

PARADISE STAGED: MILTON'S EPIC AS DRAMATIC TEXT

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ABSTRACT

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Title: *Paradise Staged: Milton's Epic as Dramatic Text*

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Paradise Lost is an epic poem, yet elements of Milton's work are undeniably theatrical and are indebted more to the dramatic genre than the epic. Milton, in fact, first conceived the poem as a drama—tentatively titled *Adam Unparadised*—and at least one section of Satan's Book IV soliloquy was evidently written with the stage in mind. These original theatrical designs are crucial to the process of (re-)contextualizing *Paradise Lost*, prompting us to look backward to the influence of Milton's inherited dramatic tradition as well as forward to modern theatrical adaptation. Milton draws from Shakespearean drama in particular, oscillating generically from tragedy to history to romance and channeling some of Shakespeare's most compelling villains in his famous portrayal of Satan. Last year, the Stratford Festival staged a new adaptation of *Paradise Lost* by Erin Shields to much acclaim; the play puts Milton in conversation with present-day political and social issues as well as simply demonstrating the dramatic potential of Milton's source material. The implications of a dramatic consideration of *Paradise Lost* touch both stage and classroom. Milton deserves a place in Shakespearean and early modern theater companies' repertoires. Correspondingly, performance and play should be employed as pedagogical tools, expanding the successful strategy of teaching Shakespeare's plays through performance to less explicitly dramatic works. *Paradise Lost* gains much in the transition from page to stage, and the conceits of the dramatic form complement and reinforce the conflicts and ideas at the heart of Milton's epic.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	2
Acknowledgements	3
I. <i>Paradise Lost</i> 's Dramatic Structures and Shakespearean Parallels	5
II. Staging <i>Paradise Lost</i> : Erin Shields' New Adaptation	39
Conclusion: Milton Teaching/Teaching Milton	55
Works Referenced	61
Biography	67

I. *Paradise Lost*'s Dramatic Structures and Shakespearean Parallels

Back in 2006, the big-budget summer blockbuster of note might not have been the latest Marvel superhero flick or teen romance. Legendary Pictures planned, instead, to produce a \$120 million adaptation of John Milton's *Paradise Lost* with such recognizable names as Bradley Cooper and Casey Affleck signed on to play Satan and Gabriel, respectively. In February of 2012, however, Legendary pulled the plug, reportedly unable to justify the expense of an exorbitant post-*Avatar* special effects budget demanded by director Alex Proyas' vision for the film.¹ Fans of *Paradise Lost* regained some hope of a screen adaptation in 2017, when none other than Martin Freeman signed on as executive producer of a TV adaptation.² It remains to be seen whether the current Golden Age of Television can see Milton's poem through to a proper dramatic retelling. Nevertheless, the question remains: why does anyone want to try? What is so dramatically compelling about this (allegedly) dry old 17th century poem?

Hollywood is decidedly not the first to conclude that *Paradise Lost* contains material ripe for performance. The poet John Dryden finished work on his libretto for *The State of Innocence*—a *Paradise Lost* adaptation—with Milton's consent in 1674, the same year as Milton's death and the publication of the second, twelve-book edition of *Paradise Lost*.³ The music for

¹ Borys Kit, "Legendary Pulls Plug on Bradley Cooper's 'Paradise Lost,'" *The Hollywood Reporter*, February 9, 2012, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/heat-vision/legendary-pictures-paradise-lost-bradley-cooper-288520>.

² Stewart Clarke, "'Sherlock' Star Martin Freeman to Produce TV Adaptation of 'Paradise Lost,'" *Variety*, June 13, 2017, <https://variety.com/2017/tv/global/sherlock-hobbit-martin-freeman-paradise-lost-tv-1202464040/>.

³ Lara Dodds, "'To change in scenes and show it in a play': *Paradise Lost* and the Stage Directions of Dryden's *The State of Innocence and Fall of Man*," *Restoration: Studies in English Literary Culture, 1660-1700* 33, num. 2 (2009): 1-24.

Dryden's opera was never written, and *The State of Innocence* has never been performed, thus ushering in a proud tradition of unsuccessful and thwarted *Paradise Lost* adaptations with extravagant and prohibitive technical and special effects demands.⁴

Paradise Lost is an epic poem rather than a play; however, Book IV presents a strong generic shift toward the dramatic. Satan's first speech in Book IV, for instance, resembles Prometheus' first speech in Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* as well as displaying kinship with Shakespearean drama. The latter parallel is most pertinent to my analysis, which seeks to align Milton's verse with inherited Elizabethan and Jacobean theatrical traditions. This first section establishes the connection between *Paradise Lost* and the theater of its past to better understand how writers and theater companies today might successfully adapt the poem to the stage.

The second section takes a recent production as a case study, suggesting that leaning in to the relatively minimal early modern theatrical practices that underpin *Paradise Lost* (rather than tackling Milton's theme with big-budget extravagance) allows for compelling theatrical adaptations that enrich understanding and appreciation of the poem while remaining true to Milton's original artistic vision. While many scholars (addressed in this first section) have remarked on the dramatic elements of *Paradise Lost*, they invariably use the theatrical genre as a metaphor for understanding the poem rather than a genuine avenue of inquiry. There are very few *performances* of *Paradise Lost* and therefore hardly any critical appraisals of those performances.

⁴ Katharine Fletcher, "Milton and Performance," in *darkness visible*, Cambridge: Christ's College at Cambridge University, 2008, <http://darknessvisible.christs.cam.ac.uk/performance.html>.

This Satan speech in particular serves as a firm foundation on which to build this theatrical claim since “Edward Phillips, Milton’s nephew and biographer, claims that he was shown [the first ten lines of it] ‘several years before the poem was begun’ and that they were ‘designed for the very beginning’ of a tragedy on the same subject.”⁵ The soliloquy begins with these ten lines:

O thou that with surpassing glory crowned,
 Look’st from thy sole dominion like the God
 Of this new world; at whose sight all the stars
 Hide their diminished heads; to thee I call
 But with no friendly voice, and add thy name
 O Sun, to tell thee how I hate thy beams
 That bring to my remembrance from what state
 I fell, how glorious once above thy sphere;
 Till pride and worse ambition threw me down
 Warring in Heav’n against Heav’n’s matchless King: (4.32-41)

Already, Satan’s account of his self-defeating ambition brings to mind Shakespearean villainy. Compare Macbeth’s “Vaulting ambition, which o’erleaps itself / And falls on th’other [side]” due to his own violence against King Duncan (1.7.27-8). Macbeth’s metaphorical equestrian experiences a fall analogous to Satan’s own fall from Heaven and Man’s Fall. And Macbeth expresses a disdain for the sun similar to Satan’s, saying, “I ‘gin to be aweary of the sun, / And wish th’estate o’th’ world were now undone” (5.5.49-50). While the energetic Satan never

⁵ John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (New York: Random House, Inc.), 2007, 124n32-41.

exactly matches the extent of Macbeth's weary fatalism, he certainly shares Macbeth's wish for an upset to the established order of the universe.

Satan, in the second line of his soliloquy puns on the sun's "sole [sol] dominion," while in Richard's second line in *Richard III*, he puns on "this son of York"—his brother, King Edward IV—who must die before Richard can satisfy his ambitions to the crown (1.1.2). And Satan too is troubled with a "son"—in God the Son—that eclipses his greatness and obstructs his path to glory. Satan himself will use the metaphor of the Son's eclipse in Book V in his oration to the rebel angels, arguing that God the Son "hath to himself engrossed / All power, and us eclipsed under the name / Of King anointed" (5.775-7). Richard's second mention of the sun in his opening speech is contained within these lines:

Why, I, in this weak piping time of peace,
 Have no delight to pass away the time,
 Unless to spy my shadow in the sun
 And descant on mine own deformity.
 And therefore, since I cannot prove a lover
 To entertain these fair well-spoken days,
 I am determinèd to prove a villain
 And hate the idle pleasures of these days. (1.1.24-31)

The sun is again a reminder of the speaker's wretchedness and abjection. Richard's other sentiments are also echoed by Satan, who, exiled from Heaven, no longer experiences joy. Satan admits that "fierce desire, / Among our other torments not the least, / Still unfulfilled with pain of longing pines" and therefore, like Richard, cannot prove a lover (4.509-11). Satan's solution—

and Richard's—is to accept an inverted system of good and evil, of pleasure and pain: “Farewell remorse: all good to me is lost; / Evil be thou my good” (4.109-110). And in Book IX, Satan imposes deformity on himself when he transforms into a snake, allowing pride and ambition to reduce him to bestial incarnation, while Richard is frequently described and derided with animal imagery in the play.

The characters of Macbeth and Richard III bear linguistic similarities to Satan in their soliloquies on a micro level, but the plays also evoke deeper thematic connections with *Paradise Lost* that deserve attention. In her article, “Theology as Tragedy in *Macbeth*,” Susan Snyder first cites *Paradise Lost* to connect Satan’s verbal trickery with the thematic equivocation of *Macbeth*, particularly the temptations offered by the Weird Sisters or provoked by interpretations of their messages.⁶ Just before Macbeth expresses weariness of the sun, he doubts “th’equivocation of the fiend / That lies like truth” and will soon describe the witches as “juggling fiends... That palter with us in a double sense (5.5.43-4, 5.7.49-50). Snyder reminds us that “equivocation is the favored weapon of the capital-F Fiend himself, Satan.”⁷ The serpent and the witches both speak in ambiguous prophetic language, foretelling greatness to their hearers. And Malcolm makes an explicit connection between Macbeth and Lucifer when he reminds Macduff that “Angels are bright still though the brightest fell” (4.3.22).

In both *Macbeth* and *Paradise Lost*, foreknowledge—either suggested or certain—of future tragedy provokes questions of agency and free will. In Shakespeare’s play, the degree of moral culpability among the characters (Macbeth, Lady Macbeth, the Weird Sisters) is more

⁶ Susan Snyder, “Theology as Tragedy in *Macbeth*,” in *Bloom’s Modern Critical Interpretations*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2010), 77-8.

⁷ Snyder, 77.

ambiguous, so much so that multiple high-profile mock trials have debated the question of their relative guilt.⁸ In Milton's poem, free will and moral agency are more firmly insisted upon and confirmed by both God the Father and Satan. Choice and free action are in fact requirements of Milton's tragic vision, which would prove hollow if events could not have turned out another way.

Nevertheless, Snyder complicates the scenario by nesting the "short view" of a tragic individual "who must act according to his limited human vision and take responsibility for the results" within the use of "sin and suffering as God's instruments in bringing about an eventual larger good."⁹ Snyder's concept of theology as tragedy helps navigate the intersections of these two works, especially when the action of divine justice appears mysterious or paradoxical. Milton, in his introductory essay to *Samson Agonistes*, mentions a similar connection between tragedy and theology:

The Apostle *Paul* himself thought it not unworthy to insert a verse of *Euripides* into the Text of Holy Scripture, I *Cor.* 15.33, and *Paræus* commenting on the *Revelation*, divides the whole Book as a Tragedy, into Acts distinguish'd each by a Chorus of Heavenly Harpings and Song b'tween.¹⁰

⁸ "Lady and Lord Macbeth on trial: guilty or bewitched?" *CBC News*, June 12, 2017, <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/ideas/lady-and-lord-macbeth-on-trial-guilty-or-bewitched-1.4156488>.

