had not shed "guilty blood" (1.7.47.3) unlike so many errant knights. When Redcrosse wanders away from Una, forsaking holiness and abandoning the woman who has the capacity to check him against further error, he stands in mortal peril of losing the innocence that makes him worthy of the quest. More dangerously, *The Faerie Queene* does not give Una "a hero who confronts his pride, only one who embodies it, largely unawares, and who therefore misses the pressing moral question that pride presents" (Mikics 40). Thus as Redcrosse makes his way towards Orgoglio's prison, the young Saint George's success in his mission to bring Eden back to right rule is anything but settled. Here lies the strong difference between the Platonic narrative, in which one indulgence ruins the potential for future spiritual journeys entirely, and the Christian tradition, in which Israel's punishment and forgiveness in the wake of the people's idolatry becomes the paradigm for the personal narrative as mastered by Augustine. That succession of innocence and fall and renewal becomes crucial to *The Faerie Queene* and to the kingdom of Eden precisely because the one who defeats the dragon must be one forgiven, a sinner who knows that he has sinned and returns to righteousness because divine grace has rescued the rescuer. Because Redcrosse exists within a Christian framework, the one-time ruin of his desires does leave him damned, but the damned are precisely the ones who get saved in Christian stories.

Fall and Rescue

Setting up the Orgoglio encounter as a fall into sin and a redemption from the same, culminating as it does with Redcrosse's undeserved rescue by Arthur at Una's request, Redcrosse's wretchedness invokes, among other things, Saint Peter's restoration from Christ-denier to early Christian leader; Augustine's redemption from his own sins of the flesh to become theologian and bishop; and Luther's self-description as one imprisoned by false doctrine until divine act allowed the text of Augustine to lead him back to the Biblical gospel of grace. The common thread in these narratives, one that becomes quite clear when Una and Arthur restore Redcrosse, is the need for the militant Christian first to be the helpless sinner. Una, hailing as she does from Eden, does not recognize the superiority of the *felix culpa* and consequent redemption from sin to the mere innocence that can only be lack of experience, but the shape of the poem renders Redcrosse's redeemed state to stand even more powerful than his state of innocence before Duessa's trap. Una's ignorance allows Spenser to explore the possibilities inherent in a young human existence that comes into its own in what the Christian New Testament calls the end of the age, that *saeculum* between the resurrection of Christ and Christ's return to bring the Kingdom of God to completion. Una's love for Redcrosse, fortunately for Eden, spurs her to rescue the fallen knight even after his failings, by her own criteria, render him unfit to face the dragon. Such love allows Una and Arthur and more generally the narrative to carry Redcrosse forward in the redemption-story and ultimately to victory over evil.

Read through the lenses of Platonic desire and of Christian redemption history Redcrosse undergoes a complex and an insurmountable fall, something that is a failure of

discipline in philosophical terms and a betrayal of Una and of God in theological terms. When Redcrosse does succumb to the lusts of his limbs, he at once disregards the sacramental character of marriage and fails to be a Christian-Platonic hero simply by losing his focus on the higher desires in favor of Duessa's flesh. In terms of Plato's *Phaedrus,* Redcrosse has forever lost the crucial tension that would even make possible his ascent to spiritual desire.[21] And in terms of Pauline and Apocalyptic theology, he has committed the compound crimes of idolatry, unfaithfulness, and the rejection of the true Church and the true God in favor of duplicity. In the wake of this enormous failure, he promptly loses his ability to muster the heroic strength to resist the giant Orgoglio. Whether a knight at the height of his powers could have overcome the pride-giant the text leaves unsaid, but in the particular moment when Orgoglio grabs Redcrosse and tosses him into prison, the knight has already defeated himself, having fallen into the arms of the woman who promptly encourages the giant to greater cruelty still against the knight. Spenser takes great pains to note the utter depths of the knight's helpless state as Orgoglio charges him to do battle:

> [Redcrosse is] haplesse, and eke hopelesse, all in vaine
> Did to him pace, sad battaile to darrayne,
> Disarmd, disgraste, and inwardly dismayde,
> And eke so faint in euery ioynt and vayne... (1.7.11.4-7)

Like Beatrice for Dante, Una stands as the only one in the story who will intercede for the lost sinner, but when she does so, she makes her plea not to the shades of the dead but an earthly rescuer, the counterpart to each *Faerie Queene* book's knight, Prince Arthur.

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21 *Phaedrus*, 255e-257a

Guyon Succumbs to Self-Denial

Much stranger than Redcrosse's fall, and thus more interesting for the parallel, is Guyon's need for rescue. Guyon's separation from the Palmer does not sink him into the same swamp of indulgence; if anything, his problem is that he forgets to allow his mortal body the comforts that he needs to continue struggling. The trick of Mammon is not to convince Guyon to love money, though like Acrasia his temptations are intelligible as attempts to supplant God as chief good by making the pleasures of possession and of indulgence good in themselves (Wood 137-38). But without the Palmer there to tell Guyon to return to a place where he can eat and drink and rest, he falls all too easily into another trap, one far more insidious. Because Guyon stands strong and resists temptation for so long without any attention to his mortal limitations, the very duration of the trip ends up being Guyon's undoing. But since Guyon's virtue is temperaunce, the practice of allowing reason to govern the appetites and the movements of the body,[22] his fall makes perfect sense as a succession of rightly-ordered self-discipline to a self-discipline that ignores the proper context for self-discipline.

Although his story is not headed for a baptism but a reunion with the Palmer, Guyon nonetheless fails to embody his signature virtue and as a result undergoes a rescue and rehabilitation. But the Knight of Temperaunce does not fall because of the tempter in his story: “Guyon's victory over Mammon is, in this sense, achieved too easily; the bliss he is offered in Mammon's idolatrous kingdom manifestly fails to challenge its heavenly counterpart” (Wood 141). But when Guyon, exhausted from his three-day journey into the underworld with Mammon, finally faints and thus renders himself in need of rescue,

22 Plato, *Republic* 442b-443b

the limitations of human strength rather than a discrete immoral or disloyal act bring the knight of Temperaunce to the ground:

> And now he has so long remained theare,
> That vitall powres gan wexe both weake and wan,
> For want of food, and sleepe, which two vpbeare,
> Like mightie pillours, this frayle life of man,
> That none without the same enduren can. (2.7.65.1-5)

The strong difference between the knights' situations stems from the nature of the virtues they stand to represent. Where Holiness is, in Christian traditions broadly and especially in Protestant traditions, always and entirely a gift from God, granted without merit and irrespective of circumstance to the elect, temperance in the Aristotelian tradition comes from within the citizen but requires that the body remain whole and able. When Guyon's own body reaches its limits, temperance fails because it is the virtue that governs a body faced with abundance, not with want. Here *The Faerie Queene* makes one of the most interesting moves in the parallels between Guyon's and Redcrosse's stories, namely repeating the fall and the offer of grace in the second book. Such a move serves to articulate that every main character in Spenser's Romance is going to be at once Christian and Christ-denying, both saint and sinner, at different parts in the narrative. Spenser's succession is always that of the mortal body, and it always happens across moments. That Guyon's fall and rescue happen in the course of exploring a virtue that the New Testament inherited from Greek philosophy means that *The Faerie Queene* charts its own course, steering neither towards the Italian universalism of a Pico della Mirandola[23] nor

23 Although the bulk of Pico's *On the Dignity of Man* concerns itself with reconciling Platonic,

for the polemic Protestant dualism of a Luther but instead communicates the differences between getting-saved in terms of holiness and getting-saved in terms of temperance by slight modulations in the parallel story lines. Guyon really does not seem to deserve to lie helpless, looted by Cymochles and Pyrochles, because he has relied on a virtue that is entirely out of place in moments of deprivation. At the very least, a robust temperance would not have denied the self that which health requires but taken in enough food and rest rather than none at all. Yet the parallel plots of quest, separation, capture, and rescue (especially considering that other books of *The Faerie Queene* do not follow that formula nearly as neatly) undeniably link the shape of his story to that of Redcrosse's, challenging the reader to go along with the poem as it reinterprets the Greek tradition in light of Christian grace.

Mediated Salvation and the Excesses of Mediation

Only the divine grace of Arthur's appearance, whose immediate cause is in turn Una's plea in Redcrosse's case and the Palmer's intervention in Guyon's, allows the knight to repent of his indulgence and continue to pursue divine Holiness or true Temperance. *The Faerie Queene,* though certainly playing out within a distinctively Protestant frame of reference that stands suspicious of prayers to saints, nonetheless allows for the intercessions of the Palmer and Una, the figures of Reason and of the one true Church, and points to Arthur, who figures Britain as a mytho-political reality, as a vehicle for

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Aristotelian, and Biblical philosophy, the part that remains most famous is his famous praise of the human soul, that power in the world that can raise a human being to the grandeur of angels or sink the same human being lower than the beasts, who have no intellect. In Pico's treatise, all human beings have equal capacities to ascend to Christlike goodness.

divine salvation. When Arthur finds each knight, Guyon has gone from body-denying to out-of body, and the weakness that Redcrosse exhibits upon his capture by Orgoglio has given way to utter waste that figures the moral reality in a sort of mock blazon:

> His sad dull eis deepe sunk in hollow pits,
>
> Could not endure th'vnwonted sunne to view;
>
> His bare thin cheekes for want of better bits,
>
> And empty sides deceiued of their dew,
>
> Could make a stony hart his hap to rew;
>
> His rawbone armes, whose mighty brawned bowrs
>
> Were wont to riue steele plates, and helmets hew,
>
> Were clene consum'd, and all his vitall powres
>
> Decayd, and al his flesh shronk up like withered flowres. (1.8.41)

Although he will need rehabilitation before he can wage further battle, Redcrosse has at this point put behind him the wiles of the now-exposed Duessa and the illusions of Archimago and go forth to re-enact the story of salvation once more in the kingdom of Eden. With an exchange of divine healing elixir for a bound book of the gospel (1.9.19), Redcrosse stands forgiven by his lady and his rescuer, brought back into the community of the righteous as signified by the giving of gifts.

That the questing knight can fail not only for outright immoral acts but also because of the limitations of morality brings *Faerie Queene* into conversation with the Reformation's disputes about the inherent capacity or incapacity of mortals to do genuinely good works, and even though all of the characters in *The Faerie Queene* encounter temperance and excess in a Christian intellectual context, the strong

differences between narratives of divine grace and of Classical self-control make the deceivers in the two quests very important to the ways that the successions of "rulers" within the souls of the knights grow complex in the stories. Whether the duplicity of words leads the will actively to commit crimes against God or whether the duration of words wears out the otherwise-temperate body, the mediation of necessary goods through language stands as a central anxiety within *The Faerie Queene.*

In the leadup to Redcrosse's rescue, Archimago and Duessa embody what happens when mediation goes to deceptive excess and demonstrate the difficulty of spotting that excess. The villains in Redcrosse's story stand as contrasts to Una and Arthur not in the fact that they stand between the knight and God's grace, but that their manner of standing-between keeps the succession of events that would communicate grace from taking their saving form. The possibility that form can be dangerous is, of course, not a Christian innovation. Mikics notes that even between Plato and Aristotle, their strong disagreement about poetry's suitability for moral instruction hinges upon whether a city can control the passions that poetry arouses (17-20). Further, the Reformation, as Georgia B. Christopher imagines it, stands "as a shift of the sacramental medium from things to words, which demonstrably can be both intimate and communal" (7). In light of these powerful intellectual tensions, both Duessa and Archimago place before Redcrosse and Guyon, in their very literary bodies, the the perils of apostasy, and "because the poem fuses the Chrsitian quest for identity with the chivalric quest for manhood, the spiritual dangers connected with the loss of faith and joy in the quest get dramatized predominantly as sexual dangers" (Berger 30). Such dramatization, of course, runs parallel with the Old Testament's tendency to articulate the perils and the betrayal of

Israel's idolatry in terms of adultery and fornication. Such a metaphoric matrix, in *The Faerie Queene,* entails a strange reversal in which the male lead ends up being the unfaithful bride, fleeing from Una and turning his desire towards falsehood embodied (and, in terms of poetic narrative, textualized). In short, Redcrosse's own soul cooperates with Archimago's phantom squire to deceive him: as Berger asserts, "he *got himself* deceived" (36). Redcrosse must undergo the discipline of the House of Holinesse before his desires even point rightly towards Una: until he realizes that she is not just some maiden who can be replaced by any other woman the way that any horseshoe can replace any other, his desires will be in disorder and therefore will not be capable of embodying holiness.

Although Guyon's devotion remains for Gloriana alone, in his own particular circumstances he also descends voluntarily into the underworld of Mammon. The parallel quests, both featuring a captivity that comes about because of a will that does not aspire towards but ends with self-destruction, sets up the context within which the quests manifest as distinct but analogous quests of the soul: "As Christ descends not just into the underworld but also to a Hell-like despair on the cross to achieve our salvation, each person descends into his or her own soul to confront what must be overcome" (Fike 12). Even after being reformed in the House of Holinesse, Redcrosse must face Despair personified, while Guyon's journey to the Bower of Bliss puts to a final test the wisdom he must personify if he is to face Acrasia and defeat her. Guyon's and Redcrosse's struggles in the midsections of their narratives highlight some of the difficulties that the Christian story of redemption poses for moral philosophy, mainly those regarding the transformation that Christian baptism and preaching purport to elicit from the believer

(and the failure of both to elicit any such thing consistently) and the dilemma of representing vice and weakness. Christian theology, departing to a large extent both from Plato and Aristotle, holds that a fall from grace and a descent into utter depravity is both universal and necessary for true spiritual health (salvation) to happen; the fall is a component of the good story of salvation. Yet even though the fall happens to all, and even though it is a part of a good story, inherently each sinner's fall stands as a negation of goodness, and thus a Christian writer cannot call it good in itself. ChristianWood poses the difficulty of moral instruction within this matrix, by means of poetry, in the form of a rhetorical question:

> [A]llegory is brought face to face with the traditional dilemma concerning the representation of evil in art: how are the temptations of vices to be mimetically represented without distorting their appearance to facilitate their condemnation, or making them so inherently appealing to the reader that the moral perspective might be lost altogether? (146)

If Duessa and Archimago turn out to be too appealing, they stand to lead the soul away from goodness rather than setting up the atmosphere of tension that a negative exemplar ought to establish before the positive exemplar leads the soul towards goodness. And if Mammon's trickery appears too airtight, if the stratagem of posing temptations that do not lead Guyon's will to perdition, but tax his body beyond endurance, appears insurmountable, the reaction on the part of the reader is likely to be despair, rather than a fear that watches for the fearful. Yet if any of the crew stands simply as clownish, the poem minimizes the genuine erotic pull of evil and thus minimizes the true horror of the fall that always comes before redemption. *The Faerie Queene* navigates these troubled

waters always by situating characters, events, and other entities in relationship to one another.

With regards to Duessa, her rich iconic presence at once signals to the reader that this is neither the spare Una nor an easy negation of the same: “The text parodies the tendency of antipapist iconoclasm to slander woman by making her an idolatrous embodiment—an embodiment not only of the Catholic idolatry it criticizes but also of the reformed faith's own iconoclastic aspiration to invisible truth” (Berger 36). Yet she is also a woman, and like Una that fact places her in a kind of relationship to strong Christian imagery, for the Protestant most notably the Bride of Christ who is the Church. Therefore Duessa's danger is not hard to spot at first, but more difficult to distinguish from the purpose and rescue that Una provides. The strong central challenge for Redcrosse is faithfully to remain with (and later, after he has failed, graciously to return to) Una even though there is enough indeterminacy in the distinction between the two women that Redcrosse could, in good faith (but not in informed faithfulness) regard the appearances of the two women as immaterial to their roles in the story. Yet he must at all turns take responsibility for and seek forgiveness on account of his failure to choose the right allegorical woman, if not in terms of their dress then certainly based on testimonies of her former victims.

For Guyon's tempter, Mammon, the deception lies not primarily in the text but in the invisible reality surrounding the text, namely the passage of time as the text unfolds and the body's need for nourishment and rest across the same passage of time. Like Duessa, Mammon is not a mere negation of apocalyptic imagery: after all, Christ appears to John at the outset of the book of Revelation as a man shining like gold. Instead,

Mammon is a man of gold who has no place in the divine economy and thus appears as rusted and crusted, and while he does share some features of the apocalyptic brilliance of Christ, he ruins it by his very hoarding. Moreover, he takes Guyon not on a journey that stands unrelated to the Christian narrative but on a parody of the harrowing of Hell: when the narrator reveals that Guyon has been in the underworld for three days, the reader has only been hearing Mammon's speeches, beholding the wonders of the underworld, and walking through the modified temptations of Christ, for a fraction of that time. Like the crowing of the cock in the synoptic gospels, the sound of the three days' passage alerts the reader to the horrors of the living man's journey into death and reminds the same reader that Guyon, unlike Christ, has no particular business being in Hell that long. The contradiction that confounds Guyon comes not in the logic of Mammon's speeches (they are conventional acts of bribery and no real match for the dedicated Guyon) but in the double-time to which Guyon's body falls. Forgetting that he remains a mortal as he travels through superhuman places, Guyon loses sight of the strong interdependence of body and soul, abandoning his body to go on his journey and taxing even his disembodied self beyond its endurance by remaining in Mammon's realm longer than the three days allotted.

Sequence and succession therefore stand as central to the falls of the two heroes: while Redcrosse's loyalty undergoes a succession of objects, first to Una and then to Duessa and then, after his sanctification, back to Una; Guyon's neglect of the succession of moments leaves him vulnerable to his own mortal limitations, which never do lose contact with the number of moments that pass and the strain of each moment that confronts the body. Guyon's education in the House of Alma also involves historical

study, which is itself a disciplined beholding of the moments that have constituted one's own moment and how those moments relate to one another. More specifically, of course, the history that Guyon reads also involves the succession of monarchs in Faerie. Like Redcrosse when he looks to the end of time on the mount of Contemplation, Guyon learns to see his own life more fully by establishing relationships to the moments that constitute his history, and in both cases, the education scene allows each knight to charge forward to the final battle.

The Dragon, Acrasia, and the Reign of Eden

Redcrosse's quest has as its ultimate end the beast that menaces Eden, and though he wanders for many stanzas before getting there, from the outset the aim of slaying the dragon moves him to venture the next allegorical challenge:

> ...euer as he rode his hart did earne,
> To prove his puissance in battell braue
> Vpon his foe, and his new force to learne;
> Vpon his foe, a Dragon horrible and stearne. (1.1.3.6-9)

The book of Revelation explains the Dragon and its apocalyptic referent more clearly than nearly anything else: "And the great dragon, that olde serpent, called the deuil and Satan, was cast out, which deceiueth all the worlde" (Revelation 12:9, Geneva Bible). What Eden needs, then, is another apocalyptic figure, a Son of Man who has the standing before God in turn to stand before the Dragon and drive it to the lake of fire. But to become the embodiment of that figure, in the world of *The Faerie Queene,* means no mere innocence but the dying-to-self and rising-to-life that comes from redemption. Una

therefore stands ignorant of the power of salvation from sins when she narrates the fall of Eden just as Redcrosse has entered completely into perdition. As he lies captive in the palace of Orgoglio, robbed of martial and moral strength because of his own dalliances with Duessa and lacking the purity that seems necessary to avoid the fate of those who have battled the dragon before, Una unwittingly but effectively writes him off as just another lost cause:

> Full many knights aduenturous and staout
> Haue enterprized that Monster to subdew;
> From euery coast that heauen walks about,
> Haue thither come the noble Martial crew,
> That famous harde atchieuements still pursew,
> Yet neuer any could that girlond win,
> But all still shronke, and still he greater grew:
> All they for want of faith, or guilt of sin,
> The pitteous pray of his fiers cruelty haue bin. (1.7.45.1-9)

The timing of this narration sets the stage for the grand apocalyptic questions of forgiveness and worthiness in the Despayre episode: Redcrosse, in episodes still fresh on the reader's memory, has been among all people wanting faith, breaking his faithfulness with Una; and has been guilty of sin, although the narrator leaves the particular nature and extent of his encounter with Duessa ambiguous. Beyond allegorizing the psychological and spiritual threat of despair, the encounter sets up tension the story of Eden’s rescue. Though Redcrosse is capable of journeying to Eden to fight the dragon, Una's narration has established that, as she comprehends the problem, Redcrosse has

already ruled himself and his innocence out as a solution if the terms of the problem require unstained original innocence.

Guyon as well needs Arthur to rescue him because of his own virtue's failure, though in his case not because of a deliberate act but because of ignorance and recklessness of his own natural limitations. Paradoxically in its own right but in keeping with *The Faerie Queene*'s insistence on divine grace as uniquely salvific, Guyon's encounter with Mammon ends with a scene of martial helplessness but with Guyon's own weakness being the occasion upon which which he returns to earthly existence and therefore to the site of his salvation. When Arthur fights Pyrochles and Cymochles over the seeming-dead body of Guyon, there is no sense that Guyon deserves any moral blame for his situation; he is by definition helpless. That helplessness, however, in a tale that purports to celebrate and demonstrate the self-contained virtue of temperance, highlights that, in the universe of *The Faerie Queene*, all virtues are in some sense gifts, and even temperance requires, for its fulfillment, gratuitous rescue, the gift of salvation. Grace, arriving just in time to save, succeeds self-containment when the self cannot continue to sustain consciousness. As the first two books time and again confront the reader with parallel plot moments brought about by entirely incommensurate acts on the parts of the two knights, the poem shapes in the reader a sense that Classical distinctions between the act deliberately committed and the act received because of a lack of attention ultimately do not stand as radically separate as Aristotle would have them. Instead, the Christian narrative of unmerited rescue remains universal even when pre-Christian formulations of virtue are the sources for the moral question. Grace is grace and failing is failing, and Guyon's foolishness, though not by any means a moral equivalent of Redcrosse's

indulgence, still renders him unable to redeem himself. Both knights, because their stories are Christian stories, get rescued and stand to do battle, having been saved.

As the parallel rescue stories flow from very different causes for helplessness, theologian John Milbank helps to clarify why the Classical virtue, in the den of Mammon sheared from the Right Reason of the Palmer, proves inadequate: “For charity does not, like prudence, really 'form' a passionate material that wells up from below; rather it produces its own material, shaping it according to its precise needs for every occasion, and in this precision also engenders an 'excess' that is by no means culpable” (Milbank 361). Because *The Faerie Queene* is a poem operating within the ethics of charity, the parallel stories, with their notable departures, open out into two sides of a repeated story that leave room for significant ethical deliberation. Redcrosse's original-innocence narrative and Guyon's self-containment narrative, both of which end up failing, come into conversation with each other as a complex meditation on the character of a temperance that cannot exist except as a variation on holiness and an approach to Greek moral philosophy that is in itself incomplete unless supplemented by grace. Thus the Redcrosse knight, pushed into physical and moral weakness first by the trickery of Duessa, then by imprisonment at the hands of Orgoglio, then twice in his fight with the dragon, nonetheless never exhausts the gracious gift of further strength precisely because holiness, in a Christian scheme, has at its source the infinite love of God. Guyon cannot stand even if his volitional acts are blameless, because his attempts to resist Mammon stem entirely from his own strength (the text does note, just before he encounters Mammon, that he is all alone) rather than going forth with the aid of graciously-given right reason. Only later, when the Palmer helps him to navigate the waters on the way to

the Bower of Bliss, can Guyon's intrinsic discipline sustain him in his journey, and that only because the Palmer helps him.