"*Macbeth* Mock Trial," *C-SPAN*, June 19, 2017, <https://www.c-span.org/video/?430119-1/ruth-bader-ginsburg-presides-shakespeare-theatre-company-mock-trial>.

⁹ Snyder, 78.

¹⁰ John Milton, "Of that sort of Dramatic Poem which is called Tragedy," in *Samson Agonistes*, ed. Thomas H. Luxon, *The John Milton Reading Room*, Dartmouth College, 1997, https://www.dartmouth.edu/~milton/reading_room/samson/tragedy/text.shtml.

Milton uses Paraeus' tragic interpretation of the Book of Revelation and Paul's verse of Euripides to bolster and Christianize an understanding of tragedy as "the gravest, moralest, and most profitable of all other Poems" inherited from classical civilization.

Paradise Lost's dramatic connection to *Macbeth* goes back to the poem's first sketches in the Trinity Manuscript as a dramatic narrative titled "*Adam Unparadiz'd*."¹¹ On one piece of paper, Milton details his vision of a tragedy of the Fall that, interestingly, does not include the temptation of Eve or the actual Fall in its organizational structure. Instead, Milton would have concentrated much of the action of his epic into the first three acts of this play in the form of narrative speeches before Adam and Eve, "having by this time bin seduc't by the serpent," enter "confusedly cover'd with leaves."¹² As Brendan Prawdzik notes, compared to *Paradise Lost*, *Adam Unparadised's* general description seems remarkably light in conflict.¹³ The central interpersonal confrontation of the sketch is Adam and Eve's argument after the Fall, in which the two "accuse one another but especially Adam layes the blame to his wife, is stubborn in his offence."¹⁴

Blaming a strong female character for urging a man into evil against his better judgement is not, however, the principal "dramatic connection" with *Macbeth* found in the Trinity Manuscript. On the opposite page from Milton's "*Adam Unparadiz'd*" notes—a page turn is not

¹¹ John Milton, *The Milton Manuscript*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1899, <http://trin-sites-pub.trin.cam.ac.uk/james/viewpage.php?index=1394>.

¹² *Milton Manuscript*, 40.

¹³ Prawdzik, Brendan Mark, "Milton on Stage: Drama, Sin, and the Holy Script," PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2009, 126.

¹⁴ *Milton Manuscript*, 40.

even necessary—are some of his thoughts on possible “Scotch stories.” One narrative, concerning “Duffe and Donwald,” might tell a “strange story of witchcraft, and murder discover’d, and reveng’d”; another possible story concerns Macbeth himself, “beginning at the arrivall of Malcolm at Mackduffe,” noting also that “the matter of Duncan may be express’d by the appearing of his ghost.”¹⁵ The proximity of these ideas to the generative sketches of *Paradise Lost* is a powerful reminder of the theatrical kinship between the characters of Satan and Macbeth. No other Shakespearean character resembles Milton’s great Adversary so intimately, and (based on this evidence from Milton’s personal manuscript) no other Shakespearean play was more present in Milton’s mind at the time he formulated the theatrical idea that would develop into *Paradise Lost*.

Satan echoes the theatrical presence of Richard III through his fraught relationship with an implied audience during soliloquy. The ostensible purpose of the soliloquy is self-reflection and analysis, but Satan, according to Elizabeth Sauer, “denies the dialectical nature of expression and narration by composing his autobiographical history in formalist and absolutist terms.”¹⁶ In other words, Sauer helps explain how Satan generates his own story, rather than interpreting his situation “in the context of providential history” like other characters (Raphael, Michael, Adam, and Eve) do.¹⁷ This generation of story resembles the work of a playwright, made particularly relevant in transition to the stage. Richard and Satan make frequent use of the soliloquy to

¹⁵ *Milton Manuscript*, 41.

¹⁶ Elizabeth Sauer, “‘I now must change those notes to Tragic’: The Sad Task of Raphael, Satan, and the Poet-narrator,” in *Barbarous Dissonance and Images of Voice in Milton’s Epics*, (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1996), 71-2.

¹⁷ Sauer, 72.

express their thoughts and establish their own histories for their audiences. But both characters repress, rather than confront, the instability of their personal evil through audience interaction.

Richard is eventually forced to engage himself in a dialectic in his 5.3 soliloquy before the Battle of Bosworth Field. This frantic (yet honest) self-inquiry seems so antithetical to the character of Richard advanced in the play previously that the soliloquy essentially fractures Richard's conscience into at least two speakers:

What do I fear? Myself? There's none else by.

Richard loves Richard; that is I and I.

Is there a murderer here? No. Yes, I am.

Then fly. What, from myself? Great reason why?

Lest I revenge. What, myself upon myself? (5.3.180-184)

But the simultaneous presence of thesis and antithesis in one mind—as per Hegelian formulation—makes for a fascinating and engaging character. Satan and Richard conduct self-defining debates within themselves, collapsing the substance of dialogue into the form of monologue. The First Quarto's "*I and I*," rather than the Folio's more familiar "*I am I*," more fully portrays the extent of Richard's disassociation from himself.

A battle at the end of Richard's story provokes this debate within him. Satan's battle (the war in heaven) occurs, however, chronologically near the beginning of his story. And yet Satan's initial war in heaven remains analogous to Richard's concluding Battle of Bosworth Field because the conflict seals Satan's fate. The war in heaven "represents [Satan's] eternal defeat. It is the eternally reoccurring or archetypal moment of his failure and the Son's triumph."¹⁸ After

¹⁸ John Rumrich, email message to author, April 9, 2019.

this definitive loss, Satan and the fallen angels shift their goalposts for victory from conquering God to perverting his new creations, redefining their success in terms of God's failure and estranging themselves from goodness and joy. Sauer looks forward to the Son's "dialogic soliloquy" in *Paradise Regained*, which "makes possible a humanizing self-confrontation that develops into his debate with Satan."¹⁹ Sauer implies that Satan is not capable of carrying out this level of dialogue alone in *Paradise Lost*. Perhaps the potential consequences of Satan's soliloquizing are not self-knowledge and insight, since "internally divided Satan" represses these consequences by "tyranniz[ing] over the other voices in the poem."²⁰ Satan cannot enact the universal tyranny of which he accuses God, yet he still (somewhat ironically) tyrannizes where he may—namely, within the multi-vocality of the poem and the heteroglossia of his own mind.

Satan and Richard express and repress the dissonant voices of the self in soliloquy, and the very presence of internal dissonance is the stamp and residue of sin: "The soliloquy, monologue, apostrophe, and even the invocation in *Paradise Lost* are postlapsarian modes of discourse that reveal the conflicted nature of the speakers."²¹ Without sin, there is no moral debate and therefore no drama. We should expand Sauer's list of postlapsarian modes to include the dramatic form itself, which requires conflict to advance plot. And a drama with Milton's subject calls attention to its own postlapsarian nature through its imperfect representation and multi-vocal dissonance. Rather than a unified, prelapsarian chorus, Milton writes multiple warring voices whose struggle constitutes conflict that advances his drama, serving also as a

¹⁹ Sauer, 83.

²⁰ Sauer, 83.

²¹ Sauer, 83.

reminder of the fallen poet's precarious task: describing characters in both pre- and postlapsarian forms to an already-fallen audience. In this sense, Raphael's approach of "lik'ning spiritual to corporal forms" in his relation to Adam and Eve is a fundamentally performative (if not outright theatrical) one (5.573). Raphael encounters a difficulty opposite to Milton's—he must describe the fallen angels to Adam and Eve before their Fall in terms that they can understand. In the second section, I revisit a specific adaptation of Raphael's dramatic impulse that manifests in a more explicitly staged (and meta-theatrical) fashion in order to tease out the theatrical subtext of this interaction. The stage will prove to be a medium particularly suited to the flawed representation of ideal subjects, one that highlights the struggle of Raphael and Milton and offers a possible (though not final) solution to the difficulty of representation central to Milton's project.

Satan's first Book IV soliloquy also contains an interesting rhetorical turn which places Satan in the same dilemma faced by Claudius in *Hamlet's* prayer scene—an inability to repent. From Satan:

But say I could repent and could obtain
 By act of grace my former state; how soon
 Would highth recall high thoughts, how soon unsay
 What feigned submission swore: ease would recant
 Vows made in pain as violent and void.
 For never can true reconciliation grow
 Where wounds of deadly hate have pierced so deep: (4.93-9)

Satan recognizes in himself the impossibility of contentment under God's reign; even if God extended him forgiveness for his initial rebellion, Satan would start drumming up more resistance. Claudius, too, considers the possibility of forgiveness, but is unable to successfully repent "since I am still possessed / Of those effects for which I did the murder— / My crown, mine own ambition, and my queen"—all things he is decidedly *not* willing to give up (3.3.53-55). Satan and Claudius share, therefore, an internal tension resulting from personal sensitivity to a perceived impossibility of meaningful action; both feel trapped into quasi-deterministic courses of events occasioned by their very natures. Claudius will not relinquish what he has achieved, and Satan will never waver in his opposition to God (seeking either to achieve power and glory in Heaven or, failing that, to lessen God's triumph by corrupting Adam and Eve).

Satan's speech should not only be compared to Shakespearean soliloquy but also (because of its theatrical inception) evaluated as a theatrical utterance in its own right to see how the context of the stage might change our interpretation of Satan's words. Satan, for instance, makes frequent use of questions in this first speech of Book IV. In the world of an epic poem, Satan either speaks aloud to himself or the words on the page detail his unspoken thoughts, and his questions are merely rhetorical devices designed to advance the logical progression of his reasoning. Satan, on this more traditional understanding, directs these questions inwardly, expecting no answer from outside himself.

In a theatrical setting, however, performed before an audience, Satan's questions assume new power through their immediacy. They become variously accusatory, desperate, and hopeless. His words garner sympathy, implicating the audience in Satan's plight through a supposed

(though false) equivalence between the demonic predicament and the human condition. Satan, rather than interrogating himself in the second person, is able to direct his questions outward and ask his fallen audience as well as himself, “Hadst thou the same free will and power to stand? / Thou hadst: whom hast thou then or what to accuse, / But Heav’n’s free love dealt equally to all?” (4.66-8). The human form of the actor realizes the human form assumed by figures such as Michael and the Son in “postlapsarian divine accommodation to human frailty.”²² Satan, played onstage by a human, might pass for one, making his threats against Mankind all the more shocking, reflexive, and insidious.

Even though Man has not yet fallen in the poem when Satan speaks these words, a live performance of the text makes Satan’s words more potent and moving because they are more accessible and relatable. Man, the poem’s didactic message goes, *also* has the freedom to choose between embracing or rejecting God’s love and grace. And performance traditions of the early modern stage in particular facilitate a more open, interactive relationship between performer and audience member. Universal lighting, for example, makes no attempt to differentiate the space of the play from the surrounding world of the audience, making the events of the stage feel immediate and local, facilitating Satan’s ability to slither into the hearts of his audience. This specifically theatrical level of interaction is crucial to Satan’s ability to interrogate, shift blame, and use language to manipulate humanity in the world of the poem as well as in the contemporary world of a reader or audience member.

In Book IV, Satan, about to enter Eden, discovers “A sylvan scene, and as the ranks ascend / Shade above shade, a woody theater / Of stateliest view” (4.140-142). Milton’s diction

²² John Rumrich, email message to author, April 9, 2019.

—describing paradise as both *scene* and *theater* as well as implying spectatorship in *stateliest view*—suggest Eden as a stage “upon which the tragic drama of the Fall will take place.”²³

Because Eden is the only populated region of Earth, its “woody theater” expresses the concept of *theatrum mundi* in a dramatically potent arena. In *As You Like It*, Jaques famously rephrases this idea as “All the world’s a stage, / And all the men and women merely players” (2.7.139-140).

Milton not only casts all men and women (Adam and Eve) as players in the action of his drama, but details some of the behind-the-scenes producing and directing done by God the Father and Son. Milton’s drama is large enough to subsume all of Creation throughout all of time. It is a primordial, an archetypal, drama both because later drama draws inspiration from the story and because, according to theology inherent to the drama of the Fall, all subsequent tragedies occur as a result of Adam and Eve’s catastrophe. Indeed, Michael’s Book XII vision of the joys and horrors to come in the future of Man firmly establishes Adam and Eve’s responsibility as the progenitors of those people and events. [in a performative manner]

On the early modern stage, there is also, conveniently, a “heaven” space in the balcony area and a “hell” down under the trapdoor which flank *the world* of the stage, providing an actor convenient physical reference points for these abstract concepts. Satan speaks these lines:

Me miserable! Which way shall I fly

Infinite wrath and infinite despair?

Which way I fly is Hell: myself am Hell;

And in the lowest deep a lower deep

²³ John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Thomas H. Luxon, *The John Milton Reading Room*, Dartmouth College, 1997, https://www.dartmouth.edu/~milton/reading_room/pl/book_4/text.shtml.

Still threat'ning to devour me opens wide,
 To which the Hell I suffer seems a Heav'n. (4.73-8)

And the actor playing the part might gesture around the space, asking for an impossible escape route or point down at the trapdoor and up at the balcony to contrast the torments of the one space with the joys of the other. Milton's epic verse fits in comfortably with his inherited dramatic tradition, and Satan is at home on the stage, where he is most seductive, manipulative, and dangerous. When an audience is included, even artificially, in a character's decision-making process, the events of the play appear less deterministic. Even though we know from the poet-narrator's opening lines that Man will disobey and lose paradise—as the choral introduction to *Romeo and Juliet* kills off the young lovers before we ever meet them—the dialectic of a good theatrical performance keeps doubt and hope alive in the face of a fated (or at least foregone) conclusion.

A recourse to Weimann's formulation of *locus* and *platea* (adapted to suit Shakespearean drama using older medieval drama as a metaphor) will also prove helpful. Erika T. Lin details Weimann's distinction between these two privileged locations on the stage:

The *locus* was 'a scaffold, be it a *domus*, *sedes*, or throne' and was the playing area that was most distant from the audience. Associated with it was 'a rudimentary element of verisimilitude' and the representation of 'fixed, symbolic locations'.

By contrast, the *platea* was a 'platform-like acting area' situated closest to the audience. On the *platea* 'the play world continue[d] to be frankly treated as a theatrical

dimension of the real world', and this non-illusionistic mode of performance corresponded to 'unlocalized' or 'neutral' space.²⁴

Lin describes how the *locus/platea* dichotomy "inverts expectations about theatrical authority," allowing characters with relatively low social status to gain theatrical privilege through their more intimate relationship with the audience. The characters of Satan and God the Father represent a version of this inverted relationship in which God (a *locus* figure) possesses the theological and moral authority in the story, but Satan (more of a *platea* figure) often manages to usurp the theatrical authority through the intimate dramatic privilege of soliloquy. We understand what God stands for and represents perfectly well, but we comprehend the mind of Satan far more easily than the mind of God. The identifiable presence of the realms of *locus* and *platea* in Milton's poem further evinces *Paradise Lost*'s kinship with Shakespearean drama.

James Holly Hanford's seminal 1917 article, "The Dramatic Element in *Paradise Lost*,"²⁵ argues that Milton's poem was profoundly influenced by an inherited Elizabethan dramatic tradition and that Milton's genius as a dramatic poet is as evident as his epic genius in the form and substance of *Paradise Lost*. Hanford claims that *Paradise Lost* is especially useful in this generic debate because "it is here that the epic and dramatic impulses meet, as I believe in equal strength."²⁶ As evidence, Hanford starts by pointing out some of the small dramatic quirks in the text that distinguish Milton's epic from earlier, classical epics. Milton's utterances—the words he

²⁴ Erika T. Lin, "Performance Practice and Theatrical Privilege: Rethinking Weimann's Concepts of *Locus* and *Platea*," *New Theatre Quarterly* 22, iss. 3 (2006): 284.

²⁵ Hanford, James Holly, "The Dramatic Element in *Paradise Lost*," *Studies in Philology* 14, no. 2 (1917): 178-195.

²⁶ Hanford, 180-1.

puts into his characters' mouths—are more responsive to changing environmental conditions than previous epic utterances: “They are not, with him, as they are in the main with the earlier epic writers, merely a means of varying the narrative method or of giving rhetorical expression to emotion; they are rather revelations of character and motive and constitute an integral element in the plot.”²⁷

Character, in Hanford's estimation, drives the tragic plot of *Paradise Lost*. He acknowledges the poem's debt to Greek tragedy—Milton expressed great admiration for Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides—through an analysis of the hamartia, hubris, and dramatic irony seen in Adam and Eve. Prawdzik reminds us, though, that “Aristotle makes it clear that character should be subordinated to plot and that simplicity of character is a virtue.”²⁸ For a confirmed classicist such as Milton, perhaps the refuge of the epic form provided artistic distance from Aristotle's precepts necessary to achieve *Paradise Lost*'s dramatic effect. Any reasons proffered to explain Milton's decision to repurpose his original dramatic sketch of *Adam Unparadised* into epic form carry, admittedly, an air of speculation. And yet, even as early as 1642, Milton, in his *Reason of Church Government* tract, hinted at the possible limits of Aristotelian drama when he wrote of the fertile poetic ground afforded by investigation of “wily subtleties and refluxes of man's thoughts from within.”²⁹

²⁷ Hanford, 182.

²⁸ Prawdzik, 122.

²⁹ John Milton, *The Reason of Church Government Urged against Prelaty, the Second Book*, in *The Essential Prose of John Milton*, eds. William Kerrigan, John Rumrich, and Stephen J. Fallon. 2013 Modern Library Paperback edition. New York: Random House, Inc., 2007, 90.

In any case, Milton stresses the character defects of both Adam and Eve that lead to their downfall. Eve's "intellectual inferiority," "curiosity," and "vanity," as well as her "desire for admiration" reveal themselves most clearly in monologue and dialogue rather than narration.³⁰ Adam's fatal weak spot, on the other hand, is his "love for Eve"—his "passion." Satan deceives Eve, but Adam clearly chooses to join Eve in disobeying God rather than let her fall alone, and "as his nature is nobler and more steadfast than Eve's so his fall is greater and more tragic," brought about "through the seeming accident of fatal excess in what might have been a best endowment" (185).

Hanford also connects Milton's language to Shakespeare's, drawing parallels between the two writers. He compares Adam at different times to Lear, Antony, and Hamlet, pointing out, as well, the similarity of the dramatic trio of Adam, Eve, and Satan to Othello, Desdemona, and Iago.³¹ Through these and other Shakespearean connections, Hanford advances his main ideas: Milton sees and writes the Fall through the lens of Elizabethan tragedy, and his aims are clearly higher than mere doctrine pushing. (As an aside, Hanford writes only in terms of "Elizabethan" drama, and he seems to use the term as shorthand for all Shakespearean drama even into the Jacobean period despite the arguably deeper resonances of the later tragedies with Milton's imagination of the Fall.) *Paradise Lost* is to an extent didactic, but Milton also explores truths about humanity as he attempts to explicate the divine. Hanford sets his own views in opposition to reminders that Milton disparaged the drama of his time in preference for ancient drama as well

³⁰ Hanford, 184.

³¹ Hanford, 189.

as to the “notorious Miltonic self-consciousness, which has led critics to regard all his work, from *Lycidas* to *Samson*, as essentially autobiographical and non-dramatic.”³²

Hanford’s analysis of the dramatic (and specifically Shakespearean) elements in *Paradise Lost* is helpful, though his arguments are good enough to expand to other characters in the poem. Hanford considers Adam the chief tragic figure of Milton’s drama, and while Hanford makes the connection between Satan and Shakespearean villains such as Iago, Richard III, and Claudius, Hanford’s consideration would benefit from a parallel analysis of Satan as the poem’s central tragic hero. Satan is, after all, the first to lose paradise, and his character has famously had more power to attract and connect with readers than any other in *Paradise Lost*.

Hanford also underestimates the character of Eve. He is not quite correct to refer to Eve as Adam’s intellectual inferior. On the contrary, while Adam is more analytically intelligent, one of Eve’s defining characteristics is her sharp mind, evident in her emotional and poetic intelligence. When Adam, “Ent’ring on studious thoughts abstruse,” questions Raphael concerning cosmology—borrowing Hamlet’s “this goodly frame” in line 15—Eve leaves the two alone. Milton assures his readers that Eve did not leave the conversation due to some incapacity to understand complex concepts:

Yet went she not, as not with such discourse
 Delighted, or not capable her ear
 Of what was high: such pleasure she reserved,
 Adam relating, she sole auditress; (8.48-51)

³² Hanford, 179.

Rather than displaying one of Eve's faults, this scene showcases her virtue. Eve was, in fact, the first to inquire about the seemingly inexplicable abundance of the stars in the night sky, asking Adam in Book IV:

But wherefore all night long shine these, for whom

This glorious sight, when sleep hath shut all eyes? (4.657-8)

Eve has plenty of positive qualities to match and complement Adam's, and though she may not be strictly *equal* with her husband in absolute terms, the two complete each other—Adam is not whole without her. This is part of the dramatic beauty of *Paradise Lost*; rather than having one main tragic figure, the poem offers distinct, overlapping visions of tragedy. Satan, Adam, Eve, and Christ may all be rightly considered tragic in their own unique ways.