By intertwining thus the story of Eden, the story of Arthur, and the story of Redcrosse; and by linking Acrasia's dissolute rule to the false authority of Mammon, the poem reinforces the strong bonds between the state of the soul and the soul of the state. The dragon feeds off of the private guilt of knights and terrorizes the kingdom of Una's parents and stands as the Satan who continues to ravage Eden even in an age where knights already wear crosses as indicators that they are among the faithful redeemed. Mammon, even though he encounters Guyon after Redcrosse has defeated the dragon that terrorized Eden, still claims authority over all of the knights and kings of the world. Salvation history in *The Faerie Queene* repeats rather than exhausts primordial and apocalyptic moments: there is no time in the Romance before Christ is savior, and there is no time after the final defeat of evil. All moments within the poem remain rooted in the salvation-history of the world the poem creates, but the rise and fall of the faithful (and the faithless) in the narrative happen on analogous scales, never in totalizing cosmic terms but some on an individual level and others on the levels of kingdoms and dynasties. Even when Arthur later faces Maleger's hordes, the vastness of those hosts reminds a reader once more of the invincibility of Original Sin, and that the defeat of one dragon in Eden does not mean that all things are therefore right with the world. Arthur, the paragon of virtue in *The Faerie Queene*, only defeats Maleger when he embraces the sin and accepts a sort of divine grace (Mikics 87) and submits Maleger, the figure for bodily weakness, to his own sort of baptism in a standing lake. The repeated inability for unaided martial virtue to overcome evil in books one and two of *The Faerie Queene*

return the reader again and again to the story of salvation that stands always between the reader and the divine encounter, never nullifying the need for Christians to strive against evil but never granting that the mortal's struggle against evil can ever come to anything save with the help of God. Such stories do not nullify the political realities that give shape to the poem's images but certainly situate political events within a theological vision that makes them allegories in addition to allusions. Such complex stories will mediate between the soul and salvation as long as the world remains between the times the encounters that the Christian has with the Trinitarian heavens.

The house of Holinesse, therefore, plays a political role that is also a personal role: the three daughters of Caelia enable Redcrosse to regain the wholeness of soul that his ordeals with Archimago and Duessa and Orgoglio have taken from him, certainly, and at the same time they prepare him to take up the mantle of Saint George, the plowman-saint, and become the savior of England (after he's slain the dragon in Eden). And when Guyon destroys the bower from which Acrasia rules the souls of men, he does so with the righteous rage of the balanced soul (unmoved by the pity that might have slowed him because of surface beauties in the place), but he also renders harmless a force that had ensnared knights, warriors that Gloriana might have sent on righteous quests for the glory of her reign. As the two tales finish, with the knights reunited with their companions (who are never parts of their bodies yet never in the poem anything but essential to their existence), the reader comes to realize that temperance, if it is to find a home in the ethical life of the Christian wayfarer, must on a structural level become more like holiness, certainly disciplining the soul but also submitting to the strong Christian doctrine and sensibility that all goods, whether in the world of phenomena or in the

constitution and sanctification of the soul, must always and perpetually be gifts, given and recognized as gift, gracious rather than deserved.

Classical Virtue in an Already-Saved World

Redcrosse's and Guyon's tales point to some of the difficulties that arise when Christians attempt to bring temperance, a thoroughly Greek virtue, inherited in the Roman tradition, into a conception of good human life defined not by the eternal recurrence of Greek and Roman myth but by the eschatological story of Christian redemption. That difference does not mean absolute separation, of course; as early as the New Testament Christian theology has made moves to appropriate the vocabularies of Greek ethical philosophy, and the difficulties translating, from language to language as well as from thought-world to thought-world, have been part of the game from the beginning. As Harold Weatherby's close examination of virtue-languages in Greek, Latin, and English indicates, Spenser's choice of "temperance" comes in the midst of a raging translation battle that attempts to situate *egkrateia*, the word that Paul uses to name the fruit of the Spirit, and *sophrosyne*, the word that in the gospel of Luke names the psychological state of a person whose demons have just been exorcised, in terms of their Latin and English correlates (Weatherby 212-13). Although Cicero and the Vulgate both, when they translate these words, render *egkrateia* as *continentia* (continence) and *sophrosyne* as *temperentia* (temperance) (Weatherby 207), most sixteenth-century Bibles prefer "temperance" for *egkrateia*. Erasmus renders *egkrateia* as *temperentia* instead, conflating the two concepts, and such is the tradition that Spenser seems to follow (Weatherby 214). Spencer establishes an association with the virtue-lists of Paul and, in

his letter to Raleigh and in the subtitle of the second books, takes the same path as do English Bibles. He sets up the poem as a catalog of Biblically-inflected rather than Aristotelian-inflected virtues for the prince. In all of this negotiation, Spenser's need to choose among vocabularies in Greek and Latin and English stand as a reminder that, contrary to the strong objections of Luther, every Christian virtue in some sense adapts, departs from, and inherits classical virtue, even as the philosophy of history that surrounds Greek philosophy could hardly differ more from the apocalyptic, eschatological picture of history that animates Christian theology.

Nor does the division mean that eschatology means a simplistic linear view of the course of human life. As the repeated salvations of Redcrosse by agents other than his own prowess (before the poem, assuming that he knows what the cross on his armor means; at Orgoglio's castle; when confronted by Despair; twice while battling the dragon) testify, and as the five books of *The Faerie Queene* that happen after the defeat of the dragon agree, the plotline of fall, rescue, rehabilitation, and mission occur repeatedly in the *saeculum*, often several times within any given character's career. The succession of powers for these knights runs back and forth across the stories of fall and redemption and sanctification and relapse, painting a complex picture of the possibilities that exist when the soul has the capacity to forsake one ruler in favor of another. Every moment in that complex story relies for its aesthetic power not on a glimpse into an interiority by definition invisible but in the relationships between textual thoughts, textualized actions, and the ways in which one event informs another, how a thought informs an act, and the ways in which an act sets the stage for a thought. Succession and relationships, in *The Faerie Queene*, allow readers to make the moral judgments that the poem calls for.

The problems of mediation that Guyon struggles to surmount reflect an anxiety in Reformation-era Protestantism about the tension between the long tradition of sacraments, with their connection to the corruption of Church officials and abuse of their power, and the doctrine of incarnation, whose logic seems to require that the Christian soul come to the Father (who is unseen) by means of "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6) which is for the Christian always and already involved in and mediated through the particular human (and visible) life of Jesus of Nazareth. That anxiety takes its shape in the poem through the repetitive but not perfectly cyclical character of the knights' journeys in the first two books, and insofar as variation marks the core character of those books, they perform the movement of thematic repetition that characterizes the best of Christian theology.

Talus, Artegall, and Mercilla: From State to Soul and Back

Among the allegorical figures for Elizabeth I in the poem, Mercilla perhaps best illustrates the complex and recursive character of virtue in a Christian universe informed by Classical learning. Even more than Caelia and Alma, Mercilla embodies her book's virtue, standing less for a celestial or even psychological abstraction and more for the outworking of justice in a complex world. *Faerie Queene*'s combination of political and moral allegory reminds the reader that virtue always unfolds and develops amid the contingencies of human history. Such an Aristotelian notion fits well with Christian theology, whose Sermon on the mount does not articulate an abstract theory of politics but proclaims, "Ye are the light of the worlde. A citie that is set on an hill, can not be hid" (Matthew 5:14, Geneva Bible). *Faerie Queene* sets up Elizabeth's court as such a city,

bringing the trial of Mary Queen of Scots into the allegory of justice. To set up this collision of philosophical deliberation and remembered political event, *Faerie Queene* starts with inadequate attempts at justice before bringing the narrative around to a more adequate mean between them. An encounter between two rival versions of justice early in book five comes to its Aristotelian solution (which is always also a Classical virtue inspired and transformed by Christian doctrine) in the end in the figure of the just queen.

Artegall's episodic journeys with Talus bring him time and again into contact with situations that call for the prudence and the awareness of complexity that characterize a good ruler. One of the earlier encounters happens early in canto 2, when a giant is rallying the peasants in a fairly transparent parody of the Peasants' War of 1524 and of various uprisings in Ireland. The giant does not begin his appeal with a call to overthrow tyrants in the name of Christian liberty; instead the poem has him claiming hyperbolic and apocalyptic authority over the elements, promising to right unbalances in the nonhuman created world before he ever gets to the tyrants:

> He sayd that he would all the earth vptake,
> And all the sea, deuided each from either:
> So would he of the fire one ballaunce make,
> And one of th'ayre, without or wind, or wether:
> Then would he ballaunce heauen and hell together,
> And all that did within them all containe;
> Of all whose weight, he would not misse a fether.
> And looke what surplus did of each did remaine,
> He would to his owne part restore to the same againe. (5.2.31.1-9)

Artegall enters into debate with the giant, noting that what might seem unjust to the untutored eye is actually an inequality that has antiquity on its side since the proportions and placements of the natural elements enters the existence of mortals not because of a temporal king's decree but because of a divine decree that predates and thus stands prior to all human will:

> Such heauenly iustice doth among them raine,
> That euery one doe know their certaine bound,
> In which they doe these many yeares remaine,
> And mongst them al no change hath yet beene found. (5.2.35.1-4)

Clearly the giant has no warrant for his position on natural-philosophical grounds (especially given the divine source of the inequality), but his appeal has not ended; he quickly enough turns from reason to revelation, reframing his appeal for the overthrow of the current order in terms that echo the Magnificat:

> Therefore I will throw downe these mountaines hie,
> And make them leuell with the lowly plaine:
> These towring rocks, which reach vnto the skie,
> I will thrust downe into the deepest maine,
> And as they were, them equalize againe. (5.2.38.1-5)

Artegall quickly enough assigns the role of mountain-leveler to Providence, not the work of any mortal giant (5.2.41). Both Artegall and the giant appeal, in the course of their debates, to a concept of Natural Law (Fowler 62) in addition to the text of the Bible, granting that in addition to the specific content of divine revelation the powers of reason can, if governed by the heavens and not by mortal ambition, rightly order a community

for the good of its inhabitants. The difference between the giant's Biblical interpretation and sense of natural law and Artegall's is that, for the giant, mathematical equality (which stands as a sort of *reductio ad absurdum* parody of political egalitarianism) is the content of natural law, deriving its force from an abstract good. For Artegall, on the contrary, the farthest that natural law can go is to say that things are as they are, and the divine will has ordered them so:

> What euer thing is done, by him is donne,
> Ne any may his mighty will withstand;
> Ne any may his soueraine power shonne,
> Ne loose that he hath bound with steadfast band. (5.2.42.1-4)

The Faerie Queene in this dispute puts an Ockhamist assertion that God is inscrutable will (the argument inherited by Luther and Calvin), as articulated by Artegall, strongly in opposition to a farcical version of a Platonist argument (though not one of which the meritocrat Plato would approve) on the giant's part. Anticipating later developments in book five, Fowler points to the debate between Artegall and the giant not as a contest between reason and not-reason but, in the light of the higher justice that will later manifest in the person of Mercilla, as a clash of two excessive conceptions of justice (66). The fate of the giant, drowning at the iron hands of Talus, stands as a reminder that the full process of prudent jurisprudence is not yet within reach at this point in the knight's and the iron page's journey.

Such displays of violence, however, do not rule out the possibility that justice might be done. When Mercilla's trial of Duessa ends with Duessa's execution, neither the narrator nor Artegall condemns the results as unjust in any way. Beyond the obvious bit

of political obsequy that the allegorical trial of Mary Queen of Scots represents, the way that *The Faerie Queene* frames the justice of the decision offers a locus for examining what counts as the content of a higher, moderated form of justice, as opposed to the giant-justice and the iron-flail justice which rule the second canto. Justice, in the fifth book of *The Faerie Queene*, is even more complex than holiness or temperance, an ordering of things in the world that a ruler (of a soul or of a kingdom) must arrange by intentional will as well as discerning in the patterns and content of reality.

Leading up to the trial itself, the chamber of Mercilla, the damsel queen (5.8.17), is crowded with symbols of legitimate authority and active justice. Besides the scepter and sword (5.9.30), alongside her elevated golden seat that invokes the judgment seat of God in the Old Testament (5.9.27), in addition to the royal lion at her feet (5.9.33), Mercilla is attended by allegorical figures that echo the various ministers in the House of Holinesse and the House of Alma. Figures with transliterated Greek names like Dice (justice), Eunomie (good law), and Eirene (peace) join figures like Temperance (an echo of the second book) and Reuerence as those who honor the Queen of Mercy (5.9.32). As the poem does with the "houses" in books one and two, *The Faerie Queene* illustrates the adequacy of Mercilla's court not by starting with an overly complicated schema of public virtue and moving from there to a pared-down version (as a good Calvinist might hope), but begins without apology with an array of objects and attendants, each contributing to a grand and complex network of relationships between virtues, psychological dispositions, institutions, and other realities as a sort of parade before the reader. The art of justice, in the chambers of Mercilla, consists not of cutting away that which is not-justice but by arranging all of the goods that compete for primacy in a manner that as a composite

comes to form justice. By the time the trial of Duessa begins, the poem has set forth a setting (the allegorical figures do not really do enough in the story to count as characters) so rich and intricate that the actual judgment of Mercilla in the case of Duessa can move forward, in its own complexity, in an atmosphere that both inspires confidence in the right rule of the merciful queen and sets before her the challenge of putting the goods of soul and state in a properly-ordered hierarchy.

When the trial begins, *The Faerie Queene* presents the legal arguments in the character of another allegorical figure, Zele. His narratio includes not only her deceiving knights but also her slanders against Mercilla (5.9.40), and he attributes the failure of her plot to Providence (5.9.42). His arguments precedes a parade, this time of advocates who do not speak directly in the text of the poem, but whose names speak for the reasons that Mercilla ought to condemn Duessa to death. Among those parading for the prosecution (the narrator says they plead, but the text of their pleas does not appear in the poem) are Authority, Nations, Religion, and Justice (5.9.44), indicating that Duessa's crimes are the complex sort whose composite natures largely demand the swift and final punishment of execution. Because Mercilla's court is a fair one, advocates for sparing Duessa then process through the court, including Pittie, "Regard for womanhead" (5.9.45.4), the Daunger of revolt as a response to the execution, her "Nobilitie of birth" (5.9.45.7), and Griefe (5.9.45). None of those "testifying" for the prosecution or for the defense is inherently excessive or deficient; the queen herself must decide, in the given moment, which will have priority over which. When all of those figures have had their moments in the proceedings, Mercilla makes a decision that the poem does not narrate directly, instead indirectly pointing towards execution. Through all of this, Mercilla allows all of

the varied and opposing elements to attempt influence, then acts in the role of the righteous judge without asking any of them to depart from the intricate picture: "Mercilla's role in [the trial of Duessa] is not to dispense either condemnation or pardon; it is to *uphold* the rule of law against vengeance" (Clegg 259). As the ideal ruler in an allegory of justice, Mercilla thus holds together the complex expectations that define justice in the Christian era: she does not act in manners that would only be proper to prelapsarian existence, yet her entertainment of such things as pity and grief indicate that her stance towards Duessa is always informed by Christian concerns for the dignity even of the condemned. As a figure of justice, a virtue that always takes its shape in a complex world amid conflicting claims to righteousness, Mercilla stands as exemplary in the poem's explorations of secular virtue. Thus as the various allegorical figures vie for rulership, Mercilla herself succeeds all of them as the rightful ruler of Duessa's trial.

In the accounts of the defeat of the dragon and the restoration of the throne of Eden; the ouster of the mis-ruler Acrasia; and the trial of Duessa, who slanders the rule of Mercilla, *The Faerie Queene* tells stories of souls who are already saved and become saved; who stand responsible for the embodiment of virtue even as they learn what the virtue means. Within the course of the Christian's life the influences of the ancients enter into a complex temporality that will not admit of any simple linear progressions. Whether the moment in the story demands a contest between Classical and Protestant conceptions of virtue; a plea for forgiveness in the moment when the sins of the soul or the state have plunged to perdition; or the complicated dance between the dignity of the accused and the goods of the state and the soul; moments and virtues and considerations of justice always stand together, taking form as the picture of virtue only as God will

allow *and* as the sinner will accept forgiveness and the forgiven will accept sanctification. Such is the character of life in the *saeculum,* but not all of recorded human history happens in the Christian *saeculum.* The next chapter will explore some texts in which characters not privy to Christian revelation act in a sort of pre-secular moral laboratory, sometimes approaching goodness, or at least seeming to.

CHAPTER 3: Shakespeare and Opaque Act

When the question of virtuous act remains a question of competing influences within the span between Christ's resurrection and Christ's return, the ancients are already Christianized, but when Christian-era literature imagines the lives of pre-Christian or non-Christian polities and souls, the questions of act change with respect to capability and with respect to focus. When Christian theology regards the span of human history, God never ceases to be a live question because created existence is always already a gift. But because Christianity is a historical faith that began in a particular place and time, traveling from here to there by means of historically intelligible vehicles such as evangelists and epistles, stories of life outside of Christian confession invite thoughtful Christian writers to think about the operations of divine goodness alongside and perhaps contrary to the impulses of those who have not been evangelized. The question of the virtuous pagans has fascinated literate Christians through the centuries because the form of their virtue persists despite their separation (for inevitable historical reasons) from the handed-down Christian tradition. That separation and the aesthetic force of the best writers, thinkers, and tales of virtue complicate questions of act and goodness in ways that complicate greatly the questions of how goodness begins with God, travels through intermediaries, and eventually arrives in some form that the Christian faithful can appreciate.

Although his career started well after Shakespeare's ended, John Ford's *The Broken Heart* serves well, because of its extreme shifts of plot and moral stance, to start to show how dramatic texts in the English Renaissance handle questions of the virtuous pagans. In Ford and in Shakespeare pre-Christian Greece and Rome serve as testing grounds, sites for exploring questions of act, desire, and participation in (or rebellion against) the Good and God. In Ford's *The Broken Heart,* Ithocles and Orgilus demonstrate the complexity of classical virtue and vice, the sources of so much debate in the Reformation period, by their debates over who wronged whom worse. Beyond words, however, their careers in the drama disclose violence at the heart of Ford's Sparta that belies even their attempts to speak virtuously. To judge by his speeches early in the play, Ithocles is the picture of the civic-minded Spartan, receiving honors for his exploits on the battlefield with a sense that everything he does or receives gets its main meaning from its situation in the particular community called Sparta. When he faces the acclaim of the Spartans, he insists that whatever glory he receives he conceives of in terms of the glory of the city:

> Let me blush,
> Acknowledging how poorly I have served,
> What nothings I have done, compared with th'honours
> Heaped on the issue of a wiling mind.
> In that lay mine ability, that only.
> For who is he so sluggish from his birth,
> So little worthy of name, or country,
> That owes not, out of gratitude of life,

A debt of service, in what kind soever
Safety or counsel of the commonwealth
Requires for payment? (1.2.69-79)

Like Socrates in Plato's *Crito*, Ithocles speaks of service to the city, even unto death, as the basic requirement of one who has come of age in the city and thus one who stands heir to the moral and spiritual goods that a city's common life bestows on citizens. And like Plato's Socrates, Ithocles distinguishes himself in the city's battles and returns home in hopes of living peaceably. Judging by his early speeches, Ithocles seems to embody something akin to Platonic virtue, something available in common to all nations in all ages because of the structure of human communities and independent of gods or nationality. A soliloquy not long afterwards reveals that, for Ithocles, maintaining his sense of place is no automatic disposition like strength or speed or size but requires deliberation:

Ambition? 'Tis of viper's breed, it gnaws
A passage through the womb that gave it motion.
Ambition, like a seelèd dove, mounts upward,
Higher and higher still, to perch on clouds,
But tumbles headlong down with heavier ruin.
...Morality applied
To timely practice keeps the soul in tune,
At whose sweet music all our actions dance.[24] (2.2.1-5, 8-10)

24 Coburn Freer, in *The Poetics of Jacobean Drama*, notes that Ithocles's lack of emotional depth, evident in his wordiness, makes him unsympathetic even beyond what his actions towards Orgilus make of him

Ithocles here seems to draw on the common Classical trope of the city as mother, one that the *Crito* uses as well and that Plato develops at more length in the *Republic*. The place of the fighting man in the good city is to fight in behalf of the city and never to turn one's gifts against the city-mother for the sake of one's ambition, and when Ithocles realizes that his friends have designs upon his fame in order to usurp the throne of Sparta, his initial reaction is one that would have made Socrates proud, that of the dutiful son of the city and of the practitioner of goodness. The temptation to ambition is always present, but Ithocles has more than adequate resources to resist that temptation because of his established place in the city's order.

Plato proposes in the *Apology* and *Phaedrus* and *Republic* (among other places) and Aristotle develops in the *Nicomachean Ethics* the idea that goodness is not inherent in any mature form to humanity but must develop through some sort of learning. The radical Plato proposes excising the old poems of the gods and replacing them with a curriculum in mathematics to instill a proper reverence for unchanging, eternal reality, while the conservative Aristotle seems more inclined to find the roots of civic virtue in the careful observation and imitation of the courageous and just and magnanimous among one's own city. But both on a root level agree that a warrior like Ithocles learned to be a warrior like Ithocles by means of the previous generation of warriors. Likewise, a good citizen always has some sort of city to thank for his goodness, whether that city is one generation old or has been living life since days of legend. Within that mindset, to corrupt such a warrior is a crime not mainly against an individual soul but against the

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(180). However, the content of the speech and its contrast with the content of his conduct are more relevant to the current argument.

spirit of the city that makes such a soul possible. Therefore pride and ambition are at the same time, in richly interrelated ways, problems of the soul and of the city.

However, Ford's vision of Sparta does not allow the lofty speeches of Ithocles to shape the heart of the drama. His insult to Orgilus, at the expense of his own sister's life, reveals that his attention to the city does not extend far enough to become love for those citizens closest to him, his sister Penthea and her betrothed Orgilus. In a series of plot moves that echo Classical anxieties about the possibility of a good city and resonate with theological concerns of the English Renaissance, Ithocles abandons his duty and indeed reveals an ambitious soul when he pursues Calantha, the heir of Sparta who is promised to the prince of Argos in marriage. Ignoring his own role in destroying Penthea's marriage, Ithocles rails against Calantha's betrothal to Nearchus, prince of Argos, threatening the fabric of the society and revealing the military hero as inconsistent in his devotion to civic goods. When Nearchus's calculations allow Ithocles to marry Calantha, Ithocles does not end happily but meets *nemesis* when Orgilus, avenging the dead Penthea, traps and stabs him. Ithocles never can realize in time and space the good order that his soliloquies imagine in his own soul, and Orgilus, whose desire for revenge never does acknowledge Ithocles as a rightful peer or authority, magnifies the chaos of the court's disordered desires when he, with the help of the dead Penthea's aged husband Bassanes, commits a bloody on-stage suicide.

Ford's *The Broken Heart*, with its revenge and betrayal storylines, shares in the tradition of Greek *hybris* plots two characters, one whose inordinate desire for personal honor overrides any sense that the city's good is the highest good and another whose erotic desires for Calantha and for power do not do him in so much as distract him from

the revenge that he should rightly expect to be on its way. Orgilus begins as someone who will go into hiding to assess his next move, but by the end of the play, he becomes a Euripidean overreacher, willing to murder friends and sow the seeds of chaos to bring his own revenge plot to completion. Because *The Broken Heart* is a Christian-era text exploring the ways of ancient Sparta, however, it gains more force on account of its points of contact with Christian doctrines of Original Sin and Total Depravity. Whereas Plato seems to hold that, in theory, a properly disciplined soul could indefinitely restrain the desires that would tear apart a soul and a city, certain strains of Christian thought hold that at least the souls of the ancients were destined for doom even when the cities persisted for some generations. Certainly the Athenian and later Senecan tragic traditions offer sources for such suspicions of good order, but in the Christian theological tradition, the actual vices of the characters become far more powerful agents of destruction than they could have been when they were competing with the capricious gods of Euripides or the indifferent hand of Senecan fate.

Because the dramatic action takes place in pre-Christian Sparta and thus out of the reach of Christian repentance for such sin and depravity, the question of salvation history mixes in with questions of sin-psychology in ways that address some of the burning questions of the Reformation. In Ford's Sparta, the passions for love and for revenge rather than fate or the gods bring down the main characters, and those psychological realities win out over the duties that should bind Orgilus and Ithocles to their cities. In the end, tellingly, Calantha, the beloved of Ithocles, meets her demise in the last scene not because a god or goddess has stricken her down but fades out on stage, dying of the title's broken heart. This chapter will argue that all of these matters of moral flaw and of

motivation more generally, including those tragic moments when erotic desire pulls communities apart rather than perpetuating them (as comedies promise), are always matters of theological as well as psychological and sociological concern, and the question of how such desires play out in the classical world are matters closely related to questions of good act, even if the goodness and badness of the Greeks' and Romans' actions always remain hidden on the level that the Reformers hold to be central.