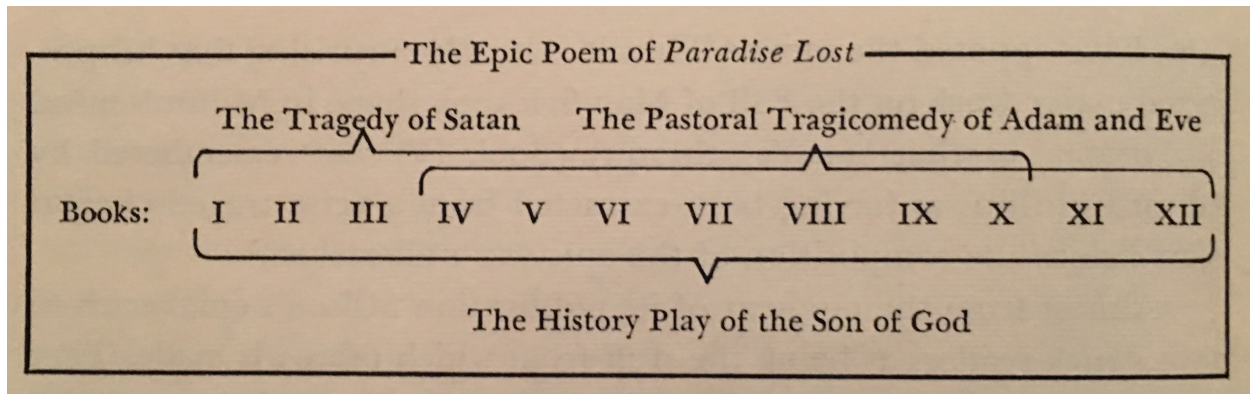
But the tragedy of the Fall also extends to all humans, implicating each new reader of the poem in Adam and Eve's original sin and casting all of us as tragic figures in God's cosmic drama. It is worth remembering, however, that paradise is not simply lost but *regained*. We need not consider Milton's "brief epic," *Paradise Regained* to make this note, either, since Christ's eventual redemption of humanity is directly addressed in Book III of *Paradise Lost* (and alluded to in the epic's first lines). The fact that the Fall is not the end of the story hints at a poignant connection to Shakespeare's romance plays in addition to his tragedies. The romances (*The Tempest*, *The Winter's Tale*, *Cymbeline*, *Pericles*) are marked by their tendency to recover tragic circumstances over time, often leading to dramatic reconciliations and forgiveness for past wrongs that resembles divine grace. In *Paradise Lost*, there is a promise of God's (perhaps undeserved) grace and a final reconciliation with the heavenly Father. Adam and Eve's

comparatively happy ending suggests that Satan—forever alienated from grace and reconciliation—is the poem’s truest example of a tragic figure.

Hanford’s paper eloquently details literary and dramatic *theory*, but it seems that the thing most sorely absent from his short essay is any acknowledgement or appraisal of *performance*. If Milton’s genius is dramatic in nature, then we should consider theatrical adaptations of *Paradise Lost* and see which aspects of the poem translate well to the stage and which are necessarily diminished or lost altogether. I begin filling in this gap in the second section by analyzing adaptation and performance of a notable recent production of *Paradise Lost*, which demonstrates that staging Milton is the surest way to display and realize the poet’s “dramatic genius” that Hanford so eloquently defends. This new dramatic paradigm invites a rethinking of the poem, as well as its claim to the dramatic and theatrical genres. Most importantly, *Paradise Lost* demands continued theatrical reinvention and comparison with its dramatic forebears.

Partially in response to Hanford’s dramatic paradigm, Roger B. Rollin advances a detailed dramatic framework for the poem in his article, “*Paradise Lost*: ‘Tragical-Comical-Historical-Pastoral,’ ” in which the full epic is itself composed of at least three “distinct yet interlocking plots, each of which approximates the theoretic form of a different genre of Renaissance drama.”³³ Unlike Hanford, who sees Adam as the central tragic figure of *Paradise Lost*, Rollin (in Dryden’s vein) takes Satan as the most accurate approximation of a tragic hero—by Aristotelian as well as Renaissance and modern criteria. Adam, by contrast, becomes the protagonist of a pastoral tragicomedy we might closely associate with Shakespeare’s late

³³ Roger B. Rollin, “*Paradise Lost*: ‘Tragical-Comical-Historical-Pastoral,’ ” *Milton Studies* 7 (1973): 3.



Rollin, 6. A diagram detailing the interlocking plots of three dramas operating within *Paradise Lost*.

romances, written as the tragicomic form began to rise into prominence. The third drama contained within *Paradise Lost* is the story of the Son of God, whose narrative arc approximates a Renaissance history play. Rollin attributes the poem's success largely to this dramatic formulation, writing not only that Milton's design is most comprehensible "if his poem is analyzed in terms of the theoretic forms of three genres of drama—tragedy, tragicomedy, and history play," but also that "*Paradise Lost* is most successful when it adheres most closely to these three theoretic forms and comes closest to failure when it most deviates from them."³⁴ The portions of *Paradise Lost* which Rollin understands as the least compelling (Books X through XII) supposedly suffer from a lack of dramatic focus, "fully realized action and expressive dialogue among characters in confrontation," as well as an aesthetic departure from the genre template of the history play.³⁵

Rollin takes pains to assure us that his assertion that *Paradise Lost* contains dramas does not imply that these dramatic forms were the result of deliberate Miltonic imposition. His

³⁴ Rollin, 4.

³⁵ Rollin, 29.

statements about the poem that resort to “terms out of the lexicon of dramatic literature and criticism...are meant to be taken metaphorically rather than literally.”³⁶ The literal argument is, consequently, my chief interest and focus in this project. I do not mean to argue that Milton intentionally scaffolded multiple dramas in his epic after abandoning the dramatic form. Rather, the poem’s vestigial dramatic structures remain intact despite Milton’s generic shift. These dramatic structures are more than figurative, and subsequent (successful and failed) attempts at theatrical staging evince their influence over Milton’s narrative development.

Rollin, introducing the idea of Satan as early modern tragic hero, cites Helen Gardner. Gardner aligns the character of Satan with a prevailing tragic theme of the Elizabethan and Jacobean eras—that of the “deforming” of a great person, “in its origin bright and good, by its own willed persistence in acts against its own nature”—and labels the tragic stage the principal location for explorations of “the idea of damnation in English literature before *Paradise Lost*.”³⁷ Satan’s voluntary self-debasement in the form of the serpent—echoed by the fallen angels’ Book X transformation into hissing snakes—becomes a tangible example of this tragic deformation of his nature.

In addition to signifying the tragic nature of Satan’s deformation, this hissing which assaults Satan at the height of his sense of triumph and glory represents the common expression of disapproval from a discontented audience at the theater.³⁸ Milton contrasts the “dismal universal hiss, the sound / Of public scorn” with the “universal shout and high applause” that

³⁶ Rollin, 4.

³⁷ Helen Gardner, “Milton’s ‘Satan’ and the Theme of Damnation in Elizabethan Tragedy,” in *Milton: Modern Essays in Criticism*, ed. Arthur E. Barker (New York: 1965), 206.

³⁸ Prawdzik, 136.

Satan expects to hear from his fallen comrades (10.505-9). In lieu of a physical audience to observe the action of *Paradise Lost* and which applauds and hisses according to a collective moral compass, Milton reinforces his poem's underlying framework of good and evil within those theatrical terms through the fallen angels' transformation. Milton robs Satan—a consummate actor—of the greatest victory an actor can achieve for his performance: approbation through applause.

For Rollin, this final metamorphosis “fulfills Aristotle’s requirement” of a Scene of Suffering, though Satan’s entire plot is essentially “a series of variations on the theme of suffering, and like most tragic protagonists Satan achieves a kind of release from suffering at the moment of catastrophe.”³⁹ Depending on interpretation and personal sympathy or antipathy toward Satan within an audience, Satan’s tragedy may also fulfill the Aristotelian requirements of a “change from ignorance to knowledge” and the arousal of “fear and pity.”⁴⁰ Although, Rollin’s argument for the former somewhat dubiously rests on the supposed yearly repetition of the serpentine punishment to continually teach the fallen angels a lesson:

...Thus were they plagued
 And worn with famine, long and ceaseless hiss,
 Till their lost shape, permitted, they resumed,
 Yearly enjoined, some say, to undergo
 This annual humbling certain numbered days,
 To dash their pride, and joy for man seduced. (10.572-77)

³⁹ Rollin, 7.

⁴⁰ Rollin, 7-8.

No external source has been located for the popular lore contained in Milton's "some say," but the wording implies didactic punishment rather than malicious spite. If the lesson must be repeated annually, however, perhaps the wisdom it imparts is not lasting or easily forgotten among the pains of hellfire. *Paradise Lost* is far from an ideal Aristotelian tragedy, but Satan's plot approximates one that does not contradict other possible formulations (such as those of Northrop Frye and Richard Sewall).⁴¹

Beyond attacks on his own personal nature, Satan might also be said to persist in attempts against nature itself (in the form of God's design). Indeed, the relative theological certainty of Milton's text vis-à-vis Shakespearean tragedy is a notable distinction. The scope and narrative ambition of *Paradise Lost* "provides its audience with a view of Satan's tragedy and ultimate fate *sub specie aeternitatis*, whereas the audiences of Shakespeare's tragedies are largely left to their own spiritual resources."⁴² Several Shakespearean tragedies gain a degree of dramatic or emotional weight due to their theological ambiguity—the uncertain nature of the ghost and the afterlife in *Hamlet* as well as the vague and possibly nonexistent gods in *King Lear* are two such examples. But *Paradise Lost* gains tragic significance partially from its assertions of theological and historical truth, even if its God occasionally seems as pitiless or cruel as those inhabiting Lear's heavens. There is no hope for Satan operating within the systems at play—the structure of the cosmos as well as his own mind.

The sense that Satan's falls—from Heaven to Hell and from angelic form to beastly incarnation—were in some sense fated, inevitable turnings of fortune's wheel provokes a

⁴¹ Rollin, 10-16.

⁴² Rollin, 10.

comparison with the medieval concept of *de casibus* tragedy. God the Father would caution against the moral grayness of this concept which does not lend itself to easily digestible lessons in right and wrong. But, from Satan's perspective, God's plan seems more like some vast crushing machine designed both to torture him and exploit his role as Adversary to make the narrative point of the Father's grace and the Son's glory. This interpretation, theologically defensible only after Satan's rebellion and effective loss of free will, highlights a distinctive connecting feature of *de casibus* tragedy and *Paradise Lost*—the centrality of a “Christian concept of history.”⁴³ Satan must fall so that the Son can rise and enact the honor that his Father planned for him.

The sometimes-permeable boundary between history and tragedy leads to a political, as well as literary, genre distinction. *Richard II* is an excellent point of contact with *Paradise Lost*, although Bolingbroke's rebellion against God's anointed is successful. And although *Richard II* is one of Shakespeare's history plays, the First Quarto text carries the full title of *The Tragedy of King Richard the Second*. This text, for reasons of political sensitivity, omits the now-famous deposition scene in which Richard hands over his crown to the usurping Bolingbroke. Richard, in this deposition scene, holds the crown together with Bolingbroke and conjures a strikingly quotidian image:

Now is this golden crown like a deep well
Which owes two buckets, filling one another,
The emptier ever dancing in the air,

⁴³ Paul Budra, “*The Mirror for Magistrates and the Shape of De Casibus Tragedy*,” *English Studies* 69, iss. 4 (1988): 3.

The other down, unseen, and full of water.

That bucket down and full of tears am I,

Drinking my griefs whilst you mount up on high. (4.1.177-82)

The only distinction between the two buckets is one of height. There is presumably no reason to prefer one bucket over another, and the image colors Bolingbroke's rise as surprisingly arbitrary for a character as attached to divine right as Richard. The connection to Satan and the Son brings Milton's divine order dangerously close to Manichaeism, with the Son embodying the forces of good and light and Satan standing in for evil and darkness. The presence of God the Father above these two, however, prevents Satan's evil from balancing equally with God's goodness.

As complicated as the political machinations and backstory of *Richard II* can become, the heart of the plot is as simple as "Richard falls; Bolingbroke rises." In *Paradise Lost*, Satan falls and the Son rises, according to one possible interpretation of events, for the same reason—namely, to characterize and humanize an otherwise impenetrable Father as supremely good. *Paradise Lost* also includes at least one provocative reference to *Richard II*. In the play's most famous speech, Richard says that:

...within the hollow crown

That rounds the mortal temples of a king

Keeps Death his court... (3.2.155-7)

Milton latches onto this image in his depiction of the amorphous figure of Death, who "The likeness of a kingly crown had" upon "what seemed his head" (2.672-3). Even though God the Father expresses dissatisfaction with Satan's rebellion, his theatrical image ostensibly benefits from casting Satan as an evil archenemy for contrast.

The contrast, however, is not with the Father but the Son, without whom God's goodness cannot be understood. The Father may *know* perfect goodness, but the Son becomes the means of *realizing* that goodness in the overarching narrative that, in Rollin's view, approximates the form of a Renaissance history play. "Whether or not he is physically present in a scene," writes Rollin, "the Son of God is always Satan's antagonist" even though "the only 'onstage' confrontation between the two takes place in Book VI."⁴⁴

But the Shakespearean parallels are not exact. If Satan and the Son resemble the shifting power dynamic of Bolingbroke and Richard, the Father and the Son are closer to Bolingbroke (as Henry IV) and his son, Prince Hal, in the *Henry IV* plays. And since Richard banishes Bolingbroke (albeit temporarily) from the "other Eden" of England, that expulsion from paradise presumably aligns him more with Adam and Eve than God the Son. Taken as the protagonist of his own history play, "Milton's Son as hero is closer to Hal than to Hamlet; though he has no Falstaff, his Hotspur is Satan."⁴⁵ The Son, like Hal, achieves victory on the battlefield. We do not get much of a sense of the Son's inner life, but his scenes are both public and full of historical and political implications, particularly for an anti-monarchical revolutionary such as Milton.

The genre of history is, admittedly, somewhat difficult to pin down. That liminal position, however, allows for enlightening connections. Coleridge, for instance, interpreted the history genre as "the transitional link between the epic poem and the drama."⁴⁶ And Tillyard, helpful in an attempt to bridge the gap between Milton and Shakespeare, hypothesizes that Shakespeare's

⁴⁴ Rollin, 23.

⁴⁵ Rollin, 25.

⁴⁶ Rollin, 25.

history plays—*Richard II* and both parts of *Henry IV* specifically—constitute an attempt to fulfill an epic function through dramatic means:

We can now see how the epic comes in and how *Richard II* contributes to an epic effect.

Those works which we honour by the epic title always, among other things, express the feelings or the habits of a large group of men, often of a nation. However centrally human, however powerful, a work may be, we shall not give it the epic title for these qualities alone....Shakespeare, it seems, as well as exploiting the most central human affairs, as he was to do in his tragedies, was also impelled to fulfil through drama that particularly epic function which is usually fulfilled through the narrative.⁴⁷

Tillyard's reading of the history plays characterizes the traditional, if somewhat old-fashioned, view that Shakespeare uses his historical drama to reinforce the established Tudor monarchy and warn against the dangers of rebellion against authority.

John of Gaunt's patriotic speech from 2.1 of *Richard II* famously describes England as "This other Eden, demi-paradise," connecting the subjects of Shakespeare's and Milton's work as well as conflating Tillyard's theorized ideal audiences for both poets (2.1.42). The "group of men" Shakespeare's history plays represent are the English—for Milton, this ideal group is ostensibly widened, conservatively, to Christians and, more radically, to all humans.

But Milton, in Book VII's invocation, undercuts the notion that his universal drama will connect with a large group of people. Rather, Milton's muse will "fit audience find, though few," implying that only select readers will be religiously or politically fit to receive his message

⁴⁷ E. M. W. Tillyard, *Shakespeare's History Plays* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd, 1944), 262-3.

(7.31). Prawdzik takes this line as indicating a shift in Milton's ethical consideration, which "turned away from a national audience...to the individual Christian and to his own scriptural poetics."⁴⁸ But, on Tillyard's reading, both Milton and Shakespeare share "a scheme fundamentally religious, by which events evolve under a law of justice and under the ruling of God's Providence" even if the machinery of Milton's historical theology is more openly on display than Shakespeare's.⁴⁹ We ought also to remember the diminished political circumstances under which Milton began work on *Paradise Lost*—the republican project had failed with the restoration of the English monarchy, and Milton's hopes for the viability of a national epic were surely dashed. Perhaps God the Son was the only political leader Milton remained comfortable supporting in epic form.

The distinction between drama and theater is an important one, and must not be neglected in our discussion of a dramatic and/or theatrical *Paradise Lost*. Ann Baynes Coiro, sketching an outline of Milton's dramatic tradition, usefully differentiates drama from theater: drama is literature that may be read alone, as Milton's *Penseroso* does, while theater is necessarily performed for an audience.⁵⁰ Detailing Milton's four preliminary versions of "a drama of the fall" in the Trinity Manuscript, Coiro stresses the notes' position in a "tantalizing middle space [between drama and theater] — hinting at past influences, sketching unrealized possibilities, and suggesting elusive connections with *Paradise Lost*."⁵¹ The hurdle of performance supposedly

⁴⁸ Prawdzik, 122.

⁴⁹ Tillyard, 320-21.

⁵⁰ Ann Baynes Coiro, "Poetic tradition, dramatic," in *Milton in Context*, ed. Stephen B. Dobranski, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 59-60.

⁵¹ Coiro, 65.

prevents the poem from being considered a theatrical text or script, but the first step in that direction—reading *Paradise Lost* as a *dramatic* text—is far from radical.

In fact, “drama’s presence is profound and pervasive in *Paradise Lost*,” and “the blank verse of *Paradise Lost* was associated in English almost exclusively with the stage.”⁵² The blank verse form—radical and unprecedented for English narrative poetry—which Milton chooses for his poem, therefore, fundamentally links his epic to the early modern English theater. Coiro also argues convincingly that tragedy is not the only genre of the Renaissance stage that ought to be considered in the structure of the poem. She identifies comedy, masque, and tragicomedy in addition to pointing out Satan’s role as “revenge tragedy antihero,” the angels’ dual function as literal and dramatic chorus, and the presence of a “tragic flaw” in not only Adam, but Satan and Eve as well.⁵³

Even scholars, such as John Creaser, who resist the dramatic and theatrical interpretations of Milton’s epic, write of the energy and dynamism in *Paradise Lost*’s poetry.⁵⁴ Creaser contradicts the dramatists’ hopeful interpretations, writing that “[Milton’s] are not the characters of drama living in apparent autonomy; they, even God, are the poem’s creatures and speak in its manner. For all the sophistication of this ‘tertiary epic,’ the radical remains the vocal continuity of the singer of tales, not the theatre’s versatility of voice and perspective.”⁵⁵ Despite Creaser’s

⁵² Coiro, 65.

⁵³ Coiro, 65.

⁵⁴ Creaser, John, “‘A Mind of Most Exceptional Energy’: Verse Rhythm in *Paradise Lost*,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Milton*, eds. Nicholas McDowell and Nigel Smith, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 462-3.

⁵⁵ Creaser, 468.

anti-theatrical convictions, his textual analysis of verse structure and rhythm depends on some form of oral performance of the text, even something as simple as reading the poem aloud to oneself. His article reads like the script of a diligent actor, scanning difficult lines and considering the dramatic impact of a vocal stress here rather than there.

Creaser compares Milton's poetic strategies to those of (a mature) Shakespeare, concluding that "the blank verse of *Paradise Lost* is a deliberate and distinctive creation, influenced by but antithetical to late Shakespeare through working within a strict discipline."⁵⁶ In other words, Creaser interprets the chief poetic force of Milton's verse as a result of relatively rigid adherence to a prosodic rubric: Milton is, by this interpretation, the omnipotent god of *Paradise Lost*, and he does not bend his rules without good reason. He never breaks them.

John D. Staines differs from Creaser in a telling manner. Staines stresses the importance of dialogue and conversation to the success of the poem: "the human reader needs dramatic dialogue to learn."⁵⁷ The contrasts between the characters of *Paradise Lost*, rather than their unities under Milton's grand poetic design, accomplish the didactic purpose central to the poem—explaining the ways of the divine to mere mortals. While epic narrative can (and almost invariably does) include dramatic dialogue, *Paradise Lost* places unique emphasis on the amount and importance of speech acts relative to narrative passages in the voice of the inspired bard, particularly in comparison with classic epics such as the *Odyssey* and the *Aeneid*. Milton knew, as many modern-day English professors do, that theater is a powerful tool of pedagogy:

"Although they were designed to be extravagant compliments for the monarchs and aristocrats

⁵⁶ Creaser, 473.

⁵⁷ John D. Staines, "The Age of Shakespeare Versus the Age of Milton: Reopening the Noisy Theatres," *Modern Language Quarterly* 78, no. 3 (2017): 405.

who sponsored them, masques presented moral principles and sought to instruct the country's elite."⁵⁸

Staines complicates an easy division between a literary "Age of Shakespeare" and an "Age of Milton."⁵⁹ He considers an interpretation of Shakespeare's public stage as a "democratic space" where groups can gather to communally converse and debate important issues.⁶⁰ The heteroglossia of a play, especially one without a narrator or chorus, ostensibly leads to a less definitive moral lesson amongst the plurality of voices and, thereby, more freedom for dissenting opinion. But with Milton, we supposedly "have essentially the same disagreement about whether Milton opens up his readers to debate or pushes them toward a single identifiable orthodoxy."⁶¹

I share Staines' frustration that Milton's writing is often easily dismissed as anti-theatrical or merely dogmatic. And I side with Rollin's judgement that "although Milton was of the party that closed the theatres, as one whose longstanding attitude toward drama was strongly positive though not uncritical, he must have opposed the move."⁶² I seek to expand Staines' and Rollin's lines of reasoning to the classroom as well as the stage. There should not be such a harsh division between the way that Milton's and Shakespeare's poetry is taught in English classrooms. Within the (more or less) democratic space of a classroom, students should be able to see Milton through the lens of performance, sparking the kinds of lively debates that Shakespeare's theater

⁵⁸ Ann Baynes Coiro, "Poetic tradition, dramatic," in *Milton in Context*, ed. Stephen B. Dobranski, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 61.