Dante and the Goodness of the Ancients

As a previous chapter noted, Dante's influence on the literary imagination of the English Renaissance must be indirect if there be influence at all, but his *Purgatorio* serves as a vivid illustration of one way that poets in the Christian era could imagine the ancients. As the Pilgrim (whom Beatrice calls Dante late in the *Purgatorio*) makes his way up the terraces of Purgatory, the educational function of the mountain becomes apparent. Although these souls have already been saved and will eventually ascend to Paradise, their desires are not yet unified so that they can desire God for God's sake and thus genuinely enjoy Heaven rather than being tormented, in their own duplicity, by the purity of Paradise. Before they are capable of enjoying the rarefied experiences of Paradise, divine love must turn their souls away from their own destructive and disproportionate desires. Thus far Dante basically echoes Augustine, treating virtue as desire rightly directed and insisting that Christian salvation involves, among other things, a transformation of loves.

Where the *Comedy* departs significantly from the (*City of God*) Augustinian tradition is in his selection of allegorical characters and moral exemplars. As Virgil and

the Pilgrim enter Purgatory proper and walk along the terrace of the prideful, they see giant images, carved in the stone to educate the souls of those striving for Heaven. The first group of images tells iconically the stories of figures who exemplify humility, the antithesis of pride.[25] The first image is that of the angel Gabriel descending from on high, an angel's proper place in the cosmos, to speak to the peasant girl Mary in the Annunciation. Such is an image would not have given Augustine pause. However, immediately following that image is a scene depicting condescension neither by a Biblical figure nor a Christian saint but by Emperor Trajan as he stops his military adventures to hear the troubles of a widow. If the point had not been clear when Virgil was permitted to travel into the realm of the saved, the inclusion here of a pagan Roman Emperor's act of self-emptying makes perfectly clear that the relationships between the powerful and the powerless, not the vocabularies with which the actors make sense of their own deeds, make a story worthwhile for the Aristotelian and Thomist aims of training the soul so that it can aspire to virtue. As the Pilgrim and Virgil make their ascent, they see further classical embodiments of humility: not only Orestes as exemplar of generosity but Aeneas as exemplar of zeal and Pisistratus as model of meekness stand as exemplars to train Christian souls in the ways of the holy God. In terms of how the ancients' stories shape the Christian soul, two moral economies operate in the *Comedy.* On one hand, except for strange cases of divine decree, no pagan can enter Purgatory and begin the ascent to Paradise. On the other, the eternal destiny of the individual matters less for *Purgatorio*'s program of aesthetic-moral education than does the visible moment of virtue, the shape of the act that a soul can imitate and so overcome its own deformity.

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25 The following scenes happen in Canto 10 of *Purgatorio.*

Form matters for Dante because the soul learn to desire perfect Form only by seeking first the forms of love and humility and temperance in earthly stories. Because those stories stand as powerful moments, succeeding one another to comprise stories of goodness, they are just as good as Christian saints' stories for the aims of Mount Purgatory.

In *The Comedy*, a good deed strives towards the one true God simply by virtue of the deed's being good, even if those good deeds, like Virgil's, will not permit entrance into Purgatory, the land of those saved by divine grace. At every turn on Mount Purgatory, images and stories of souls who will not themselves enjoy the benefits of Heaven nonetheless serve to educate the soul of Dante, showing forth the virtues that counter the Seven Deadly Sins and thus participating in some way in the same goodness towards which the souls of the saved strive. Their inclusion in the education of the saved indicates that their goodness is, by virtue of their visible form, good enough for God's purposes, so even in the absence of a lengthy theory of the acts' goodness, their place in the cosmic architecture lends them a weight that a careful reader likely will not deny. Dante’s influence will shape the way that the Italian Renaissance, as opposed to the Northern European Reformations, regard human goodness: with far weaker a distinction between the semblance of goodness and the substance of goodness, Dante and his successors offer one option for regarding the ancients, namely to take what looks good to be good and not to dwell too heavily on the possibilities for deception and duplicity, those horizons that so plague the Reformation.

Erasmus and Luther on the Virtuous Pagan

In the sixteenth century, as the Renaissance starts to take its turn north and become an ecclesial reform movement, the hypocrisy of the established church and the theology that allows that hypocrisy to remain institutionalized become chief concerns and awaken a new sense that what appears good might underneath rot with corruption and vice. That sense of potential duplicity extends to the ways in which writers imagine the goodness of those who come before Christ. Among the many sites of struggle between Luther and Erasmus, one of the most notable has to do with the question of the virtuous pagan, an ethical conundrum that has worked its way through Christian theology at least since Augustine and that gets played out in drama such as *The Broken Heart*. Treating the question of whether Romans of the Republican era (that is to say, those who knew not Christ) were capable of genuinely good action, Erasmus opts for a basically Dantean formula that asserts their inadequacy in light of subsequent Christian revelation but nonetheless grants that what the people around him in Renaissance humanist circles admire about Mucius Scaevola and others is genuine goodness and thus worthy of imitation. As noted in the opening chapter, Erasmus holds that in the people and nations ignorant of Christ, "reason was obscured but not extinguished, so it is probable that in them, too, the power of the will was not completely extinguished, but that it was unable to perform the good (Erasmus, *On the Freedom of the Will* 49). Erasmus's treatment of the virtuous pagans is a rhetorical one, trusting in common reactions to the stories of the Romans and assuming that the purpose of a story of virtue, in the economy of salvation, is to inspire analogous acts of virtue on the part of the hearer or reader. Echoing the convictions of humanist educational programs, Erasmus asserts that the soul can see

goodness and thus desire it: those stories that bring forth in a listener or a reader admiration of excellence and the longing to emulate virtue likely do so because there is genuine virtue to emulate.

Erasmus holds fast to a doctrine of universal grace, given in different measure depending on any given soul's relationship with Christ, the first kind coming to all given human nature:

> The first is implanted by nature and vitiated by sin (but, as we said, not extinguished), which some call a natural influx. This is common to all, and remains even in those who persist in sin: they are free to speak, be silent, sit down, get up, help the poor, read Holy Scripture, listen to sermons... Since this grace is common to all, it is not called grace, though it really is grace, just as God every day works greater miracles by creating, preserving, and ordering all things than if he healed a leper or liberated a demoniac, and yet these things are not called miracles, because they are offered to all men alike every day. (52)

Erasmus's view of the common gift of being and soul holds that every entity's existence is at root a gift, and no doubt Erasmus's extensive reading in the literature of the Ciceronian era and other antique texts led him to see in the ancient Greeks and Romans certain excellences of mind and soul that resonated with his own Christian sense of what ultimately pleases God. As a reader often comes to sympathize both with a poem's characters and with the voice writing the epic, Erasmus assumes, the characters within stand as do the righteous outsiders in those Scriptural texts (Cornelius the Centurion in Acts, the pagan sailors in the book of Jonah, and Melchizadek King of Salem from

Genesis immediately come to mind). Those in the Biblical text who are not formally believers at least resemble the poets, philosophers, and others that Dante relegated to the circle of Limbo as Virtuous Pagans but displayed without apology as exemplars of virtue. Although Erasmus never mentions Dante in his treatise on free will, the Florentine poet's sense that virtue persists across all of the nations certainly seems to animate Erasmus's theological reflections. Such a response flows naturally from Erasmus's strategy of pointing to general narrative contours rather than asserting propositions and constructing syllogisms based on those propositions. By contrast, when Luther responds in the diatribe that will define his response to Erasmus, the far more famous *On the Bondage of the Will,* the syllogisms become the main focus of the action.

Luther, countering what must have looked like a compromise of the strong theology of inherent and pervasive sinfulness that would later gain the name Total Depravity, flattens the old Romans, dismissing at a stroke anything that anyone might admire about them, challenging Erasmus to name

> one example in the entire human race (even though it were Socrates himself twice or seven times over) who has actually done what you speak of here, and what you say they taught. Why, then, do you tell such empty tales? Could men strive after virtue who did not even know what virtue was? Perhaps if I ask for a very outstanding example, you will say it was virtuous when they died for their country, their wives and children, their parents, or when they endured exquisite tortures rather than give way to lying or treachery—men like Q. Scaevola, M. Regulus, and others. Yet in all these instances, what can you show but the outward splendor of the

> works? Have you looked into their hearts? […] But although this may be honorable in the eyes of men, in the sight of God nothing is more immoral, indeed it is most impious and the height of sacrilege; and it is so because they did not act for the glory of God, nor did they glorify him as God, but by an act of most impious robbery they robbed God of his glory and attributed it to themselves... (*On the Bondage of the Will* 274)

Whom Erasmus would hold up as exemplars for all people of all ages, Luther dismisses as self-centered and sacrilegious because of Roman pursuit of glory and Greek striving for self-contained moderation. More importantly for a discussion of virtue as represented in literary art, Luther dismisses without argument the "outward splendor" of an act, taking the aesthetic and the possibility that a story might, without explicit confession of Christ, lead one to virtue, off the table. Returning to the austere separation between City of Earth and City of God that characterizes Augustine's later work, Luther asserts a profoundly different reading of the experience of admiration, assuming that the desire that might compel a student to emulate the heroes of the Roman Republic are themselves not good desires but deceptive seductions, luring the reader to admire their pride and idolatry where one should pay more attention to those whose invisible inner lives orient existence towards the true God. One wonders whether, in light of this, Luther has forgotten this point or engages simply in bad-faith flattery when, at the end of his treatise (333) when he commends Erasmus's work promoting and studying ancient language and literature.

Luther shows early tendencies (that will later appear in Calvin's more systematic treatments of the same questions) to internalize ethics as a result of the determination-of-

immutability that governs human actions. For a reader convinced by Luther's division between true inner life and deceptive visible act, the primary task of a theologically-acute reader is not to delight in a gift of a compelling story that inspires the soul to seek out embodied goodness but rather to discern the distortions of human act resulting from total depravity and from the ongoing struggle between God and Satan in the world. For Luther, then, virtue can never be the name for a disposition of visible actions, for the heart of a mortal, invisible to other mortals, determines everything that counts as goodness, and everything worth imitating lies beyond imitation because it stands invisible. Luther thus will not allow any room for a succession of moments unless the text disclosing those moments explicitly names Christ as the inspiration for the good ones, and those texts which set before a reader goodness not affiliated by name with Jesus present the same reader not with the gift of goodness, newly revealed for edification, but a deception to be tested and dismissed as inadequate to the word "goodness."

Calvin's Pagans: Only Apparently Virtuous

Because Calvin was a more direct influence on Renaissance England than was Luther, his adaptations of Luther's position are more obvious in the texts that take on questions of virtuous pagans. Calvin begins from what seems a middle course between Luther's and Erasmus's positions, starting out with a concession that virtue and vice are indeed virtue and vice and that to deny as much leaves one without a place to stand philosophically:

> To begin with, I do not deny that all the notable endowments that manifest themselves among unbelievers are gifts of God. And I do not dissent from

> the common judgment as to contend that there is no difference between the justice, moderation, and equity of Titus and Trajan and the madness, intemperance, and savagery of Caligula or Nero or Domitian […] For there is such a great difference between the righteous and the unrighteous that it appears even in the dead image thereof. For if we confuse these things, what order will remain in the world? (*Institutes* 3.14.2)

However, like Luther, Calvin ultimately turns to the invisible interior in order to make final judgments, holding that the rewards that attend virtue in the world ultimately are not rewards for true goodness but simply point by analogy to God's love for true goodness:

> For we see that he bestows many blessings of the present life upon those who cultivate virtue among men. Not because that outward image of virtue deserves the least benefit of him; but it pleases him so to prove how much he esteems true righteousness, when he does not allow even external and feigned righteousness to go without a temporal reward. Hence, there follows what we just now acknowledged: that all these virtues—or rather, images of virtues—are gifts of God, since nothing is in any way praiseworthy that does not come from him. (*Institutes* 3.14.2)

In fact, Calvin goes as far as to call the virtues of pagans positive evils insofar as they have as their ends something other than the glory of the one true God: "because they do not look to the goal that God's wisdom prescribes, what they do, though it seems good in the doing, yet by its perverse intention is sin" (*Institutes* 3.14.3). Thus following Luther's lead (and citing Augustine along the way), Calvin maintains that the disposition of the heart, discernible by historical periods even if invisible in the *saeculum* between Christ's

ascension and Christ's return, ultimately stands as the measure of genuine goodness. Like Luther's conception of God's invisible will, Calvin's emphasis on the invisible heart means that the form of the act ultimately cannot define the act's goodness.

Calvin leaves open some profoundly disturbing possibilities in terms of the goodness of the ancients, and foremost among those possibilities is that, as in the Classical era, the stories of good lives that surround Christians in their own moment might entirely be deceptive. There can be no unqualified saints within the world Calvin articulates, only those people whose lives might or might not genuinely be good, who might or might not be lying when they say that their goodness is inspired by Christ. Because duplicity is always a threat in the Christian era, it becomes an inevitability in contexts where nobody names Christ, and that strong sense of depravity that runs past suspicion into outright hostility informs the ways that Shakespeare treats his Republican Romans.

As with the opening chapter's survey, this one means not to give a comprehensive picture of the intellectual horizons available to the Elizabethan playwright or poet so much as to indicate that, although Erasmus and Luther and Calvin differ widely about the abilities for the virtuous (or seemingly virtuous) pagan to act in a genuinely good manner, still all three grant that a reader can call the acts recorded by history good or bad in a meaningful manner, but only apparently good if good. Poetic and dramatic texts respond to the strong anxiety generated by such duplicity in two interesting ways. First, characters in plays and narrative poems perform their private lives, articulating in those soliloquies or even dialogues in private places things which history books would not have recorded and give an audience or a reader a glimpse into what Erasmus, Calvin, and

Luther regard as entirely or at least largely hidden. Given that such speeches are always constructed by Christian-era writers (even where they select and cite Classical sources), the imagination of the private as continuous with rather than hermetically sealed away from the public opens up moments when characters can extend the question of goodness beyond what a public viewer could normally see, demanding that the audience or reader ask questions such as what counts as genuine intention and whether such intentions are themselves as transparent as the treatise-writers would have them. Second, because the characters always emerge from narrative and move forward into narrative (even when they die they become memories), narrative and dramatic texts bring succession to the front, highlighting that the moments of virtue-seeking do not stand alone but derive their aesthetic power from rising, falling, and other sorts of movement. In other words, within the poetic and dramatic texts treated here, the ambiguity that would result from an entirely good story which by definition cannot be good gives way to the visible depravity that comes out of Christian-era tragedy. With both of these responses operative, the goodness and the inadequacy of the pre-Christian ancients at least become more vivid and in places reveal themselves to be both more than Erasmus's dimmed lights and far more insidious than Calvin's deceptive images.

Lucrece the Ambiguous Pagan, Junius Brutus the Duplicitous

Shakespeare's version of Tarquinian Rome begins with violence. Within the first few lines of the Argument, Tarquinius Superbus stands already as usurper and kinsman-murderer. Parker holds that Tarquin's regime is not constitutionally a tyranny because it does not arise when a democracy fails (*Plato's* Republic *and Shakespeare's Rome* 31), but

the regime demonstrates the dispositions of a tyranny if not its genesis. More important than its place in Plato's succession of constitutions, Tarquinian Rome demonstrates all of the signs that Plato attributes to a tyrannical city, all of them having to do with violence, the absence of a good principle governing the unlawful desires of the monarch, and the wretchedness of the whole scene. Superbus secures power by turning the city's violent power against its own people. He immediately sets out to besiege Ardea, cementing power by keeping the state at war (as Plato promised tyrants would do). And his son, the character in the poem closest to the head of state, does not govern so much as find himself enthralled to passions.[26]

Far from being a developed and decadent city,[27] Rome in *Rape of Lucrece* is less visibly a *polis* in the Aristotelian sense (as it is to some extent in *Julius Caesar*) and more a muted backdrop against which powerful individuals and their ways of life come to clash. Certainly the politics of family honor and redemptive retaliation are in play, but there is very little reference in the poem to the laws of Rome or anything else so abstract.

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26 Plato's *Republic* has several passages, mostly in Book 9, that deal with the soul of the tyrant. In Plato's argument, the tyrant is the man most to be pitied because, beyond having no interior capacity to govern his unruly desires, he also lacks the presence of laws to govern them for him.

27 Contrary to Parker, who wishes to see Shakespeare's Roman poem and plays as a neat succession of Plato's constitutions from monarchy to tyranny (27), the actual contours of Tarquin's reign seem to keep with ancient Roman historical traditions in naming Tarquin's reign a period of tyranny despite its position at the beginning rather than the end of a succession of states. That it did not rise from a failed democracy (Parker 31) does not discount Plato's influence on Shakespeare's imagination of the ancient world but might only indicate that Plato's succession of states either attempts to do history and fails or that the succession is an analytical rather than chronological examination.

In the absence of a strong sense of binding law, powerful individuals like Lucrece and Sextus and Junius Brutus, operating within a family-honor framework that does not to a great extent determine or even frame the character of actions, themselves perform rhetorically to turn more general senses of honor and privilege into political realities in which others participate. As the poem moves ahead, the main characters serve as figures for the political acting in a largely undetermined political arena. Along these lines, the rape scene borrows from the Platonic correspondence between city and soul, enacting a civil war even as the crimes against person and against family drive the plot on a literal level. Peter J. Smith further asserts that the poem "lacks any close attention to the process of forced intercourse. Instead the poem dwells on the larger political context that surrounds the attack" (19). Because the poem stands as an etiology of sorts, the analogy between Collatinus's family and the civic sphere of Rome runs very closely together.

The siege of Ardea and the expulsion of the Tarquins, events that frame the poem, also find echoes throughout the rape scene, as Shakespeare relates the moments of the rape in military imagery.[28] Through all of this, the unlimited ambition of Tarquin Superbus echoes Sextus Tarquin's inability to limit his desires for women to those bodies deemed safe for "consumption." Catherine Belsey points to this desire that knows no limits: "The problem is neither the carelessness of husbands nor, indeed, the inconstancy of wives but the expropriability of all property" (318). Sextus, like Superbus, goes beyond (what would later be codified as) appropriate bounds for a Roman man's ambition, seeking sexual satisfaction in manners that cause revolution because of the

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28 Platt, among others, notes that the entire scene is couched in military metaphor (*Rome and the Romans According to Shakespeare* 20).

people's (and specifically Collatinus's and Brutus's) sense of proper bounds, a movement from ambition to raw power that finds its echo in the Siege of Ardea itself. In Kahn's words, "Ironically, Tarquin is driven to risk all for Lucrece *because* the law makes her taboo to anyone but her husband" (58). Given that Rome will ultimately come to define itself as a lawful nation, the covetous Sextus embodies the tyrant, the figure who will not be bound by rules: "...it is not only the fact that Lucrece is both beautiful and unavailable which arouses Tarquin; it is the fact that Collatine's proprietorship over Lucrece *makes* her unavailable" (Kahn 52). Noting the parallels between soul and city and family, Belsey notes, "in expropriating Lucrece, Tarquin loses possession of his own faculties, and in consequence, he will go on to lose the kingdom he was to have possessed" (320). By contrast to the reserve and the utter self-control that defines Junius Brutus and the unswerving resolve of Lucrece later in the poem, the Superbus of the Argument and the Sextus of the main poem demonstrate an inability to see the proper bounds of things without violent restraint. Whatever comes next in the poem, the backdrop for the lawful characters is the entirely unruled and unruly Tarquin dynasty, and the movement from one to the other defines the ways that the reader apprehends both, even if neither ends up being adequate to true goodness.

When the sixth stanza names the moral state of Sextus, the lack of reference to Lucrece's beauty stands out. While later in the poem long blazons will make a visual conquest of the sleeping wife's particular features, early in the poem, she is only a "golden hap" (42), a stroke of good fortune[29], and the proud king's son is overcome not

29 Parker (*Plato's* Republic *and Shakespeare's Rome* 36) would read "golden hap" here a synonym for "golden crown," but OED seems to limit the range of connotations for the word to strokes of fortune,

with passion or desire but “Perchance that envy of so rich a thing” (39). (Even later in the poem, her blazon remains disturbingly analogous to a city-to-be-conquered.) A hurried look at the poem might lead to a conclusion that Tarquin's attack is simply overdetermined, that Galenic humor-imbalance and envy of a lesser man's greater fortune and a lack of discipline and perhaps another factor or two combine and exert roughly independent influence upon Tarquin as he rushes forward. However, relationships between criminal and responsible impulses within the poem exist in a fairly complicated but intelligible, hierarchical relationship. Just as any body's redemption or fallenness is a complex of irreducible stories in Augustine's account of raped women[30], and just as David's seduction of Bathsheba begins necessarily but does not stand sufficient with his decision to stay at home while his armies are in the field[31], so Tarquin's crime is not

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not material objects.

30 In book one, chapters sixteen through twenty of Augustine's *City of God*, Augustine specifically addresses the accusations that Christians do not care about sexual honor because Christian women do not commit suicide rather than allow themselves to be raped by invading armies. Augustine insists that being a victim of such an attack does not mean that the victim is guilty of anything and that, unless the victim consents mentally to the act, that rape involves no crime on the part of the victim. Modern readers have rightly noted that Augustine's notion of consent is far too simplistic to be adequate to the phenomenon of sexual assault, but for the purposes of this examination, the move from honor-suicide to victim-status stands most important for the question of rape. Since the question involves suicide as well, Augustine notes that suicide is one of those acts of homicide which counts as murder because there is no official state or civic sanction for the killing, and at the conclusion of this section he notes that Livy's account of Lucretia's rape is one that illustrates the stark differences between Christian and Roman-pagan conceptions of crime, shame, and the rightful place of homicidal violence.

31 In 2 Samuel 11, the chapter in which David seduces Bathsheba, covers up her resulting pregnancy by

simply a case of several sufficient causes heaped up on one another, but stands as a tragically necessary combination of circumstances and dispositions, a combination that leaves Tarquin both enslaved to his own lust and responsible for his own freedom and that of the city. Sextus becomes ruled when he should be a ruler, and that is the most inexcusable thing for one born to be a ruler. Therefore Tarquin must no longer be tolerated: "Tarquin's private conduct in seizing his friend's wife is parallel to his father's public conduct in seizing the throne; both actions are inimical to a just and ordered society" (Kahn 55). That complex, rather than being a simplistic echo of Plato's aristocracy on the wane or a tale of historical inevitability, works to make intelligible the contradictions that make the tyranny of the Tarquins unsustainable and those that make the dictatorship of the passions over the human soul both inescapable and damning. In other words, like Plato's account of what makes tyrants far worse than philosopher-kings, *The Rape of Lucrece* holds that the Tarquins are intolerable not because they are unitary rulers but because their souls lack the unity that comes when reason disciplines the desires.

In stark contrast to Sextus leading up to the rape, Lucrece after the rape is almost frighteningly firm in her resolve. Even during the commission of the crime, Lucretia is exhibiting the sort of unwavering sense of honor that will animate her later suicide: unlike Livy's and Augustine's versions of Lucretia, Shakespeare's Lucrece refuses Tarquin so insistently that Tarquin must gag her to silence her refusal (Belsey 329). And in her

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murdering his general, and takes Bathsheba to be one of his harem-wives, some preachers over the centuries have over-emphasized the importance of the fact that the chapter begins with David's remaining in Jerusalem in the time when kings go out to war.

protests, the Classically-virtuous Roman matron pleads with Tarquin to stop not merely for her own sake but so that he can become a good king (Platt 24). When Tarquin has abandoned her, exhibiting further that the young crown prince lacks the proper virtue to be a disciplined leader, Lucrece immediately begins to lay plans, using rational deliberation about future actions, to avenge the dishonor. Regarding this strong difference between victim and perpetrator of the crime, Belsey argues, "If Tarquin is driven to his act of violence by an uncontrolled desire that is deaf to his deliberations, Lucrece stages hers as a result of her deliberation, even in distress" (327). Here the pagans seem equally capable of rule and anarchy, of self-discipline and of self-indulgence, and the great crime is that the disciplined one is ruled by the undisciplined rather than vice versa. Furthermore, the aristocrat's self-governance that Calvin and Luther regard mainly as surface matters seems, in Lucrece's case, to maintain itself even in a scene to which only Lucrece, Sextus, and the reader stand privy, indicating that at least when one moves from public to private space, those dispositions remain constant enough not to break into self-centered discourse.

When Roy Battenhouse assigns guilt to Lucrece in the scene leading up to the rape, he assumes that the proper response to the visit of Sextus would have been not hospitality but rejection of the guest. In fact, he points to Lucrece's reception of Tarquin not as hospitality at all but as vanity:

> By a close reading we can sense [traces of vanity] from the very beginning of Lucrece's encounter with Tarquin. Why does she blush in giving "reverent welcome" to her visitor when he stares at her with "still gazing eyes"? Why is she unsuspicious of his "wanton sight"? The narrator says

> that she "little suspecteth" and is impressed by his shows of honor, his "plaits of majesty." […] She stayed "after supper long," we are told, in conversation devoted to his questionings. (Battenhouse 15)

Contrary to Battenhouse's accusing questions, Lucrece in the opening lines of Sextus's visit still exhibits precisely the rational discipline that will characterize her resistance to the attack and the plans she lays after the attack. What Battenhouse ignores is that Lucrece is responding in the repertoire of a Romance's code of courtesy, not inviting rape, but acknowledging Tarquin as a welcome guest rather than as an intruder. Such is not the lax or even wanton stance of a seductress but the response of a dutiful wife concerned with Collatinus and his standing within the Roman community. Battenhouse's assertion that such greetings to a recognized and respected guest constitute complicity in the rape simply ignores that, separate from Lucrece's actions after the attack; she does stand as someone who practices genuine hospitality before the rape. Moreover, the reading that would make Lucrece complicit ignores Kahn's point that "Basically, Tarquin considers the rape a violation not of Lucrece's chastity but of Collatine's honor. It is an affair between men, as the ending of the poem will reveal" (54). Lucrece's practice of hospitality should not call into question the rest of her conduct but set up Lucrece as a character worthy of Collatine's honor and thus a perfect mark for Tarquin's assault on the house of Collatine.

Lucrece's suicide for the sake of honor does indeed become a place where pagan virtue travels in different directions from Christian virtue, but her response makes far more sense as the reaction of one wronged, not the bad faith of a guilty conscience. In the end, Shakespeare remains critically aware of Rome's sub-Christian code of pollution

yet, in the end, looks on Lucrece, who knows no better, compassionately (Kahn 49). The difference between Lucrece and whatever Christian ideal Shakespeare might hold up lies not in Lucrece's failure to act honorably within a system that the character would not recognize but in a difference between systems. Lucrece's incapacity to imagine forgiveness thus must strike a Christian-era reader as genuinely insurmountable. The fear and pity that Aristotle wishes tragedy to inculcate come to the fore as readers of *Lucrece* face a set of reactions that only makes sense in the absence of Christian revelation, a way of responding to a crime that would be entirely unintelligible in the wake of the Resurrection.

The strong separation of systems nonetheless allows ironic echoes (in Milbank's sense of irony) across systems, common threads that highlight the alienness of Lucrece's soul even as they echo with the Christian-era audience. Shakespeare writes Lucrece's response so that her speeches after the attack begin within the vocabularies of lament, a recognizable Biblical way to relate to the world and to God. When Lucrece begins to set herself towards making her public declaration of the crime and commit suicide, her choice of language sets up an analogy between Biblical ethical thought and the Roman honor-system even as the turn that normally would have the Psalmist call upon a trustworthy God has Lucrece turning to herself and upon herself:

> In vain I rail at Opportunity,
> At Time, at Tarquin, and uncheerful Night;
> In vain I cavil with my infamy,
> In vain I spurn at my confirm'd despite;
> This helpless smoke of words doth me no right.

The remedy indeed to do me good,

Is to let forth my foul defiled blood. (*Rape of Lucrece* 1023-1029)

To rail against God is the conventional beginning of the lament Psalms, and those Psalms constitute most of the Psalter. Moreover Job, whose lament is much longer and more sustained, begins himself with a lament against the day he was born. In a significant way, then, Lucrece begins her response to her horrifying turn of fortune with a gesture that echoes Christian traditions of worship. But after the calls on God to remember or awaken or simply to start caring for the chosen people, the Pslams of lament, with the exception of Psalm 90, always turn towards a declaration of confidence in or even of praise for God.[32] Lucrece instead leaves the gods behind, moving towards her own demise as the agency that will bring justice, choosing will over patience and marking the most significant departure from Christian ethics up to that point in the poem.

When Lucrece offers reasons why her suicide is inevitable, her logic moves

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32 One brief example of a lament Psalm with which Shakespeare would have been familiar is Psalm 13, whose Geneva Bible translation reads thus:

> How long wilt you forget me, O Lord,
>
> For euer? How long wilt thou hyde thy face from me?
>
> How long shal I take counsel within my self, hauing weariness daiely in mine heart?
>
> How long shal mine enemie be exalted aboue me?
>
> Beholde, & heare me, O Lord my God:
>
> Lighten mine eyes, that I slepe not in death:
>
> Lest mine enemie saie, I haue preuailed against him:
>
> & they that afflict me, reioyce when I slide.
>
> But I trust in thy merci: mine heart shal reioyce in thy saluacion:
>
> I wil sing to the Lord because he hathe delt louingly with me. (Psalm 13, Geneval Bible)

directly counter to a Christian ethos of forgiveness for the attacker and entirely flies in the face of Augustine's (troubling though they are) teachings about rape victims. Instead, because she considers the core of her identity, the faithful wife, to be destroyed, she proceeds with full resolve to make what she can of what is already destroyed:

> 'In vain,' quoth she, 'I live, and seek in vain
> Some happy mean to end a hapless life:
> I fear'd by Tarquin's falchion to be slain,
> Yet for the self-same purpose seek a knife:
> But when I fear'd I was a loyal wife:
>
> So am I now: O no! that cannot be;
>
> Of that true type hath Tarquin rifled me.
> 'O that is gone for which I sought to live!
> And therefore now I need not fear to die.
> To clear this spot by death, at least I give
> A badge of fame to slander's livery;
> A dying life to living infamy.
>
> Poor helpless help, the treasure stol'n away
>
> To burn the guiltless casket where it lay? (*Rape of Lucrece* 1044-1057)

By this point the Roman honor system, lacking a sense of ontological forgiveness and thus without capacity to restore Lucrece to what once she had been, limits and governs Lucrece's plans. Since the best option available within that system is to restore some honor by means of suicide rather than to live the rest of her life in dishonor because she

refuses suicide, her own knife becomes something that she welcomes where Tarquin's sword, because it would have ended an existence that is still legitimate within that system, was something genuinely to be feared.

As her preparations continue, Lucrece's turn away from the Psalms transforms itself into a warped version of the Passion of Christ (Battenhouse 25), which also stands as a dark parody of her own rape. Invoking blood that washes away from sin and echoing Christ's last words on the cross from the gospel of John, Lucrece throws herself rhetorically into a dark attempt at redemption:

> 'Thou, Collatine, shalt oversee this will;
> How was I overseen that thou shalt see it!
> My blood shall wash the slander of mine ill;
> My life's foul deed, my life's fair end shall free it.
> Faint not, faint heart, but stoutly say, "So be it":
>
> Yield to my hand; my hand shall conquer thee:
> Thou dead, both die, and both shall victors be. (*Rape of Lucrece* 1205-1211)

The parallels here with Christian imagery and vocabulary diverge significantly from the use of Christian vocabularies in *The Faerie Queene*: because *The Rape of Lucrece* has as its context a time period that by definition could not know anything of Christ, the irony of the echoes alienates the anti-Christian act of righteous self-slaughter even more, even as it makes perfect sense for a Roman.

Lucrece's succession of interior rulers, exhibited first in the call to hospitality and then as the hortatory moral voice, finally in the voice of one despairing in the gods and to

the righteous suicide, cannot stand as a singular, simplistic answer to the question of the virtuous pagan. Within the poem, Lucrece's moments of intellectual and spiritual shift, some of which a Christian reader could recognize and even condone and others which stand alien or even antithetical to the wide range of Christian responses to life, derives its great aesthetic and moral force precisely from the potential for a range of different rulers to be present in the same soul, one after the other. Echoing Calvin's remarks, no reader can too easily say that Lucrece's hospitality, Tarquin's attack, and Lucrece's responses to the attack are morally equivalent; to say as much would be to render ethics entirely a matter of arbitrary fiat. Yet, as Lucrece moves through the poem and questions of invisible motivations take their shape by means of speeches and other utterances, Lucrece's final causes (Augustinian loves) move around in response to the events of the poem, making difficult, if not impossible, the sort of judgment that the question of the virtuous pagan seems to require if the question remains in Luther's and Calvin's terms. Instead, a close reading of Lucrece's responses leave a Christian reader unable to follow her into self-slaughter, yet unable to deny that her range of responses includes some that any Christian aware of the Bible might hold up as valid and even compelling. If a reader can even momentarily entertain the possibility of an unwittingly good response to life on the part of a pre-Christian character, finding the hidden vice in Lucrece becomes a matter not of digging below the surface (because under the surface of a literary character is another surface) but comparing moment to moment, a very different hermeneutical move from the ones recommended by Luther and Calvin.

The poem does lend the reader some tools for judging between acts, some places where Lucrece's response is decidedly out of bounds. The presence of quasi-

Christological language in the speeches leading up to Lucrece's suicide indicates that, when her own words tend closest to the cross of Christ, her own expectations for life and death will not allow her to imagine even the horizon of forgiveness. Her promise to wash away blood comes just before her indirect echo of Christ on the cross, and because she imagines her most prominent self-initiated act as analogous to Christ's death on the cross, the poem sets her up as not only ignorant but ironically anti-Christ. A Christian reader thus can sympathize with Lucrece but must note that, in the Romanness of her response, she goes places intellectually and ethically in the final and most intense moments of her career where no Christian ought to follow.

If Lucrece is the most interesting figure for exploring questions of pre-Christian interiority for the first half of the poem, Brutus makes a fascinating but brief character study for the last few stanzas. Taking advantage of low expectations that rise from his reputation for brutish silence, Brutus begins "to clothe his wit in state and pride" (1809) when he realizes that the moment is upon him to drive the Tarquins from power. Unlike Lucrece, who stands firmly within the traditions of the Roman honor system, Brutus is able to manipulate the terms of that system in order to accomplish his political ends. Where Lucrece commits suicide because Tarquin has taken away her honor, Brutus shifts the locus of dishonor, spurring his fellow Romans to revenge:

> Courageous Roman, do not steep thy heart
> In such relenting dew of lamentations;
> But kneel with me and help to bear thy part,
> To rouse our Roman gods with invocations,
> That they will suffer these abominations,

> Since Rome herself in them doth stand disgrac'd,
> By our strong arms from forth her fair streets chas'd (*Rape of Lucrece* 1828-1834)

Thus Junius Brutus reveals the honor system to be flexible as well as binding, and his manipulations of Lucrece's death horrify a reader even more than Lucrece's own speeches because he turns her into a quasi-Christ figure for Rome. Certainly Lucrece, in her ironic adaptation of Christian symbols, has stretched the traditional confines of Roman honor, but Brutus, because his shifts in the code render him more likely to rule rather than more likely to die, grasps even the sentence that dooms the woman Lucrece as a weapon, showing himself willing to raise her again as a spirit which animates revolution:

> 'Now, by the Capitol that we adore,
> And by this chaste blood so unjustly stain'd,
> By heaven's fair sun that breeds the fat earth's store,
> By all our country rights in Rome maintain'd,
> And by chaste Lucrece' soul, that late complain'd
> Her wrongs to us, and by this bloody knife,
> We will revenge the death of this true wife.' (*Rape of Lucrece* 1835-1841)

What Lucrece could not even accomplish by her own death, Brutus does with a rhetorical flourish: in the birth of a new Republic, Lucrece becomes "chaste" and "true," a symbol who has been alienated from the real, living woman who died proclaiming her own shame. Brutus's wit redeems Lucrece at the same time as it condemns the Tarquins to be the exiled kings, and a Christian-era reader cannot help but note that a strange sort of

forensic justification has occurred: because Junius Brutus has declared it so, Lucrece has been forgiven that which rendered her a sinner in the eyes of the Roman honor code. Again, although the Christian-era reader might find an afterlife as a symbol for liberty preferable to the memory of a shamed woman, still the ironic analogies between Christian theology and Brutus's appropriation of Lucrece, because the poem is itself a moment in the succession of the reader's life-moments, throws narratives of Christ into sharp relief and thus reveals Brutus as manipulative and insidious at the same time as his influence will be vital for the beginning of the Republic.

As the poem concludes, "The Romans plausibly [do] give consent" (1855) to the exile of the Tarquins, and a new order emerges, one with public acclaim rather than heredity as the vehicle for continuity. In terms of rule, Rome has gone from a monarchy to a republic, but in terms of the ideas that govern, an even more radical shift has happened. By means of a quasi-Christological self-sacrifice and a pseudo-theological use of that death to inspire the people to revolution, Rome has learned to forgive, even if the one forgiven must be dead and gone first. Such should not deceive a reader into thinking that Rome has become anything like a Christian republic; on the contrary, what Luther and Calvin would limit to inner depravity, Shakespeare has made public, founding the new order on the unholy, suicidal sacrifice of a woman violated and the opportunistic exploitation of the same event. Far from Christian conversion, which arises as a divine initiative and works from the interior life of the sinner into the works of the saint, Rome's transformation begins with despair appropriated by wit and transformed into Machiavellian politics.

Marcus Brutus the Overmatched Pagan, Antony the Envious

Like the rise of the Republic, its fall highlights the ethical complications that surface when Christian-era texts appropriate the stories of pre-Christian rulers. And like the poem *The Rape of Lucrece*, the tragic play *Julius Caesar* explores the possibilities for pre-Christians' goodness by means of both their public actions and their private words. The two main conspirators against the dictator in *Julius Caesar* are superb exhibits of the limits and the promise that inhere within the pagan soul and of the ways in which successive moments inform each other in the judgment of the audience.

Cassius has begun to plot against Caesar as soon as he steps onto the stage, but Brutus must meditate on the goodness of opposing Caesar before he can make plans to destroy his friend. Early in act two Brutus, alone in his orchard, contemplates the means by which he might keep Caesar from becoming a tyrant in the city that will know no tyrants:

> It must be by his death; and for my part,
> I know no personal cause to spurn at him,
> But for the general. He would be crown'd:
> How that might change his nature, there's the question. (2.1.10-13)

The question of nature in this scene depends on a concept of dynamic human nature, one that behaves in certain ways in well-governed cities and which move in entirely worse ways in cities where nothing checks ambition and pride. The play's sense of providence in the world encompasses not only the strategic errors of Brutus but also his inability to imagine genuine transformation, a succession of rule from ambition to love. Brutus convinces himself not only that the potential for tyranny lies within Caesar, but also that

the moment at hand, in which no laws of Rome can keep Caesar from taking the crown of the hated *Rex*, will be sufficient cause for that nature to emerge. A tyrant needs both will and opportunity, and musing on the occasion that tyranny needs, Brutus reaches for serpentine analogies:

> It is the bright day that brings forth the adder,
> And that craves wary walking. Crown him that,
> And then I grant we put a sting in him
> That as his will he may do danger with. (2.1.14-17)

Beyond the image of the adder without a sting, the important relationship here is between opportunity and wickedness. In Brutus's speech, the working assumption is that the mere presence of the sting, the capacity to effect his will by means of violence, will make a Roman hero, Caesar, into an adder who will poison the Republic. The preservation of the Republic lies in the preservation of those structures that keep the adder latent in the ambitious Roman from emerging, and since Caesar has marched his armies through those safeguards, in Brutus's imagination the sun is up, and the snake with the fangs to bite will not hesitate to poison the Republic fatally. The potential for tyranny was a common idea in Classical philosophy, and Brutus's invocation of the idea here demonstrates at least a degree of awareness that political goodness is a horizon, provided that lawful structures check the ambition that threatens political goodness.

Later in the same scene Cassius proposes a dual assassination of Caesar and Antony. Since a literate audience will know that Antony succeeds Caesar as the one who would make himself king, Cassius's suggestion has both its own logic for the characters in the drama and a different, ironic logic for the audience. But Brutus continues to play

the virtuous pagan, insisting on limitations far stricter than the pragmatic Cassius imagines:

> Our course will seem too bloody, Caius Cassius,
> To cut the head off and then hack the limbs--
> Like wrath in death and envy afterwards;
> For Antony is but a limb of Caesar.
> Let's be sacrificers, but not butchers, Caius.
> We all stand up against the spirit of Caesar,
> And in the spirit of men there is no blood;
> O that we then could come by the spirit of Caesar,
> And not dismember Caesar! But, alas,
> Caesar must bleed for it! (2.1.162-171)

Although Brutus maintains a sense of moral limits in his refusal to assassinate Antony, his language, which in other scenes remains fairly well within his control, deteriorates into sacrificial mania. As the speech moves to its conclusion, Brutus wanders from metaphor to metaphor, unable to make a coherent case for restraint. His case for a political assassination, circumscribed by a just restraint, founders on the rocks of religious vocabulary. As Ronan observes about Stoic characters in Shakespere's plays, Brutus here exhibits the strange tension between the passive sage and the incoherently active madman with the capacity to destroy anything, even the sacred, if it stands in the way of justice and peace (2). Brutus the sage, with the moral and intellectual resources available to him, articulates a rationale for limiting the assassination, and his reasoning resonates with the basic contours of Christian just war doctrine in spite of the fact that his

picture of justice is not the Christian's. Even though his pre-Christian vocabulary never does go beyond the Ciceronian, the intellectual rulers available to a pre-Christian Roman seem at least adequate for some sort of recognizable goodness. Yet the speech ends with an exclamation about bleeding Caesar, an image at once visceral and clinical. Thus from moment to moment, Brutus shows intimations of a temperance that a Christian audience could commend as genuine virtue, then drifts into a bloodlust that highlights for the same Christian audience the lack of power to sustain that temperance. Just under the surface of restraint always waits the possibility of brutal violence. The same Brutus reaches for restraint and proves unable to restrain himself.

Brutus describes Caesar in strangely Christological (and, in Renaissance England, kingly) terms as someone whose body is made up of his followers and whose death would be a decapitation.[33] By intruding into an otherwise Stoic speech, the quasi-Christological discourse highlights for the audience that Brutus has wandered directly but unwittingly into one of the central questions of the virtuous pagan: whether the devices of a reasoned morality can defeat the overwhelming force of Original Sin and bend the unredeemed will towards goodness. Just as Caesar's nature is always serpentine but he formerly lacked the sting to poison, likewise there is no hope in Brutus's speech that Caesar's spirit might bend from tyranny by means of rhetorical persuasion or divine influence. The only way to confront such corruption is to cut it free, to end life rather

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33 One brief passage that illustrates this dynamic is Colossians 1:17-18, reproduced here from the Geneva Bible:

> And he is before all things, and in him all things consist.
>
> And he is the head of the bodie of the Church: he is the beginning and the firstborn of the dead, that in all things he might haue the preeminence.

than redeeming life. As far as Brutus can imagine, the moment of conversion, something that stands as spiritual and ultimately originating with the transformed will, is impossible. Such horizons of forgiveness and regeneration stand beyond the scope of Stoic philosophy's power; coercive, violent force stands as the only hope for preserving the Republic. Within the world that the drama sets forth, there is nothing that Brutus can do save let Caesar rise or keep him from rising by means of assassination. Yet for the Christian-era audience, those words of Paul, which imply the futility of combating spiritual powers by means of material weapons,[34] make his speech ring hollow.

Caesar should know full well that Brutus is coming; the principles of Stoicism and the limits of pre-Christian imagination lead nearly inevitably to the duty-bound assassination. His strategic vision fails when confronted with betrayal rather than military threat. But Brutus, bound by the system he inherits as Lucrece is bound by hers, also lacks the tools to anticipate that Antony will prove even more deadly than Caesar. When at Caesar's funeral Antony addresses the multitude in Rome as "friends," he clearly makes the tyrant's move, playing to the volatile passions of the many (Parker 81). Unlike his namesake in *Rape of Lucrece*, the slayer of Caesar is a man of honor but of small wit, and his response turns out to be both violent and inadequate. Because he does not anticipate the rhetorical power of the lesser rival, he does not manage to restore a Republic so much as hand the reins of the emerging Empire to Antony and to Octavian so

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34 In the closing chapter of Ephesians, Paul counsels against achieving divine ends by military means:

> Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the assaults of the deuil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, and against the worldlie gouernours, the princes of darknes of this worlde, against spiritual wickednesses, which are in the hie places. (Ephesians 6:12, Geneva Bible)

that they might fight for those reins later. Ultimately, despite his own attempt to speak virtue, Brutus proves, like Ford's Ithocles, unable either to restrain his own passion for blood or to anticipate the dangers that his strategic superiors pose. In a series of misjudgments that result in his own demise, Brutus plays out in public the failure to reach for genuine goodness (and the ability to sustain a good order) that Calvin consigns to the private soul of the pre-Christian.

When the assassination is complete, and when the tide in the city has turned against the conspirators, scenes featuring the warring armies preparing to meet bring to light the brutality of both sides of the conflict, highlighting that Brutus, separated from the structures of the Republic, lacks the power to hold things together. Within three lines of the fourth act's beginning, Lepidus, the least of the new Triumvirate, has agreed that his own brother is to die (4.1.3), and within ten lines, Antony's nephew likewise becomes a target of the Triumvirate's purge. More telling still, as soon as Lepidus leaves the room, by the end of the first scene in which the Triumvirate becomes visible on stage, Octavian and Antony have agreed to betray the third man. Brutus's Stoic sense of honor certainly has its limitations, but without Brutus in Rome, the politics get positively nasty, and they get there quickly. On its own, the betrayal of Lepidus is Machiavellian; succeeding the moment when Brutus refuses to assassinate Antony, its brutality becomes even more powerful.

In the field, things do not fare much better. Brutus is present, but there is no Rome for him to serve or for his men to rally around, and thus even the friend whom Brutus once trusted to help him to save the Republic becomes Cassius who cannot convince Brutus that he has not taken bribes in the course of battling tyranny. Brutus,

flustered at the apparent development of corruption in the noble cause, tries to invoke the death of Caesar as his ancient namesake invoked Lucrece:

> Remember March, the ides of March remember:
> Did not great Julius bleed for justice' sake?
> What villain touch'd his body, that did stab,
> And not for justice? (*Julius Caesar* 4.3.18-21)

Try as he may, Brutus cannot keep the Republican party from disintegrating by invocation of the slain. For a victim to be a martyr, a compelling story must surround the demise, and away from Rome, Brutus lacks that moral ground on which to base his rally for justice. Relationships among events once again turn out to be beyond Brutus's grasp, and anyone in the play with any rhetorical ability finds far too easy the manipulation of Brutus's actions for ends contrary to his own. In fact, Cassius is all too able to turn the charges around into a lament for loyalty:

> Come, Antony, and young Octavius, come,
> Revenge yourselves alone on Cassius,
> For Cassius is aweary of the world;
> Hated by one he loves; brav'd by his brother;
> Check'd like a bondman; all his faults observ'd,
> Set in a note-book, learn'd, and conn'd by rote,
> To cast into my teeth. O, I could weep
> My spirit from mine eyes. (*Julius Caesar* 4.3.92-99)

In this series of reversals, in which those who would avenge Caesar turn on their own families and on their own allies; and in which those fighting for the ideal of Republic

become as capable of dressing bribe-taking in the garb of honor as they are of invoking their revolt as a redemptive act, Rome loses what once held it together, not a goodness arising from forgiveness and transformation, something that might manifest as harmony with a capacity to forgive and to redeem, but the reins of the law, that force within a godless society (as Renaissance Christians might imagine it, if they were late-Augustinians at heart) that keeps evil from running entirely amok and destroying more than God might otherwise, providentially but not salvifically, restrain. Again running from the ambiguity of apparent goodness masking inner rot, *Julius Caesar* relates moments when the vices of the ancients tear things apart in manners all too visible.