⁵⁹ Staines, 398-9.

⁶⁰ Staines, 402.

⁶¹ Staines, 402.

⁶² Rollin, 4.

facilitated. It is not so clear, for example, despite Milton's and Creaser's opinions of Heaven's moral righteousness, that Satan is always in the wrong—especially when you get the chance to speak his words yourself. But I let this particular point rest for now, and I will briefly return to the pedagogical applications of performance in my conclusion.

II. Staging *Paradise Lost*: Erin Shields' New Adaptation

During the Stratford Festival's 2018 season, one ticket was the hottest of them all. The production performed to sold-out crowds every evening and was so popular that its run extended several weeks beyond the original closing date. And though this was a Shakespeare festival, the must-see story was not the Bard's—this time, it was Milton's. Erin Shields wrote the script, a fresh adaptation of *Paradise Lost* that eschews most of Milton's language but dutifully footnotes the four direct quotations from his poem, on special commission from the Stratford Festival.⁶³ The production's popularity alone is eye-catching enough to prompt a reconsideration of *Paradise Lost*'s dramatic potential, but Shields' writing, combined with the efforts of director Jackie Maxwell and a talented cast and crew, contradicts Sir Walter Raleigh's famous assertion that *Paradise Lost* is "a monument to dead ideas."⁶⁴ Instead, we find staging Milton a remarkably effective method of getting into conversation with him, and his ideas—about God, humanity, temptation, love, loss, sacrifice, and free will—still pulse with lifeblood in 2018.

Shields pushes back in some places against Milton's version of the story, but always in a way that challenges and engages, rather than whitewashes, the original. Shields' *Paradise Lost* is far more than a feminist retelling of Milton's epic, but the play's feminist perspective is a good place to start. Shields' feminist interpretation of the Fall, for instance, establishes her revision of Milton as essentially Miltonic in its approach. I do not (nor does Shields) identify Milton as a proto-feminist. Shields, understandably more in tune with 21st century gender dynamics, portrays a more fluid and equal relationship between Adam and Eve before everything goes

⁶³ Erin Shields, *Paradise Lost* (Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2018), 1.

⁶⁴ Sir Walter Raleigh, *Milton* (London: Edward Arnold, 1915), 88.

south. “Following Milton’s lead,” Shields writes, “I decided to portray my Adam and Eve as a product of our time. Before the Fall, they are the embodiment of a modern relationship at its best... We get a glimpse of a living Paradise that exists in the relationship between the two. It is only after the Fall that conventional gender roles take hold.”⁶⁵

Indeed, in Shields’ adaptation, Adam and Eve are so intimately connected that they are nearly the same person. The pair, played at Stratford by Qasim Khan and Amelia Sargisson respectively, move in beautiful choreographed harmony and utter comfort with one another.⁶⁶ Shields even has them speak in the third-person before tasting the apple, only realizing the possibility of the personal pronoun “I” after their first fatal bites.⁶⁷ Before the Fall, Adam’s and Eve’s dialogue is also entirely lowercase, demonstrating stylistically their lack of hierarchy (even “god” does not come with a capital letter until the big shift). And not only do Adam and Eve receive different punishments after the Fall, but Eve asks—to sympathetic laughter in performance—“Is it just me, or did my punishment seem disproportionate to yours?”⁶⁸ In Shields’ vision, Adam and Eve’s disobedience of God’s rule directly results in the unequal gender divisions she (both Eve and Shields) criticizes.

Gender conflict is not, however, confined to Adam and Eve’s relationship. Shields also plays with gender through the role of Satan, recasting the persuasive Adversary as a woman in her play in perhaps the most immediately striking difference between this new adaptation and the

⁶⁵ Erin Shields, “Repopulating the Canon,” in *Paradise Lost* (Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2018), xiv.

⁶⁶ *Paradise Lost*, Stratford Festival, Studio Theatre, Stratford, Ontario, October 21, 2018.

⁶⁷ Erin Shields, *Paradise Lost* (Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2018), 116-121.

⁶⁸ Shields, 135.

original poem. Milton does not preclude a female Satan: “For spirits when they please / Can either sex assume, or both” (1.423-4).⁶⁹ But Shields does not write a female Satan on a whim, and by her own admission:

I have not sought to reduce Milton’s expansive story to a contemporary, feminist parable. Rather, I have endeavoured to situate the central conflict of the play in a female body as a means of challenging our assumptions about the archetypes we have inherited. In exploring Satan through a female lens I hope to both reflect our current time in which women everywhere are speaking truth to power and create a complex character with whom every audience member, irrespective of gender, can identify.⁷⁰

Shields’ Satan, played by Stratford veteran Lucy Peacock, rages not merely against the patriarchy but against the ultimate patriarch: God. Milton’s own heretical conception of the Trinity as three separate entities helps emphasize this point further in the adaptation. When Satan addresses the



Lucy Peacock as Satan, Stratford Festival, photography by Cylla von Tiedemann

“dear patriarch,”⁷¹ she addresses God the Father specifically, and, after the character’s introduction, stage directions and character cues refer to him simply as “FATHER.”

Satan is the only character who addresses the audience directly,

⁶⁹ John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (New York: The Modern Library, 2008), 30.

⁷⁰ Erin Shields, “Repopulating the Canon,” in *Paradise Lost* (Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2018), xiv.

⁷¹ Erin Shields, *Paradise Lost* (Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2018), 140.

and, in one soliloquy, she argues that love is “God’s favourite tool of oppression,” and appeals to “You women out there” in the crowd.⁷² The women will be able to empathize, Satan thinks, with her analogy: She compares God to “a very nice gentleman” who pays for dinner on the first, second, and—even after reluctantly agreeing to let his date pay for a change—third outing. Satan’s hypothetical woman returns from the washroom to find he has paid the bill again:

He’s got a mischievous grin on his face,
and while you don’t begrudge him his obvious joy,
you feel a growing sense of dread.

An invisible debt is rising.

A debt you know you can never repay.

A debt which imprisons you in a state of eternal gratitude.

That is how it feels to be loved by God.⁷³

Satan, then, frames her struggle against God within the contexts of modern feminism, seeking to win some progressively-minded converts. Peacock left the stage to deliver this analogy, choosing instead to walk up into the house, making the speech all the more intimate and the audience all the more complicit.

Shields, crucially, sees herself as “following Milton’s lead” rather than forging her path anew. Her willingness to use Milton’s work as inspiration to revise and retell the story of Genesis aligns her writing process with Milton’s own. Professor Paul Stevens, who cemented Shields’

⁷² Shields, 40.

⁷³ Shields, 41.

love for *Paradise Lost* in an undergraduate class at the University of Toronto, writes in a short introductory essay to her play that “Milton is not the servant of his sources but their master” and that “the liberation of the author to create as he or she needs, is central to Erin Shields’ wonderful contemporary adaptation...She has learned from him and does what he did.”⁷⁴

Shields not only does (in Stevens’ sense) what Milton did, she does what he *intended* to do at the beginning of his process. Stevens invokes the dramatic origins of the epic poem, stressing the influence of Shakespearean drama on Milton’s poetry: “As a young man growing up just across the Thames from Shakespeare’s Globe, his father being a trustee of the Blackfriars Theatre, Milton had originally wanted to write a great play, to rewrite the story of the Bible as a tragedy called *Adam Unparadized*.”⁷⁵ Shields writes a version of this tragedy (she updates Milton’s iambic pentameter to her own more pliable free verse), although rather than foregrounding Adam as the tragic subject of the drama, Shields recognizes the multiple layers of tragedy contained in the story of *Paradise Lost*. Several characters may be considered tragic (Adam, Eve, Satan, the Son), and none of these characters are tragic in the same way. If there is one uniting factor between these four, it is the way in which their free will results in their suffering. Milton, we recall from the first section, gives Satan a soliloquy in which he interrogates himself concerning his own free will:

Hadst thou the same free will and power to stand?

Thou hadst: whom hast thou then or what to accuse,

⁷⁴ Paul Stevens, “Freedom and the Fall,” in *Paradise Lost* by Erin Shields (Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2018), x.

⁷⁵ Stevens, ix.

But Heav'n's free love dealt equally to all? (4.66-8)⁷⁶

But it is only when Satan takes his place onstage that the full dramatic force of Satan's rhetorical questions becomes clear. Satan not only affirms his own free will, he may look an audience member in the eye and affirm theirs too, answering for them the question he poses.

Shields' Satan has a soliloquy before the Fall in which she describes the "ostentatious beauty" of nature making her "sick."⁷⁷ She probes humanity, searching for our confession that we are just as interested in destroying the beauty of the world as she is:

I know you're burning it, chopping it, draining it,
 building it up, tearing it down, selling it to the highest bidder;
 don't feel guilty about it.
 Don't feel like you have to deny it,
 or pretend you aren't part of it,
 or justify the makeup of your investment portfolio.
 You've had no other choice but to play by the rules of the game.
 You inherited this global economic system.⁷⁸

As with her earlier soliloquy, Satan uses her unique relationship with the audience to emphasize the similarities between herself and them. Milton's Satan says in soliloquy that "only in destroying I find ease / To my relentless thoughts,"⁷⁹ but his and his demons' powers of

⁷⁶ John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (New York: The Modern Library, 2008), 125.

⁷⁷ Erin Shields, *Paradise Lost* (Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2018), 105.

⁷⁸ Shields, 106.

⁷⁹ John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (New York: The Modern Library, 2008), 286.

destruction seem to outweigh those of humanity (9.129-130). In 2018, however, Shields' Satan takes her cue from us, describing distinctly human ways of corrupting God's work. She wants to run a pipeline through an ancient wood, melt a stupendous glacier, and mar the beauty of a waterfall with a new casino, recalling specific human actions harmful to the beauty of God's creations. Satan's sentiments hint at Shields' larger critique of capitalism, and they help to reframe the true threat posed by Satan in these, as she admits, "secular times."⁸⁰ Whether or not a modern audience *believes* in Satan is almost irrelevant—we are destroying the world ourselves, doing all the heavy lifting for her.