Perhaps the most telling moment of law-restrained evils coming to dominate a once-law-bound scene is the moment when Cassius, who self-identifies as Epicurean, loses rulership even of his own soul, abandoning the rationalism of Epicurean philosophy in favor of portents that seem to foretell his demise:

> You know that I held Epicurus strong,
> And his opinion; now I change my mind,
> And partly credit things that do presage.
> Coming from Sardis, on our former ensign
> Two mighty eagles fell, and there they perch'd,
> Gorging and feeding from our soldiers' hands;
> Who to Philippi here consorted us:
> This morning are they fled away and gone,
> And in their stead do ravens, crows, and kites
> Fly o'er our heads, and downward look on us,

> As we were sickly prey: their shadows seem
>
> A canopy most fatal, under which
>
> Our army lies, ready to give up the ghost. (*Julius Caesar* 5.1.77-89)

Once again invoking Plato's analogy between soul and city, Cassius submits himself, even if only "partly" (5.1.90), to the most absurdly hierarchical relation of all, one which subjugates human fates neither to gods nor to men but to inanimate portents, those signs that no self-respecting Epicurean would hold divine. The audience might hold that Cassius's philosophy is inadequate to the world of the drama, especially given that the ghost of Caesar has appeared to and spoken with Brutus, but nonetheless, Cassius proves unable to hold together even an inadequate consistency. Thus the disintegration completes itself, leaving the death of Brutus to happen at best as the death of an old order and at worst the death only of one who managed not to "D[o] that [he] did in envy of great Caesar" (5.5.70). Brutus will be given a burial, but that comes only as a condescension on the part of Octavian, the man who will make final the decline of the Republic that Brutus killed and died trying to save.

Although this study will not give a lengthy reading of *Antony and Cleopatra*, that play in some senses carries forward the succession of spiritual principles and of earthly rulers that *Julius Caesar* begins. Octavian, by means of political maneuvers at least as savvy as Antony's at the funeral of Caesar, secures for himself what Julius Caesar seizes before his play begins. In the Republic of Rome there would be no king, but by the time *Antony and Cleopatra* ends, a newborn Empire is more than ready to proclaim themselves subjects of a Caesar. Caesar, the general from the house of Julii, and his nephew Octavian, get limited lines and yield the stage more often than not to Brutus and

Antony. Yet the best efforts of the more visible characters cannot stop the ascent of Caesar, the sign and the signifier, to iconic status and to rule.

The narratives of traduced Republic and solidified Imperium become condensed to a word, and by the time of the New Testament, Jesus can say "render unto Caesar what is Caesar's," and those in the crowd know full well that he refers to absolute power taken generally. Thus the characters with the most significant moments of interiority in *Julius Caesar*, those whose interior rulers give the viewer the best hints about what's going on with the souls of the ancients, seem to desire genuinely selfless and principled moments, even in the moments that are "private," but neither stands capable of sustaining a desire for recognizable goodness. Perhaps more importantly, neither stands capable of preventing the rise of an opportunistic dynasty, whether for good or for ill. And in *Antony and Cleopatra*, when Antony does fall, Parker argues that his demise comes not out of love for Cleopatra but out of jealousy of Caesar (96-97). And when Octavian becomes Augustus, the promise of order but not of love arrives with him. As Parker concludes, all of the major characters' deaths in *Antony and Cleopatra* follow attempts to grab power, not after attempts to embody love for another human being as human being (105). Thus the pattern that begins in *Rape of Lucrece* and continues in *Julius Caesar* merely follows the same predictable vector in *Antony and Cleopatra*: these texts do not leave much room as Erasmus might to entertain questions of interiority and thus the presence of genuine goodness. Instead of the dark forest of interiority, Shakespeare's poem and tragedies paint the most-honorable as the most-bound and those powerful enough to transcend systems in turn as the most opportunistic, separating the drive for power from desires for goodness and thus indicating that, theologically, his Romans are

not capable of inherent goodness so much as some of them stand more fully restrained from evil.

Shakespeare's Step Beyond Calvin

Nobody who has read Shakespeare's Roman texts can deny that the characters are complex and thus enjoyable to read, exhibiting successions of motivations that have kept the texts in anthologies and on bookshelves even as Shakespeare's contemporaries become lost to all but graduate students. But that complexity happens, as all literary complexity does, within an intelligible framework, one that will allow pagan Roman characters to live under the rulership of laws and of customs and even of philosophy but ultimately will not allow them to live inherently, God-sustained and love-rooted, good lives. Like Calvin and to a greater extent Erasmus, Shakespeare allows for the form of goodness to manifest in some parts of the narrative, but when occasion and hardship and other trials come to remove the stable frameworks within which virtuous characters like Lucrece and Brutus exist, Shakespeare's texts throw them dangerously close to blasphemy, putting in characters' speeches phrases that reach for the Christological but, unable to grasp what God has not given, forge their enemies and even themselves as anti-Christs. Thus, as poetry and drama blur the lines between public and private, Shakespeare's Roman texts project the patterns of depravity onto the world, removing most if not all of the ambiguity about what pre-Christian virtue can promise for good life. When, at the end of *Antony and Cleopatra*, Octavian grants an honorable burial to Antony, echoing his burial of Brutus, a reader familiar with the soaring optimism of Paul's vision of the Church cannot help but note that Imperial Rome, though a monarchy

like Shakespeare's own England, stands as a pale imitation or even a dark travesty of what a kingdom formed and informed by Christian love might be.

CHAPTER FOUR: Satan's Condemning Act

The title of Caesar, when in Renaissance a play or poem tells stories of the pre-Christian world, is a name for a man, whether Julius Caesar or Augustus Caesar, but political power in the abstract always comes along with the name. Added onto one man's given name (Julius was, after all, a family name) is his adopted great-nephew's adoption of the name to be a new political title. Beyond Augustus, succeeding Roman emperors (not to mention Germanic emperors of Rome and emperors who reign in places other than Rome) complicate the name by adding their history to the word. Yet the particular individual, whether Julius Caesar or Octavian called Augustus Caesar, never entirely disappears, because such identification with an historical figure is essential for drama, which requires a compelling main character. In Milton the accretion of history moves in a different direction, from a Hebrew noun, then to a Greek concept, and only then to a body of narratives. The character who carries all those levels of meaning about, Satan, strives to define himself over against the Son of God, and, in a gesture that might not for Milton be identical but certainly stands related, against the Father. The name and the narratives and the icon Milton inherits; his innovation in the Satan-tradition is to develop Satan's interiority in a cloudy manner fitting the chief of liars, to give readers a sense that Satan, like mortals, undergoes a succession of interior rulers even as he rebels against the only being powerful enough to be his ruler in the traditional sense. In *Paradise Lost* Satan's origins and original rebellion do not disclose themselves to a reader but remain

nested in layers of time and tradition and legend, and the direction he takes the chief devil both partake of and revolutionize the word Satan.

How Satan Became a Character

The Hebrew noun *ha-satan,* a word for adversary, first appears in early Biblical narrative when, upon forgiving the curses of Shimei, a young man of the house of Saul, King David finds his nephew Abishai rebuking him for sparing an enemy and thus showing weakness. Regaining for a moment the kingly stature that Absalom's revolt stole from him, David asks his rash nephew, "Why are you being *satan* to me?" (2 Samuel 19:22, Gilmour's translation and transliteration) The connotation in this episode seems to be that Abishai, who should be among David's most loyal subjects, is setting himself up as one fit to judge a king rather than allowing him the royal prerogative to forgive his own enemies.[35] In Job *ha-satan* (the adversary) seems to be the role of one of the divine council, assigned the role of prosecuting Job but still making moves only with the leave of God. Whether Job's Satan is an adversary of only Job or of God as well remains ambiguous throughout the book. Later in the canon, in the prophet Zechariah, *Satan* without the definite article seems to be an inveterate foe of Israel, someone who

35 In the synoptic gospels an echo of this episode happens: when Jesus tells his followers that his messianic career will end not in his seizing Jerusalem from the hands of the Romans but in his own destruction at the hands of Jerusalem's authorities. When Peter hears this, he rebukes Jesus, at which point Jesus says, "Get behind me, Satan!" (Bible references) Rather than assuming some sort of demonic possession has happened, a reading sensitive to the range of connotations that the Hebrew noun carries might assume that Jesus is figuring himself as a latter-day David rebuking his own too-eager ally.

does not take orders from God so much as torment Israel to spite God. When the Hebrew word gets transliterated into Greek, the New Testament most often uses it to name a particular invisible enemy of the Messiah and the Church, though sometimes the name can signal something like excommunication (1 Corinthians 5:5).

In another stream of language and tradition, the Greek word *diabolos*, in the Septuagint a simple term usually connoting any slanderous talker (Esther 7:4), but sometimes referring to a heavenly troublemaker (1 Chronicles 21:1, Job 2:1), becomes in the New Testament a name for the tempter of Christ (Matthew 4:1) and an enemy of all the faithful (1 Peter 5:8). Transliterated into English the common noun "devil" sometimes becomes the Devil, and Christian texts often conflate Devil and Satan to refer to the same entity in a given narrative.

Finally, the *helel* in Isaiah 14 (*heosphoros* in the Greek Septuagint), an overreaching Assyrian monarch who in Latin versions becomes *Lucifer*, quickly becomes Lucifer, no mere mortal monarch but chief of the angels who has overreached his creaturely bounds to become the chief enemy, not only for the eighth century, but for all time. When the Isaiah 14 narrative becomes a tale of demonic origins, Jesus's saying in Luke 10:18 that he has seen Satan fall like lightning turns the Lucifer who has fallen from a high place and from grace into the troublemaking enemy of all humankind. Although the Bible itself does not do this systematizing work, as early as the third century of the Christian era, Origen of Alexandria crafts just such an overarching narrative in his polemical *Contra Celsum*, and Augustine follows suit later in the course of his polemic *City of God*.

Like Caesar, Satan and Devil become iconic signs, signifying a range of things from psychological states to historical tendencies to unclean spirits to be exorcised. And unlike God, who knows no “shadow of turning” (James 1:17), the core of Satanic stories, from those mortals who become adversaries all the way out to the elaborate narratives of patristic theologians, involves at least one moment of succession, a place in the story where a soul once loyal to proper authority (namely God) forsakes that proper authority for the sake of some other end, usually setting himself up as the monarch of all reality. God does not end up displaced in any such story, but in all cases, loyalty gives way to rebellion, signaling an order in creation that was not on the horizon before. Such a succession of inner rulers makes perfect sense at the core of the Biblical and Christian traditions concerning adversaries and the great Adversary; the turn from proper humility to overreaching pride provides a compelling backstory and a foil to the central Christian story, borne out to some extent in Exodus’s account of Moses and to a far greater extent in the New Testament’s of Paul, the story of the mortal rebel who returns to obedience. Satan's basic obedience-to-insurrection story also provides a template to place on one's enemies in the Christian tradition, rendering the person who has wronged a leader or a community "satanic" because her or his actions have not only wronged a person or a group of people but the very cosmic order of God.

When Milton first names the adversary in *Paradise Lost,* he begins with a phrase already double-coded, naming “th' infernal Serpent” (1.34) as the seducer of humanity. As with the dragon in *Faerie Queene,* the word “Serpent” alludes to Revelation 12:9, in which Satan is the apocalyptic dragon, and it likewise refers to the snake's body that Satan takes on to deceive Eve (the identification of Satan and Genesis 3's serpent dates

back roughly to the second century[36]). *Paradise Lost* from the outset thus relies upon the composite character of traditions about Satan's origins and borrows freely from them as he works his way towards the great innovation of Book Four and past that moment into his more stereotypical role in the later books of *Paradise Lost*.

Paradise Lost does not bring Satan's origin to the reader directly through the main narrator's voice but by means of plural second-hand accounts, each of which rehearses some kind of transformation. But each account, situated as it is in the mouth of a storyteller devoted to or departed from divine service, makes the origin of the Adversary more complicated, and each, presciently or in hindsight, forces a reader to think differently on the great of moment of interiority in Book Four. Origin, of course, has at least a dual sense in Satan's case: the gift of being, the primary sense of origin, is decidedly the moment of God's creating the angels, and Satan never loses that primary divine gift, even when he is at the peak of his rebellion. But when the Arch-Angel becomes Satan, his own corruption causes another moment, not of creation out of prime material, but certainly of novelty, the establishment (or disestablishment) of a creature against its Creator. For Satan, succession is also (anti-) creation, the beginning of Satan that happens in the moment when Lucifer stops being a light-bearer and becomes the agent of discord.

Every invocation of Satan assumes the turn from proper authority inherent in the Hebrew word, and in addition to all those times when characters name attributes of Satan, a few times characters narrate the origin of adversity and the adversary. Sin offers an

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36 Elaine Pagels argues in *The Origin of Satan* that the identification of the Eden serpent with the devil (and sometimes the two of those with Christ) begins with second-century Gnostics.

early account of the rise of Satan in book two, when she attempts to elicit recognition from her incestuous father. Personifying the procession of sin from desire and death from sin in James 1:13-15, *Paradise Lost* reifies the Bible's psychological process and turns it into an infernal version of the birth of Athena:

> T' whom thus the Portress of Hell Gate repli'd:
> Hast thou forgot me then, and do I seem
> Now in thine eye so foul, once seem'd so fair
> In Heav'n when at th' Assembly, and in sight
> Of all the Seraphim with thee combin'd
> In bold conspiracy against Heav'n's King,
> All on a sudden miserable pain
> Surpris'd thee, dim thine eyes, and dizzy swum... (*Paradise Lost* 2.747-54)

Sin is an entity in her own right, inhabiting spiritual reality yet nonetheless bodily and shaped as a misogynistic fantasy. Moreover, she claims first rights to say how the former angel Lucifer became Satan, the adversary, citing her own emergence as the moment when Satan began to desire Sin as a good. Yet when she tells the story, the rebellion is already assembled when Sin springs forth from her father's head, and the goddess full-grown that crafts her own past never does explain why those angels were assembled for conspiracy in the first place. Without a moment before Sin's story, Satan's origins as the rebel angel remain unintelligible. The gap in the story's logic does not find resolution in Sin's own account, and the mystery surrounding Satan's becoming Satan persists.

Sin mainly raises the question of how rebellion and adversity against God (or, to return to this study’s central categories, when a good relationship of rulership and

obedience gives way to a bad one) relate to one another. (Obviously one could answer, "incestuously," but that still leaves questions unanswered.) Satan's immediate desire for and subsequent rape of his own Sin make his rise, in Sin's account, one in which interior disposition (whose causes remain dark) brings forth fruit that is not only visible and hideous but whose own offspring, Death, threatens even (especially?) the one who brought it forth and begets (very visibly in this horrifying allegory) even more strife, the howling hell hounds. Thus with a few visual allegorical elements Satan becomes both the begetter of Sin and the indirect cause of Sin's and Death's offspring.

When Sin places her begetting chronologically after the rebel angels are already gathered, she presents all sorts of logical and ethical problems, unsolvable precisely because that they are memories distorted by Sin as well as the memories of Sin. In this moment of indirect discourse, Milton articulates part of the difficulty of saying where sin has its origins, namely that sin always involves deceptions, among them self-deceptions, and those moments of untruth break up the sequence of successive moments that, when arranged properly, can disclose the truth of things. At least as far as Book Two is concerned, Satan is indeed a liar even before he begins, and the reader hoping to get an intelligible origins story runs into the reality that lies do not often beget truth.

In contrast to the strange allegory's story, Raphael, whose story issues forth from one still devoted to the proper order of things, places the Arch-Angel's transformation directly after and in direct confrontation with a celestial celebration of the anointing of the Son as Messiah:

> Celestial Tabernacles, where they slept
>
> Fann'd with cool Winds, save those who in thir course

> Melodious Hymns about the sovran Throne
> Alternate all night long: but not so wak'd
> *Satan*, so call him now, his former name
> Is heard no more in Heav'n; he of the first,
> If not the first Arch-Angel, great in Power,
> In favor and preeminence, yet fraught
> With envy against the Son of God... (5.654-62)

Already, as the celebration goes on, Satan is already Satan, and he already bears the freight of Envy. Raphael does not offer any account for why envy, the sorrow that rises from another being's well-being, should be present in Heaven before the fall of Adam, but the point is that envy is already there when Raphael chooses to start his story. For Raphael, whatever else the satanic is and however it begins, it involves the rejection of the grand celebration and good gifts of a righteous master. The coronation of the Son should, for all of the angels, be a moment to celebrate the rise of a good ruler, but for Satan, there is no good ruler but himself. (In this Raphael echoes Jesus' parables of the banquet.[37]) What Satan calls tyranny Raphael calls bountiful generosity, and when Satan encourages revolt against a tyrant Raphael can only see it as envy, that sin which desires nothing and hopes only for evil to come to another.

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37 Matthew 22:1-14, Luke 14:15-24. In this parable a master invites those who normally would be good guests to a grand banquet, but for various commercial reasons, they reject his invitation. The master then invites those who really have no business at a grand banquet, the poor and the sick. Certainly Satan in Raphael's account of the rebellion is, among other things, an ungrateful recipient of divine invitation to celebrate.

In Raphael's account no moment stands as the decisive moment when Satan becomes a sinner; his sin (not the same as the character Sin in Raphael's account) has already possessed him as the story begins, and to narrate directly the genesis of his rebellious psychological state does not concern the tale of the war in Heaven. Seen through the faithful eyes of an unfallen angel, Lucifer's rebellion is a simple datum rather than an occasion to speculate about the growth of evil from ethical freedom, and even the name that he bore before is not part of the memory that informs and defines the relationship between Heaven and Hell.

Satan's own account of his origin is nested within Raphael's story of Abdiel's faithful refusal. When the brave Abdiel resists the mob of the Satanic rebellion, Satan, acting as deceiver, acting as deceiver, sets forth an argument whose only force derives from his own self-imposed ignorance:

> That we were form'd then say'st thou? And the work
> Of secondary hands, by task transferr'd
> From Father to his Son? Strange point and new!
> Doctrine which we would know whence learnt: who saw
> When the creation was? remember'st thou
> Thy making, while the Maker gave thee being?
> We know no time when we were not as now;
> Know none before us, self-begot, self-rais'd
> By our own quick'ning power, when fatal course
> Had circl'd his full Orb, the birth mature
> Of this our native Heav'n, Ethereal Sons. (5.853-63)

Whether Satan is merely getting lazy in his attempts to deceive Abdiel or whether he believes what he says, the content of the speech reveals a radical failure to take memory on its own terms. Since Raphael is narrating, Satan's honesty with himself has to be doubtful, and the reader is not privy to Satan's private thoughts, at this point, to check whether his strange logic is a ruse only for others or whether he has convinced himself as well. The compound nesting of the account—Satan talking to Raphael in the midst of Raphael's story to Adam, related to readers through Milton's narrative persona—defers what desire the reader might have to see what really happened at the genesis of Satan unhindered by verbal tradition: in Eden as well as in Milton's England, verbal and written tradition are a necessary medium, and such a medium, even when truthful, only grants what knowledge befits a contingent creature. Humanity need not know precisely how Lucifer became Satan, only the broad outlines of what it involved and that similar temptations lie before humanity. The only thing that the reader comes away with is the core of the argument itself: since Satan cannot remember a time before he existed, therefore there must not have been such a time. Like Sin, Satan seems unconcerned or unaware that the missing moments, those lacunae that render his story deficient aesthetically, also constitute the deceptive shape of his self-consciousness. That Abdiel does not find the argument convincing is no surprise to anyone who knows what it means to be created.

Milton's divergent accounts are not simple sloppiness: his fragmented account of Satan and the satanic points to a reality in which willful abandonment of one's proper bearings towards the divine always entails an inability to enjoy the succession of moments that make up a good story, the good ordering that makes up a joyful story

having become largely inaccessible to the (divinely created) faculty of memory once departing from the illumination of divine goodness. His origin is the story of Christian salvation in reverse, a forgetting of sin that stands in contrast to Augustine's remembering and naming of his sins in *Confessions* and the naming and repenting of sins that happens in Christian conversion and in the sacrament of confession. Satan's self-imposed damnation results in forgetfulness as well as absurdity. The multifaceted origin also allows for something like moral allegory:

> A number of evils are manifest in Satan as a whole or are indistinguishably part of all three roles [of archangel, prince of demons, and tempter]: for example, envy, malice, anger, pride, ambition, hate and jealousy. Milton apparently intended his Satanic figure to exemplify, like Adam and Eve, the whole range of sins that followed a first act of disobedience. He obviously makes full use of the oneness of the figure to do so. (Kastor 74)

In terms of rulership, Satan is the figure for Milton who is not only unrestrained but unrestrained to the most absolute sense that God will allow: because he is, like Plato's tyrant, the figure with the least check on his own badness, one whose sins, like the damned in Dante's *Inferno*, God allows to run their full course. Once again, something like a Christian sense of tragedy manifests here: the turn comes not from the caprice of gods but from the unchecked wickedness of God's creation. Fiore notes this abandonment of proper rule when he argues that "the angels did not sin because their natures had gone bad. On the contrary, they sinned because they preferred to contemplate *too* much the magnificence of their own natures, which, in this sense, is a rebellion against a hierarchical creation" (17). The establishment of the Son as the true chief of

Heaven should be the moment that brings to completion the joy of all of the heavenly hosts, but for Satan, to be placed in a hierarchy is always to be limited and thus negated by hierarchy.

Satan is no pure anarchist, however. Rather than a timeless un-rule, Satan seeks what he imagines as the old order of things. As Rebhorn notes, in an astute examination of Satan's motives, Satan fancies himself a kind of Ciceronian conservative rather than a rebel, one who fights to establish the "old order" that held before the Son was crowned king (82). In fact, Satan's fall is among other things a failure of literary and political imagination:

> If for Milton and his God terms like "monarch," "prince," and "majesty" are merely metaphors borrowed from our fallen language for an inexpressible reality where order and achievement, freedom and service are one, then Satan's perverted and fallen intellect manifests itself most distinctly insofar as he uses those terms not metaphorically but literally. (Rebhorn 92)

In Hart's terms, then, part of what makes the Satanic evil is its denial that divine gift is infinite, a reckoning that the whole multiplicity of exchanges between the Creator and Creatures happen in zero-sum terms, assuming that the only way that a creature can be exalted is for other creatures to be diminished (assuming that Milton holds the Son to be created) and eventually regarding Creator as mere being-among-beings rather than rejoicing in the confession that God is infinite and infinitely generous, able to exceed the creature's capacity to receive gift but lovingly limiting those gifts so as not to overwhelm even the greatest of creations.

Because Satan cannot be satisfied with the infinite but hierarchical bounty of divine gift, his own ability to govern himself warps his own being into something incapable of imagining goodness or justice or even coherent power. What stands above Satan, in the fallen angel's imagination, cannot but limit his desire to rise, and that arbitrary resentment stifles his capacity for gratitude. Christopher compares Satan's soul as it manifests in his speeches to a medieval conception of monstrosity:

> Just as the medieval demon often was represented by a melange of mismatched body parts (for example, Duessa stripped for her bath), so Milton's Satan is a mind whose parts do not function well together. (86-87)

From the perspectives of loyal creatures (and even from Sin's), then, Satan does not allow for a comprehensive theory so much as a series of cautionary tales indicating that other creatures might likewise rebel and thus lose their own sense of memory. (Such tales, of course, do little good for Adam and Eve, who do rebel and who do lose their powers of memory.) Such agnosticism as to the heavenly moment of evil's genesis is not new to the Satan tradition; what makes Milton's Satan such an interesting figure of the diabolic is what Satan says, in the course of direct narration, to other characters and ultimately to himself.

The Niphates Speech

Satan, in the tradition of Christian literature, is a complex character, sometimes changing names, often shapes, always tactics. Kastor coins a neologism summarizing the chief devil's multiplicity: "Put simply, Satan is a trimorph, or three related but distinguishable personages: a highly placed Archangel, the grisly Prince of Hell, and the

deceitful, serpentine Tempter" (15). In none of these three roles is Satan ever alone: whether scheming alongside the other conspirator-angels, leading the infernal army in futile apocalyptic battle, or tempting Eve and her children (including Jesus of Nazareth), Satan in most literary traditions is always with somebody else, and his function as *diabolos* renders his appearances in Biblical and other poetic contexts a great exercise in hermeneutics: while some texts will render him a liar in very simple terms, others will have him distort great truths, and others still will render his words ironic oracles. What Milton's poems add to this mix are scenes in which Satan talks to himself.