The Stratford Festival's *Paradise Lost* is a particularly valuable case study for my project, not least because of the extent to which performance and (meta-)theatricality are central to the ethos of the work. Rather than simply relate the story of the war in heaven to Adam and Eve through protracted narration as with Milton, Shields' Raphael attempts to teach the pair valuable lessons through a play. "It is my hope," Raphael tells the pair, "that this performance will be both entertaining and educational; / that, by watching it, you will learn about the dangers of envy...the arrogance of pride...the foibles of vanity"—all concepts with which Adam and Eve are not yet familiar.⁸¹

The stage directions instruct us to think of this play-within-the-play as "*the very first amateur theatre production. The text is clunky, the set and costumes are DIY, the performances vary greatly, but there is an incredible amount of heart.*"⁸² Not only is the text clunky, Shields

⁸⁰ Erin Shields, *Paradise Lost* (Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2018), 8.

⁸¹ Shields, 81.

⁸² Shields, 81.

switches to heroic couplets for most of Raphael's play. Milton, writing *Paradise Lost*, made a great point to eschew rhymed heroic couplets in favor of blank verse. In fact, with *Paradise Lost*, Milton wrote the first unrhymed narrative poem in the English language.⁸³ This choice was so striking that many clamored for an explanation, prompting Milton's printer, Samuel Simmons, to "procure" from Milton a note on "The Verse" which was then inserted along with the prose arguments summarizing each book beginning in 1668.⁸⁴ In this note, crucial to a theatrical understanding of the poem and worth quoting at length, Milton explains his artistic decision:

The measure is English heroic verse without rhyme, as that of Homer in Greek, and of Vergil in Latin; rhyme being no necessary adjunct or true ornament of poem or good verse, in longer works especially, but the invention of a barbarous age, to set off wretched matter and lame meter...Not without cause therefore some both Italian and Spanish poets of prime note have rejected rhyme both in longer and shorter works, as have also long since our best English tragedies, as a thing of itself, to all judicious ears, trivial and of no true musical delight; which consists only in apt numbers, fit quantity of syllables, and the sense variously drawn out from one verse into another, not in the jingling sound of like endings, a fault avoided by the learned ancients both in poetry and all good oratory. This neglect then of rhyme so little is to be taken for a defect, though it may seem so perhaps to vulgar readers, that it rather is to be esteemed an example set,

⁸³ John Rogers, "9. *Paradise Lost*, Book I" (lecture, Yale University, New Haven, CT, Fall 2007), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H62G9yIN5Wk&list=PL2103FD9F9D0615B7&index=10&t=0s>.

⁸⁴ John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (New York: Random House, Inc.), 2007, 9n1.

the first in English, of ancient liberty recovered to heroic poem from the troublesome and modern bondage of rhyming. (9-10)

The stilted, rhyming iambic pentameter of Raphael's play sticks out as artificial against the rest of Shields' free verse poetry (and indeed against Milton's unrhymed pentameter) just as the second-rate set and costumes signal a shift in the seriousness of the storytelling (despite Raphael's sober intentions). The clunky couplets sound as discordant against Milton's epic idiom as they do against Shields' theatrical idiom. As Professor Stevens notes of this adaptation, "angels often sound like Bottom and the mechanicals from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*," and Shields channels those Athenian workmen in Raphael's play.⁸⁵ Rollin, interestingly, remarks that Michael's vision also "could have had the effect of a play-within-a-play and occasionally does," connecting the meta-theatricality of Shields' text with a meta-theatrical strain inherent to Milton's.⁸⁶

Milton claims that his blank verse connects him with classical epic tradition, but he also acknowledges his poem's connection with the predominant verse form of the early modern English stage. Milton adopts blank verse from early modern dramatists such as Shakespeare to suit his (fundamentally dramatic) epic project. And Shields remains "Miltonic in her revision of Miltonic practice," echoing Milton's desire to liberate "poetic narrative from formal constraints" and taking his impulse to abandon rhymed verse a step farther in "abandoning prosodic regularity" through free verse.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Paul Stevens, "Freedom and the Fall," in *Paradise Lost* by Erin Shields (Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2018), xi.

⁸⁶ Rollin, 29.

⁸⁷ John Rumrich, email message to author, April 9, 2019.

The boundaries of the play-within-the-play break down, however, in a dramatic twist after the real Satan hijacks the *role* of Satan in the performance. She turns up onstage in “*the character mask of SATAN*”⁸⁸ and injures the angel Ithuriel (cast as the Messiah) with a real sword rather than a prop, causing the reenactment of the war in heaven to fall apart as the angels discover Satan and pursue her in chase. Adam and Eve unsurprisingly fail to learn anything from Raphael’s disaster of a play. Raphael’s failed task, interestingly, is the task of both Milton and Shields. It is Milton’s because it is didactic, seeking to explain the ways of God to Adam and Eve while successfully warning them against eating the fruit; it is Shields’ because it is theatrical, attempting to stage events far beyond the limits of the dramatic form (certainly the crudely executed drama of Raphael).

The play-within-the-play more than likens spiritual to corporal forms, it incarnates the spiritual and brings the Father’s divine warning down to earth. Of course, the distinction between spiritual and corporal forms is already a fraught one considered against Milton’s peculiar brand of materialism. Raphael explicates Milton’s philosophical view most clearly in the poem:

O Adam, one Almighty is, from whom
 All things proceed, and up to him return,
 If not depraved from good, created all
 Such to perfection, one first matter all,
 Endued with various forms, various degrees
 Of substance, and in things that live, of life;
 But more refined, more spiritous, and pure,

⁸⁸ Erin Shields, *Paradise Lost* (Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2018), 88.

As nearer to him placed or nearer tending
 Each in their several active spheres assigned,
 Till body up to spirit work, in bounds
 Proportioned to each kind. (5.469-479)

And, in Shields' play, Raphael's theatrical representation of *Paradise Lost* is, in a sense, more faithful to Milton's personal materialist heresy. To reword Raphael's formulation briefly (and at the risk of becoming reductive), Milton's conception of the universe is monist rather than dualist. Milton rejects the distinction between physical matter and spiritual matter; all beings in existence consist of the same stuff in various degrees (depending on how close they are to God). The stage realizes this Miltonic tenet, and allows angels, demons, humans, and even God to be played by actors of the same substance, "Differing but in degree, of kind the same" (5.490).

The actors are human in the world of Stratford, but they remain angelic in the world of Eden. The comedy inherent in the angels' parodic production acknowledges a shift along the spectrum of material existence. The angels undergo a descent—from heaven to earth, from mighty seraphim to awkward players, and generically from tragedy to farce—in order to attempt effective communication with the humans just as the human actors ascend to the level of angels for the duration of the play. The nuance of Shields' meta-theatricality lies in the fact that these binaries (heaven/earth, angel/mechanical, tragedy/farce) are forced to collapse and meet somewhere in the middle. This dual shift—the lowering of representational accuracy to effect a simultaneous rise in understanding—is central to Raphael's mission and to Milton's.

Representing Man's original tragedy to a fallen audience requires the postlapsarian form of drama, inextricable from Milton's conception of *Paradise Lost*.

Raphael's play is not the only instance of acting and theatrical performance within the world of *Paradise Lost*. Earlier in the play, Satan gives another convincing performance as an inquisitive lesser angel (wearing a backwards baseball cap) in order to sneak past Uriel and Urania and make her way down to earth. Satan, in fact, brings the central dramatic moment of the story—the Fall—about through a theatrical performance: Satan casts herself in the role of the serpent. In performance, this entails a black garment worn over her arm like a sock puppet and focusing physical expressivity to the arm by draping it over Eve, coiling it around her, almost choking her.

These performances of Satan exemplify Prawdzik's assertion that in "*Paradise Lost*, Satan's ceaseless posturing, both physical and rhetorical, defines him as a virtuosic improviser skilled in manipulating others by manipulating his own language, gestures, and appearance."⁸⁹ Prawdzik, in fact, re-contextualizes Satan's temptation of Eve in theatrical terms. In order to influence Eve's free will toward evil, Satan weaponizes a theatrical paradigm, casting Eve in a dramatic form her prelapsarian eyes cannot recognize as such. Satan performs for Eve the spectator, yes, but he also "*perform[s] the audience upon Eve,*" convincing her that she is (and ought to be) an object of scopophilia.⁹⁰

Milton also describes Satan's approach to Eve and his oratory in explicitly theatrical terms after Satan leads Eve to the Tree of Knowledge:

The Tempter, but with show of zeal and love
To man, and indignation at his wrong,

⁸⁹ Prawdzik, 135.

⁹⁰ Prawdzik, 137.

New parts put on, and as to passion moved,

Fluctuates disturbed, yet comely and in act

Raised, as of some great matter to begin. (9.665-69)

Satan “shows” false emotion to Eve and “puts on new parts” as he “acts” out artificial “passion.”

Before Satan as the serpent reared himself up erect, he licked the ground where she had stepped and “His gentle dumb expression turned at length / The eye of Eve to mark his play” like a dumb show prefiguring and drawing attention to the great matter approaching in the main play (9.527-8).

The production calls attention to the special significance of clothing even before the start



Gordon S. Miller as God the Son in *Paradise Lost*, Stratford Festival, photo by Cylla von Tiedemann

of the play. Upstage, the one major stylized set piece is a tower of shirts, white at the top, then shifting into grey and black near the bottom, emphasizing the division between Heaven and Hell, angel and demon (with the added ambiguity of shades of grey in the shirts, perhaps representing the realm of chaos between heaven and earth). Satan wears black; the Son wears white. While audience members take their seats, several shirts hang suspended from the ceiling of the black box theater.

Shields’ first stage directions call for “*Darkness.*

Falling.”⁹¹ The production accomplishes this by suddenly dropping the shirts and cutting the lights, signifying the

⁹¹ Shields, 7.

fallen angels' descent into Hell. Shields' *Paradise Lost*, as Milton's poem, begins in Hell, and we soon see Satan emerge from the "hell" of the trapdoor in the middle of the stage after the falling of the shirts. There is a balcony too, where we first see God the Father (nonchalantly spinning a fidget spinner) in Heaven. Even though the play is staged in a black box theater, the "heaven" and "hell" areas evoke the corresponding portions of a typical early modern stage, recalling the staging possibilities discussed in the first section regarding Satan's Book IV soliloquy and linking the theatrical traditions of Milton's recent past with our present theatrical practice.

One of the major challenges inherent in staging *Paradise Lost* is representation of Adam and Eve's nakedness. For most of the play, Khan and Sargisson wear formfitting nude leotards, allowing their nudity to be evident without becoming a distraction. When they become aware of their nakedness after the Fall, they come onstage nude, without their leotards, shocking the audience into hyper-awareness and second-hand embarrassment, mimicking the characters' feelings:

Adam: I want to hide.

Eve: I want to crawl into a thicket.

Adam: Cover myself with pines.

Eve: Cover myself with leaves.

Adam: Hide myself from the sight of myself.

Eve: I know what you mean.

We are naked.⁹²

⁹² Shields, 130.



Amelia Sargisson as Eve and Qasim Khan as Adam with members of the company of *Paradise Lost*, Stratford Festival, photography by Cylla von Tiedemann

When the Son comes to check on them, they hide behind the tower of clothes and emerge in a pair of men's striped pajamas—Eve wearing the shirt and Adam the pants, the familiar morning-after uniform of a one-night stand.

Performance enhances and clarifies

their sense of shame and shock. Adam and Eve only have the Son and themselves from which to hide themselves, but actors playing Adam and Eve must also feel hundreds of (already fallen) eyes rediscovering that first shame from their ingrained sense of propriety and decency.

Prawdzik points to examples in “both the *Vacation Exercise* and *Animadversions* how the idea of nakedness corresponds with an intense sense of exposure to scrutinizing eyes” in Milton’s imagination.⁹³ The pieces of clothing that Adam and Eve put on in Shields’ play are costumes, but Prawdzik conceptualizes the clothing of Adam and Eve as costume in the epic as well:

As in theater, where the actor’s costume participates in his ability to personate, to distance his performance from the limitations of his actual person, thereby helping him to bring richly to life what has only been shadowed forth in the script, so here the clothing of beasts, the fleshly form of the robe of righteousness, allows Adam and Eve enough distance from their sins, and from the consciousness of God’s eyes upon their

⁹³ Prawdzik, 156-7.

nakedness, to begin the process of drawing light from the shadow, spirit from the flesh of the Son's judgement.⁹⁴

Prawdzik considers the benefit of costume here to be entirely for the performers (Adam and Eve) and not their celestial audience, who can still observe into their hearts and minds. Adam and Eve are, thanks to the protection and distance of their costumes, able to participate in the divine script without collapsing under the weight of divine scrutiny.

⁹⁴ Prawdzik, 158.

Conclusion: Milton Teaching / Teaching Milton

I would like to conclude this project with a few brief comments on the pedagogical significance of performing *Paradise Lost*. First, my reason in drawing out some of the connections between Milton's dramatic epic and the Shakespearean plays which preceded it in my first section was not merely to feed my appetite for Shakespeare while writing about Milton. I argue that understanding of *Paradise Lost* benefits from theatrical staging, taking into account the inherited Elizabethan and Jacobean theatrical traditions with which Milton was familiar.

In case some readers still find this claim dubious, I intend also to bolster my claims by drawing attention to the disparity between the ways that Shakespeare and Milton are generally taught in classrooms. Shakespeare studies specifically have benefitted from the integration of performance into coursework, so much so that some scholars feel compelled to remind us that there are things performance *cannot* accomplish.⁹⁵ Yet studies of *Paradise Lost* do not often include performance as a means of teaching the poem. This does a disservice to both the dramatic potential of the text and Milton's own philosophy regarding the instructive power of theater.

It makes sense, though, why classrooms would be slow to incorporate performance of Milton's texts into the educational process. There is very little easily accessible performance material online or available for purchase from even major early modern theater companies such as Shakespeare's Globe or the Royal Shakespeare Company, which regularly stage works by

⁹⁵ Esther B. Schupak, "Shakespeare and Performance Pedagogy: Overcoming the Challenges," *Changing English* 25, iss. 2 (2018): 163-179.

Shakespeare's contemporary dramatists and include educational packets to guide teachers through early exposure Shakespeare lessons for schoolchildren.

But children—and indeed university students—should not have more trouble understanding Milton than Shakespeare. If there is not a tradition of performance associated with a work, or at least a tradition of considering a piece of literature as worthy and able to be performed, then inertia can seem insurmountable. In recent years, with the Stratford Festival's production and a staged reading of Milton's text at the Sam Wanamaker playhouse as two prominent examples, performance trends seem to be moving in a promising direction.⁹⁶ *Paradise Lost* deserves a place in early modern theater repertoires alongside its contemporaries and immediate forebears. But students and instructors should, in the absence of accessible productions of the poem, still take initiative and perform *Paradise Lost* themselves.

Performance need not take the form of a full stage production. Studying *Paradise Lost* as a freshman at the University of Texas, a portion of my grade in class came from memorized recitation of Milton's verse. I performed Satan's Book IX soliloquy and was struck then by the dynamism of the language and the force of Satan's emotions and intellect. Performance may remain intensely personal and need not have any audience at all, as one charming story concerning the poet William Blake and his wife recalls:

At the end of the little garden in Hercules Buildings there was a summer-house. Mr.

Butts calling one day found Mr. and Mrs. Blake sitting in this summer-house, freed from

"those troublesome disguises" which have prevailed since the Fall. "*Come in!*" cried

⁹⁶ Caroline Spearing, "Staging *Paradise Lost*: a workshopped reading of the text," *Institute of Classical Studies, School of Advanced Study University of London*, June 7, 2018, <https://ics.blogs.sas.ac.uk/2018/06/07/staging-paradise-lost-a-workshopped-reading-of-the-text/>.

Blake; “*it’s only Adam and Eve, you know!*” Husband and wife had been reciting passages from *Paradise Lost*, in character, and the garden of Hercules Buildings had to represent the Garden of Eden: a little to the scandal of wondering neighbours, on more than one occasion.⁹⁷

Blake and his wife, reportedly, read *Paradise Lost* together in the nude to get a more full effect—an exercise I heartily endorse to adventurous souls.

Last month, the Broccoli Project—Plan II’s playfully avant-garde theater troupe—held a reading of Erin Shields’ adaptation. All but one of the actors reading had some experience with other early modern Broccoli productions, from *Romeo and Juliet* to Kyd’s *Spanish Tragedy* and Lyly’s *Gallathea*.⁹⁸ Those present at the reading with experience reading Milton found something new in *Paradise Lost* they had not noticed before, and some new to Milton entirely expressed interest in reading the poem after experiencing the great fun and deep pathos encapsulated in Shields’ adaptation.

Hugh Richmond emphasizes the performative nature of teaching itself: “Teaching is mostly oral performance, requiring dynamism, pacing, diversity, and progression.”⁹⁹ And, in performances of Milton’s text, Richmond presses the importance of memorization, as reading aloud from a printed excerpt does not achieve the same degree of textual understanding.

⁹⁷ Alexander Gilchrist, *The Life of William Blake*, ed. W. Graham Robertson (London: John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1863), 114-5.

⁹⁸ Elizabeth Zeman Kolkovich, “The Spanish Tragedy (review),” *Shakespeare Bulletin* 35, num. 4 (Winter 2017), 703-6.

⁹⁹ Hugh Richmond, “*Paradise Lost* as an Oral Epic,” in *Approaches to Teaching Milton’s Paradise Lost*, 2nd ed, ed. Peter C. Herman, New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 2012, 192.

The sheer length of *Paradise Lost* is also a barrier to performance when compared with shorter Shakespearean plays and poems:

The dividends of dedicating class time to reading sonnets aloud far outweigh their one-minute reading time. But what about works like John Milton's 10,565-line *Paradise*

Lost, which can take anywhere from nine and a half to thirteen hours to read aloud?¹⁰⁰

For those with opportunity and willing participants, Angelica Duran describes the benefits (like a greater appreciation of the scope of Milton's theodicy and assurance that all members of a class have read the whole poem through at least once) and logistics (food, advertisements, selecting a location and a date) of organizing marathon readings of the entire poem.

Performance also, crucially, helps a student get closer to the mind of Milton. This is Prawdzik's paradox of improvisation flowing backwards. Rather than the "author becom[ing] the text," the actor becomes the author through the vehicle of internalized poetry.¹⁰¹ *Paradise Lost* was not, of course, originally a written text; Milton, blind since 1652, dictated his verse to scribes and amanuenses rather than writing himself. This, over and above Milton's *Adam Unparadised* sketch, forces a consideration of *Paradise Lost* as essentially performative and designed for vocal expression rather than silent contemplation.

Prawdzik is correct to point out that most scholarship concerning the dramatic elements of *Paradise Lost*, "while revealing, inevitably struggles to move beyond analogy, beyond the approximation of a literary form that, once extracted from the context of staged performance,

¹⁰⁰ Angelica Duran, "Premeditated Verse: Marathon Readings of Milton's Epic," in *Approaches to Teaching Milton's Paradise Lost*, 2nd ed, ed. Peter C. Herman, New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 2012, 197.

¹⁰¹ Prawdzik, 149.

becomes difficult to distinguish from other literary modes that represent action and dialogue.”¹⁰²

This is why my chief concern—I hope my chief contribution—deals with literal stagings and performances of *Paradise Lost* rather than theoretical connections to the dramatic form which only become tangible in the transition from page to stage. The difficulties inherent in staging *Paradise Lost* make textual discoveries through performance all the more rewarding.

In his introductory essay before *Samson Agonistes*, Milton specified that that play was never intended for the stage.¹⁰³ Regarding *Paradise Lost*, partially because Milton was not writing a theatrical script and partially because his original intention was indeed for the stage, he made no such claims. I take this particular silence as an open invitation from Milton and reassert that there is no better way to understand Milton than to perform him. Prawdzik notes that:

The way that Milton evaluates theater hinges on how he understands the desire that links actor to audience and audience to actor. He makes it clear that theater can serve as a privileged vehicle for elevating an audience towards God, yet its didactic efficacy inevitably depends on its ability to entertain.¹⁰⁴

Education through performance is a core belief of Milton’s and one that proliferates through the plot and imagery of *Paradise Lost*. Prawdzik does “not wish to suggest that [*Paradise Lost*] should not be performed.”¹⁰⁵ I, by contrast, eliminate that double negative and emphatically say

¹⁰² Prawdzik, 120.

¹⁰³ John Milton, “Of that sort of Dramatic Poem which is called Tragedy,” in *Samson Agonistes*, ed. Thomas H. Luxon, *The John Milton Reading Room*, Dartmouth College, 1997, https://www.dartmouth.edu/~milton/reading_room/samson/tragedy/text.shtml.

¹⁰⁴ Prawdzik, 132.

¹⁰⁵ Prawdzik, 246.

that it should. Shields' adaptation is proof that Milton's dramatic epic can entertain, educate, and move audiences even in today's "secular times."

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BIOGRAPHY

Austin Hanna was born in Corpus Christi, Texas, in 1996 and enrolled at The University of Texas in the fall of 2015 as a Dedman Distinguished Scholar. Austin was president of UT organizations Spirit of Shakespeare and Shakespeare Outreach (SHOUT) as well as a student of the Shakespeare at Winedale program in the spring and summer of 2017 and the summer of 2019. He also acted and directed in Plan II's Broccoli Project theater troupe, with performance highlights including Han Solo in *William Shakespeare's Star Wars*, Hieronimo in *The Spanish Tragedy*, Telusa/Hebe/Venus in *Gallathea*, and Mercutio in *Romeo and Juliet*. Austin graduated with a B.A. in Plan II Honors and English Honors in 2019 and plans to pursue his passion of early modern performance.