Satan's apostrophe to the sun in *Paradise Lost* book four does not, of course, negate the hermeneutical problems that come with reading speeches from the chief of liars. The speech does put Satan in a new sort of literary moment, however, one in which he has a long span of time alone and nobody to deceive but himself. His speech begins with an address to the unspeaking orb, referring to it as "like the God / Of this new World" (4.33-34) and revealing from the speech's beginning that his tendencies to divine aspiration taint his sight even of lights who likely will not talk back to him to remind him who the God of every world is. He also puts memory into play, blaming the sun because it "bring[s] to my remembrance from what state / I fell" (38-39). He seems capable of recognizing that his vices are vices (though by personifying he does reduce his own responsibility for acting as rebel and Tempter of Angels):

> Till Pride and worse Ambition threw me down
> Warring in Heav'n against Heav'n's matchless King:
> Ah wherefore! He deserv'd no such return
> From me, when he created what I was

In that bright eminence, and with his good
Upbraided none; nor was his service hard. (4.40-45)

In this moment, the potential at least exists for Satan to return to right obedience to God and thus to beatitude: by naming Pride and Ambition as those things that throw him down (echoing the tradition of Christian rather than Classical tragedy), Satan names truthfully the moral universe which he inhabits. But Satan's rhetoric, dark though its origins stand, has powers even over the mouth who speaks it.

Although the Sun does serve as an apostrophic audience for his speech, no other characters directly serve as the occasion for this speech as directly as they do for his other discourses. Satan speaks to the Sun for lack of a confidant, engaging in a dialectic in which the other partner does not speak and in which Satan can only negate himself. Because he has not yet assumed Kastor's Tempter role, he needs no disguise to hide his shape or his soul, and he stands in the light of the sun, symbol of illuminating good at least since Plato's use of it in his cave allegory, unable to maintain sight of his own ultimate good:

So farewell Hope, and with Hope farewell Fear,
Farewell Remorse: all Good to me is lost;
Evil be thou my Good; by thee at least
Divided Empire with Heav'n's King I hold
By thee, and more than half perhaps will reign;
As Man ere long, and this new World shall know. (4.108-13)

Satan's vocabulary in this segment of the speech reaches the fullness of sophistic ambiguity that characterizes his speeches in Hell: after he bids Hope farewell, he

immediately follows it with the more ambiguous Fear, an abstraction that can mean proper reverence for the Almighty or servile cowering. And by finishing his triad of farewells with Remorse unmodified, he blurs the line between pious penitence and the forsaking of a good cause and the simple sensation of failing to accomplish a really nasty deed. The strange thing about this rhetorical display is that Satan has only himself to convince that Remorse should mean not proper penitence in the face of God, but regret that one has not seized the day. Satan has already acknowledged in the Hell scenes (even after he denies the desire to reign except as a dictator protecting diabolic liberty) that a reign of evil cannot help but become a facet of the complex good of divine providence, yet he finishes his Niphates speech with the verb "know," an echo of Exodus and Ezekiel,[38] in which "to know" is not mainly a cognitive moment but a deference to a forgotten authority. Satan should know as well as anyone that the people of this new creation shall know that God's name is the LORD, and he knows that his worst efforts cannot help but become part of God's good plan, yet he pines after being known, acknowledged not merely as an arbitrary tyrant, but as the source of true authority.

Making this speech, Satan demonstrates that his fall was not complete when first he rebelled, nor did it come to its final form when he stood and deceived the fallen angels

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38 In Exodus, the narrator indicates that the Hebrews' troubles begin when a new Pharaoh "who knew not Joseph" (Exodus 1:8) comes to power. The same Pharaoh later responds "I know not the LORD" (Exodus 5:2) when Moses demands in the name of the LORD that the people be allowed to travel for the sake of ritual observance. Later, in Ezekiel, the refrain, "They shall know I am the LORD" comes to mark the right way to relate to God, as opposed to the idolatrous and oppressive ways of sixth-century Jerusalem. This political connotation of knowing, signifying the recognition of authority, is related to but by no means identical to the Hebraic expression that a husband might know his wife.

at Pandemonium. Instead, some remnant of goodness, which for Milton is freedom working itself out in right relationship to the Father, remains to be conquered even as Satan makes his way to Paradise to complete the destructive task before him. His desire to supplant or at least diminish the Father still has no clear point of origin, yet that urge, working its way out in a moment of profound privacy, still at this point must strive against an awareness within Satan that the Father is still and always will be the proper authority of all creation. Although his own rhetoric makes short work of the memory that he has of standing tall as the chief of the servants of Father and Son, the struggle at the center of the Niphates speech reveals that, even for a soul as far gone as Satan, the succession of inner rulers remains a possibility, one that the Devil must squelch if he is to carry through with his plans to harm God through God's human creations.

In the poem's chronology Satan could not possibly be the beneficiary of Classical philosophical learning, much less be a virtuous pagan, ignorant of the advent of the Son, yet the poem sets up his inner struggle in terms of the composite soul as imagined by Plato and others, then inherited by Paul. Satan's appetite for power and pride in his own grandeur must overcome the reasonable conviction that shapes the beginning of the speech, the recognition that his place is among the angels, in service to the Father. Indeeed, in the Niphates discourse Satan does not start with the singleness of mind that a reader might expect of the chief of devils; instead, even in his rebellion and rejection, some part of him clings to the notion that a single, ordering good governs or at least ought to govern all created things. The anxiety that takes shape in the speech seem to hold that created being can and must construct existence on the basis of such a good. The terrible and ironic "Evil be thou my Good" eliminates neither the hierarchy of being nor

the privative nature of evil, as Satan knows better than anyone, but that absurd sentence does signal that Satan's will to strive for what is not proper to his being cannot stop at negation but must construct nonsense (non-good as good) so that there is something at least formally equivalent to an order of goods puts his own soul in some place in some hierarchical order. In short, Satan brings the decline of proper ethical goods closer to absolute null than the Romans in Shakespeare can do, yet even at the moment where he declares his absolute separation from Good and God, by analogy at least he still clings to a kind of order which proves inescapable.

The Satanic School as Point of Departure

In the school of Milton criticism that claims Blake and Shelley as forebears but whose most reliable public defenders have been William Empson and Neil Forsyth, ethical reasoning which assumes a central, singular Good has given way to a kind of reading that makes Milton's Father one god among gods, an entity who has more raw power and a will to exert that power but himself falls short of genuine goodness rather than being the source of Goodness. Because that circle of critics, known as the Satanic school among Milton scholars, has presented such a popular and in some senses appealing reading of *Paradise Lost*, this investigation of the ethical battles within Satan really should address their main points.

Empson sets out in *Milton's God* to demonstrate not so much that Satan is a genuine moral exemplar, but that the devils stand no chance of remaining the good beings they should be because of the evil of the Father. Assuming throughout his examination of the first two books that the devils are genuinely ignorant of the Father's true omnipotence

and of their metaphysical inability to do Heaven harm (or, even if they could, to come to a good and separate peace from the most powerful of powers), Empson holds that their speeches use terms like "Almighty" and "good" as mere concessions to conventional God-talk (38-39), implying at least that, in this primordial scene, such terms would have had time to become conventional. By pretending vulnerability and leaving the devils to their own devices, God intentionally drives the fallen angels "into moral absurdity, calculated to make their characters rot" (53). Empson thus at least seems to agree with Plato that such souls, left to their own devices, are worse off than are those governed by some power who has the good of the ruled in mind. As Satan realizes the absurdity at Niphates, continues nonetheless unrepentant, and eventually takes on the absurd physical serpentine form that reflects his nature as a thief, Empson maintains that the Father "has deliberately reduced [him] to such a condition" (70). Empson does concede that Satan knows, from his interaction with Abdiel before the rebel angels' expulsion from Heaven, that Lucifer was created through the Son (82-83); yet he insists that God "drive[s the faction of Satan] into real evil" (97). Neil Forsyth echoes this accusation when he asserts that “The heroic values that Satan embodies are present early, and only gradually diminished” (30). Thus, in the face of Socrates in the *Republic*, Empson and Forsyth hold that Milton’s poem features a chief god who does genuine harm, in fact the worst possible harm, damaging not only the “bodies” of the fallen angels but also placing them in situations in which their souls will deteriorate. Some standard of goodness lies in the background of such arguments, one that transcends both Father and Satan, but neither Empson nor Forsyth names the reference point by which they judge the Father to have corrupted devils' souls.

Moving on to Satan himself, Neil Forsyth in *Satanic Epic* notes that Satan's claim of self-begetting, though it comes after the Niphates speech in the poem, precedes it chronologically (56). Thus Satan might have been confused early, but later realized his status as creature. To explain why the Father might breed such confusion in the highest of angels, Forsyth argues that the Father acts as an arbitrary, Ockham-style God who derives a certain, warped aesthetic satisfaction from the destruction of Satan, not because God regards Satan as valuable in his own right but because God sees Satan, who possesses enough interiority to make him a fully articulated character, nonetheless as a plot device, to be discarded in his own right once his function in the story is complete. In Forsyth's reading of *Paradise Lost*,

> It is Satan's presence that both causes and excuses the fall of mankind, and his role is to allow God to forgive Adam and Eve. Like his great opponent in the poem, the Son, he is, in an important sense, sacrificed for the good of mankind. Both Son and Satan are, in this version of Christian myth, necessary for salvation. (Forsyth 17)

Forsyth's implication, even if he does not state as much directly, is that Satan is far more abused than is the Son, largely because the Son wills himself to be the vehicle for God's violent redemption, but Satan does not know about the purposes to which the Father has destined him. On the contrary, while the Son, the arbitrary favorite, knows and volunteers knowingly to play his part in the bloody divine drama, with the promise of reinstatement at its conclusion, Satan truly is the wronged sacrificial victim, summoned to play a role and then cast into eternal torment once that role is played. Like Homer's Zeus in the *Iliad*, Milton's Father, as Forsyth reads him, plays with the "lives" of his

angelic creatures without any regard for their inherent dignity.

Forsyth is right to note that, in *Paradise Lost*'s story of the ascendance of Satan, "Even though he transformed the story of Satan's jealousy into a myth of the very origin of the Devil, nonetheless the key moment of his story, the primal scene of the birth of evil, is thus eluded, as in all such myths" (187). Where Forsyth differs from my own reading is in his implication at least that such an evasion means that the designations "good" and "evil" serve only to name the winners and losers in an otherwise arbitrary struggle, serving only to bolster the power of the most powerful. Certainly a survey of history will reveal figures who have made such moves, branding political enemies as evil without any critical appreciation for the movable nature of such terms. But in order to say that this or that use of such terms is worthwhile or not is itself to make at least an analogous moral judgment that itself requires some conception of good and evil, and so forth. In short, every criticism of the language of good and evil implies at least that this use of evil is itself evil, which means that evil or something like it must have some purchase beyond the surface at hand. So even granting, as Forsyth notes (Forsyth 55), that the already-present rebellion of the king's enemies is implicit in Psalm 2 (and thus in *Paradise Lost* book 5), the Satanic school argument must rely on a simple equivalence of unknown origins and arbitrariness, and furthermore it must assume that a rebellion that is as old as anyone can remember must therefore have legitimacy simply in virtue of its unknown roots.

Empson's book *Milton's God* and Forsyth's book *Satanic Epic* therefore operate in terms that seem to fall victim to something like the problem of vocabulary in Plato's *Euthyphro*: in order to make moral judgments against the Father who appears in the

poem, each implies (but does not state) that some point of reference for moral judgment exists by which one could put the Father and Lucifer in the dock and judge between them. Such a move might indeed result in a judgment of the literary construct, "The Father," but it does not ultimately remove the philosophical problem of moral judgment, for if the grand problem in Milton's universe is that the Father is too powerful without having sufficient self-restraint to use that power in ways that benefit the less-powerful, then such a judgment assumes that some entity, presumably neither identical with the Father nor with Satan, has established and given to the human reader an ethical code that would declare the Father guilty of doing harm. Whether or not that super-God would likewise be culpable Forsyth and Empson do not address, but the variation on the third-man problem remains.

The *Euthyphro* problem and the ways in which the Satanic School and the Reformation theologians approach its dilemma differently illustrate nicely the large ethical problems that are at hand in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries when literary texts range over questions of ethical free will: the working assumption that Erasmus and Luther and Calvin share alike is that, in cases where the Father as revealed in the Bible *seems* unjust or even monstrous, the problem must be one that lies with the mortal interpreting the revealed text. The corollary of the same is that a conception of goodness and a reading of the Bible that do not discover the divine as inherently good has a problem either with the operative conception of goodness or with the hermeneutical strategies brought to the Bible. Although Erasmus follows Augustine's move towards allegorical reading and Luther follows Augustine's move towards the assertion of mystery, both assume that, whatever goodness means, the Creator of all things seen and

unseen must be at the root of that goodness. Thus moments where God seems other than utterly good mean that the reader is imposing an alien definition of goodness on an utterly free God (as in Luther) or that the reader is misreading and imposing monstrous structures where a more loving allegory would preserve divine goodness (as in Erasmus).

By contrast, the Satanic School assumes that the Father is both mostly intelligible and mostly inadequate to the concept of goodness. Such an approach is truly an atheistic approach, even if it does not exclude superhuman realities. Although the Father might wield powers entirely incommensurate with any entities that might try to oppose the Father, the criticism still harbors a resentment for the Father for failure to be a true God in the Platonic and later the Christian sense. (At least Percy Shelley, one of the forerunners of Empson and Forsyth, has the decency to throw Jupiter out of Heaven in *Prometheus Unbound.*) In short, returning to the aesthetic arguments of Milbank and Hart, arguments that attempt to declare Milton's Father (and thus, in Empson's and Forsyth's cases, the Christian God) no God at all still retain traces of a desire for there to be a truly good, truly powerful entity that can root existence and provide moral intelligibility. Where classical theologies long for a mind's eye that can behold God, the Satanic school longs for a God worth beholding with the mind's eye.

Such discussions of the Father and Satan in turn stand to inform the way that one reads the moral imagination of the Renaissance as one reads Shakespeare's (and Ford's) pre-Christians and Spenser's Christian-era knights: Milton certainly stands as an inspiration for Romantic poets such as Blake and Shelley, who long for superhuman powers beyond Urizen and Jupiter. One could thus situate Milton as a (knowing or unwitting) genesis point for a new sort of theology. However, Milton also undoubtedly

stands as a culmination of sorts, one who takes the questions of inner and political rulership inherited from the tension between Calvin and Plato and lets those questions play out in the primordial dawn of evil-as-we-know-it. Although this study is not mainly a repudiation of the Satanic School of Milton criticism, I read Milton as a poet who takes questions of God and rulership where Renaissance and Reformation texts were already going rather than as a poet who breaks strongly with those traditions. A different strain of scholarship posits Milton mainly as he who initiates the Romantic and later the modern-atheist reactions to classical Christian thought, and that difference between points of departure should at least illuminate the significant ways in which those two approaches to Milton rely on one another.

Satanic as Function of Divine

Read through the lenses of Reformation and Renaissance disputes about inner rulership and one's disposition towards God, Satan's multifaceted origin and his self-deceiving soliloquies make him the prototypical Platonic tyrant, one who has thrown away his proper orientation to the Good and thus becomes slave to himself and, in Milton's epic, deceiver of himself. In a separation from divine grace even more radical than ancient Rome's because self-inflicted, Satan is nothing less than adversity, *satan,* in dramatic person. And as Devil, troublemaking *diabolos* in all of his disguises, he both exhibits and personifies his own defining character as liar. Yet just as each Caesar retains the idiosyncracy of a personality in Shakespeare's Roman plays, so this Satan, because his adversity and trouble turn inward, does not become the two-dimensional icon of Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, much less the plot device that the Devil is in Luke's and

Matthew's temptation scenes. As Kastor notes, “Indeed, the Tempter has human impulses similar to those of postlapsarian Adam and Eve, and the parallel is not accidental” (68-69). Milton’s Satan, read as a contribution to discussions of inner rulership, stands to be a powerful negative moral exemplar precisely because he has the capacity to be other in so many crucial moments. Later in his book, Kastor adds to the point with a compliment on the depth of this character: “Milton's Tempter is no two-dimensional, Machiavellian villain. He is a full, round character, in whom the total inner experience—emotional, mental, and spiritual—of evil finds a living, human voice” (77-78). On the other hand, Satan does not have one kind of being in opposition to another kind of being located with the Father. Instead, Satan's Satanic character is precisely that of negation: “Like Augustine, Milton feels that evil is not a nature, and if it does not have a nature, it must be nothing” (Fiore 15). When Satan beholds the world, he beholds a reality that he did not create but nonetheless experiences as something snatched from him by a Father who does not recognize his true greatness. His failure to appreciate those moments that come before his own in the grand succession make him incapable, ultimately, of receiving the gift of existence graciously, and *Paradise Lost* is the outworking of that ignorant, ungrateful, broken memory to the detriment of humanity.

Imagined thus, as a cipher of memory where humility should check ambition, Satan is Caesar writ large, usurper over spirits who should be his equal just as Caesar usurps the power of the consulate and the Senate. Both do so by appealing to the worst instincts of the crowds, their inadequate grasp of logic and their urge to elevate themselves unduly; and Satan as an intensified Caesar rises as one who would upset Creation's order by standing, still creature, above Creator. Because a creature of God, he

retains the being of an angel and the existence of a willing soul even as his name stands and becomes apocalyptic and symbolic and metonymic. *Paradise Lost*'s manner of presenting the arch-fiend places the former Arch-Angel's will at the center of the drama, making his desires to reach above his station evident even as the narrator, as Stanley Fish points out,[39] provides perfectly valid commentary that keeps the careful reader from falling into sympathy for the devil. Although the so-called Satanic school of Milton criticism takes seriously Satan's aspirations to overcome the Almighty, the text of the poem makes Satan's role in the heavenly drama less analogous to Brutus's (Junius or Marcus) and more akin to the *dictator perpetuus* who appealed to the masses only to elevate himself above the natural limits of a human being's proper authority. Like Caesar, Satan rises only to fall. Among the many differences between Shakespeare's Roman Kings and Milton's King of Hell is the manner in which each falls from his brief moment of elevation. The penultimate chapter of this book will examine the Son who is more than Brutus, who does not by active plotting make his *satan* immortal (as does Brutus his one time friend), who regains Paradise not by plotting but by standing.

39 Although I have not cited particular passages, the gold standard for anti-Satanic readings of *Paradise Lost* remains Stanley Fish's *Surprised by Sin.* His core argument, that *Paradise Lost* stands as a trial for the reader, one in which the reader must resist Satan's rhetorical devices, seems to assume much of the theological background that this essay attempts to articulate.

CHAPTER 5: Christ's Paradigmatic Act

Caesar and Satan in many Christian traditions ultimately name usurpers, hubristic souls who ignored the true relationships between beings and Being, divine and not-divine, creatures and Creator in favor of a self-deception wherein God is simply one powerful entity in the same sense that an angel is a powerful entity or (in the case of Caesar) that one man could rise metaphysically above humanity's limitations and into an entirely different sort of existence by means of law and tradition. Such overreachers, in Christian theology and doxology, are destined to be overcome first when the Word becomes flesh and ultimately when the redemption of creation and of all nations is consummated in the end of things. Caesar cannot, when things come to their end, but succumb to Jesus of Nazareth, *Pantakrator* over against empire, and Satan cannot but be rendered null in the face of Christ, redeemer from the greatest of adversaries. John Milton's *Paradise Regained* sets this final change of ethical paradigm in the desert temptation of the Son of God by the Devil, outlining the ways in which Christ will redefine rulership in the compact frame of the episode borrowed from the gospels.

In Paul's letters "Christ" sometimes retains some of the narrative particularity of the man Jesus of Nazareth, who died on a cross outside Jerusalem. In other passage Christ has the flavor of the Hebrew Messiah, the anointed spiritual/historic successor of King David (himself iconic). But in other passages still, Paul can write "to live is Christ, and to die is gain," and the Christians first hearing the letter read aloud, like those

listening to the Jesus signified (but not exhausted) in the word "Christ," knew that the narrative of the ascendant anointed dead and resurrected King of the Jews was quickly becoming its own icon, shifting in terms of signifier even as the sign retained the same Greek letters. In the centuries of Christian writing between Paul and Milton, the word "Christ" took on meanings ranging from allegorical to psychological without ever entirely effacing the historical particularity of the man from Nazareth, and Milton uses that rich range of meanings to imagine the Christ-event as simultaneously unique in itself and adequate for moral exemplar, bringing and holding together the divine and the human by means of Christ's act in his brief epic about the Son of God. In order to succeed, Christ must perform the utterly innovative act of refusing to innovate, becoming entirely passive until the Father reveals the shape of the new humanity in him. Or, to put things more briefly, his innovative act requires that he neither innovate nor act.

For Christ to succeed as Son of God (the puns are inevitable here), his own nature must remain true to his divine calling while becoming impressive enough aesthetically and spiritually to convince people's souls that in this human body, the Jew's from Nazareth, dwells the presence of God in ways that neither Lucifer nor David could boast. In the moments that pass between the birth of Jesus and the ascension of the Son of Man on a cloud to the Ancient of Days, the Christ must become more and more transparently God's vessel so that, as an icon, the world can truly look upon the Son and see the Father. That narrative dynamic lies at the heart of *Paradise Regained*, and the way that the Son of God engages with and overcomes every moment of temptation brought to him by Satan establishes him truly as the unique Son of God.

Anti-Traditional Christology

The difficulties that face a Christian poet writing about Christ are manifold, not least for a poet whose theology, if unfinished manuscripts tell the truth, leans away from Trinitarian understandings of God. In the century or so after scholars rediscovered Milton's *De Doctrina,* articles and books have sought to define Milton's Christology in light of his unpublished book by focusing on Jesus' metaphysical person, assuming that whatever Jesus is metaphysically will result necessarily in what Jesus does in the poem's storyline. Barbara Lewalski's survey of scholarship on *Paradise Regained* reveals that such scholarship frames the question almost exclusively in terms of Milton's acceptance or refusal of Patristic Greek categories established in the ecumenical councils of the late Roman and Byzantine Empires. Her chapter title itself tells much: the survey of relatively recent scholarship falls under the heading "The Problem of Christ's Nature." Her chapter begins by noting that most scholars since the discovery of Milton's *De Doctrina* have tended to call Milton Arian,[40] that only recently (in 1966) have scholars attempted to locate Milton's theology in something other than a direct genealogy from Arius to *De Doctrina*. For instance,

> Louis A. Wood has argued that Milton has closer affinities with the so-called semi-Arians like Basil of Ancyra and Eusebius of Caesarea who affirmed with Arius that the Son is not eternal and not of the same essence as the Father, but modified the Arian statement of his creation from

40 Arius held that the Father is one and is uniquely self-sufficient; thus the Son could not share in those divine qualities. As a result the Son is indeed the unique co-creator of all things seen and unseen but remains himself the first of all of the Father's creations rather than a co-eternal Person of the Trinity.

> nothingness by declaring that he was of like substance (*homoiousian*, not *homoousian*) with the Father. (141)

Other possible departures from calling Milton's a strong Arian theology are labels like subordinationism (the Son is derivative from and thus not wholly divine) (142), Nestorianism (Christ's human nature is strongly separate from an imputed divine nature) (151), and monophysitism (Christ's human nature effectively disappears as the divine nature takes over) (152). Each of these positions has its own internal logic and its own ancient adherents, and scholars have attempted to locate them all in Milton's seventeenth-century corpus, but all of the heresies named largely fall out of common practice after the seven ecumenical councils of the Roman-imperial and Byzantine church condemn them as heresies.[41] To frame the discussion of *Paradise Regained*'s Christ in their terminology implies that Milton could not have had anything to say *to his own moment in Christian history* about how human and divine relate in Christ, that all possible formulations of that relationship must have come into being very early, and that poetry as a form ultimately adds nothing worthy of note to the Christian theological vocabulary. To put things another way, such studies pay no attention to the possibility that Milton might have been bringing a strong emphasis on succession to the question of Jesus Christ.

Such scholarly focus is not surprising; literary critics, while often describing poetry's theology as different from theological treatises, rarely have the audacity to call poetic speculations original. Such limited concerns did not begin recently either. As

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41 This decline does not apply to the Coptic Orthodox traditions and others which have retained some form of monophysitism as part of their acceptable range of theologies.

Rumrich notes,[42] not much time passed before writers began to associate Milton alternately with Nicene orthodoxy or with Nicene-era heresies, and speculations that he might have been an Arian are much older than the publication of *De Doctrina*. Moreover, since Milton tends to internalize religious realities, these scholars do make a valid move when they begin their investigations into Milton's theology with what one might find within Jesus. However, there are better and worse ways to start with interior questions and move to exterior answers. Stanley Fish's *How Milton Works* posits an overriding inward-to-outward movement as the first assumption one must make when one approaches Milton's poetic and prose texts:

> The priority of the inside over the outside is thematized obsessively in Milton's prose and poetry. Indeed, "priority" is at once too weak and misleading, since often outsides will either be declared nonexistent and illusory or found to be indistinguishable from the insides of which they are the local manifestation. (*How Milton Works* 7)

Scholarly treatments of the Son in *Paradise Regained* have certainly taken this tendency to heart, and rightly so. In the face of epic's and tragedy's tendencies to develop characters by means of visible action and the outer dispositions of characters, Milton's Protestant texts always live in the tension between the conventions of narrative poetry and Calvin's tendency to turn inward as a response to the fixed providence that governs the world of matter. But my objection to such a heresy-detecting mode of scholarship is not with the emphasis on the interior but on the neglect of the literary and thus on the

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42 John Peter Rumrich, "Milton's Arianism: Why It Matters." Rumrich begins his survey of Milton's accusers as early as Daniel DeFoe.

successive. There are ways to write about heresy that honor the succession of moments, but those rooted in theologies that prioritize stasis over motion neglect precisely what poetry-as-theology most promises to the discipline of theology.

As an organizing principle Fish's first reminder works to keep readers' focus on those important internal realities, but readings of *Paradise Regained* that attempt to ignore too totally the dramatic character of the poem often neglect Fish's next guideline about reading Milton:

> When one interprets Milton, the language should be allowed to generate questions of philosophy, theology, history, and politics rather than the other way around. Even the first-time reader who has little knowledge of dualism, monism, republicanism, free will, or the doctrine of the Fortunate Fall will be led to the issues named by these abstractions if he or she is responsive to the demands of the verse and prose. (24)

Certainly Fish's caution applies to Milton's Christ, and *Paradise Regained* does not merely ape the debates of the Seven Ecumenical Councils with regards to Christ but, as Fish holds, generates its own framework within which "Son of God" takes on particular meaning. Like Milton's Satan, who performs his way into iconic status even as the foreknowledge of God frames his free actions, Christ according to *Paradise Regained* does indeed move towards an internal, invisible order, but does so by means of public (or at least literarily articulated) proclamation and by choosing courses of action, speech, and resistance that are by no means already evident to the human being Jesus.

More recent scholarship has focused less on Nicene and anti-Nicene matters: Baumlin, for instance, merely notes that "Without an assertion of Christ's humanness

(though unfallen), his freedom and sufficiency of will, the temptations would lose much of their force and significance" (43), and Jane Melbourne emphasizes the poem's ambiguity, noting that Jesus can only know "in the fully experiential meaning of that word, in what degree and meaning he is Son of God" (145) when he has already vanquished Satan on the top of the temple.. Milton's *Paradise Regained* tells a story not in terms of ontological and categorical human and divine but in relations of performances and roles, an emphasis that much contemporary theology, especially the Radical Orthodoxy school, has in recent years rediscovered by bringing creed and catechesis into conversation with rituals and initiations as performances. Because Christianity stands most meaningful when constituted by the Church's performances, *Paradise Regained* anticipates much of such theology when it sets up Jesus as the model human and the initiator of Christian practice not by virtue of a narrator's metaphysical assertions, but by virtue of good performance in the face of diabolic temptation. The poem's action and conflict do not often or directly state what already lies within Christ; a reader (Fish included) must postpone conclusions about what sort of "Son of God" Jesus might be as the narrative unfolds, in successive moments, act from potential and shapes the role in the rich context of his Satanic encounter.

As Fish's second methodological point warns the reader, *Paradise Regained* is far more than a simple partisan apologetic. Because Milton works with narratives and speeches and poetry, rather than with creeds or with grammatical minutiae, the poem's Christ can move through successive points of time as a true human moves, yet because the narrator's voice frames the encounter, the temptation can also function as an iconic event. As Lewalski notes,

> Milton's unusual conception of an incarnate Christ who has really emptied himself of divine understanding and will, together with the conventional conception of a puzzled and deluded Satan seeking throughout the temptation to learn whether Christ is indeed divine, provides the basis for a genuine dramatic encounter in the poem, an epic duel transmuted into intellectual and spiritual terms. (159)

Critics who "find" in Milton the marks of Arianism or Nestorianism or even Nicene orthodoxy read rightly insofar as they note phrases and terminology and relationships that resemble these ancient camps but miss the mark (as Milton's reader hopes Christ will not do) by straying too far towards reading Milton as perpetual prose polemicist (even when he narrates in verse) rather than as sometimes epic poet. If a critic allows the poem to move away from ancient Patristic categories and towards the vocabularies of plot and character, Milton's contribution to Christology becomes wonderfully evident.

Performing Alternatives

In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, perhaps following Milton's lead, some Christian theologians have begun to see Nicene and other confessional and catechistic categories less as fixed points in a static system and more as shorthand for the stories and events and practices and fields of meaning that make up Christian intellectual life. Explaining why earlier Christians would want to condense the narratives in the first place, recent theology has remembered that those creeds, arising as they do in particular historical moments, stand as bulwarks against particular teachings that Christian leaders of this or that moment and exerting force in latter centuries, not as "timeless" statements

whose adequacy for Christian faithfulness will always be sufficient, but as very important nodes of resistance in a temporally continuous set of traditions. *Homoousion* does not flow from the particular moment of revelation when Jesus of Nazareth is declared the beloved Son at the Jordan River, but rather draws on that Scriptural tradition in order to counter a much later intellectual and ecclesiastical problem. Such polemic theology remains Christian irrespective of genuine difference, but the mark of Christian theology, rather than discourse about the Christian figure of Jesus, is that it retains intelligible (and rhetorically defensible) roots within that long tradition, and that tradition has given privilege to the texts of the synoptic gospels. The Church has continued to make the public reading of the text of the gospel part of its liturgical performance precisely because of a conviction that the sacred text might speak again to a new moment.

That churches have maintained the creeds certainly indicates a continuity of worship and a respect for tradition, but in most cases an adherence to ancient creeds does not cause as much controversy as do other questions because, as thriving traditions, Arianism and Nestorianism have since fallen out of popular favor. If the noun "heresy" names a body of teaching that can poison Christian traditions, certainly such a thing can arise in the centuries after the Ecumenical Councils, and poetry doing theology should be able to look upon its own moment for such things rather than being limited to centuries long past. As well-read as he was, John Milton had the resources to look back to figures like Arius and Nestorius and claim them as authorities for genuine Christianity, but such moves would seem not only to deny Milton's capacity for original arrangement but also to fly in the face of his larger tendencies towards independence of thought and the priority of the Bible over any other textual authority. If indeed Milton's brief epic seems

to articulate theologies that resonate with the ancient heresies, the divergences from the old ways are at least as interesting as the parts that seem to correspond.

A certain sort of critic, one concerned to keep literary texts confined to their own moments, might hold that such readings are at best anachronistic and at worst teleological. If creeds and councils and other late-Roman theological writings served to address late imperial concerns and correct late imperial error, however, then by analogy, Milton's epic, coming about as it did in the early modern era, might make more sense as an examination of theological problems that were waiting to arise rather than the theological problems long dead. Therefore, as Mikics notes,

> Milton's desire to transform his readers into the author's spiritual counterparts, as righteous in their understanding as the poet himself is, requires the abandonment of... conventional poetics, which assumes the author's condescension to his audience. (128)

Paradise Regained, in other words, sets before the reader certain intellectual problems precisely in order to offer occasion for the reader to perform faithfully the office of right reason. Systematic theology, because of its (sometimes beneficial) conservatism and insistence that the creeds common to centuries of Christian worship be the starting points for theological reflection, simply had not gotten to the questions that Milton was addressing by the late seventeenth century. However, theology has in the last decades of the twentieth and first of the twenty-first finally caught up with Milton in that theologians have turned significant attention to performance and ethics as primordial theological categories rather than simple "application" of static metaphysical claims. And as this study has attempted to demonstrate, some of the moves that come into their own in

Milton were already taking shape in Spenser and Shakespeare and Ford, indicating that the theological resources that literary texts were developing, and Milton refining, are intelligible as parts of an ongoing conversation about, among other things, how to appropriate newly-discovered non-Christian resources for the sake of Christian faithfulness. Fortunately for those who want to see Milton as inventing rather than merely reciting concepts proper to academic theology, some theoretical developments from the last century make a fair bit of sense of Milton's dramatic Christological project.

Theologian Stanley Hauerwas, a friend of Stanley Fish's who often makes reference in his own books and essays to Fish's work on Milton, holds forth performance categories as helpful not only for describing Christian modes of being, but for evaluating them: "Performance (and in particular improvisation) proves indispensable both in providing access to but also in offering a means of assessment of Christian faith" (Hauerwas 81). Because even creedal confessions have rhetorical force as well as intellectual content, a theologian can describe Christian modes of life in terms of improvisation and talk meaningfully about better and worse manners of doing so:

> The church is therefore called to perform the good news of God's redeeming love in Christ. That is its vocation. What it means to be a good performer of the gospel, then, is not simply a matter of finding the right words—although it is clearly that—but it is also a matter of finding the right key in which to sing our song, the right meter and cadence in which to say our poem, the right register in which to play our piece. All performances of God's called people, in other words, are repeat performances, at once emulating *the one true performance of God in*

> *Christ* but also an extension and variation—an improvisation, if you will—of that singularly defining performance. (Hauerwas 103, italics mine)

Jesus stands as paradigmatic for and as ontologically necessary to the ongoing Christian performance in Hauerwas's schema, and Milton's Son of God in *Paradise Regained* performs in such a way that he can remain both. Milton's poem stands to teach the theologians of ages to come in its insistence that Jesus is at once exemplary (every Christian should strive to be like Jesus) and unique as a moment in God's salvation history (no Christian will ever be like Jesus in unique divine capability or in purity of purpose). That Jesus can get such things right inspires the Christian imagination in two distinct but related ways: because Jesus, God's saving event, got everything right, Paradise can be regained, and his overcoming Satan in the temptation scene clears the way for Christians in the entire age of saving faith to approach the Father. Also, because Jesus, as human as any of Milton's readers, got everything right, any Christian's getting it right stands as human possibility despite temptations to the contrary. In *Paradise Regained*, Jesus' humanity and participation in divine life are evident neither in displays of raw power nor in flawless conformity to simple morality, but in his being Israel's heaven-sent salvation and finally getting Israel's special election and call to obedience right at the same time. The Son of God takes the shape that the faithful recognize as saving precisely because of the way that he navigates successive moments.

In a liberal, pluralistic, post-enlightenment setting, Hauerwas's emphasis on "getting it right" might seem like a dangerous retrogression towards inquisitions, Pogroms, and the sorts of horrors often associated with Calvin's Geneva. Some forms of

liberal politics seem to prefer not only a political, but a social freedom of religion in which any given person can interact with an inscrutable but felt divinity, worshiping any way that the individual sees fit. Hauerwas's claims ill fit such a political situation, but within a post-liberal intellectual framework, his insistence upon evaluation of performances makes more sense. As Milton sets the stage for Hauerwas's discussions of performance, so Lindbeck articulates systematically what Milton did poetically, setting forth understandings of Christian doctrine capacious enough to recognize and invite Milton as a teacher of Christian theology.

George Lindbeck lays out in *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Post-Liberal Age*[43] two antagonistic dispositions within modern theology (according to his definition, Milton is included in the modern era). The disposition Lindbeck calls the cognitive-propositionalist prefers a correspondence theory of truth in which Christian doctrine is a matter of speaking sentences that describe objective realities accurately. Good or bad doctrine in such a system is good or bad only to the extent that speaking a theological sentence creates a picture in the hearer's mind that mirrors the reality of creation and Creator, and the test of good or bad theology is the test of logically valid syllogisms: good conclusions will follow from good premises, and all such premises are therefore testable in terms of syllogistic logic. When scholars ask whether or not Milton's vocabulary is Arian, they seem to assume that theology in Milton's time and thus Milton's own poems must have been concerned first and foremost with such doctrinal propositions, the same ones that stood most important in the day of Athanasius and Arius. Thus Milton's use of the epic genre is mere decoration for a logically prior

43 The following summaries cover *The Nature of Doctrine* chapters 1 and 2.

series of declarative sentences linked in logical relations, be those sentences Nicene or Nestorian or Arian.

Within the system that Lindbeck calls “experiential-expressivist,” “insofar as doctrines function as nondiscursive symbols, they are polyvalent in import and therefore subject to changes of meaning or even to a total loss of meaningfulness” (Lindbeck 17). The dramatic conflict in the poem, inside this model, would stand as some sort of moral or existential allegory, perhaps “standing for” every leader’s struggles with how to use power or even every human’s struggle to define one’s self over against various life circumstances. Here not only the epic genre but the particularities of a Jesus and Jerusalem and the devil become secondary; religions in this model are basically decorations and creative names for a universal human experience with “the transcendent” or “the divine.” Within this model Jesus’ real challenge might be fidelity to self irrespective of his situation as a Jew or as the son of any god in particular, and Hauerwas might be especially out of line presuming to evaluate as an outsider what ought to be individual and interior, and Milton's task is to construct an experience called "poetry" irrespective entirely of its doctrinal content. Such an approach resonates with some tendencies in literary criticism to treat investigations of the theological content of poetry as missing the point.

Lindbeck proposes a third way that holds together the logical and the existential, not unlike the way that *Paradise Regained*’s Christ holds together the roles of event and exemplar as well as performance and interiority. Hauerwas's theological project operates within this third way, and Milton’s Christ makes a good deal of sense within Lindbeck’s “cultural-linguistic” model, in which a body of doctrine is

> …a communal phenomenon that shapes the subjectivities of individuals rather than being primarily a manifestation of those subjectivities. It comprises a vocabulary of discursive and nondiscursive symbols together with a distinctive logic or grammar in terms of which this vocabulary can be meaningfully deployed. Lastly, just as a language (or "language game," to use Wittgenstein's phrase) is correlated with a form of life, and just as a culture has both cognitive and behavioral dimensions, so it is also in the case of a religious tradition. Its doctrines, cosmic stories or myths, and ethical directives are integrally related to the rituals it practices, the sentiments or experiences it evokes, the actions it recommends, and the institutional forms it develops. (Lindbeck 33)

Thus within the context of Christian theologies and Christian communities, to say nothing about Jesus' own temptation encounter, the means by which the Son of God plays the Son of God and by which the Church of Jesus plays the Church of Jesus have immense consequences in terms of what kind of person or community stands before the world and what kind of God the person or community proclaims. Theologians can say of Christian communities or of other theologians that they "get it right" or otherwise neither because of formal conformity nor because of correspondence to an accessible and determinate prior written standard nor even because of perceived sincerity but in more complex evaluations of the parties' participation in a meaningful and meaning-making community. A scandalously particular chosen people (which is also the body of the sent Christ) and the world to which the Father sends them will not admit of simplistic formulae to name their complex shared history. When the same chosen people, through

the corruption of false teaching, stops performing as the community is sent to perform, theologians rightly take on critical roles and speak (and sing) judgment. Instead, like literary characters, the ability of such "characters" as Christians stands open to judgment precisely in terms of how Christians perform coming out of particular moments, heading toward particular moments, and always in relationships with all of the realities that constitute the world. Getting it right is always possible, but saying what getting it right looks like is never at the outset given.

Just as one Milton scholar might say intelligibly of another that he has gotten *Paradise Regained* wrong, or a writing teacher might say that a student has yet to grasp organization of papers around theses, likewise one Christian theologian might say that a form of Christianity (or in *Paradise Regained* a way of being Christ) that seeks salvation via military might has taken the tradition in directions not faithful to the particular mission of Christ (and thus the Church's best) and thus not gotten Christian existence right yet. (The "yet" is always present in a tradition whose core includes the confession of sins and the promise of forgiveness.) Theologians, like literary critics, do not have simple formulae to determine what performances are "right" or "wrong,"[44] but continual formation and education within the tradition, not least in contemplating the salvific and exemplary life of Christ, shape the thinkers' imaginations and vocabularies to the extent that such claims are not nonsense or simply power plays.

Within a cultural-linguistic paradigm, improvisation becomes an important feature of Christian theology. Just as no language has answers pre-formulated for all

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44 When theologians and literary critics do use shorthand phrases such as "cheap grace" or "intentional fallacy," the terms usually invoke book- or career-spanning critiques on the parts of other practitioners.

contingencies but offer vocabularies for answering questions, Christian ethics must use the resources of tradition in new ways as the world changes:

> …concentrating on performance helps retain the importance of historical and temporal contingencies for understanding Christian existence. Timing is indispensable to all good performances. Musical improvisation or extemporization is a kind of performance especially attuned to matters of time, and in that sense it lends itself well to fertile descriptions not only of the ethicist's work in particular but of the general art of living well under God. Albert Jonsen, for instance, is surely right to draw attention to the ways in which rhetorical and casuistic invention are features of the ethicist's craft in much the same way that improvisation and invention are part of the artistry and virtuosity of an accomplished musician. (Hauerwas 79)

Christ in *Paradise Regained* begins with a repertoire of Scriptures and traditions, but without a set script according to which he must deploy them. But he must speak in order to meet Satan's challenges: what makes Christ adequate in *Paradise Regained* "concerns not his consciousness, but his verbal action. When the hero comes under verbal attack by Satan, we see not so much how Christ understands himself, but how he understands God's word" (Christopher 210). He plays the Scriptural tradition as a master musician improvises with a musical instrument and scales and memory of melodic phrases: the laws and sayings and stories and modes of reasoning and other elements of Jewish tradition are available to any faithful follower of Israel's God, but Jesus combines them and invokes them in time better than anyone. Beyond those skills that ought to be

common to any God-fearer, Jesus has abilities and powers and status beyond what any prophet before or any Christian after has exhibited, and the drama of *Paradise Regained* happens when the newly-announced Son of God takes on the challenge that has befuddled Israel: wandering in the wilderness, in all of its nuance and layers of meaning, seeking to settle in the Promised Land for the sake of God's glory.

Contesting the Son: Events, Exemplars, Tension, and Temptation

Christ in *Paradise Regained*, as the paradigm for Israel and for the Church, has more at stake in "getting it right" than anyone else has. In the temptation scene he will become one sort of Messiah or another, and each of Satan's temptations makes a play to shape the role into forms that ultimately, because the reader confesses a sort of Christ that Christian traditions take as revealed, cannot but be inadequate. Although Satan does not know what Christ is to become, and even though Christ in the beginning of the poem expresses some sense of not-knowing, the readers, because they can evaluate Christ against the canonical narratives of the Biblical Gospels and of the various confessions and hymns that have grown up around Jesus, know at each step what will come to be in the life of Christ and thus what sort of distortion each temptation represents. Such dramatic irony translates into another absurd task that Satan takes upon himself: because Satan cannot create a Messiah as he gave cranial birth to Sin, and because he can only have a vague idea what sort of Christ might emerge as his own destroyer, the devil plays with caution, suggesting known forms that are themselves better than himself but still within his intellectual domain. Satan, in other words, does not presume to shape Christ as an open rebel after his own image so much as to distort his good vocation for the sake of

rendering a messiah who is very close in form to the corrupted powers that he controls as prince of the air. Yet Satan does not seem to have a strong sense of just what distortions would be enough to ruin the Son. Such indeterminacy, within the limits of the plot, make Satan's plan genuinely evil in its disrespect for the divine and human integrity of Christ: "Satan's object is a chilling one—to destroy someone's identity, to destroy his psychic integrity, to shake his grasp upon reality, to make him believe that white is black (or that God is evil). The object here, as in the case of brain-washing, is to create a defector" (Christopher 211). In this respect Satan aims to fulfill the low expectations he had of his mission in *Paradise Lost* book two, annoying God once more by convincing the singular chosen human being to swerve slightly and thus to ruin everything. Although Satan does not seem to know whether the man standing before him is indeed the Son of God who expelled him from Heaven, he has intimations (and perhaps more than that) of what the Son of God stands to become, and he sets out to unbalance the tension that might make Jesus a genuinely revolutionary figure. Taking note of such tension, Lewalski writes,

> …only if Christ comes to understand himself and his work perfectly can he withstand the temptations of Satan, all of which present extremely clever parodies, falsifications, or inadequate statements of that self and that work. (Lewalski 133)

Dramatic categories help to make sense of the already-defined and thus inadequate christologies Satan proposes. Jesus' body does not change from temptation to temptation, nor does his vocation of obedience nor his unseen but nonetheless real *telos*, but his potential to perform well or to perform corruptly stands open at each temptation-moment, and his obedient verbal performances stand as moments of refinement as he works out

over the course of successive moments what Son of God means. The dramatic tension in the poem stems from the ironic relationship between reader and characters, one in which the modern reader, beneficiary of the canonized books of the New Testament, knows exactly where Jesus should land in his rhetorical flight, but in which neither the Son nor the Satan start the poem knowing, as the reader knows with clarity, where the story is going. And as noted above, each of the temptations threatens either to pull Jesus away from his known-and-unknown role as exemplar for God's people or to forsake his status as unique event in salvation history or to do both, and in each moment, Jesus makes himself worthy of the title Son of God by virtue of his performance.

Satan's first temptation pulls Jesus towards self-elevation, setting before him an opportunity to raise himself above the Hebrews, who have to wait until God gives Manna every morning in Exodus, and above Elijah, to whom God sends food-bearing birds in 1 Kings. Whatever Satan knows or does not know about Christ's metaphysical makeup, he does seem to know that such a move would be to forsake an exemplary patience in favor of imperial command of resources, and Jesus' reply to him invokes both Elijah and Moses, focusing not on their power as prophets, but on their humanity and forbearance:

> Think'st thou such force In Bread? Is it not written
> (For I discern thee other than thou seem'st)
> Man lives not by Bread only, but each Word
> Proceeding from the mouth of God, who fed
> Our Fathers here with Manna? In the Mount
> *Moses* was forty days, nor eat nor drank,
> And forty days *Eliah* without food

> Wander'd this barren waste; the same I now:
> Why dost thou then suggest to me distrust,
> Knowing who I am, as I know who thou art? (1.346-56)

The threat here is not that an ontologically static "Son of God" in a creedal connotation will commit an act on an established list (perhaps catechetical) of "sins," but that his moves as a performer will shape his performance into some sort of savior that cannot save the souls of the faithful. The true Son of God, as reader knows and Satan intimates, performs miracles (*semeia*), signs that point to divine reality in order to inspire faithfulness. To divorce superhuman power from its signifying function, to serve self with extraordinary ability, would be to forsake the divine semiotic vocation that will be Son of God. Jesus resists distrust neither by invocation of his status as uniquely sent by God nor by philosophical speculation but by memory, a resource he holds in common with all the faithful of Israel: he cites Deuteronomy, remembers Moses and Elijah as exemplary people and the Manna as paradigmatic event, and situates himself firmly among the long traditions of Israel. In doing so he completes what those constitutional stories hold forth as possibility, and thus Jesus keeps his exemplary force even as he remains a salvation-historical event. Responding to the first temptation, Jesus situates himself as unique not as pure *novum*, but as the truest culmination of the stories of Israel's God-trust and defiance of would-be Satanic benefactors.

In a later and more elaborate temptation, Satan does not call on Jesus to conjure bread but instead produces in the wilderness "A Table richly spread" (2.340) along with nymphs and naiads, offering to Christ food and worshipers. Beyond the Biblical temptation to produce nourishing food, Milton's Satan introduces the possibilities of

luxury, both culinary and concupiscent. This time the Son replies not as a moral exemplar but as one whose authority and vocation elevates him above the need for such gifts:

> Said'st thou not that to all things I had right?
>
> And who withholds my pow'r that right to use?
>
> Shall I receive by gift what of my own,
>
> When and where likes me best, I can command? (2.378-381)

In this extrabiblical temptation Satan offers Jesus hospitality, setting him up as a traveling epic hero. Satan expects him to act as an Odysseus or an Aeneas, offering his allegiance in exchange for the generosity of the sitting lord. Such a gesture would make sense for most lords, but Jesus responds not as a traveler dependent upon a king who rightly rules the territory, but as Lord of all heaven and earth speaking to the chief of all usurpers, the one holding the throne rightly belonging to the Son of God. Because all of creation rightly belongs to the Father, and because the Father has sent the Son, to take this diabolic hospitality would reduce Jesus to an Odysseus, one king among kings rather than as the firstborn of all creation, Lord of lords. Moreover, even if Jesus were merely another lord, accepting hospitality from the Satan would be a crass distortion of the *Odyssey*, one in which the rightful king poses as a beggar among his own thieving rivals not to overthrow the rivals, but to legitimate the robber by treating him as rightful lord.

The two food temptations stand as two basic kinds of temptations Satan sets forth. Both rely on a logically prior but subsequent-in-the-narrative good performance of the Son of God. For Jesus adequately to perform "Son of God," he must at once remain ethically exemplary and maintain his unique vocation as God's saving agent.

Maintaining such a tension must happen within human time to save time-defined human beings, so time and timely deployment of Jesus' particular resources become essential for his saving temporal creation, more so in the seventeenth-century moment even than Nicene essences and persons. The terms of this dialectic, though another set of questions might demand answers like the Nicene categories *anthropos* and *theos*, bear more resemblance to what would come centuries later in Bultmann's existential Jesus and von Rad's salvation-history Jesus[45] than to the Nicene Son in that these twentieth century pictures of Christ focus not on abstract anthropological/theological categories, but what sorts of work that Jesus does in terms of the community that confesses Christ. Those two twentieth-century pictures of Jesus engage not questions of neo-Platonic essence but the problems of Hegelian history and Nietzschean psychology, maintaining that Christ continues to speak even as historical-intellectual debates rise anew. In short, Milton anticipates in his theological-poetic focus those moments when the next era's problems would dominate theological talk, leaving the Nicene era to the historians and forming poetry for the future. Jesus begins the story neither adequate nor distorted as Son of God: temporally and in terms of narrative, Satan's perversions and Jesus's adequacies must

45 These two representatives of twentieth century Christology serve as handy metonyms for Jesus' two kinds of temptation in *Paradise Regained*: Rudolph Bultmann's existentialist theology would have Jesus act as a vehicle for human imagination, not caring so much for Jesus' epoch-altering singularity as for his moral and imaginative correspondence to each human's experiences with God. Gerhard von Rad, while acknowledging that Jesus' life is exemplary given what God does in the world through him, nonetheless is more concerned with narrating how the world is different in light of what God does through him.

happen in these performances, just as post-Hegelian and post-Heideggerian theology must engage with new questions of temporality, the presence of different traditions in the world, and other distinctly modern problems with Christian confessions.

Satan's final temptation happens in Jerusalem at the temple, following the order of trials from Luke's narrative rather than Matthew's. By this point in the story Satan has become "swoln with rage" (4.499), and when he whisks Jesus away to the top of the temple, the character of the temptation becomes muddled. He speaks words borrowed from Luke's account, but the force of the temptation has mutated in this last, desperate attempt:

> There stand, if thou wilt stand; to stand upright
> Will ask thee skill; I to thy Father's house
> Have brought thee, and highest plac't, highest is best,
> Now show thy Progeny; if not to stand,
> Cast thyself down; safely if Son of God:
> For it is written, He will give command
> Concerning thee to his Angels, in thir hands
> They shall up lift thee, lest at any time
> Thou chance to dash thy foot against a stone. (4.552-60)

When Satan "in scorn" (4.551) sets the Son atop the Temple, the stakes have changed: Jesus, who as of yet has not displayed in the poem any particular physical power, suddenly stands in a place of danger and of spectacle. In a moment, if indeed God protects him, he could survive what ought to kill any man, and if God does not protect him, his mission as God's chosen human being would suddenly and violently end. Added

to the physical danger are the spiritual dangers that accompany earlier temptations: if he does make of himself a spectacle, then his mission is reduced from a transformation of human interiority to mere circus stunt, and if he dies, then God's unique sent one dies, and the possibility lies open that God's saving the world might end along with the person Jesus. Because death is the moment that stops the succession of moments for any given human existence, this temptation, though it stands roughly parallel to the food and kingdoms temptations in Matthew's and Luke's accounts of the temptations, *Paradise Regained* elevates it to the most dramatic and perhaps the most dangerous (in theological as well as corporeal) temptation of the three.

Predictably but not unimportantly, the Son speaks and stands. Satan and not the Son plunges from the temple, and the temptations end with a newly-proven Jesus and a defined Son of God. The performance of the debate, the answers given and the silence maintained and the spare, sure manner in which Jesus answers—all of these performance elements define what kind of Son of God returns to his mother's house to rest, and Milton's brief epic leaves readers with a mature, tested, complete Christian hero and with the embodied, defining moment in God's salvation of creation. In about a thousand lines, before the Christian reader and the eternal Father and the fallen Satan, the son of Mary takes on and shapes the divine and human persona that will conquer sin and death and call Christians to follow.

Time and Space: Why Son of God Cannot But Be Performed

Geoffrey Hart, noting the particular modes in which Milton reframes and develops Christian vocabularies about Christ and the Father, sees that the most important moves

that Milton makes involve the literary itself:

> For the poet, everything, even God, was somehow historical, and so potentially story. Even aspects of Christian doctrine the church declared to be "not story"--such as the begetting of the Son before the ages—Milton made into narrative again. And in the positing a real continuity between God and creation, Milton made all history in a sense part of the one story of God. (Hart, "Matter, Monism, And Narrative" 25)

The reality named "Son of God" in *Paradise Regained* necessarily involves Jesus' working out the two dialectical poles of his vocation. Because none of the temptations lead him into any places that a reader would recognize as other than Biblical confession regarding Christ, the story does not give the reader a sense of movement, even though the passing of possibilities at every temptation might, without those prior relationships, generate just that impression. Even if every temptation-moment carries with it a genuine threat to corrupt Christ (and each does), Christ's perfect, perpetual endurance has the feel of stasis rather than of motion. Still, the character of the proven Son of God at the end of book four differs meaningfully from the untested, uncertain Son of God in the beginning of book one precisely because he has gone through with the performance and done so adequately to the Christ that a Christian-era reader confesses (or not, but even in those cases, the confession is accessible). Paradoxically, the perfect dramatic action Christ executes in order to prove his Sonship give the impression of not being an act at all.

Such a disconnect between aesthetics and doctrine should come as no surprise from the poet who writes the most compelling Satan in English literature, nor should the one who maintains both the Father's absolute foreknowledge and the first humans'

absolute ethical freedom catch readers off guard with a savior who saves by veering neither to the right nor the left. Milton's paradoxical mastery and suspicion of poetry are on display in *Paradise Regained* precisely in that he makes a succession of moments seem like a static picture, one without moments at all. Jesus' performance as the Son of God and the conceptually difficult dialectic that drives the performance train the Christian mind in the same way that Satan's *Paradise Lost* rhetoric trains the mind not to be caught by empty words from wicked speakers. As with *Paradise Lost*, the text of *Paradise Regained* is a site where the poet serves as teacher to the reader, presenting the intellectual challenges that will equip the one beholding Milton's version of Jesus to see rightly when the world would deceive with empty images.

Paradise Regained imagines Christ's temptation as a performance event. The stage is at once the wilderness near the Jordan River through which Jesus wanders to get from here to there and the wilderness through which Jesus' mind must wander without losing its divinely-appointed way if he is to arrive at an adequate Christ-existence and the wilderness through which Milton's Christian readers wander as they await their own entry into a final promised land. The characters are Jesus the unique Son of God and savior of creation and the Sons of God, Jesus included, all who call Israel's God Father. The Adversary is in the desert and on the page and in the readers' minds, and redemption in all cases happens when justice and righteousness are performed rightly before God and before humanity. Although the epic narrator and obvious read-text quality of the narrative mark it off as something other than traditional stage drama, nonetheless *Paradise Regained* derives its rhetorical force and pedagogical value from Jesus's and Milton's and the readers' performances.

Milton's brief epic comes to the reading public in the period following the Thirty Years' War and the Commonwealth, but just as importantly the poem does its intellectual work in the wake of theological movements, most notably Luther's and Calvin's but no less the Council of Trent's, whose focus on intellectual assent to written bodies of doctrine reduces the sense that Christian ethics is the core of Christian witness rather than a byproduct of right teaching or even some sort of decorative addition. As systematic catechism comes to replace hagiography as the definitive didactic mode of Christianity, *Paradise Regained* makes the bold move of beginning theology with narrative. In a moment when neither Son nor Satan has yet articulated what exactly the Son of God means in the grand scheme that will come to define Christian teaching, *Paradise Regained* insists that the genesis of the Christian era come to readers in a dramatic movement. *Paradise Regained* anticipates those theological movements that will arise when Continental philosophy rediscovers (in Heidegger and Foucault first but perhaps more helpfully in Gadamer and in Alasdair Macintyre) that all intellectual traditions, even a tradition like Chrisitanity that purports to fulfill other traditions, arise from the particular questions of a historical moment. Unlike Satan in *Paradise Lost*, Jesus in *Paradise Regained* remains always mindful of the moment and thus becomes the embodiment of truth and a place on earth where one can see the Father. Because the advent of Christ is the fulcrum-moment of history in Christian schemata of history, Milton's radical insistence on the nature of the Son of God as dramatically unfolding sets the stage for understandings of divine and human, creation and Creator, that likewise stand open to the wonderful and exciting (and I do mean both of those words) possibilities of life under the authority of a living God.

CHAPTER SIX: Literature as Theological Act

Succession stories, because they highlight the movements from innocence to fall to regeneration to relapse to redemption instead of relegating them to the status only of vehicles for ideas, incorporate a broad range of possibilities into theological accounts of the human soul, recalling the grand stories of Israel's Exodus and confederation and monarchy and exile. Such narratives and dramas affirm that the life of the Church and of the particular person, analogous to the stories of Israel and of Abraham, can incorporate a range of such phenomena, never calling good that which is evil but always allowing for the possibility that a given moment of good would not have taken its particular shape except as a moment of redemption from an evil of a likewise particular shape. English Renaissance literature, read in light of the tumultuous theological scene of early Protestantism, therefore promises a picture of ethics, whether Christian-era or pre-Christian or primordial or in the person of Jesus himself, more adequate to the complexity of every human moment than do accounts of things that make human nature a static thing.

Renaissance humanism, Reformation theology, and the plays and poems that emerge in their wake self-consciously situate themselves in Biblical, philosophical, and other sorts of literate traditions. Brutus and Caesar, Satan and Christ come to Plutarch and Paul already laden with traditions and debates, and by the time these figures reach Erasmus and Calvin and Shakespeare and Milton, history has piled up so many data and

so many contradictions upon them that a new version of their narratives cannot be anything but an act of choosing, the struggle against falsehood that Milton praises as leading to truth. In an age that knows Augustine's *City of God* as well as it knows Plutarch's *Lives* and Livy's histories, meaning can hardly help but proliferate and spill over the boundaries of the tightly limited theological syllogisms of Martin Luther and John Calvin. Theologies that highlight succession, because they allow moments to relate to and inform one another, simply have more capacity for variety and thus adequacy to the world than do accounts of ethics where succession is absent or relegated to a secondary place. More traditional theological treatises sometimes default too readily to static categories, and their treatments of human goodness and failures-of-goodness tend to reduce the complexity of human existence to the point where it becomes a mere caricature of human existence. Literary texts, with the advantage of succession, stand to lead theology away from the binaries that Luther and Calvin inherit from medieval scholasticism and towards a richer, complexity-respecting theology that will characterize the best of modern and postmodern Christian theology. Because the Scriptures are to a large extent narrative rather than systematic and syllogistic, and because creeds are largely summaries of the narratives of Scripture, Christian doctrine can retain a fair amount of continuity from age to age even as theology strives towards adequacy to the changing expectations of its particular moment.[46]

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46 George Lindbeck, in *The Nature of Doctrine*, makes a distinction between doctrine, the collection of stories and symbols that make up a religious "language," and theology, the discourse that takes place using that language as its set of tools.

Such attention to the age to which a text speaks will curb the tendency (perhaps the temptation) to dismiss some theological texts as timelessly worse than or inherently better than others. In the light of historical contingency, texts written in the mode of assertion, proof, syllogism, and proposition serve well for certain moments, most notably those in which the faithful need education in rigorous thinking, logical implications, and other such intellectual practices. By contrast, dramatic and narrative texts serve well in those moments when the faithful are quite capable of working out logical implications, but have lost some of their capacity to imagine the complexity of the world, preferring to reduce things to some common denominator. Thus literary texts serve as theology not because they mimic the generic conventions of the scholastic dispute or simply because they swerve from those conventions, but because, in a moment that needs imagination more than it needs logic, they deploy paraphrase and description, rather than rigorous category and conclusion, for the good of the faithful in their moment. In order to inspire imagination, such must be the tools with which one reads revelation, and the ongoing conversation outlined here, the exploration of succession as the core of created human experience under the gaze of heaven, promises both to instruct and to delight Christians in an era which sees rationality rise and threaten the capacity to imagine. In the face of Francis Bacon, who would diminish rhetoric to simple factual assertion and unnecessary decoration; confronting the rise of standardized, industrial labor; and anticipating modern atheism, a system of thought largely impervious to logical proofs of God's existence; literary texts offer a rich succession of spiritual states over against economic reductionism, psychological reductionism, and all the sorts of least-common-denominator ideologies that begin to assert themselves. Although Milton certainly did not fear

theological assertion, and even if Shakespeare in some moment not preserved in text made some theological assertion at some point, such things remain secondary to the imaginative performances of succession, the texts of Shakespeare's plays and Milton's poems, when it comes to these writers' contributions to coming centuries' theological imaginations.

Ultimately theological literature, because it approaches questions of act by means of *mimesis* of existence, rather than categorization of static assertions, will land somewhere between Plato and Calvin in questions of the goodness of an act *per se* and somewhere quite different from Erasmus or Luther when it comes to internal motivation, and such preferences in the end are not merely arbitrary but end up more adequate teachers for a life of faithfulness in an overly-rationalized moment. Literature is not life, and life is not literature, but consciousness and literary text do stand in analogy, and the aesthetic force of a good literary character, one with a rich texture of speech and act, might serve to illuminate consciousness, spirituality, and other realities that technical and technological accounts of life have a much harder time grasping. The basic shape of Aristotle's ethical and literary theory allows a text to make sense ethically precisely because it does not equate the two. Succession in Shakespeare's Rome is not a discrete state of being and never stands as given, separate from what comes before and what comes after, but always mirrors the complex of processes that constitute human, creaturely existence.

Even if the least in the Kingdom is greater than John the Baptist, still the possibility of naming greater and lesser goodness among the faithful and the unbelievers relies upon an analogy between kinds of goodness. Spenser’s knights demonstrate that

salvation is always both an act of God and the disciplined living-out of the saved life, and the figure of Mercilla reminds the reader of the vastly complex range of voices that always must inform the practice of justice. Shakespeare's *The Rape of Lucrece* discloses Junius Brutus as a morally ambiguous founding father, seizing a grisly moment to unfold courage and wit where before he stood silent, but he never stands alone in the poem. Brutus always emerges from the arrogance of Tarquin Superbus and the forsaken duty of Sextus Tarquin, and the Tarquins are always the figures who come before the Republic of Rome. Although Shakespeare's version of Lucretia herself departs significantly from the condemnation that Augustine heaps upon her, nonetheless a reader can only experience her deficient sense of honor (deficient because lacking Christian *caritas*) as tragic because it stands analogous to the sorts of self-sacrifice that even Calvin would name as excellent even as it blasphemes ironically. (Perhaps Calvin would only concede apparent excellence, but the word remains.)

On the other hand, the rise of Caesar and the rise of Satan allow for a profound pessimism about the world between the ages, one that will not entertain the hope that the capacity for goodness, present to some extent in the brooding Marcus Brutus and even in Satan on Niphates, might translate into genuinely good political orders or spiritual lives. Because every moment of goodness might lead into another moment that builds on that goodness or into a moment that rejects goodness, in the realm of human existence, no regime can guarantee good results on a long scale. In a period marked by strong ideologies, scientific and pietist and Monarchist and Republican alike, literary texts refuse to admit that anything but a radical shift in the mode of existence that defies the imagination (theology calls such shifts apocalyptic) can result in permanent harmony.

Instead, moments of apparent goodness (which might be analogous to genuine goodness or which might be deceptive by nature) could, when one moment succeeds another, give way to the urges and machinations that ruin kingdoms and souls. Conversely, no moment of darkness ever stands immune to grace, even in the absence of confessing Christians. Brutus rises to challenge the potential tyranny of Caesar, demonstrating an admirable resolve, but finds himself unable to maintain the spirit of the Roman Republic in the face of Antony's rhetoric, and even among his own faction, he turns out powerless in the face of Cassius's corruption. When the military might of the triumvirs comes to bear, Brutus's republican virtue does not waver internally, but proves inadequate to match the military prowess of Antony and Octavian. Among the triumvirs themselves, the rise of Octavian is hardly a hopeful moment; his cold calculations might stand in contrast to Antony's flights of passion, but they are no more proximate to genuine goodness, the sort of rule that might include mercy as well as discipline. In an entirely different story of falls and successions, Satan, possessed of a sense of what right relationship to God looks like even in the moment before he rushes in to ruin Eve and Adam, ultimately prefers, in his obstinacy, the nonsense of evil-as-good to the humility that will necessarily attend a return to real goodness. Because Satan is a spiritual rather than a corporeal being, and because his textual presence shifts so readily when in the presence of the devils, of human beings, and of himself only, every moment in his career in *Paradise Lost* complicates and adds depth to the others.

Milton's version of Jesus stands as a good final piece to this puzzle because *Paradise Regained* exhibits all of the things that establish narrative poetry as a valid and helpful mode of theological exploration. Unlike some moments in Kazantzakis's *The*

Last Temptation of Christ, which blur the lines between temptation and sin so thoroughly that Paul and Matthew (as they appear in the novel) decidedly fabricate a self-sure Christ rather than communicating the doubt-ridden Jesus, Milton's Jesus experiences uncertainty in a compelling dialectical relationship with the stern steadfastness that characterizes the Son of God atop the Temple. *Paradise Regained* discloses Christ as the victor over all of the rhetorical engines of Satan at the same time as Jesus, the mortal man who always lives and moves in the aftermath of his uncertainty, stands as an accessible moral exemplar, one whom a reader could strive to emulate without reaching out to become a usurper-god herself or himself. A strong narrative character version of Jesus does not negate the grand cosmic pronouncements of Paul (which, after all, Milton accepted, since Paul is Scripture) so much as it brings into intelligible relationship the contours of the man and the ways that they reflect the glories of the Father who sends the Son.

Theologians: Companions on the Literary Journey

The theologians who have shared this study with Spenser and Shakespeare and Milton are not a representative sample of contemporary theology; in modern seminaries the spectrum of theologians and Biblical scholars runs a range as broad and diverse as literary scholars and includes right and left, traditionalist and liberal, historicist and formalist, and all sorts of other varieties. Instead, those writers included reflect that, in the face of so much academic theology that takes its cues entirely too much from Whitehead's rationalism or Schliermacher's flight from the particular, some theologians' projects run in the same streams as the Renaissance playwrights' and poets'. Paying close attention to the rich details of Christian and classical tradition, entertaining the

possibility that one might learn from those who do not confess Christ (yet still remaining convinced that confession of Christ matters), still interested in the grand questions of Creation and Fall and Redemption, theologians as diverse as the Eastern Orthodox David Hart, the Catholic John Milbank, and the Methodist Stanley Hauerwas share a recognition that the true bounty of divine grace lies not in an escape from the particular, much less a reduction of the old confessions of God to something more palatable for the technical and technological classes, but a loving and attentive exploration of all the ways that a living tradition might speak to a late-industrial world.

Theologians of this sort, dependent as they are upon the kinds of moves that Milton and Spenser were already making, make good traveling companions for literary critics interested in describing and disclosing what goes on in such texts: because they operate with the working assumption that the words constituting a text (whether a liturgy or a tragedy) matter, and because they think that each text participates in a conversation with genuine potential for changing minds and souls, they share a sense that language and performance and aesthetics are important, and the surfaces of the texts themselves therefore become sites of grand and possibly even divine action.

To offer perhaps an over-simplified point of contrast, those reading strategies as a group called hermeneutics of suspicion simply do not encourage the sorts of readings that Hauerwas or Milbank might encourage. Certainly hermeneutics of suspicion has its place in literary studies; like the Satanic School of Milton criticism, they offer readings of the "great books" that expose the contradictions within, reminding the careful reader that the Romantic and Victorian worship of the creative genius can ignore some of the potential monsters in the literary canon if nobody will offer an alternative narrative. Whether the

suspicion is that of the Nietzschean looking for hidden power relations, the feminist articulating the shape of the period's patriarchy, or the Marxist discovering new means of class-oppression, the suspicious reader decidedly has something valuable to contribute to any text's reading. Theologians who attempt to render the contributions of suspicious readers null ignore the power of the critic to act as the *nomos* (law) functions in Paul: such a reader can show the one with ears to hear where the evil and the self-deception lie, a necessary step towards repentance.

What this study's theologians might add to literary studies is not a nullification of suspicion but a dialectic negation to their negation, a post-suspicious reading that, like the Christian tradition in much of its history, acknowledges humanity's grand capacity for self-deception, yet holds that any tradition of good texts, though its contradictions might compound and though no single human being might ever reach the end of those contradictions, has within it, in the particulars that draw people to the stories and play sin the first place, a moment when goodness lies open as a possibility. Opening up that possibility, theologians like Hart assert that the literary text is analogous to the infinite love of God, capable in moments (though not always, because a text is not God) of giving something new to the reader without in turn taking something greater away. The horizon of grace lies open before such readers, and Milbank's sort of theology goes into a text always with eyes open to see such grace.

Although the tendency is not universal, the hermeneutics of suspicion sometimes threatens to become its own system, one bearing resemblance to Nietzsche's concept of Eternal Return. If one power relation always replaces another, if one class revolution tends to give way to another structure of class struggle, and if the intellectual extends

those patterns of strife replacing strife indefinitely, a system of its own emerges, one in which difference remains constant and change always a possibility but in which the standards by which one judges between the old and the new come to be inherently (rather than provisionally) untrustworthy themselves. In other words, the world becomes unintelligible in principle rather than dark for the moment, and the criticism of systems becomes a system itself. Although theology is not by any means immune to such tendencies, those theologies that pay most and closest attention to succession have at their core a conviction that revelation happens, and that concept of revelation might end up being theology's most important contribution to literary criticism.

To return once more to the concept of succession, the sort of theology that this study cites maintains, aware that readers need suspicion but willing to step beyond suspicion, that the stories and the symbols and the worship-traditions of Christianity are not mere window-dressing for a spiritual experience that is, in its content, basically identical to Hinduism or reverence for the galaxies or other kinds of spirituality. Instead, insisting that the content of Christian revelation matters, such theologians hold that all that happens in the *saeculum*, that time between the times, cannot derive its meaning exclusively from its relationships to the power struggles and deceptions that so often characterize the world's systems. Instead, because the shape of Christian revelation is eschatological, Lindbeck and Milbank and Hauerwas and Hart (and others) hold that all reality, whether political or psychological or spiritual, has its own inner complexity and stands in relationship to the time-to-come. To be fair, many strains of Marxism and feminism also share this sense that the present order of things always stands judged by the time beyond the revolution, but Christian theology especially makes that sense of a

revealed but not fully intelligible apocalypse central to its understanding of all reality. Therefore, Christian theology does not nullify suspicion but locates it, insisting that objects of suspicion make the most sense precisely when they stand beside and thus judged by the age to come, an age that stands beyond our own suspicions because in principle beyond our imaginations. In short, succession does not cease when one steps off of Spenser's page; the next moment always promises to disclose reality, and reality promises to disclose goodness, and even moments of suspicion, because they clear away that which is not true, promise to disclose a glimpse of what is to come. Such is a lofty goal for literature, and hopefully theology can help literary critics to see and to desire and to pursue just such an end.

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